

STRATFORD TIMES

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Shakespearean Gardens celebrates 90 years

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Shakespearean Gardens celebrated its 90th anniversary last week, complete with cake, a fete and perfect garden party weather.

On a particularly sunny afternoon on May 28, the Friends of the Shakespearean Gardens invited community members and dignitaries alike to the gardens to celebrate its history, adorning the grounds with signs, balloons and informative notices.

Although it is just one garden in a city known for its horticulture, the Shakespearean Gardens are an important historical and cultural fixture in the city.

“For the past 90 years, the Shakespearean Gardens has been a special place in the heart of Stratford, delighting both residents and visitors alike,” Perth-Welington MP John Nater wrote in a commemorative letter for the anniversary, read that day by Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma. “This beautiful sanctuary beside the river connects us to the history that has made Stratford the city it is today, from the plants and the flowers that arrived from Stratford, England, and are mentioned in the plays and sonnets of William Shakespeare to the striking tower once part of the Dufton Woollen Mill that stood on this site. These gardens commemorate the art and industry that have defined our city for generations.”

The gardens are next to the Perth County Courthouse on Huron Street, just before the stone bridge crossing the Avon River and beyond a wooden lychgate bearing its name. Like its name suggests, it is a Shakespeare garden, a garden that specifically cultivates the

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The Waterloo Region Chinese Canadian Association's Dragon Dance, Waist Drum and Big Drum teams pose after a high-paced performance during the closing ceremony for Asian Heritage Month. For more photos of the performance, see page 7.

2026 Pride March most successful celebration to date

SYDNEY BOYLE

Times Correspondent

Volunteers and pride workers gathered together Sunday, May 31 at 9 a.m., unpacking and preparing the tents at Upper Queen's Park for this year's vendors. Tasks were quickly given out and everyone was sent to work, putting together what was going to become Stratford-Perth Pride's most successful festival to date. Everyone was feeling just how needed this celebration of love was this year.

"We are thrilled to see so many community members come out to support the 2SLGBTQIA+ community at this year's Pride March and Festival," expressed A.J. Adams of Stratford-Perth Pride. "We hope that we have been able to create a welcoming space for the community to come be their true authentic selves and show their pride!"

At the Tom Patterson Theatre a few hours later, and after a few speeches, the ninth annual Pride March began. The excited crowd started walking along the river towards Upper Queen's Park, flags held high and pride on

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



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Shakespearean Gardens celebrates 90 years

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

plants mentioned in the works of William Shakespeare. They are common globally; however, in Canada there are only a few public gardens known. As such, the garden in Stratford, which has grown over 60 species of plants mentioned in the Bard's plays, attracts thousands of visitors each and every year.

Before it was a garden, and as Nater's letter alluded to, the site housed the Duffton Woollen Mill, the chimney of which is the only surviving feature after an early 20th century fire. That tower, still prominent in the gardens today, also happens to be the inspiration for the City of Stratford's logo.

Thomas Orr, a prominent turn-of-the-century community leader, had previously wanted to create a Shakespeare garden downtown and when the empty lands were put up for sale, he petitioned the council of

the day to purchase the land, which it did.

In 1925 the city purchased the land and began work designing the garden; however, due to the Great Depression in the '30s, the gardens took longer than expected to open, completely stalling until 1934. It wasn't until 11 years after the work started, in 1936, that the gardens opened. When it did, the opening was a huge event, drawing visitors from afar to Stratford. Then Governor General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir, officially opened the gardens to much fanfare.

It wasn't until many decades later that its unofficial caretakers began to work on it.

"In 1979 there was a group of garden enthusiasts and historical people – guess who that was?" said Reg White, chair of the Friends of the Shakespearean Gardens, at the celebration. "... We saw some things that we thought could be improved, and we thought, 'Well, hey ... we should help.' and we created an organization that very day."

Since its inception, the volunteer group keeps the grounds tidy and advocates for the gardens' continued success. It also recently spearheaded an informational brochure to raise the gardens' profile and inform tourists of the gardens' significance.

"City hall is probably the most photographed site in Stratford, but if it's not the first, this is, and if city hall is the first, this is definitely the second," said Rits-



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The Shakespearean Gardens celebrated its 90th anniversary last week with a garden party on May 28.

ma during the celebration. "... One other thing I will say as well, that when I think about the history of city hall, the friends of the gardens here were instrumental as well in the late '60s, early '70s of being part of 'No, we're not going to take that building down.' So you reach beyond the gardens, and we thank you for that as well. Thank you very much."

Ritsma was quick to thank more than just the friends during his speech, as he noticed a few familiar faces in the crowd:

members of the Orr family.

"There's so many fingerprints in our history of the Orr family that we can never say thank you enough," Ritsma said. "So, thank you for being here, and thank you for not only what you've done in the community in the past, but what you continue to do in the present as well." The Friends of the Shakespearean Gardens, the unofficial caretakers of the gardens, invited residents, visitors, and dignitaries alike to the celebration.

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The Friends of Stratford's Shakespearean Garden

Wish to thank all those who attended on May 28th to enjoy complimentary cake, in celebration of the Garden's 90th year.

Special thanks to the following community businesses whose generous support was key to the afternoon's huge success.

Ballinran Entertainment: For their professional audio and video documentation of this community event.

Festival Furniture

Indigenous poet, Scott Tillson

Sobeys' Bakery: Cake Decorator Extraordinaire!

Stratford Walking Tours

The Stratford UPS Store



Much like other prominent gems in the city, this historic Stratford Garden would not have been possible without its original community engagement. The Chair, Reg White, shared key historical milestones of this garden site that cultivated the former 19th century Duffton Mills location to the delight it is today. The Friends SSG were immensely honoured to have R. T. Orr's (key Parks advocate in the early 1930's) descendants and Mayor Ritsma join them in the Garden for the celebration.

Lastly, The FSSG wish to acknowledge **the City of Stratford Parks staff** for their daily, hard work: planting, watering, weeding, mowing and rubbish clean up. It is their efforts that sets the stage for the beautiful green spaces in our community.

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2026 Pride March most successful celebration to date

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

everyone's faces.

This year's festival had the highest turnout rate to date, with well over 1,000 attendees celebrating pride. A turnout as large as this year's helps ensure that pride visibility in Stratford and the Perth County-area is growing ever stronger.

The march concluded at the top of Upper Queen's Park, leading the marchers through the vendors, welcoming them into the festival, offering resources and showcasing community organizations that are welcoming and accepting for all. Participants then got to enjoy a wide array of activities and attractions at this year's festival. There was live music thanks to the return of the band Gravity Junky, performances from local drag queens, Brass Panda Brass and On Stage Dance Studio, a kids' zone with games and facepainting for all ages to enjoy and ally alley, with plenty of resources and information for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and allies alike.

Food trucks were available at the festival for participants to grab something to eat, whether it was gourmet grilled cheese from Fo'cheezy, Fries from Ken's or some popcorn from Poppin Kettle Corn.

None of the festival would be possible were it not for the sponsors of the Stratford Pride Festival: the Huron-Perth Children's Aid Society, the AV Guy, Dunphy Burdett Lawyers, TD Bank, Good Vibrations Rock Shop, the City of Stratford, Home & Company Real Estate Corp. Brokerage and Scotiabank. The Stratford-Perth Pride team also wanted to express their thanks and gratitude towards the community of Stratford-Perth; if it weren't for the participants, members of the community and allies alike, this festival wouldn't be as successful as it is.

Every year, more people begin to find themselves, discover who they are, where they belong and learn to be comfortable with who they are meant to be. If you would like to learn more about the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, or have any questions in regards to pride, the Stratford-Perth Pride can be reached on their website at StratfordPride.com, via email at stratfordperthpride@gmail.com, or on social media under the name stratfordperthpride on both Instagram, and Facebook.

Editor's note: Sydney Boyle is the program coordinator for the Stratford-Perth Pride Centre.



(SYDNEY BOYLE PHOTO)

Marchers gather at Tom Patterson Theatre on May 31 for the kickoff of the 2026 Pride March and Festival, the most populated and successful parades to date.

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Alzheimer's Walk brings out more families and awareness in new location

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Walk for Alzheimer's brought out lots of families raising awareness on Alzheimer's disease at a new location for the event.

The annual IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's took place on May 30 on a sunny Saturday morning in Veteran's Drive Park with plenty of families, friends and individuals of all ages participating.

"It was a great turnout and I feel there's more awareness out there today and definitely additional families this year, which was great to see," said Lori Speiran, development and community coordinator of the Alzheimer's Society Huron-Perth.

Veteran's Drive Park was also a brand-new location for the event, which had been held at Upper Queens Park previously.

As of June 1, the Stratford Walk raised \$22,437.30 of the \$35,000 fundraising goal to support Alzheimer's Society of Huron-Perth, its programming and those with Alzheimer's and dementia, along with their families.

The Alzheimer's Society is about 60 per cent government funded and needs fundraisers like the Walk for Alzheimer's to cover the other 40 per cent that keeps its programs running.

"It allows us to go into people's homes that normally wouldn't have access to different services and link them up in the community so that they're able to live at home for longer and safer. It allows us to identify problems earlier and allow recreation to come back into their life if they're socially isolated," said Shannon Brown,

in-home recreation coordinator.

"A lot of our services and programs are free of charge, so we need that funding to be able to provide a lot of our programs and services that we offer," Speiran added.

Ahead of the walk, Stratford participants heard from Gary Hicks, who led the walk with his family including son Lucas, daughter Claire and wife Celina. Hicks praised the Alzheimer's Society of Huron-Perth for their support in navigating Celina's journey with Alzheimer's.

"I told a friend one time that out of all of the people from the Alzheimer's Society that I have met, that 10 per cent of them were very, very good. The other 90 per cent are very, very excellent. Yes, they are that wonderful," he said.

Hicks encouraged those with a loved one facing Alzheimer's to reach out to the Alzheimer's Society and any other support system available.

"If you are a family member or a friend, please reach out to be a source of support, as it is so badly needed and so totally important," he said.

Before the warm-up and walk, Hicks read the poem "Do Not Ask Me to Remember" by Owen Darnell, which highlights Alzheimer's from the perspective of someone living with it.

The Alzheimer's Society of Huron Perth also held walks in St. Marys, Goderich, Listowel, Clinton, Exeter and Wingham. Several retirement and long-term care facilities across the counties also participated in Walk and Wheel events.

Donations towards the Stratford Walk for Alzheimer's can be made online until July 1 via <https://tinyurl.com/2026stratfordwalkforalzheimers>.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

The Hicks Family led the IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's on May 30. From left to right: Lucas, Gary, and Claire, with Celina in the center.

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Countenance

(in sweetest memory of Kelly Walker, on the occasion of Kelly's Celebration in Thanksgiving, June 1st, 2026)

His face, I think,
belonged best on a box
of cough drops

or perhaps a tin
pipe tobacco.

It was that kind.

It spoke of such comfort,
proclaimed such compassion,
issued into the world
such a benevolence
through those kind eyes
with the soul shining through,

saying without words
why not slip those
shoes off, stay a while,
tell me about yourself
because you matter.

It was a countenance
of healing.

It radiated forgiveness
and all of us who were so
blessed to share in its orbit
felt the wonder of transformation,
a sense of stepping into light
and becoming, however briefly,
a better version of ourselves.

Some faces command attention,
Kelly's offered refuge.
You could rest your worries there
as did so many
for so long.

People say that kindness
is a practice, but in Kelly
it was simply the landscape
his features lived in.

Oh, such a face,
such a splendid
map of mercy

right there
through those kind
bright eyes
all the time

endlessly

offering direction
and love
to the world.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

United Housing research paper examines effectiveness of temporary shelter models amid homelessness crisis

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A position paper from United Way Perth-Huron's United Housing is suggesting that funding to prevent and end homelessness should be directed to housing first models with supports, rather than temporary tiny shelters and similar accommodations.

The report, titled *The Social and Financial Cost of Non-Permanent Shelter Systems for Addressing Homelessness*, concluded through secondary research that temporary accommodations to address homelessness such as tiny shelters is not as effective in finding permanent housing solutions compared to the housing first model.

