KINSMEN REVIVE DUCK RACE PAGE 12

LINCS WIN HOME OPENER PAGE 16

St. Marys Independent

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A BUSY MORNING AT THE FARMERS' MARKET (STEWART GRANT PHOTO)
Fresh local produce, warm September weather, and the nearby Kinsmen Duck Race made for a bustling St. Marys Farmers' Market down at Milt Dunnell Field on Saturday.

Local trustee candidates make their case to St. Marys-area voters

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

As voters prepare to cast their ballots in the Oct. 26 municipal election, four candidates are seeking to represent St. Marys and surrounding communities at two local school-board tables.

In the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) race, incumbent Mary Helen Van Loon and challenger Derek Van De Walle are seeking to represent St. Marys, Perth South and West Perth.

Meanwhile, incumbent Sheila Armstrong-Marshall and first-time candidate Ginny Rolph are seeking the local seat on the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB).

The Independent asked each candidate to introduce themselves to voters and explain the experience, priorities and perspectives they would bring to the role of school-board trustee.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

'VIA Rail is never on time': Nater presses rail service over chronic Stratford, St. Marys delays

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

For passengers relying on VIA Rail to travel between Stratford, St. Marys and Toronto this summer, arriving late wasn't the exception. It was essentially the rule.

Perth-Wellington MP John Nater is calling on VIA Rail Canada to address what he describes as an "unacceptable" level of service on the Toronto-Sarnia route after data showed trains serving Stratford and St. Marys were consistently delayed throughout the summer.

In a Sept. 10 letter to VIA Rail interim president and CEO Mathieu Paquette, Nater said he began looking into the issue after a constituent told him, "VIA Rail is never on time."

"While I had assumed this was an exaggeration, when I looked at the facts, it was true: VIA Rail is quite literally never on time," Nater wrote.

Historical train data provided to the Independent and Times for trains 84 and 87 between July 1 and Sept. 7 paints a similar picture. Of the 134 journeys listed during that period, only one was recorded as on time, and that was a bus replacement for Train 84 on Aug. 16 rather than regular rail service.

Across the other 133 trips, the average recorded delay was approximately 67 minutes. Train 84, travelling from Sarnia to Toronto through St.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3

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MLS

COMMUNITY

Local trustee candidates make their case to St. Marys-area voters

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board

Mary Helen Van Loon

After a decade representing St. Marys, Perth South and West Perth, Mary Helen Van Loon is seeking another term as an HPCDSB trustee.

Van Loon has spent six of her 10 years as a trustee serving as board chair. She said that experience has given her an extensive understanding of both the strengths of the Catholic school system and the challenges it faces.

"Our schools are vibrant, growing spaces where faith and learning go hand in hand," Van Loon said. "To build on this foundation, we need thoughtful, proven leadership."

If re-elected, Van Loon said she will remain focused on student achievement and wellbeing, faith formation and responsible stewardship while working with administrators, educators, support staff and parishes to strengthen Catholic identity.

Technology and its rapidly changing role in students' lives will also require attention from trustees, she said.

Van Loon said schools need to use new technology responsibly and ensure students are prepared to navigate those changes critically, safely and confidently while remaining grounded in Gospel values.

Her connection to Catholic education is also personal. Van Loon is a Catholic-school graduate as well as a parent and grandparent of students in the Catholic system.

She and her husband, Mike, have farmed and raised their family in Perth County for more than 40 years.

"I remain grateful for your trust and I am proud of the work that has been accomplished," Van Loon said. "I would be honoured to have your continued support in the upcoming election."

Derek Van De Walle

Derek Van De Walle is hoping to bring a new voice to the HPCDSB table, drawing on his experience in agriculture, veterinary medicine and community leadership.

A dairy farmer and veterinarian living just west of St. Marys, Van De Walle is a graduate of Holy Name of Mary Catholic School and St. Michael Catholic Secondary School.

He operates an organic dairy farm and works as a bovine veterinarian. He has also served as president of the Perth County Federation of Agriculture and, after growing up in 4-H, has remained involved as a volunteer working with local youth.

Van De Walle said those experiences have taught him many of the same skills required of a trustee, including listening, taking responsibility and making careful decisions about how money is spent.

He is running to bring what he describes as a "fresh, new and young voice" to the board while keeping Catholic identity at the centre of local schools.