Kathy Vassilakos, United Housing director, and research intern Maria Erb made a position paper that demonstrated that while more communities are turning to temporary shelters, research shows that it does not help find permanent housing for unhoused individuals. However, Vassilakos said that the paper is not suggesting eliminating emergency shelters.

"It's not a criticism of emergency shelter systems and it's not a criticism of emergency shelter systems of youth or women and children escaping domestic violence. Those emergency shelter systems are crucial," she said. "What we're saying is if we're having limited resources and we should not be expanding an emergency shelter system that isn't the gold standard of how we actually address

this in the long run."

Vassilakos said that United Housing has often been asked if the organization would implement temporary accommodations.

Ontario saw an increase in those who experienced homelessness over the past few years. In 2024, more than 85,000 people across the province experienced homelessness – a 25 per cent increase from 2022 and more than half experienced chronic homelessness.

In Stratford and St. Marys, 144 households were experiencing homelessness with 131 experiencing chronic homelessness. Similarly in Huron County, there were 148 households experiencing homelessness in July 2025 and 126 considered to be experiencing chronic homelessness.

Vassilakos hopes the report can ignite conversations.

"We're hoping to have community conversations where we can talk to people in the community about when you're advocating for this, when you're coming to us with a concern about the rise in homelessness – which I will add homelessness is growing at twice the rate rural and small communities in Ontario than it is in large urban centers – so it is a crisis that has come to small town Ontario," she said. "So, when we're having conversations and when the community's having conversations of what they're demanding of their municipality or the province or the feds, what should you be advocating for?"

The report can be read online by visiting <https://united-housingperthhuron.ca/educate-and-advocate>.

Queer Book of the month: *Marsha: the Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*

SYDNEY BOYLE

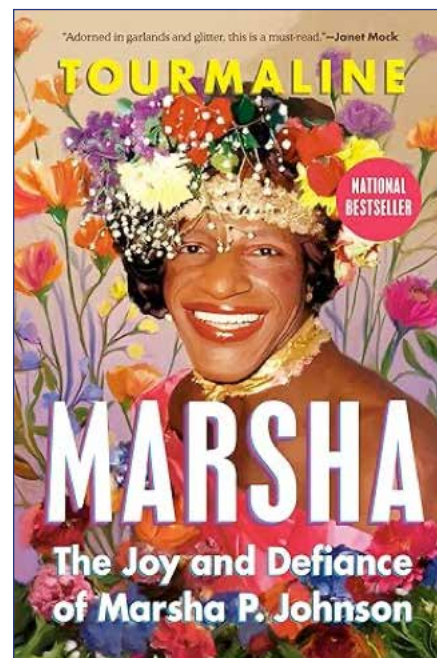
Stratford-Perth Pride

On a hot, incendiary night in June 1969, Marsha P. Johnson famously stood at the vanguard of the Stonewall Riots, a week-long uprising now widely recognized as the birth of the modern gay liberation movement. Much folklore and swirling legend surround Marsha's role in the riots: stories of her throwing a shot glass and screaming "I GOT MY CIVIL RIGHTS!" when cops demanded that she show them her ID; of her climbing a lamppost to drop a bag of bricks on a police car windshield, shattering it; of her fixing her makeup in a broken mirror fragment picked up off the ground, murmuring, "Thank God the revolution has begun, honey." Though her exact actions are still up to speculation to this day, every historian who has looked at this piece of 2SLGBTQIA+ history agrees Marsha P. Johnson was integral to the resistance, and it would not have galvanized without her.

Author Tourmaline has been combing through the life of

Johnson for decades, working tirelessly to piece together the life and legacy of this historical figure; bringing Johnson back through her writing in a way only very few actually could. This book is more than just a memoir of a historical figure, it is a look into the start of a revolution, an uprising spurred by a black trans woman who made it very clear to anyone that would hear her, that she was not going down quietly, and she was going to be known. Marsha tackles what it was like for Johnson to live as a minority such as herself, the constant pushback she faced, and the amount of determination she needed to have to make sure no one thought less of her. This book is for every person who feels they do not fit in the norm of society, that something feels wrong about them or that they are standing out too much; this book makes the reader know that it's okay to stand out, and that you have to stand out to make your voice heard.

If you are interested in reading *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, it is available at the Stratford Public Library. You can also purchase the book at Fanfare Bookstore.



STRATFORDTIMES

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Stratford celebrates Asian Heritage Month



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)

The Waterloo Region Chinese Canadian Association's Dragon Dance, Waist Drum and Big Drum teams kicked off the closing ceremony for Asian Heritage Month with a performance at the bandshell of Upper Queen's Park. For the month of May, the Asian Heritage Month Stratford group hosted a plethora of events celebrating the contributions of Asian communities locally and across Canada.

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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What animal is on the Canadian quarter?
2. What is Lady Gaga's first name?
3. Which is the only piece of artwork that Michelangelo signed?
4. What type of nut is commonly used to make pesto sauce?
5. How many noses does a slug have?
6. What city would you find the Boboli Gardens?
7. Which rapper set the Guinness World Record for the most words in a single hit?
8. How many continents are there?
9. The festival of lights is called what?
10. How many bones does a shark have?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

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Locals and tourists alike thrilled over Bijou at the Church announcement

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

An iconic building in Stratford with a rich hospitality history will once again continue its legacy with Bijou at the Church.

Led by managing director Michael Lutzmann and general manager Mark Simone, Bijou at the Church will take over 70 Brunswick St. in the summer with an anticipated opening on July 24. The restaurant will offer casual fine dining and a space for weddings and events and feature local flavours of Perth County.

Simone said the announcement brings plenty of excitement and positive reception from the greater community, including more than 100,000 views between the announcement posts on Instagram and Facebook.

"The enthusiasm from the community is incredible," he said. "We're excited, the team's excited and we're looking for this new fresh start at this legendary legacy building that has so much character and history and is such a beloved brand within the Stratford community and we're look-

ing to just grow."

Bijou at the Church combines the legacy of Bijou restaurant, a hit with locals and tourists alike for 27 years, as well as the Church restaurant that ran from 1975 to 2016.

"Everybody we talked to just loves that branding and it basically allows two legendary and legacy-based brands to unite and to start the new start," Simone said.

The building was also under Revival House up until recently.

Lutzmann said that many people in Stratford and outside of the city have fond memories of the building.

"Just the iconic state of this particular building is remarkable. The number of people that I speak to that said, 'Oh my gosh, my daughter got married there,' and 'We had the best meal ever before we went to the theatre back in the '80s,'" he said. "I was at a party in Guelph last night and everybody knows that building. It's incredible. There are people from all over Ontario and they all knew about that building and they've all eaten there once before."



(WARREN STABLEFORD PHOTO)

Bijou at the Church will be the newest 70 Brunswick St. hospitality venture and lots of people, whether they live in Stratford and area or visit the city for theatre, are thrilled.

For the latest updates on Bijou at the Church online, visit bijourestaurant.com, facebook.com/bijoustratford, or [Instagram/bijourestaurant](https://instagram.com/bijourestaurant).

Ham and Strawberry supper returns to Avondale

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A popular summer dinner will return to Avondale United Church, continuing Parkview's legacy.

Avondale United Church will host its third annual Ham and Strawberry Sup-

per on June 17 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. The supper will include ham, pasta salad, carrot salad, coleslaw, a bun, strawberries and ice cream, with cake replacing the ice cream in take-out orders.

"This is our third year doing it since Parkview United Church joined us and continuing on the tradition that they

started and it's been very successful the last couple of years and really appreciated by our congregation and the community as a whole," said Doris Barkley, congregation member.

The Ham and Strawberry Supper began at Parkview United Church and continued at Avondale ever since Parkview amalgamated with the church in 2024. Aleah Graff, Avondale's community engagement coordinator, remembers the enthusiasm for the beloved supper after the amalgamation.

"They dove just right into the planning and I remember it really got the rest of us engaged and it really showed how well everybody was able to work as a team which I think is really important to Avondale," she said.

Lots of volunteers put the event together from making phone calls, promoting the event, picking and hulling strawberries, making the salads, setting up the dining hall, and serving the food.

"It certainly takes an army to put something like this together," Barkley

said.

Although Avondale's event is half the size of what Parkview drew in, it's still popular and celebrates the approaching summer season and coming together to enjoy local flavours.

"It's all about the ham and strawberries. Strawberries means that summer is coming and it's a gathering," Barkley said. "We're used to gathering over food and even though people do takeout, they often go to someone's house and have dinner together with others. It is a gathering over food and being thankful for what our local farmers have and what we can provide."

Proceeds from the event will support Avondale's congregation including the community meals, food shelf and other initiatives.

Tickets for the Ham and Strawberry Supper are \$25 and can be purchased up until June 15 at noon by calling the church's office at 519-271-7946 on Mondays to Thursdays between 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

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Owners of the Bunker featured on episode of *Legacy Makers* television series

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Bunker Performance Lounge & Café is the setting for a new episode of the American television series *Legacy Makers*, and co-owners John Crawford, Candace Crawford and Jereme Berg are the stars. The show explores the journey of influential entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders who are shaping the world around us.

It all started last February when the Crawfords were on vacation down to Nashville to explore one of their influences, the famous Bluebird Café. They were on their way back when John saw a casting call on Instagram for *Legacy Makers* airing on Inside Success TV. After checking it out and thinking it was interesting, there was little Candace could do to stop John from applying as she was driving.

Upon hearing of their application's success, John's first thought was immediate.

"Oh no, what have I done? We were surprised but thought it was pretty cool. So that started the conversation. We hopped on a Zoom call with the three of us and had a chat about what it would look like to be on a TV show," said John Crawford.

The trio thought it would be a good way to get the story of the Bunker out to the community and beyond. Now in its third year, second as a licenced establishment, they felt that people may still not be connecting the Bunker as a licenced performing arts lounge and date night destination.

"It seemed like something we shouldn't pass up because there were over 7,000 people who had applied," said Candace.

They stood out to the producers as three people from different backgrounds with different experiences who came together with each their own passion to establish a venue that serves the arts community of Stratford.

"We tried to keep a lot of things in mind during the interview, but what we wanted



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Television series *Legacy Makers* stars John Crawford, Candace Crawford and Jereme Berg of the Bunker in an episode airing June 6. Come that day for an episode watch party at 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.

to highlight was the grind. We don't come from money, we don't come from success, we're not moving from business to business. We just started this from scratch and with a lot of blood, sweat and tears we can make this thing work," said John.

They were eager to share some of the success stories that have come out of the Bunker, like people coming out to open mics and then getting their own show and moving on. Their transition from opening as a café and recording studio and listen-

ing to their patrons that they needed a liquor licence was part of the journey that has been meaningful.

They listened again, even since the episode, and picked up a hot kitchen for apps and snacks and have become known for the diversity in programming with writers' groups, poetry, play readings, comedy and music.

"We're very malleable, we're here to suit the needs

of the folks that need the space. Being a 30-to-40-person room is a really niche area to be in Stratford," said John.

The interview process began with a large questionnaire giving the opportunity to share their story. They were unique subjects because there were three of them together which was a first for *Legacy Makers* which usually features solo business owners, athlete entrepreneurs and the like, generally shining the light on one person and their journey.

"We individually answered each of those questionnaires so that we each felt that we got our own voice in what our journey was like. We put them together and submitted them and then they crafted the story from that," explained John.

Telling the story and reflecting on the progress has given them the opportunity to an enlightened perspective. "For sure, I think it did affect our perspective of how far we've come, reflecting on the beginning and where things are now," said Jereme. "Watching the episode shows where we come from and our background, so the people know the faces behind the Bunker but also what the Bunker is to educate people more about the space, that the Bunker is a performance space and a bar."

There are also sponsors to thank: Destination Stratford, Schooley Mitchell, Spottydawg Productions and Brilliant Images Photography and Film.

In celebration of the episode which airs June 6, there will be watch parties for the community to gather and join in with John, Candace and Jereme at the Bunker. The first is at 7 p.m. then 9 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. The episode will also be featured on the website thebunkerstratford.com.

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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Current Stratford city councillor Jo-Dee Burbach threw her hat in the ring for this year's municipal election. Burbach, pictured here at her May 30 campaign launch, is vying to be Stratford's next mayor.