Van De Walle also wants to advocate for rural schools, including Holy Name of Mary in St. Marys and St. Patrick's in Dublin, while ensuring resources are directed toward classrooms, special education and school buildings.

He said schools should offer strong literacy and numeracy education while providing practical pathways into skilled trades, agriculture, college and university.

"My hope is that our schools help form young people who can go out into the world and then choose to come home, to live, work and give back to our communities in Perth County and beyond," he said.

Van De Walle can be reached at davandewalle@gmail.com or 519-275-4120.

Avon Maitland District School Board

Sheila Armstrong-Marshall

Sheila Armstrong-Marshall is seeking re-election to the AMDSB, bringing three decades of experience as an educator to her work as a trustee.

A Perth South resident, Armstrong-Marshall spent 30 years teaching primary, special-education and music classes.

She is also a member of the Stratford Agricultural Society and Stratford-Perth Museum and was previously involved in 4-H and Junior Farmers. For the past eight years, she has been involved with the Ontario Plowmen's Association, including two years as president.

Armstrong-Marshall said she is seeking another term because she believes strongly in public education and the responsibility of school boards to provide students with opportunities to learn, grow and succeed.

"Serving as a trustee is about more than attending meetings or making decisions," she said. "It is about listening to families, supporting our educators and staff, advocating for our students and making sure every decision we make keeps student achievement, wellbeing and opportunity at the centre."

Supporting teachers, administrators and other education workers remains one of Armstrong-Marshall's priorities. She said stronger schools result when staff, trustees, families and communities work together.

If re-elected, she said she will continue advocating for responsible use of public money, student achievement, mental-health and wellbeing supports and the resources educators need to help students succeed.

Armstrong-Marshall said families should also be able to expect transparency, accountability and a board willing to listen to their concerns.

"We may not always agree, but we must always be willing to listen, work together and put the interests of students and our communities first," she said.

Ginny Rolph

First-time trustee candidate Ginny Rolph is hoping her experience as a parent, customer-service worker and mental-health support worker will bring a different perspective to the AMDSB table.

Rolph has lived in the Mitchell area for more than 20 years with her husband, Matthew. The couple has three children, Nolan, Keith and Sarah, whose experiences in local schools, sports and the community have given Rolph a parent's perspective on the education system.

She identifies four priorities in her campaign: learning, wellbeing, community and accountability.

On learning, Rolph wants smaller, manageable classrooms and supports that recognize different learning styles. She also wants stronger mental-health and student-support resources, responsible spending and transparent decision-making.

Rolph spent 20 years working in customer service in the food industry before moving into health care five years ago as a mental-health support worker.

She said her customer-service career taught her to listen, communicate with people with different perspectives, resolve conflicts and solve problems as part of a team. Her mental-health work, meanwhile, has reinforced the importance of empathy, advocacy and recognizing that individuals have different needs.

"Our students are individuals. They don't all learn the same way, they don't all face the same challenges and they don't all need the same support," Rolph said.

Rolph said she is not running because she believes she has all the answers, but because she is willing to listen, ask questions and work with others on practical solutions.

"Our children are our future," she said. "They deserve a trustee who will listen, learn and advocate for them."

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Sun & cloud	Sun & cloud	Mainly sunny	Rain	Cloudy showers	Cloudy showers	Cloudy showers
25 °C	24 °C	23 °C	19 °C	20 °C	20 °C	20 °C
Feels like 30	Feels like 28	Feels like 25	Feels like 20	Feels like 21	Feels like 21	Feels like 21

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‘VIA Rail is never on time’: Nater presses rail service over chronic Stratford, St. Marys delays

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Marys and Stratford, averaged a delay of roughly 69 minutes, while Toronto-to-Sarnia Train 87 averaged approximately 65 minutes.

Some delays stretched well beyond that. Train 84 was recorded 234 minutes late July 2, while Train 87 was 213 minutes late Sept. 2.

Nater said those delays have consequences beyond simply leaving passengers waiting at a station.

“The consistently late trains are more than just an inconvenience for travellers; they have real impacts on the lives of residents and visitors,” Nater told Grant Haven Media. “The delays have caused missed appointments, missed connections for both rail and air travel, and missed events for both business and pleasure.”

He said unreliable rail service can also have an economic impact locally, particularly given Stratford’s reliance on tourism.

“With tourism playing a major role in our local economy, the unreliability of these trains poses yet another impediment to bringing tourists to our community,” Nater said.

In his letter, Nater acknowledged VIA does not own the tracks and freight traffic is beyond the passenger rail service’s day-to-day control. However, he argued



the persistent delays demonstrate an unacceptable lack of transparency for passengers and questioned whether VIA is committed to maintaining service along the North Main Line.

Nater asked VIA for written confirmation trains 84 and 87 will continue operating, an explanation of what action will be taken to address the delays and a response to his previous invitation for Paquette to travel by rail from Montreal to Stratford to experience the challenges firsthand.

In the short term, Nater said he wants VIA to better coordinate departure times to avoid freight traffic. Longer term, he would like to see agreements with the companies that own the tracks guaranteeing VIA access during the relatively short periods when its trains use the North Main Line.

“At the very least, I would expect VIA Rail to immediately display a greater degree of transparency for consumers and post the actual expected arrival and departure times rather than some idealized time that is never met,” Nater said. “This would at least provide some reassurance of timing for a consumer.”

In a statement provided to the Independent and Times, VIA Rail acknowledged the ongoing reliability issues.

“VIA Rail recognizes the ongoing on-time performance challenges affecting trains between Toronto and Sarnia and understands the impact these delays have on passengers and the communities we serve,” a spokesperson said.

According to VIA, much of the problem stems from circumstances beyond its control because it does not own the tracks used by the trains.

“Contributing factors include freight traffic, track conditions and associated speed limitations, as well as maintenance and improvement work on the rail infrastructure,” the spokesperson said.

VIA said it remains committed to serving communities along the route and is working with the infrastructure owners to identify ways to reduce delays and improve reliability while focusing on those parts of its operation it can control.

Asked whether VIA could do more to warn passengers travelling between Stratford, St. Marys and Toronto about potential delays so they can adjust their plans, the rail service encouraged passengers to check its real-time train-status tracker at tsimobile.viarail.ca before travelling.

For Nater, however, improving the underlying reliability of the service remains the priority.

“I am hopeful that VIA Rail will take action to improve its on-time performance,” he said.



EDITORIAL

Grant Haven journalists recognized nationally

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

Staff Contribution

The Canadian Community Newsmedia Awards (CCNA) celebrate the best in community publishing from across the country. Therefore, it was a thrill earlier this week to see our journalists, editors and graphic designers recognized for the valuable work they do in their communities.

The 2026 competition included more than 650 entries in 29 different categories which spanned the areas of editorial, photography, multimedia and general excellence from the 2025 calendar year.

Our company's original newspaper, the St. Marys Independent, recorded a trio of third place finishes within the General Excellence section for newspapers with circulation of 1,500 to 6,499 copies. The Independent, under the leadership of editor Galen Simmons, took the bronze for "Best All-Round Newspaper", "Best Editorial Page" and "Best Front Page". In each of these General Excellence categories, the Nunatsiaq News (Nunavut) and Town and Country This Week (Athabasca, Alta.) took the first- and second-place spots, respectively.

"I feel like the St. Marys paper truly has something for everyone," said Grant Haven Media publisher Stewart Grant. "Spencer Seymour consistently puts together one of the best sports sections in Canada; Wendy Lamond captures so many of those small-town feel-good stories that make St. Marys special; Nancy Abra provides excellent regional coverage of nearby Thorndale; Mary Smith provides unparalleled historical features from the Stonetown; Alona Vasylieva's Ukrainian Corner is a weekly must-read; and this is just a sampling of what's inside each issue."

Simmons also won third place for "Best Local Editorial" for his June 12, 2025, column entitled "Little St. Marys stands up to provincial giant."

Stratford editor Connor Luczka won first place for "Best National Editorial (print circulation up to 9,999)" for his patriotic April 4, 2025, editorial "A eucatastrophic nation." He also won top honours in the category of "Best Local Civic Journalism (print circulation up to 9,999)" for his May 16, 2025, article entitled "Do municipalities have legal authority to fight strong mayor powers? Not according to experts."

Tillsonburg editor Jeff Helsdon won first place for "Best Business Writing (print circulation up to 9,999)" for "A look inside Shaw's, Tillsonburg's own ice cream plant." Helsdon also won second place for "Best Historical Story" for his Oct. 9, 2025, article, "Reimagining Tillson's journey to launch Dereham Forge."