New Arts and Culture magazine What's On Live Stratford launched with June issue

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

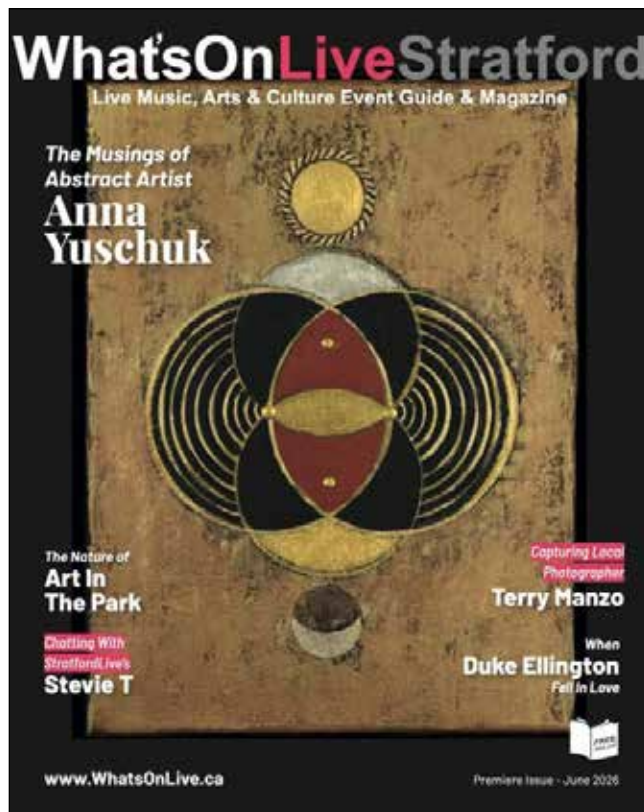
The inaugural issue of What's On Live Stratford has been launched as both a magazine and live webapp listing local events. This is the brainchild of local musician, entrepreneur and previous magazine publisher Barry James Payne.

Payne was inspired when on tour out west, in Red Deer to be precise, and came across the magazine called Red Deer Scene which was essentially an event listing of everything going on in the city. Right away he thought that Stratford needed something similar that provided not only static listings, but a way to access an event listing spontaneously online while already out. With that idea, whatsonlive.ca was conceived.

"I was thinking about people out to dinner or out for drinks with friends and they could scan this QR Code or pullup the webapp if it is bookmarked to see what's happening and the events are quickly listed on your screen rather than having to navigate through websites. It makes it easy to make an impulsive decision," said Payne.

This will be of interest to locals and tourists alike. Anybody going out to see any kind of live art event or music, which is Payne's passion, spoken word, poetry, a book launch, a gallery opening. In fact, it has been opened up to restaurants with guest chefs or bars with guest bartenders.

"We will listen to people and see what they want and if we can build it into the system, and we can try and do that, but it's all about what people want at the end of the day," he said.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Keep an eye open for the free issue of the new arts and culture magazine What's On Live Stratford.

The timing of the launch couldn't be any better. It seems that the arts and culture scene in Stratford is in a bit of a renaissance moment with so much going on.

"For a town this size it is just bustling and draws people from all over southwestern Ontario,

the U.S. and elsewhere. We can connect those dots with people visiting to really understand what else is going on, whether they came for theatre or (Stratford) Summer Music, and all the venues that are here in town. The one thing that really excites me is there is a little walking map. On each venue there is an icon that if you click it, it opens up a map and shows you how to get where you want to go," Payne said.

Having a dedicated media for the arts is an important part of his mission and the magazine takes a deeper dive into the scene and advances shows coming up that month or the next. It is easy to read, easy to find in a hard copy format as well as digital on the website.

Looking forward to the first issue, readers can expect many articles and event listings for the month. Those wanting to be listed as part of the event listing on the webapp and magazine can simply create a login on whatsonlive.ca and follow the prompts to add the event.

"The magazine is out now and there's a really great story about Duke Ellington who used to come here and there's a story about Art in the Park for anyone interested in a bit of the history. There's an overview about Stratford as a music city and delves into a bit of the history but also the current artists and events that are happening to see just how busy it is in town. Each issue will have a fine artist featured on the cover and an interview with the artist inside which is a nice feature that helps to amplify that side of the arts umbrella," said Payne.

The magazine is a free monthly periodical and can be found at most coffee shops, bars, the library, Fanfare Books, Bradshaws, or anyone can pick one up, or replenish a stack at the Stratford Business Centre where there is a good inventory.

The webapp can be accessed at whatsonlive.ca and the digital copy of the magazine can be found at whatsonlive.ca/magazine.

Editor's note: Lisa Chester is a contributor to What's On Live Stratford.

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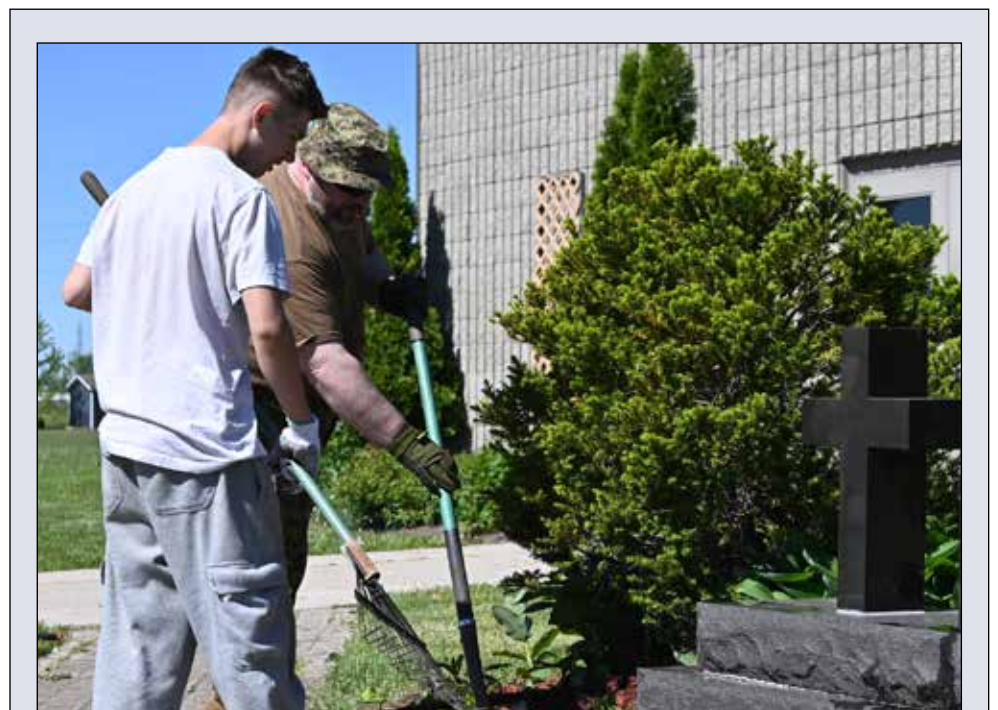
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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Linkin Tough and Capt. Andrew Piper of the Stratford Army Cadets garden around the Army Navy & Air Force Veterans Cenotaph, located at its Lorne Avenue location. Cadets and volunteers were out May 28 to clean up the Army Navy's memorial space, the start of a summer of community involvement, Piper told the Times.

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Stratford Public Library reports growth in memberships, programs and community impact

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

With more than 1,500 new library cards activated in 2025, Stratford Public Library continues to see growth in membership, programming and community use.

The library's 2025 annual report highlights increased program attendance, expanded collections, new community partnerships and continued growth in services for residents of all ages.

"The 2025 Annual Report demonstrates how busy and dynamic our library is every day," said Krista Robinson, CEO of the library. "Our library is an essential community gathering space, and a trusted source of connection, support and opportunity."

Among the library's initiatives in 2025 were new community-focused programs, the TD Summer Reading Club, expanded multilingual children's materials through the LOTE4Kids database, additions to the Library of Things collection including

Yoto players and carbon dioxide and radon detector kits, and the launch of the Poet Laureate program in partnership with Destination Stratford.

According to the report, the library recorded more than 151,000 in-person visits, circulated more than 400,000 items and delivered more than 900 programs attended by over 28,000 people.

The library also released results from the Valuing Ontario Libraries Toolkit (VOLT) survey, which measures the social and economic value public libraries provide to their communities.

The survey found that for every municipal dollar invested in Stratford Public Library, the community receives an estimated social return of \$5.85. The library's annual economic impact was estimated at more than \$18 million, or approximately \$523 per resident.

"These findings reinforce what our community already knows – the library plays a vital role in the lives of Stratford resi-

dents," said Robinson. "Whether someone is attending programs, accessing technology, borrowing materials, finding a welcoming space or discovering community connections, the value of the library extends far beyond its walls."

The annual report also highlights the library's continued advocacy for additional space and notes its support for the City of Stratford's recent approval of \$15 million toward the development of a new community facility in partnership with the YMCA of Three Rivers.

Robinson said the project would create a shared community space at the Grand Trunk site and expand opportunities for both organizations.

The library is also preparing for a busy summer season, with programs and events for all ages, including the return of popular offerings such as Wonder Passes.

"Summer's going to be jam packed with all sorts of fun events and programs," said Robinson. "One thing I'm very excited

about is the community kazoo music event that will be happening every week. We're also bringing back our happy hour event. We have our first one on June 19, we are also excited about some fundraising initiatives that we've started for 2026, as well as our wonder passes for you to go explore the community."

Robinson said the Wonder Passes provide children with free access to attractions across the region, including the London Children's Museum, Gallery Stratford, the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame, Lions Pool and Stratford Warriors games.

"I am so thankful for our staff and the hard work they do, and for the support of our community," said Robinson. "I encourage everyone to read this report and to stay connected with us through regular visits to the library and by following us on social media or our e-newsletter."

The library's 2025 annual report is available at www.splibrary.ca.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Festival artistic director Antoni Cimolino stands before the festival raises the Pride Flag to kickstart Pride Month. In honour of the month, the festival is also holding an online silent auction for the AIDS Memorial Quilt featured in the 2023 production of *Rent*, with all proceeds going to organizations that support those living with HIV/AIDS. Bidding runs from June 1-14 and can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/bd9tctax>.

OPC is right around the corner, June 17-18

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

With most of the spring planting near completion across the province, the Ontario Pork Congress (OPC) is expecting large crowds at this year's show at the Rotary Complex on McCarthy Road in Stratford.

Organizers have been working over the last 11 months to bring local farmers of all kinds, and especially those in hog farming, to set some time aside and have a look at the pork industry's new innovations at the annual Stratford convention on June 17 and 18.

Also, it is a time to see old friends and neighbours and sit down later and relax in the Hospitality Tent, for a show that organizers feel is the best yet.

On June 17, the topic of the presentations this year is piglet care. Taste the Best Pork sampling featuring local restaurants and a brewery, where the "cut of choice" is pork shoulder and apricots.

The evening sees the annual Hog Jog and Weaner Run, organized by the Ontario Pork Industry Council, take place be-

hind the complex.

This year the Hog Jog will be supporting the Emily Murphy Centre, a Stratford-based organization dedicated to supporting women and children who have experienced violence.

A new event this year is a Hog Jog live auction in the Hog Jog dining area, where participants will be able to buy boxes of back ribs, tenderloins and boneless butts.

On June 18, the OPC committee says those interested won't want to miss the Bacon Maker Classic live hog show, which is a youth swine competition open to ages nine to 21. The competition runs from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. with an award ceremony between 3-4 p.m.

There will also be a past presidents' luncheon event, international workers educational event and a pork quality competition, which this year will feature different cuts of meat instead of the whole carcass.

OPC president Victoria Stewart, knows there is something for everyone at this year's show, and encourages visitors to come with an appetite to taste some of the best pork Perth County has to offer.



A celebration in thanksgiving for Kelly Walker

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Hundreds of people gathered on June 1 at Avondale United Church not to mourn, but to celebrate a life well lived in Kelly Walker, a prominent citizen, musician, husband, stepfather. They came from near and far to be there to share their time with Walker, a man of compassion and humour who touched so many lives.

In testament to the man he was, there were many volunteers that contributed to the event. The service was led by Rev. Keith Reynolds with musical direction by Dan Van Winden and Alexander Cann. Music by Ben Bolt-Martin on cello, Eric Charbonneau on Piano, Trumpeteer Justin Forte, Stratford Concert Choir and Avondale Senior Choir.

In welcoming the many friends and family to the service, Matthew Harsant, son of Kelly's husband Ray Harsant, looked over the crowd and said, "Right now, I look out at hundreds of different expressions of Kelly Walker. Every one of them true and unique and layered. The lifelong stories and relationships, the newer ones, the easy ones, the complicated ones; love."

Music and reflection played a large part in the service with an opening prelude by Ben Bolt-Martin and Eric Charbonneau, an opening prayer and

the hymn "Gather Us In." Karen Rempel gave the readings of Exodus 3:13-14 and Matthew 5: 13-16.

Kelly's brother Michael offered reflections of his brother. "Kelly's kindness, love and generosity touched everyone fortunate enough to know him. His unwavering spirit, warm style and gentle nature brought comfort and joy to family, friends and the community alike. The legacy of compassion and laughter he leaves behind will continue to live on in our hearts."

Neighbour and close friend Larry Beare spoke warmly about Kelly and the many lives he touched and how Kelly would say, "Life is for the living, he would remind me, so live it, kid."

Seana McKenna spoke about how she had come to know Kelly as the very cool folk-rock hippy Dominican Friar priest that sang guitar and gave communion joyously. She passionately read a piece selected by Kelly that had been written by his friend. It began,

"In the heart of the universe is a new soul. A fresh source of light and love joining in the resounding heartbeat of eternity."

After the service was ended, the group transitioned to the Arden Park Hotel for a celebratory program that was expertly emceed by Judy Maddren and included performances of "Countenance, as Words Will Bend to Prayer" spoken by



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

The image of Kelly Walker looks down on husband Ray Harsant as emcee Judy Maddren looks on during Ray's welcoming speech of gratitude. Walker's family and friends hosted a celebration of life for the late musician on June 1, welcoming those near and far to share what he meant to them.

David Stones then sung by Maria Soulis and accompanied by Tim Elliott. Lorena McKennit sang "Down by the Sally Gardens," followed by a rousing "What I did for Love" by Barbara Steed Young accompanied by Eric Charbonneau.

"I hope the afternoon of expressions of love reflect the light that is in each of us, and my hope is that you let your

own light shine brightly throughout the entire day," said husband Ray in his welcoming speech.

Many old friends met, many new friendships were forged, all with the common opening line, "So how did you know Kelly?" Stories flourished and the love in the room was palatable as hundreds of people remembered Kelly.

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Sports Officer Dave Mewhinney 519-276-1317 mewhinney.55@gmail.com
Legion 519-271-4540 stratfordlegion008@gmail.com

Wednesday, June 10 Ladies Auxiliary Cold Salad Plate Luncheon, \$16 per plate.
Delivery available for an additional \$2. Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservations.

Sunday, June 14 Annual Rib 'n Kraut Dinner, baked potatoes, vegetables and dessert. \$25 per person.
Take-out 4:30 p.m., Dine-in 5:00 p.m.
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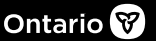
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Steps for Seniors returns to Stratford

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

ONE CARE Home & Community Support Services is inviting community members to lace up their walking shoes and step forward in support of local seniors through its upcoming Steps for Seniors fundraiser walkathon on Saturday, June 13.

The fundraising event will take place in Stratford, bringing together participants of all ages to walk in support of the organization's Driven to Care Campaign. With a goal of raising \$40,000, Steps for Seniors has already generated over \$13,000 thanks to the support of the community.

Funds raised through the event will help support transportation services for older adults and people living with health challenges across Huron and Perth Counties. Through the Driven to Care Campaign, ONE CARE continues to be a pillar of support and advocacy to address the growing need for accessible and reliable transportation. From helping clients attend medical appointments, access essential services and remaining connected to their



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

ONE CARE Home & Community Support Services is hosting its Steps for Seniors fundraising walkathon next weekend.

communities, ONE CARE is steadfast in its mission of protecting the longevity of this essential service.

“Transportation is more than simply getting from one place to another – it’s about autonomy, dignity and connection,” said Stephanie Ellens-Clark, executive director

of ONE CARE, in a media release. “Every step taken during these walkathons helps ensure older adults within our neighbourhoods can continue to live safely and in-



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ontario.ca/SeniorsMonth



Steps for Seniors returns to Stratford

dependently.”

The organization encourages community members, friends and neighbours to register individually or as part of a team, collect pledges and enjoy a welcoming and fun atmosphere while supporting an important cause. Community members who are unable to participate are encouraged to donate in support of the campaign. Businesses are also invited to sponsor the event, with various sponsorship levels available.

“MacLeods Scottish Shop is proud to support ONE CARE and the incredible work they do providing essential programs for seniors and individuals in our community – including transportation, meals, wellness programs and support that helps people remain independent and connected,” said Rob Russell, owner of MacLeods.

Beginning at 1 p.m. on Saturday, pre-walk festivities will include a kid’s area with games donated by the Stratford Public Library and face painting, coffee from Alley Cat Café and music played by beloved local DJ Ethan Maac. After the walk at 2 p.m., participants are invited to return to Stratford Market Square for pizza courtesy of New Orleans. Emcee Jamie Cottle from 107.7 2Day FM will guide the opening ceremonies.

Participants are encouraged to rally friends, family, neighbours and coworkers to support their fundraising efforts, with special rewards available for top fundraisers. Individuals who raise between \$150 and \$499 will receive a ONE CARE umbrella, while those who raise \$500 to \$999 will earn a cozy ONE CARE hoodie. Fundraisers who surpass \$1,000 will be rewarded with an exclusive ONE CARE

Sherpa blanket. No matter how much participants raise, their efforts directly contribute to improving quality of life for local residents while demonstrating the power of coming together for the betterment of our neighbours and the overall community.

Part two of the Steps for Seniors fundraiser walkathon will take place the following day on Sunday, June 14 at ONE CARE headquarters in Clinton.

Additional event details, registration information and donation opportunities can be found by visiting stepsforseniors.ca or onecaresupport.ca.

New to the 2026 iteration of Steps of Seniors, ONE CARE is proud to partner with Donate a Car Canada, making it easy for supporters to turn an unwanted vehicle into meaningful community impact. If community members cannot make it out

to the walk, they can consider contributing their vehicle of any type or condition. Newer vehicles may be sold through Donate a Car Canada’s network of agents to help maximize the value of the donation, while older vehicles are responsibly recycled in an environmentally friendly manner. Donors also receive a tax receipt for their contribution, making it a simple, convenient and environmentally responsible way to give back. By donating a vehicle and selecting ONE CARE as the charity of choice, supporters can make a lasting difference while clearing space in their driveway.

For more information about the Driven to Care campaign or to make a donation, please visit onecaresupport.ca or contact Lindsey Martchenko at fundraising@onecaresupport.ca.

Happy Seniors Month!



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Ontario 

McCarthy Place residents explore memories and creativity through new poetry circle

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Stratford Poet Laureate David Stones has recently started a new initiative for residents at McCarthy Place Retirement Residence, where poetry aims to bring together shared experiences and memories from the past.

The launch of Poetry Circle sessions aims to bring participants together on a monthly basis to share and perform original poems, or to perform favourite poems that have been enjoyed and remembered over the years.

"We all carry so many stories deep within us," said Stones. "In fact, as we get a little older we become garments woven of the stories and experiences that make us

who we are. Poetry is the perfect medium of self-expression to record these stories, to convey our emotions and to announce ourselves to the world. It's creative, freeing and a beautiful form of artistic release."

The collaboration comes after Stones' appointment as poet laureate in 2025. Since then, Stones has worked to promote poetry and literary arts within Stratford. He has worked with people of every age and is now helping seniors connect with their artistic side through poetry.

"We're gonna have some fun with this," Stones said. "With my children's poetry series performed for kindergarten to Grade 6, coupled with my high school poetry workshops undertaken with the Youth Poet Laureate, along with my community poetry initiatives, shows and open mics,

we've pretty well got the full scope of age demographics covered."

The collaboration was a welcomed offer, said Stephanie Schmidt, McCarthy Place senior health and wellness director, who has already noticed the impact the poetry circle is having.

"We're thrilled to welcome David as our Poetry Circle leader," she said. "This group offers our residents a meaningful outlet for creativity and connection. Through poetry, residents can reflect on memories and share life experiences. Poetry can be both therapeutic and empowering, helping our seniors build confidence, celebrate their voices and find joy in creativity at any stage of life."

Stones aims to continue this venture at McCarthy Place by offering monthly poetry circles. The first session saw eight attendees, and since then, word has spread

and he expects more at his June session, where love is the main topic.

"Our June topic is love and I'm encouraging them to write something original on the theme of love, or to dredge from their files or memory something they remember on the topic of love," he said. "I've chosen very simple themes and there is so much about love."

Although the McCarthy Place poetry circle is the first of its kind in Stratford, Stones says he is looking at expanding the concept to other retirement residences in the community to help seniors connect with poetry and past lived experiences.

The McCarthy Place Poetry Circle will meet on the third Tuesday of every month from 1:30-3 p.m., with residents encouraged to attend with an original poem or their favourite piece to share with the group.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Seniors participate in a poetry circle at McCarthy Place Retirement Residence led by Stratford Poet Laureate David Stones.



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Ontario 

Memorable Connections providing subsidized senior care this summer

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Memorable Moments Senior Care Services is now providing subsidized programming for its non-profit division Memorable Connections for the summer, thanks to fundraisers like the annual hockey tournament and donors.

Memorable Connections provides dementia care through recreation for seniors with dementia and their families. The community outing and the all-day Thursday option, brunch and baking programs will offer lower costs for June to August. It will be \$35 per session to participate in the baking program, \$5 per session for the brunch program, \$20 per outing and \$25 per session for the all-day outing group.

Executive director Erin Kloot said that being able to provide subsidized programming through a non-profit model has been a goal of hers, especially since she knows the cost through running a for-profit service as well.

"I understand how expensive senior care can get, especially for this vulnerable population and just the way the economy is right now just in general for everybody, it's hard," she said. "So, to be able to offer a subsidized program where it just allows them to be able to afford to get out is really nice."

The groups are small and always have a waitlist, but there's lots of community building through the activities



and outings. Kloot noticed that her clients are typically happier after participating in one of the groups.

"It allows everyone to form a close community and it allows everyone to participate fully. It allows us staff to be able to give more attention to everyone as well and ensure that everybody's participating," she said.

The outings range from a variety of activities including

trips to Black Creek Flower Farm, the Boathouse Stratford and enjoying a meal by the Avon River. There are also spontaneous outings depending on weather and staff availability.

"For example, today we had KFC at the river just because the group wanted to so we can always offer some extra programs that might not be our formalized scheduled programs," Kloot said.

For more information about the programs, either call 519-275-4902 or send an email to memorableconnections@outlook.com.

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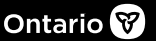
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Alzheimer's Walk brings out more families and awareness in new location



(Left to right) Jeremy, Cassidy, Natalee and Teresa Weicker.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)



(Left to right) Marguerite Dack, Mary Lynn Preistap, Deb Collins and Pat Turnbull dancing it out before embarking on the Walk for Alzheimer's.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)



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Ontario 

Rae announces funding for local seniors active living centres

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

To kick off Seniors Month, Matthew Rae, MPP for Perth-Wellington, announced \$186,537 in annual funding for local Seniors Active Living Centres (SALC). This is part of an over \$22 million investment to support 416 SALC programs across the province, including 97 new ones.

“Helping our seniors stay active and healthy in their golden years is important to ensure our communities continue to thrive,” said Rae in a media release. “Our government continues to support important senior programs, ensuring the communities our seniors helped build continue to serve them.”

“Senior Active Living Centres keep our seniors, fit, active, healthy, socially connected, close to their homes and in their communities,” said Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. “Thanks to Premier Ford’s leadership our government is making the largest investment in Seniors Active Living Centre programs in Ontario’s history. This will help even more seniors, no matter where they live, including those in a city or rural, remote and northern communities live more healthy, happy and independent lives.”