Finally, the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette took third place nationally for "Best Agricultural Edition" with its 24-page March 27, 2025, special. Along with stories from editor Galen Simmons, the farm feature included articles by Lee Griffi, Emily Stewart, Gary West, Julia Paul, Luke Edwards, Jeff Tribe, Diane Baltaz, Tim Rau and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

"Looking back at the Gazette farm edition, it's clear that it took a lot of editorial planning along with a strong cast of journalists with varied backgrounds," said Grant. "The Best Little Pork Shoppe, Windrose Farm, the late Donald Hart, Silver Creek Nursery, Danzel Holsteins and Golspie Dairy were among those to be featured in this award-winning edition."

Grant added that any of Grant Haven's past articles and editions from recent years can be accessed by visiting the company's website at granthaven.com, selecting the newspaper of choice from the drop-down menu and viewing the PDFs from the Past Issues menu.

Bravo

We have 2 Bravos this week

1) Bravo to the Lions Club for their amazing breakfast at the market. The pancakes, sausage, applesauce and coffee were excellent and so was the friendly service. Thank you for all you do for our community.

2) Bravo to the esteemed Field of Queens slow pitch team for winning the C Division and becoming the 10th best slow pitch team in town. What a season, ladies!

Boo

We have 3 Boos this week

1) Boo to the parents of St. Marys Minor Hockey who don't step up and volunteer, there is a shortage of volunteers this year.

2) Boo to drivers who are ridiculously impatient. If the car in front of you is already going 90 km/hr on Highway 7, you really don't need to pass them on a hill with double lines and traffic coming the other way.

3) A big boo to the person who took a 12-year old cement statue of a little girl with a hat sitting, from directly in front of this seniors deck in my backyard. I hope she wasn't too heavy.

**Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.*

Quote of the Week

"We must slow the pace at which we improve the capabilities of AI models. Progress will still seem fast, and we must make wise use of the time we gain."

- Excerpt from Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei's essay published on Saturday, Sept. 12, in one of the many warnings issued by industry professionals this past week regarding the potential dangers of rapidly-advancing artificial intelligence.

Overheard AT THE COFFEE SHOP

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GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

Restoring small-town journalism, one community at a time!

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Thoughts OF THE WEEK

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You're a fighter. Look at everything you have overcome.

Today I want you to think of all that you are instead of all that you are not

It doesn't matter how slowly you go, as long as you just keep going.

Life doesn't get easier, we just get more resilient.

Friends of the St. Marys Public Library's Fall Book Sale to return starting Sept. 23

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

Friends of the St. Marys Public Library's (St. Marys FOL) upcoming Fall Book Sale will have a wide variety of books for every reader and more.

The St. Marys FOL will hold their Fall Book Sale at the Lind Sportsplex Quarry and Curling Facility from Sept. 23-26. The book sale will have at least six tonnes worth of books, CDs, vinyl records, DVDs and puzzles.

"We should have a good collection of kids books this time. We should have lots of fiction and non-fiction for adults, maybe a little bit for teens, and we will have lots of puzzles and records this time, too," said Stephen Walsh, St. Marys FOL vice chair.

The St. Marys FOL will accept donations leading up to the book sale, which can be dropped off at the St. Marys Public Library, 15 Church St. N, or picked up for those unable to drop off items at the library.

The spring and fall book sales, in addition to welcome kits for newcomers and new St. Marys residents, are the FOL's main fundraisers.

"Those funds help us enhance library services, library programs and adds to collections," Walsh said.

Through fundraising, the organization has been able to provide resources like a 3D printer, a computer workstation in the children's area, a computer displaying the library catalogue, small items like bike locks and charging boxes, as well as programming like the summer reading program.

There are between 40 and 50 volunteers contributing a range of 250 to 300 volunteer hours at each book sale.

"We couldn't do it without our volunteers, so I would take the opportunity to thank all of our volunteers," Walsh said. "We appreciate everything you do for us, especially at book sale time."

The book sale runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. from the 23rd to the 25th, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the 26th.

For more information about the St. Marys FOL, visit www.stmarysfol.ca/home or send an email to FriendsOfStMarysPublicLibrary@gmail.com.