SALCs provide programming and activities for seniors that support physical and mental well being. Local programming in-



(TIMES FILE PHOTO)

Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae at an announcement at the YMCA of Three Rivers.

cludes fitness classes, educational activities and card programs. Some SALCs also offer virtual or satellite programming to engage with as many seniors as possible within our communities.

This year, Ontario is also celebrating the 60th anniversary of the first six Elderly Persons’ Centres – now known as Seniors

Active Living Centre programs – established under the Elderly Persons’ Centres Act, 1966. For six decades the Government of Ontario has continued to expand access to programs that help more seniors stay active, healthy and socially connected, ultimately improving their overall well-being.

“With June being Seniors Month in the Province of Ontario, I am glad to be sharing this good news,” said Rae. “It is im-

portant that we recognize and thank the many seniors in Perth-Wellington for their various contributions.”

Funding allocations from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility are as follows:

- Stratford Active Adults, \$55,000.
- North Perth Seniors Centre, \$18,317.
- Friendship Centre for St. Marys and Area, \$55,616
- Spruce Lodge Home for the Aged (The Spruce Active Living Centre), \$57,640.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

U15 Girls Strikers undefeated to start season, Graham Bunting Classic ahead

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U15 Strikers Girls team began their 2026 season with a flawless 3-0 record after a 3-2 comeback victory over Kitchener TFC on June 1 at the Vancea Financial Group (VFG) Field in Festival Hydro Park.

Peyton Ward started the scoring for Stratford early in the first half, then Kitchener equalized a few minutes later and took the lead late in the initial half. Early in the second half, Reese Campbell capitalized on a mistake by Kitchener, and Jessica Blake scored a low-line goal to bring the Strikers back in front midway through the period. Stratford then strengthened their defence in the final

minutes to secure the victory.

Head coach Scott Herman was pleased with the team's resilience, which helped it remain undefeated despite a slow start to the match.

"I thought we did well. We started slow, came back stronger in the second half, and the thing I like the most is that the girls didn't give up, they just kept going," Herman said.

This year's U15 squad is based on last year's U14 team, which secured the Southwest District Soccer League title and also won the Nothers Cup and the AC Douglas tournament championships.

Herman shared high hopes for the season, focusing on both team and individual achievements, beginning with the Graham Bunting Classic in Stratford this

weekend.

"This year, we want to continue with our success, have team success, individual success for the girls, and a fun, fun year," Herman said.

"We're coming in this weekend after a big performance tonight, and the expectation is we're going to give it all we've got and try and win that title in Stratford."

Stratford got off to a solid start, winning 2-0 in their season opener on home field against the Puslinch Panthers on May 11, and blew past Storm FC 7-0 the following week in Orangeville on May 20.

Both Ward and Payton Herman have each scored three goals for the Strikers, while Campbell, Blake and Elena Hogger have scored two goals each across three games.

The Strikers compete at the Graham Bunting Classic all weekend in Stratford and St. Marys on June 6 and 7. The tournament includes boys' and girls' divisions from U14 through U18.

Preliminary rounds run all day on June 6, with the semifinals and the championship matches scheduled for June 7. The U15 Strikers will compete in Pool A with Ilderton, Kitchener TFC, and St. Columban in the round-robin.

Graham Bunting Classic Pool A Schedule

8 a.m. (Festival Hydro Park - VFG Wealth Field) – Ilderton Ignite.

11 a.m. (Festival Hydro Park - GRIT Engineering Field) – Kitchener TFC.

2 p.m. (Festival Hydro Park - Cowan Field) – St. Columban .



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Strikers' goalkeeper Grace Elliott assesses the field from the back of the pitch during the game against Kitchener TFC at Festival Hydro Park on June 1.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Strikers' Lilly Harrigan (17) throws the ball back onto the pitch from the sideline against Kitchener TFC at Festival Hydro Park on June 1.

18U Nationals drop heartbreaker in Guelph

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford 18U Nationals mounted a strong comeback effort late in the game, only to lose 7-6 to the Guelph Royals on June 1.

Guelph led 3-0 at the end of the first inning, but a wild pitch enabled Stratford's Ethan Priestap to score from third, reducing the lead to 3-1. The Royals extended their lead by another run in the second after an outfield error by Finley Newton.

However, Stratford responded with two runs in their half of the inning: an RBI single by James Robinson and a wild pitch that allowed Cooper Yantzi to score, bringing Stratford within one run.

The score remained 4-3 until the Royals cashed in two runs in the bottom of the fifth off Owen Brooks, who relieved Priestap with two outs in the inning. But the Nationals roared back with three runs with the bases loaded in the next inning to tie the game at six.

However, the Royals regained the lead

with a two-out single, rendering the effort futile. The Nationals tried to rally in the top of the seventh with Logan MacMillan on first and Brooks on third, but a groundout by Daniel Hovius ended their attempt.

Reed Bowles pitched a scoreless bottom of the seventh, giving the Nationals another chance to tie the game in the final inning, but two groundouts and a flyout ended the game, marking the Nationals' third straight defeat.

Priestap pitched four and two-thirds innings, striking out four batters while

permitting three earned runs on three walks and four hits. Brooks and Bowles completed the rest of the game in relief, together recording four strikeouts, allowing three hits, and giving up one earned run. Alex Everett led the Nationals with two RBIs, and nine of the ten starters in the game reached base.

Next, Stratford will play a home-and-home series starting June 7 at Stratford National Stadium against the Simcoe Giants, followed by a rematch with the Royals on their home field on June 8.

U15 Nationals offence struggles against Brantford, crushes Cambridge on the road

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford 15U Nationals experienced a high mix of lows and highs, which resulted in a .500 week against Brantford and Cambridge.

On May 28, the Nationals aimed to extend their winning streak by hosting the Brantford Red Sox at the relatively cool, sunny Stratford National Stadium.

Brantford opened the scoring at the top of the first with a 2-0 lead. After starting pitcher Landon McCann and the defence retired the side in the top half of the second, the Nationals looked to capitalize in their half of the inning, but the aggressive baserunning by Dexter Powell attempting to score from second base backfired as Powell was tagged at home plate.

Stratford continued to press for the

equalizer in the next inning with Jackson Goebel and Will Molenhuis in scoring position with two outs, but Jake Price struck out looking, ending the inning. In the fourth, the Nationals again pressed for the game-tying score with Powell and James Antonio at the corners with two outs, but Carter Cook struck out to end the inning.

The Nationals' lack of offensive scoring was costly as the Red Sox scored three runs in the fifth inning, sealing the game. Despite gutsy efforts from McCann and Molenhuis on the mound, costly offensive and defensive errors led to a 5-0 loss.

McCann pitched four-plus innings, gave up three earned on two hits, allowed five walks, and struck out two. Aside from the fifth inning, Molenhuis subdued the Red Sox's offence in the remaining innings for Stratford.

Coach Rick Boon blamed the team's loss on poor pitch selection, noting that while the pitchers performed well, the batters swung at pitches they couldn't hit.

"I thought our pitching did well tonight. I think both our pitchers pitched well. I think the downfall of our game tonight was that we just had poor pitch selection that we were swinging at. We weren't swinging at pitches that we could drive; we were swinging at pitches that the pitcher for their team threw," Boon said.

"They pitch well, but we have to be more selective in what we swing at. If it's not a good pitch, you can drive; you should be letting it go to get into a good hitter's count. We didn't do that tonight."

On June 1, the Nationals travelled to Cambridge for a road matchup with the Cubs. Stratford got off to a scorching start

with a seven-run first inning, followed by a four-run second inning. After the Nationals put eight runs in the fourth, the lead was 19-0, only for the Cubs to escape the mercy rule at the time with six runs in the bottom half of the inning.

In the next inning, however, the visitors added nine more runs and forced the game to end on the mercy rule after retiring the Cubs' side in order.

Powell led the grand barrage of runs with four RBI's, while Price led the team with three hits. Every member of the Stratford starting roster scored one run or more in the win. Starting pitcher Max Barter pitched three scoreless innings, struck out four and allowed three hits. Goebel pitched the fourth and Reid Muselman finished off the Cubs in the scoreless fifth to enforce the early win.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford pitcher Landon McCann hands the ball to coach Rick Boon alongside his teammates on the mound in the fifth inning against the Brantford Red Sox at Stratford National Stadium on May 28.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Will Molenhuis of the Stratford Nationals swings the ball into the outfield against the Brantford Red Sox at Stratford National Stadium on May 28.

STRATFORD TIMES

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Stratford Festival review: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* enchants and delights

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the boundaries between what's real, what's fantasy and what is a dream are thin – almost imperceptible – and the play's characters slip between one world and the next, in some cases unknowingly.

That magic surrealness is captured perfectly in director Graham Abbey's 2026 Stratford Festival production. With only a few actual set pieces and props – most notably, a large, blank sphere hung above the stage and a fallen tree on which several characters sit or sleep at various points in the production – the design team's use of projection to create much of that magic is breathtaking.

From the mist-covered forest floor and a raging river projected onto the stage surface to the sun, moon and mysterious faces projected onto the sphere, the events that unfold are shrouded in mystique. And the use of projection to depict the magical powers of the fairies in this play, be it Puck (Mike Nadajewski) and Rose Petal (Vivienne Abbey) chasing fairy lights across the stage or Oberon (André Sills) instilling the light of the moon into a flower to enchant Titiana (Sara Topham), the magic depicted feels both dynamic and ever-present.

The magic of this production is also in the



(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

Sara Topham as Titiana and Michael Spencer-Davis as Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Stratford Festival 2026.

movement of the actors. Nadajewski does a marvelous job portraying the fleet-footedness of Puck, the trickster-jester, as he flits about the stage, causing chaos and confusion among the other characters, mortal and fairy alike. So too, the movement of Sills, Topham and the other actors portraying fairies feels otherworldly as they dance

under the moon to music played onstage by Nightingale (Dominique LeBlanc) on the violin and mandolin and First Fairy (Laura Condlln) on the viola.

Beyond Puck, who is hilarious in his mortal meddling, much of this play's comedy comes from the mortal characters as they are enchanted to fall in and out of love

with one another.

The constantly shifting love square between Hermia (Vivian Endicott-Douglas), Lysander (Jordin Hall), Helena (Jessica B. Hill) and Demetrius (Thomas Duplessie), and the resultant bickering and outright hostility towards one another, is a particular comedic highlight of this play. As frustration and anguish mix with Helena's unrequited thirst for Demetrius and Lysander's laughably bad ukelele serenading of both Hermia and Helena, their comedic squabbling provides an excellent counterpoint to the mystical designs of the fairies.

Nick Bottom (Michael Spencer-Davis) and the troop of roustabout, circus actors – Rita Quince (Sarah Dodd), Francis Flute (Aaron Krohn), Snout (Sara-Jeanne Hosie), Snug (Steven Hao) and Robin Starveling (Michael Man) – also add a strong dose of hilarity to the play.

Between their unproductive rehearsal in the fairies' forest, which results in Puck transforming Bottom into a donkey and Titiana being enchanted to fall in love with said donkey (also hilarious), and the troop's play within a play for the recently reunited lovers, each of the actors playing actors bring a welcome bevy of levity and absurdity to this production.

A Midsummer Night's Dream runs at the Tom Patterson Theatre until Sept. 26.

Stratford Festival review: The whole cast shines in 2026 production of *Guys and Dolls*

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Guys and Dolls is one of those all-time great musicals in which every actor, dancer and singer who takes the stage has the chance to shine.

And that's especially true in the Stratford Festival's 2026 production helmed by Stratford's go-to director-choreographer for all things musical theatre, Donna Feore. Once again, Feore has all the pieces she needs to give her cast the chance to show their full range of talents, from the bright neon lights to the simple-yet-effective set design, and a truly phenomenal musical backing led by festival music director Franklin Brasz.

And boy does this cast deliver. But where do I start?

Festival favourite Dan Chameroy as Sky Masterson is a phenomenal casting choice. His ability to perform in big, flashy numbers like "Luck Be a Lady" and "Havana," and show his softer side in "My Time of Day" and "I've Never Been in Love Before" gives his character the nuance a big-time gambler who unexpectedly finds love and seeks to reform his sinful ways needs to make him believable.

And Chameroy has undeniable onstage chemistry with Olivia Sinclair-Brisbane as Sarah Brown. The pair's playful yet resistant back-and-forth throughout the first



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

Dan Chameroy as Sky Masterson with members of the company in *Guys and Dolls*. Stratford Festival 2026.

act, particularly leading up to "I'll Know," sets the stage for their blossoming and unlikely love, and gives Sky the motivation he needs to finally and completely win her over by the play's conclusion.

Sinclair-Brisbane is also the perfect choice for the uptight and morally inflexible Sarah Brown. Her steadfast commitment to her mission work offers Sky a way

into her heart, while her initially reluctant feelings for Sky gives her cause to let loose amid the passionate dancing and brilliantly choreographed brawl in "Havana."

Jennifer Rider-Shaw's performance as Miss Adelaide is, to no one's surprise, spot on. Her powerful vocals and energetic dancing combined with the eye-catching costumes Adelaide and her Hot Box danc-

ers wear during "A Bushel and a Peck" and "Take Back Your Mink" simply can't be overlooked. Rider-Shaw also gets the chance to show off her considerable comedic timing, particularly as she laments over Nathan Detroit's (Mark Uhre) unwillingness to commit to marriage after 14 years as a fiancé.

And that ear for comedic timing extends to the rest of the cast, from Nathan Detroit's frantic efforts to secure a venue for his craps game while avoiding the attention of Lt. Brannigan (Nehassaiu DeGannes) and Big Jule (Juan Chioran) forcing Detroit to gamble with his special, undotted dice, from which only Jule knows what was rolled, to pretty well every appearance by Nicely Nicely Johnson (Steve Ross).

Ross, a personal favourite festival regular of mine, brings the house down with "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat." His mastery of stage movement, his use of props and comedic timing truly stand out in this number and make him the perfect comedic relief throughout the production, always delivering those all-important one-liners with impeccable tone and timing.

This season's production of *Guys and Dolls* is sure to be a smash hit for the festival. If you're looking for some toe-tapping fun and a two-and-a-half-hour display of awe-inspiring talent, *Guys and Dolls* runs at the Festival Theatre until Nov. 1.

The irresistible soundtrack of our lives: Peter Asher's remarkable journey through music history

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Stratford Film Festival (SFF) invites audiences on a musical journey through six decades of rock and roll history with *Peter Asher: Everywhere Man*, screening Friday, June 12 at 7 p.m. and Saturday, June 13 at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. at Stratford City Hall theatre.

Part documentary, part musical memoir and wholly entertaining, *Everywhere Man* tells the extraordinary story of Peter Asher – chart-topping musician, producer, manager and trusted confidant to some of the most influential artists of the modern era. From his early success as one half of Peter and Gordon to his work behind the scenes with a generation of iconic singer-songwriters,

Asher's fingerprints can be found on some of the most beloved music of the past 60 years.

The film features intimate interviews with music legends including James Taylor, Linda Ronstadt, Carole King, Lyle Lovett, Natalie Merchant, Marianne Faithfull and Paul McCartney, along with appearances by Steve Martin, Eric Idle, Twiggy and others whose lives intersected with Asher's remarkable career.

What makes *Everywhere Man* especially irresistible is its soundtrack. Packed with iconic songs, the film becomes a joyous celebration of the music that shaped a generation.

"Peter Asher has lived a life most of us can barely imagine," said SFF festival di-

rector Megan Smith-Harris in a media release. "He was in the room for so many pivotal moments in music history, yet he's somehow remained one of the great unsung figures of popular culture. What makes this documentary so enjoyable is that it works on two levels – you get all these incredible behind-the-scenes stories, but you also get hit after hit after hit. By the end of the evening, you'll have a playlist running through your head and a whole new appreciation for the man who helped shape the soundtrack of our lives."

Following the screening, Smith-Harris will be joined by CJCS 107.1 FM's Jamie Cottle for a in depth conversation about the music of the 1960s, 1970s and beyond, why these songs have stood the test of time and

how they continue to connect generations of listeners.

Asher's story offers audiences a rare behind-the-scenes look at pivotal moments in popular music history. From the British Invasion to the rise of the singer-songwriter movement, *Everywhere Man* reveals how one seemingly understated figure helped shape the careers of some of the biggest artists in the world.

Whether you're a lifelong music lover or simply someone who remembers hearing these songs on the radio, *Peter Asher: Everywhere Man* is a celebration of the artists, friendships and unforgettable melodies that continue to define popular culture.

Tickets are available at StratfordFilmFestival.com.

McKennitt plans 9-country European tour

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Award-winning Canadian singer and songwriter Loreena McKennitt has just announced a nine-country, 30-concert European tour for the spring of 2027.

The Mask and Mirror Anniversary Tour will launch Feb. 22, 2027 in Groningen, The Netherlands and wrap up April 3, 2027 in Paris, France, with performances in Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

The spring dates represent the third leg of McKennitt's anniversary tour, which celebrates her 1994 studio release *The Mask and Mirror*, an album that has often

been described as a defining moment in her career, celebrated for its "cross-cultural fertilization," weaving together Celtic, Spanish and Moroccan influences. When it was released, the LA Times described it as "music full of somber depths, spiritual longings and age-old echoes." The album, which the artist herself considers "a historical and musical pilgrimage," has sold more than two million copies worldwide.

McKennitt says she followed "paths of inspiration" and that the album "examines questions that echo down the centuries – Who was God? What is religion, what spirituality? What was revealed and what was concealed and what was the mask and what the mirror?"

"We're thrilled to return to Europe for

another chapter of *The Mask and Mirror* Anniversary Tour, following the first leg in southern Europe in the summer of 2024, where we performed at many of the outdoor festivals," said McKennitt in a media release. "It has been fascinating to once again engage with music inspired by questions exploring not only the history of the Celts, but also the timeless subjects of religion, spirituality and moral conundrums – that carry a fresh resonance today. We can't wait to see everyone again and to share the music."

The second leg of *The Mask and Mirror* Anniversary Tour will be taking place in eastern Canada this fall, beginning Oct. 13 in Moncton, NB. and concluding in Montréal on Nov. 2.

The tour was first launched in Europe in the summer of 2024. Due to high demand for tickets and many sold-out performances, additional shows had to be added.

The first set of each performance on the tour will feature "fan favourites," while the second set will include every song, in order from the album. McKennitt will be accompanied by musical companions Caroline Lavelle on cello, Brian Hughes on guitar, Hugh Marsh on violin, Dudley Phillips on bass and Robert Brian on drums.

Tickets for the spring 2027 tour went on sale last week. More information can be found at <https://loreenamckennitt.com/tours/>.

McGonigle and Diesel back home with another championship belt buckle

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Shakespeare's champion rodeo steer wrestler Cody McGonigle keeps on winning.

Just home from Quebec now, he has another Canadian championship under his huge and colourful belt buckle.

Cody and his partner Diesel (his American quarter horse), just got home from travelling many miles to get to Saint Tite, Que., for the International Professional Rodeo Association (IPRA)'s Canadian finals in steer wrestling.

They headed to the finals in first place for the season for the second year in a row.

A true talented partnership of athleticism, this horse and rider duo once again captured the season belt buckle and the Canadian championship in steer wrestling.

Once home, McGonigle told the Times: "Winning back-to-back in the Canadian finals in steer wrestling ... winning it once was special but winning the title two years in a row is something very special."

"... Yes it does take a lot of miles, sacrifices, great horsepower under the saddle and good people behind these wins."

He said he is grateful for everyone who's been in his corner throughout it all: his mom and Dad, Dave and Susan, sister Ally, and grandparents Murray and Margaret. Without their support he could not do what he has done already.

McGonigle and Diesel are still currently travelling down the rodeo road once again, to achieve another trip in calf roping at the 2026 Canadian finals in Saint Tite, Que.

This young cowboy is on the road for over 100 days a year and takes on interested sponsors whenever he travels. Reach him at rodeocowboy182@gmail.com.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Ally and Cody McGonigle are home again in North Easthope township after travelling to Quebec for another successful championship.

Editorial

Age-friendly communities are better for everyone, not just seniors



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Recently, I've been thinking a lot about how our communities and our society as a whole fall short when it comes to supporting people with disabilities and seniors who want to age at home.

From family members with mobility issues who are unable to secure adequate home care to our recent struggles navigating a largely inaccessible world after my fiancé, Julia, broke her leg, there are so many barriers in our day-to-day life that make it difficult, if not impossible, to retain our independence as we get older, sick or injured.

It has been said many times

that the true measure of a society is how it takes care of its most vulnerable members. Having watched countless people I love fight tooth and nail to get the support they need to continue living their lives as they always have and fall short, at least in some respects, it's clear our society has some room to improve.

And that becomes an especially salient point when we look at how our senior demographic is growing.

According to Statistics Canada, Canada had more than 8.1 million people aged 65 and older in 2025, representing 19.5 per cent of the population – nearly one in five Canadians. The Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry further predicts that by 2030, seniors are expected to account for roughly 23 per cent of Canada's population, meaning nearly one in four Canadians will be over 65.

Recent projections published by the Government of Ontario suggest the fastest-growing age group is people aged 85 and older. In Ontario, the number

of people over 75 is expected to more than double by 2051, while the number of people aged 90 and older could more than triple.

For the first time in Canadian history, there are now more seniors than children under 15. Though seniors make up less than one-fifth of the population, they account for nearly half of health-care spending because older adults typically require more complex care.

When it comes to the impending "senior tsunami," most politicians talk about seniors only in terms of hospitals, emergency rooms and nursing homes. The reality is healthy aging begins long before someone needs medical care.

Communities need programs and support services to help residents remain healthy throughout their lives, and especially as they get older. These include free or low-cost exercise programs, social clubs and cultural programming, as well as volunteer opportunities, opportunities for learning and accessible transportation. These programs help maintain physical health, reduce

isolation and keep seniors engaged in their communities.

Social isolation is becoming a major challenge for older adults, and recent surveys show loneliness remains stubbornly high among Canadian seniors. A senior who attends a weekly card game, exercise class, church supper, service club meeting or community centre program is often healthier than someone sitting alone at home.

Community organizations, churches, libraries, service clubs and recreation departments all play a role in healthy aging.

Most seniors do not want to move into long-term care if they can safely remain in their own homes. That means investing in home-care nursing, personal support workers, meal-delivery programs, transportation services, homemaking assistance and respite care for family caregivers – an often-forgotten piece of the healthy aging puzzle.

Helping seniors remain at home longer is usually what they want and is often less expensive than institutional care.

Beyond the home, commu-

nities need to become more age friendly. The conversation should extend beyond health care to include accessible sidewalks, benches and resting areas, safe crossings, affordable housing options, transportation alternatives and accessible public buildings.

A community that works for an 85-year-old generally works better for everyone.

At the end of the day, we need to look beyond the cost of the programs, services and health care we will all need as we age and remember seniors work for the benefit of our communities every day. Seniors volunteer in hospitals, churches, schools, museums, food banks and service clubs. They provide child care for grandchildren, mentor younger generations and contribute decades of knowledge and experience.

An age-friendly community isn't measured by how it cares for people in their final years; it's judged by how it supports people to remain healthy, active, connected and independent for as long as possible.

Quote of the Week

"The enthusiasm from the community is incredible. We're excited, the team's excited and we're looking for this new fresh start at this legendary legacy building that has so much character and history and is such a beloved brand within the Stratford community"

- Mark Simone, general manager of Bijou at the Church, on the restaurant's resurgence this summer.

STRATFORD TIMES

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Opinions

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL: IN THIS MOMENT



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

Our lives are seconds, built one upon the other – building the minutes, that build the hours, that build the days, the years, the lifetime – before all-time wears thin and shrinks. I am who I am before the implosion from year, day, hour, minute – back down to the iota of a second when all things stop. In this stopped moment – I die.