2026

Fall Book Sale

Lind Sportsplex/Quarry

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Books, Puzzles, Music, DVDs for sale by donation



Wed. Sept. 23 - Fri. Sept. 25

10 AM - 6 PM

'Fill yer boots'

Sat. Sept. 26th - 10 AM - 4 PM

Donations to the **Library Pantry** are also appreciated!

FOL Friends of the St. Marys Public Library

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STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



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CHECK YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION

If you've recently moved, changed your name, or aren't sure your voter information is up to date, now is the time to check. Confirm, update, or add your information to the voters' list by visiting Town Hall (175 Queen Street East), or contacting 519-284-2340 ext. 241 during regular business hours.

FALL BOOK SALE

The Friends of the St. Marys Public Library are hosting their bi-annual book sale. Browse books, puzzles, DVDs and more. Items are for sale by donation. Hours include September 23-25, 10 AM - 6 PM and September 26, 10 AM - 4 PM.

Learn more: facebook.com/stmarysFOL





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Senior of the Week



Our Seniors of the Week are Cathy and Stan Gough. They have been married for 47 years and for the last 18 years have been residents of St. Marys. Cathy and Stan enjoy gardening and camping and recently toured the Maritimes on a Stonetown Travel vacation. Cathy is also an avid pickleball player. They have two children and two grandchildren.

If you would like to nominate someone for Senior of the Week, contact us at 519.284.0041 or info@stmarysindependent.com.

Move over pumpkin spice; the flavour of apple pie reigns supreme this fall

ANDREA MACKO

St. Marys Farmers' Market Association

The St. Marys Farmers' Market has resurrected its Apple Pie Day contest and auction, taking place at the Saturday, Sept. 26 market.

The event has three delicious components. Local bakers are asked to submit two homemade pies, one for judging and one for the auction. Slices from the judged pies will be sold to enjoy at the market, and live and silent auctions will be held for the whole pies. Funds from both will support market activities.

Pies for the Best Apple Pie competition must be submitted at the market by 8:15 a.m. on Sept. 26. Judging will take place at 8:30 a.m. Pie slices will be available for sale at the market starting at 8:45 a.m. The esteemed judges for the event are Megan Brode (who won in 2019, the last year the event was held), Dan Troyer of Troyer's Spices and former market vendor and home economics instructor Diane O'Shea.

The auctions will take place at 10 a.m. after the winner of the baking contest has been announced. Auction pies must be submitted by 9:45 a.m. Bakers are strongly encouraged to purchase their apples at the market on Saturday, Sept. 19, and each entrant will receive a bag of apples from Forest Hill Orchards at the Oct. 4 market. If bakers cannot purchase their apples at the market, they are asked to purchase Ontario apples from another source.

The winning baker will receive four containers of soup at the market's Harvest Soup Day on Oct. 17, with the runner up winning two – with bragging rights, of course!

Full contest details are available atwww.stmarysfarmersmarket.ca/applepie-day, on the market's Facebook page and paper copies will be available at the Saturday, Sept. 19 market, at the manager's desk. Readers



can also scan the QR code in the graphic published with this article.

A special thanks to Farmers' Markets Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture for their support to promote the St. Marys Farmers' Market Apple Pie Day.

Happy baking – and eating!

WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

1. Who is lead singer of Pearl Jam?
2. What is the name of the AI chatbot developed by OpenAI?
3. What sport is featured in the television series Ted Lasso?
4. Which social media platform is known for its "For You" page?
5. What is the best-selling console of all time?
6. What is the name of the fictional city where Batman lives?
7. Which company owns Pixar?
8. Which famous toy has the slogan "You can be anything"?
9. What year did Canada fully abolish the death penalty?
10. Mach 1 is known as what?

This week's answers are found on pg. 31





First community dinner of the season



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

The first community dinner of the season was held on Tuesday, Sept. 8 at St. Marys United Church. Members of the Avonbank Community Church cooked and served the meal for everyone to enjoy, Here are the members, from left, John Blake, Dave Mountain, Verna Strathdee, John McIntosh, D.J. Mountain, Marion Ready, Elaine Standeaven, Kathy Blake and Lenora Mountain.







Celebrate local talent: Local Author Book Fair and Vendor Market set for Sept. 19 at the Legion

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Anyone who loves books and shopping should look no further than the St. Marys Legion on Saturday, Sept. 19, where local vendors and writers will be available to chat at the Local Author Book Fair & Vendor Market.