I am trying to comprehend the feeling of this stopping. I'm trying to get close to it, intimate with it, the moment of ending. What stops me from understanding? Where do I go instead, when I get close to a certain sense of... eternity? Easily distracted. For

while we live, we are not eternal. We hold eternity within us, but we are not it. "I think, therefore I am," doesn't work. It is not enough. One cannot think eternity into a tangible enough experience; one can only sense it. Our eternity is shared, universal and untouchable until perhaps, at the end of that last second, in the moment of implosion (the dramatic inward collapse of a situation), where we may discover what we truly are. Until then, we behave as we do, and all our abundant methods of tempting fate, our numerous searches for the thrills in living, are perhaps an unconscious desire to touch this eternity in one way or another. Eternity, possibly, is but one second at the clock stopping; that stretches out into no time.

And just as there are moments in our entertainments, on our television and computer screens, in movie theatres and in literature where we see it happen in our minds eye (death) – the leap into some kind of continuance camouflaged as ending – we wrap ourselves up in the adventure and allow the moment of the person dying on screen to pass into the greater scheme of sto-

ryline and moral in order to move the action forward. Poor character. Sometimes, we don't even know your name. But when we do have a sense of you, we feel something akin to sadness, not merely for you, but for us. What about the next episode, the next chapter in the book? Let's touch the eternity, but don't stay with it for too long. We want that character back.

I think this is why we jump off buildings and bridges, into canyons and valleys, with our human-made umbilical cords sling-shooting us back from the abyss. The moment of excited possibility, the split-second wait for the ultimate unknowing, the "yes" moment – I have gotten close to the edge and in the adjacent moment, am now safe and secure in the wide awakesness of living. We place ourselves in situations near our finalities – between the two seemingly opposite ends of our potential continuations – the one before death and the one after. This gap is the space between all this life's unique realities.

In the meantime, there are other, less extreme, fascinations. Darker preferences in decor, art,

dress, movies and music. These are all explorations, too. Sometimes in youth, most often in our teenage years, one grows in one or more of these as an initiation into pondering our ultimate end, as a rebelliousness towards life's illusions or as a reminder of our frailties. Some of us have early experiences of death through friends and family as I have. We place our younger selves into certitudes, thinking this is how life goes believing our reality is somehow superior to another's, when truly, we are all at a loss as to what reality is anyway. For myself, I try to deliberately live with uncertainties and wonders.

None of those experimental exploits into the beyond hold the same mystery now as they did back then. I am, in a manner of speaking, dressed in death through my work – but that doesn't mean I am any closer to knowing it than anyone else. Nor am I further away. It informs me. I walk alongside. And certainly, I still keep what some would consider the darker and the lighter elements in balance – in certain items in my house, in the books that I read, in the music I listen to: Henryk Gorecki's Symphony

of Sorrowful Songs or the music of Dead Can Dance as examples of the downbeat, can enlighten just as well as the band Yes and the music of Gordon Lightfoot on the upbeat. The light and the dark.

Straddling the worlds of living and dying in one's mind is good for the psyche. It places one's head firmly on the shoulders, after allowing the mind to drift off into flights of fancy and great conjecture. What always happens is a more profound return to earth after the imaginary departure; eyes awash in mortality.

Besides, I'm not convinced that most of us hold a fear of dying so much as a fear of pain. Of course, that doesn't strip the experience of deep sadness. Saying goodbye unwillingly is always hard to do. But who knows – getting to know someone who uncannily reminds us, enchantingly speaks to us in the same way our dear departed loved one did, could be a much harder reality to swallow.

Stuart is a celebrant and the manager of Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. It is his privilege to serve, dispel myths, and give information concerning his field of compassionate service.

Where does wealth come from?



BRUCE WHITAKER

Times Columnist

A good buddy of mine keeps asking me one stubborn question. He looks at the wealth in his neighbourhood and wonders where the wealth comes from? He has done well – above average income, lower-than-most debt, supporting a family and yet he watches a different kind of prosperity play out around him. After digging through data, talking to people who build and inherit fortunes and listening to his frustration, a clearer picture emerged.

Let's start with a simple definition: wealth usually means financial net worth, everything

you own less everything you owe. That number is startlingly uneven. In Canada, 20 per cent of households own roughly 63-73 per cent of assets while 50 per cent hold only about two to five per cent. One per cent controls roughly 26 per cent of Canadian wealth. In the United States, the concentration is even starker: 20 per cent control over 80 per cent of wealth and one per cent hold roughly 27-40 per cent.

Two engines have driven recent gains. First, housing. By late 2024 the average Canadian household net worth was about \$1,026,205, helped by pricey markets such as Vancouver and Toronto, and overall household wealth reached about \$17.5 trillion in Q4 2024. For many families, that million-dollar figure is concentrated in the family home as the single asset. Homeowners benefited as house prices rose and could borrow against or realize gains when they sold, that is if they downsized.

The second engine is the stock market. Over the decade to late 2024 the S&P/TSX Composite averaged about 8.6 per cent annually; in the U.S., the S&P 500

returned roughly 12-15 per cent annually (including dividends), and the Nasdaq did even better. But only about half of Canadians participate in the stock market, so those returns mainly helped people who were already invested.

Income still determines day-to-day capacity to save and invest. The 2021 Census showed median after-tax household and unattached individual income around \$73,000 (Stratford at \$68,500). By 2023 Canadian household after-tax income rose to about \$74,200 (\$105,370 pre-tax). Average incomes have not increased significantly.

The determinant of a healthy income is choosing a lucrative career. The highest pay has clustered in specialized health care (anesthesiologists, surgeons, psychiatrists), tech and data roles (software engineers, data scientists), senior management, finance and some engineering fields. These are sectors that have seen faster wage growth as demand, technology and demographics aligned.

Beyond markets and paycheques, other drivers shape

who gets ahead:

- Inheritance and intergenerational transfers. This has become huge with the baby boomer transfer of wealth. Sources suggest that roughly \$200-\$500 billion have moved from older Canadians to younger generations in the early 2000s until now. Another \$1 trillion is expected over the next 5-15 years.

- Business-succession transfers are commonly estimated at roughly \$1.5-2 trillion by the early-to-mid 2030s.

- Pensions and employer benefits: defined-benefit plans and employer retirement contributions act like hidden wealth.

- Taxes and public policy: capital-gains treatment, pension design and social programs redistribute or concentrate wealth.

- Financial literacy and advice: disciplined savers who use RRSPs, TFSAs and avoid high-interest debt build net worth faster.

- Luck and timing: being in the right industry, catching a market or housing boom, or receiving a windfall changes lives.

- Structural barriers: discrimination, unequal schooling and limited networks block many

from accessing the same levers.

The majority of citizens are like my friend. They have experienced rising prices, higher interest rates and record debt. By early 2025 Canada's household debt-to-income ratio neared 177 per cent, a rough measure of total debt relative to annual income that shows many households are financially stretched and could not repay all debts in a single year. Canadian households carry materially more debt relative to income than U.S. households, deepening fragility for people who are otherwise middle class.

The next time my friend asks where wealth comes from, I will respond by referring to business ownership, from income that can be saved and invested, from family, educational and career choices, and sometimes from luck. I will add something that not all wealth shows up on a balance sheet: a loving partner, a healthy family, dependable friends and a supportive community. Those things won't buy a house in Stratford, but they are a different kind of capital, the quiet wealth that makes life so worthwhile.

Opinions

Accessibility in Stratford and beyond

KIERAN ALBRECHT

Guest Columnist

Walk and Roll season is in full swing as summer approaches. Muscular Dystrophy Canada (MDC) is dedicated to enhancing the lives of individuals affected by neuromuscular disorders across the country by providing ongoing support and resources while funding vital research in the search for treatments and cures.

On May 31, the Waterloo-Wellington chapter held its 2026 MDC Walk and Roll event, doing its part to support this mission by raising both funds and awareness for neuromuscular disorders.

My own neuromuscular journey began when I was formally diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in the summer of 2014. The following year, in June 2015, I attended my first Walk and Roll event along with my team Kieran's Crusaders. In recent years, MDC has given me the opportunity to speak at the event, sharing my perspective as someone living with a neuromuscular disorder.

This year, I served as the event champion, a role that involved welcoming participants, bringing together individuals living with neuromuscular disorders, their families and fundraising teams, and encouraging connections throughout the event. I also helped lead the Passport Initiative, in which participants collected stamps by introducing themselves to the champion. Completed passports were entered into a draw for a chance to win a prize of up to \$50.



Kieran Albrecht and his team at the Waterloo-Wellington Muscular Dystrophy Canada (MDC) Walk and Roll event on May 31, an event which has raised nearly \$19,000 for the Canadian organization.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Waterloo-Wellington Walk and Roll event has raised \$18,989.00 to date, and donations will remain open until Oct. 31.

Before concluding, I would like to bring our Stratford community into this nationwide effort to break down barriers for the disabled community and build a more inclusive society for everyone. Recently, Stratford hosted both its Pride Parade and a Cystic Fibrosis Walk, events that sought to promote equality, awareness and inclu-

sion.

As part of my reflection on accessibility in Stratford, I first looked back on my own experiences. I attended Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS), which was fully accessible, featuring a functioning elevator and a welcoming, supportive team of teachers and educational assistants. From there, I explored the city from the perspective of a wheelchair user, travelling throughout Stratford to assess its accessibility.

Like many communities, Stratford's sidewalks could benefit from improvements, but they are generally navigable and serve their purpose. Most public spaces, including stores and restaurants, are accessible and equipped with features such as automatic doors that help individuals with mobility challenges enter and exit independently.

One accessibility issue, however, remains particularly complex – and it is not unique to Stratford. Public washrooms continue to present challenges for many people with disabilities. Accessibility needs vary greatly from person to person, making it difficult to create solutions that work for everyone. It is also a topic that can be difficult to discuss openly. For some individuals, me included, there can be a sense of self-consciousness or embarrassment surrounding these needs, whereas for many others, using a washroom is something they rarely have to think about.

Above all, I am grateful that, as someone living with a neuromuscular disorder, I have been able to contribute to the Stratford community. For nearly five years, I have worked at McDonald's, allowing me to serve and connect with members of the community every day.

While Stratford still has work to do in its ongoing effort to become fully accessible to all residents and visitors, it has made meaningful progress. By continuing to listen, learn and invest in accessibility, the city can build an even stronger and more inclusive community for future generations.

Social isolation and social prescribing: moving beyond medication

JEAN HEWITT

Guest Columnist

As populations age across Canada and much of the developed world, all health-care systems are confronting a challenge that medicine alone cannot solve: loneliness and social isolation among older adults.

The number of people over the age of 80 is rising rapidly, driven by the aging baby boomer generation. While medical advances have helped people live longer, old age has also given rise to a less-obvious crisis – many seniors are living alone, disconnected from family, community and meaningful social interaction. Increasingly, researchers and healthcare providers recognize that isolation is not simply an emotional hardship; it is a serious health risk. Studies have linked chronic loneliness to higher rates of depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease, weakened immune function and even premature death. Some researchers now compare the health impact of prolonged social isolation to smoking or obesity. Yet

despite this growing body of evidence, health-care systems continue to rely heavily on prescriptions, clinical interventions and emergency care rather than addressing the underlying social causes in those showing declining health.

This is where social prescribing should enter the conversation. Social prescribing is an approach in which physicians and health-care professionals refer patients not only to medical treatment, but also to community-based supports and activities. Rather than asking only, "What medicine is needed?", social prescribing asks, "What connection is missing?"

A patient experiencing loneliness, depression or chronic stress might be connected with a walking group, a new learning experience or a gardening group; they could be encouraged to join a seniors' centre or go to community meals. Someone isolated after losing a spouse may benefit more from companionship or social connection with a bereavement group of others who share their experience, rather than an anti-depressant medication.

The concept may sound simple, but its

implications are profound. Social prescribing recognizes that human beings are essentially social creatures whose health depends partly on belonging, participation and meaningful relationships. In many cases, emotional distress arises not from a chemical imbalance alone, but from disconnection – from community, identity and purpose.

Countries such as the United Kingdom have already moved strongly in this direction, even declaring March 26 Social Prescribing Day. The National Health Service there introduced social prescribing programs that use "link workers" to connect patients with community resources tailored to their interests and needs. Early results have shown reductions in loneliness, improvements in mental well-being and decreased pressure on primary care services.

Canada has begun exploring similar models, though implementation remains patchy. Stratford has moved in this direction recently. In April, Stratford Third Age Learning (S3AL) began distributing flyers to medical practices and communi-

ty health services, giving information on its courses for seniors. These courses not only keep aging brains sharper by learning new things, they involve much social interaction as participants share ideas in discussion groups or work together on tasks. In May, representatives of the Stratford Lakeside Active Adults Association (SLAAA), S3AL, the Stratford Public Library, the Stratford Perth Museum, the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Stratford, Probus and the YMCA of Three Rivers met to discuss the programs they offer retirees, how they might increase senior opportunities for social interaction in these programs, and how they can work more collaboratively to better serve the Stratford and area communities. Coffee Cafés for seniors are popping up in Stratford as well. S3AL runs a café on the first Wednesday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon at Falstaff Family Centre, and SLAAA provides a similar opportunity on the second Wednesday morning of the month at the Agriplex. Although One Care is meeting with seniors and looking

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Opinions

Social isolation and social prescribing: moving beyond medication

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how its strategic plan can better respond to social isolation, the City of Stratford's elected officials still have a way to go to recognize the importance of meeting the needs of older isolated seniors before they reach crisis point. A Senior Coalition request for a Senior Advisory Committee to keep council abreast of senior needs and concerns, submitted in July 2025 has yet to receive a response.

The gap in support for seniors, especially those living alone, may become increasingly urgent. As the population over 80 expands dramatically over the next two decades, healthcare systems could become overwhelmed not only by physical illness, but by the consequences of widespread social disconnection. Emergency rooms and physicians are often left managing symptoms that are deeply rooted in loneliness, grief, poverty or isolation.

Social prescribing is not a replacement

for medical treatment. Nor is it a simplistic cure for complex social problems. But it does represent an important shift in thinking: health is not determined solely inside hospitals and clinics. It is also shaped in neighbourhoods, community centres, parks, libraries, friendship circles and families. Many seniors risk becoming invisible in an era increasingly dominated by technology, individualism and large apartment buildings. Rebuilding social connection may prove to be one of the most important public health strategies of the coming decades. The challenge ahead is not merely helping people live longer, but helping them remain connected, valued and engaged while they do.

And perhaps that is a prescription worth taking seriously.

Dr. Jean Hewitt is the board chair of Stratford Third Age Learning, an organization dedicated to providing seniors with opportunities for active learning.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Members of the Stratford Third Age Learning (S3AL) ukulele class perform during a recital for fellow participants at the kickoff of the organization's Monthly Senior Drop-in Coffee Time last month.

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– Walter & Gisela Mueller

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Tournon steam train takes travellers back in time



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

When the Viking company invited us on a Rhône River Cruise, we knew we'd be travelling via airplane and, of course, boat – more specifically, a Viking Longship christened Viking Heimdal.

We hadn't realized that the old cliché, “planes, trains and automobiles,” would be true to the max. We flew into Paris, returning post-cruise by air from Marseille to Munich to Toronto.

In Paris, where we stayed for three days, we used automobiles for tours and added boats to the list as we took a Seine River cruise. We travelled from Paris to Lyon by high-speed train, and there, boarded the longship for our weeklong cruise.

So, we thought we'd pretty much covered the transportation device gamut but then came the fifth day of the trip when we found ourselves boarding a much-older railway train, a sharp contrast to the rapid ride from Paris. We were spending the morning on a leisurely trip aboard the Tournon Steam Train, riding in heritage carriages with plenty of steam blowing past as we travelled through a beautiful and unspoiled French river valley.

The official name of the train is



The steam engine was built in the early 20th century.

the Chemin de fer du Vivarais. It's in the Ardeche region in the south of France. The full line is 33 kilometres long, running from Tournon in the Rhône Valley to Lamastre in the Doux valley. However, there are also shorter, half-day trips, including the one we took.

It's quaint, authentic and quite wonderful. Riding in these heritage carriages pulled by a genuine steam locomotive is a great experience in its own right, but the scenery through the valleys is also spectacular.

There is an intriguing history to the Tournon Steam Train, both as a tourist attraction and prior to that incarnation.

The line was originally built between 1886 and 1890, and it carried freight and passengers until 1968.

Some local enthusiasts believed it was too special to abandon, and so a surprisingly brief, two-year project resulted in the 33-kilometre

line being reopened as a special attraction in 1970. It stayed in service until 2008 when a growing operating deficit and increasing disrepair of the rolling stock forced another closure. But fans of steam trains are not easily deterred. Although that hiatus lasted five years, this time, they brought the train back once again. In 2013, they again fired up the steam locomotive, and, with that, the current railway service began. All of the rolling stock is authentic with the locomotives dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.

That's the history of the train as tourism attraction, but the previous life of this railway is much more poignant. During World War II, the Rhône region was a key centre for the French Resistance, as French patriots fought against the Nazis – and against the Nazi-friendly Vichy government. I have written previously about the city of Lyon as an

important base for the Resistance. As the war unfolded, the Resistance fighters moved more and more to the forests and mountains of southern France, from where they waged what might be called guerilla warfare against their occupiers.

And we learned that the Tournon Railway, running through the district that was home to plenty of Resistance fighters, was frequently employed to smuggle guns and ammunition for these Resistance fighters, with boxes of arms and ammo buried beneath the piles of coal used to fire the engine.

The railway was also used when Jewish children were brought from Paris, where their lives were in immediate danger. They were then taken via this local railway to isolated farms where they could hide in relative safety. Thus, these cute little carriages we were riding in were actually important tools in combating the horrors of the Holocaust.

Many lives were saved from death in the concentration camps because of the Tournon railway. A sobering reality check.

Back to today. The carriages have windows that can be opened and passengers can also stand on the car's entrance platforms to take in the stunning views of the Doux River gorge, as well as to breathe in the scent of coal fires and to experience the clouds of steam. Your every sense carries you back in time.

And there is an unexpected twist at the farthest point of the excursion we took, from Tournon to the Colombier-le-Vieux-Saint Barthélémy-Plain trip. And no, I am not making up the name of the latter station. The sign fills an entire wall of the old station building.

Because he passengers quite rightly expect to be returned to Tournon, the steam engine has to be disconnected from the carriages and turned 180 degrees to head back the way it came.

This is accomplished by something that looks a little like magic but is really just good old engineering know-how. The 44-ton locomotive is turned around manually – by one man who does not even work up a sweat – on a cleverly designed turntable.

Back at the Tournon station, passengers can visit a museum, which includes heritage train cars, plenty of railroading artifacts and, of course, a gift shop.

All in all, a wonderful experience of stepping – actually, riding – back in time.

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



The Tournon Railway has a dedicated team of workers, including the engineer.



An aqueduct in the Doux Gorge.

Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Egyptian bull-god
- 5. A young canine
- 8. Cologne
- 11. Fictional British P.I.
- 13. Midway between northeast and east
- 14. A place to shop
- 15. Minneapolis suburb
- 16. Single lens reflex
- 17. NY Mets great Tommie
- 18. Informal loan clubs
- 20. Habitual twitching
- 21. Holm oak
- 22. Willing to consent or submit
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Made possible
- 31. Language in Ghana
- 32. Relating to one's birth
- 33. Deep-bodied fishes
- 38. Defunct European currency
- 41. Small American songbird
- 43. One from L.A.
- 45. After tenth
- 47. Hillside
- 49. Red deer
- 50. Partner to "oohed"
- 55. Indian musical pattern
- 56. Israeli city ___ Aviv
- 57. Golden peas plant
- 59. Breezed through
- 60. Midway between east and southeast
- 61. Frameworks
- 62. Danish krone
- 63. Fall back
- 64. Influential Korean leader

- 2. Expression of sorrow or pity
- 3. Large, stocky lizard
- 4. Turkish leader title
- 5. Nag
- 6. Blank
- 7. Closely woven cotton fabric
- 8. A nice shot in golf
- 9. Away from wind
- 10. Evergreen shrub genus
- 12. Large African antelope
- 14. Something you receive
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. Wet dirt
- 24. No longer here
- 25. Writing utensil
- 26. Ribonucleic acid
- 27. Consume food
- 28. Licensed for Wall Street
- 29. Alternative forms of a gene
- 34. Buddy
- 35. We all do it
- 36. Chicken
- 37. No seats available
- 39. Yearned to possess
- 40. Ineffectual
- 41. Explosive
- 42. Turkish title
- 44. Worn near the foot
- 45. Impatient
- 46. Set an example for others
- 47. Actor Pitt
- 48. Instrument of torture
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Grayish white
- 53. A way to print
- 54. Storied college hoops program
- 58. Midway between south and southeast

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Bridge building degree

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Pet of the week



JIMOTHY

At just eight months old, Jimothy was found alone on the side of Highway 8, injured, unmoving, and in pain. Thanks to a compassionate passerby, he was brought to our Stratford Centre and given a second chance.

With the incredible support of our community, we raised the funds needed for his pelvic surgery, extensive care, and long recovery. And today, Jimothy is healing beautifully.

Despite everything he's been through, he remains a playful, curious, and deeply affectionate young cat. He loves chasing toys, exploring his surroundings, and curling up in a warm lap whenever he gets the chance.

Now, Jimothy is ready to leave the clinic behind and find his forever home; a place filled with kindness, comfort, and love. In return, he'll bring joy, companionship, and a gentle reminder of just how resilient he is.

If you're ready to give this sweet little fluffball the happy ending he deserves, apply today and be part of Jimothy's story. Find Jimothy at our Stratford Centre: <https://kwsphumane.ca/adopt/cats>



Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathawy Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford
Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games.
Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford

Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

We are night sky enthusiasts. Everyone is welcome to attend. See our website at <https://stratfordastronomy.com/> or call 519-275-4472 for more information

YARD SALE

Saturday, June 6

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Dishes, books, jewelry, games, toys, knick-knacks, silverware, craft supplies, lamps, materials, china, decorations, small furniture, vintage and collectibles table, electrical appliances, plants and garden décor items

OLD MEETS NEW

Saturday, June 6; 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Brocksden Country School Museum 2719 Line 37 (Vivian Street) between Road 110 and Road 109 just northeast of Stratford

Free event for all ages! Come to the OLD Schoolhouse and see some NEW things! We are partnering with the Stratford Public Library's MakerSpace to showcase 3-D

QUILTERS ESTATE GARAGE SALE

All Proceeds to Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth

Saturday June 20 8 a.m.

Shakespeare Presbyterian Church (located at the lights in Shakespeare)

Contact Linda for more information 519-272-7783

printing and fun NEW ways to use OLD toys!

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 8; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Los Rolling Tacos, Born2Eat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to Camp Bimini

JESUS IS COMING SOON! COME AND LEARN THE TRUTH FROM THE BIBLE

June 9th to June 13; 7:30 p.m.

June 16 to 20; 7:30 p.m.

St. Marys Gospel Hall, 632 Jones Street East, St. Marys

Speaker: Scott MacLeod

These meetings are hosted by Christians gathered in His Name at St. Marys Gospel Hall.

For more information email fullerglenj@gmail.com or mobile: 519 703 9453

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 15; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Wild Boar, El Milagro, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

TEDDY BEAR PICNIC

Saturday, June 20; 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Brocksden Country School Museum 2719 Line 37 (Vivian Street) between Road 110 and Road 109 just northeast of Stratford

Free event ideal for families with young children! Today's the day when the teddy bears have their picnic! Grab your teddy bear, blanket and snack and head down to the Old Schoolhouse for face painting, scavenger hunt, Grandma's Storytime and more! Brocksden Country School Museum

2719 Line 37 (Vivian Street) between Road 110 and Road 109 just northeast of Stratford.

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from 2-4pm at Infinity Dance 451 Erie St. Next meeting June 21 Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/person, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamanagement.com

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 22; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Born2Eat, El Milagro, Ish n Chips

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 29; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Pablas Street of India, Swat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, July 6; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Siggi's, Los Rolling Tacos, Berlin 95

Donations to Camp Bimini

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, July 13; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

SWAT, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.
Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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- The Community Calendar is for non-profit organizations to promote their free admission events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as a phone number, email address or website.
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
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 - Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

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SUDOKU

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