The event runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with lots to look at and learn about. Organizer Shalyn Dussiaume-Good said she was speaking with Jan Scott at Betty's Bookshelf and she said there was some interest in a book fair that showcases all local authors. Dussiaume-Good, being a local author herself, jumped on board and agreed to organize it.

She wanted it to be more than just books, though.

"My thought was that I wanted to create an event that I would want to go to. I wanted it to be filled with everything Canadian. We need to keep things at home," Dussiaume-Good said.

That's where the vendor idea came in. The book fair and vendor sale will have at least 13 local authors, illustrators and over 10 vendors, all of whom live in either St. Marys, Stratford or London.

Dussiaume-Good, who belongs to Stratford Writes, has a published book at Betty's Bookshelf and has another one in the works to come out in November. Her son, Noah Good, seven, has a published children's book in which he also did the illustrations. This is Dussiaume-Good's first time organizing an event like this, but she is excited to be a part of it, knowing full well the talent St. Marys is home to.

Some of the vendors that will be there include Stonetown Tallow, Mary Kay, Norwex, a knitter who makes book bags and Dussiaume-Good's son, who makes pens and bookmarks with silicone beads. On the author side, there will books to purchase, book signing and Dussiaume-Good hopes there will be readings taking place. There will also be an illustrator who does amazing pet portraits.

The book fair will cater to all ages with a variety of themes. The Local Author Book Fair and Vendor Market is free admission, however donations will be accepted for the Imagination Library, a free book-gifting program that provides books to children regardless of household income and was started by the late Dolly Parton in 1995.

There will be snacks and drinks available for purchase and a colouring station for children.

For all who attend the event, their names will go on a ballot for a chance to win a backpack full of school supplies.

Dussiaume-Good, who has her own counselling business in St. Marys, expressed her thanks to all the authors and vendors attending on the 19th, and to her family, who is pitching in to help at the fair and have been a good support system throughout the planning process.

There is something very special about reading and supporting the authors that live in our community. It strengthens personal connections, helps the economy and maybe will even inspire others to become writers.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Shalyn Dussiaume-Good and son Noah Good show their published books as a lead-up to the Local Author Book and Vendor Fair taking place on Saturday, Sept. 19, at the St. Marys Legion.





United Way kicks of annual campaign on Sept. 19

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

On Saturday, Sept. 19, the United Way Perth-Huron will kick off its annual campaign in St. Marys.

Volunteers will be down at the St. Marys Farmers' Market in Milt Dunnell Field from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. giving out breakfast sandwiches cooked by Bruce and Nancy White in exchange for donations.

Why is this campaign so important? The United Way campaign focuses on raising funds for social services in the community along with housing projects and mental health programs. They are a strong advocate for helping with affordable housing, living wages and social assistance.

David Mackechnie, manager of community development for the local United Way, oversees awareness-raising efforts for southern Huron County and St. Marys and area. This is a newer position that was created to have someone in place to help identify social issues and and find solutions whenever possible.

Mackechnie, who has been volunteering for various organizations for a good part of his life, strongly believes in making a difference and knew the role was right up his alley.

Mackechnie divides his time between the Exeter and St. Marys area. Each community has their own challenges, so what may work for one neighbourhood may differ for the other.

St. Marys, through community outreach worker Jade Orquin, has helped over 631 residents connect with stability supports. The town also has had huge success with the Local Community Food Centre's Equal Access Nourish Market. Last year alone, the United Way helped 2,840 people in St. Marys and area. There are 12 local partner organizations and programs funded through the United Way including the community outreach worker, Shelterlink Youth Services, YMCA of Three Rivers newcomer support services, family services, the Emily Murphy Centre and much more. There are many options available thanks to these programs.

South Huron has a Connection Centre, which is a United Way initiative that offers support for trauma care, substance abuse and mental health counselling. It also offers needs like showers, laundry and food all thanks to the generosity of the Pentecostal Church. The United Way helped over 1,700 people in South Huron last year. The United Way funds 14 partner organizations and programs in the area. Some of these include Artemis Huron, Huron Homelessness Strategy, Huron County Food Bank, Urgent Needs Fund and many more. Exeter also has an excellent youth program for those up to 25 years of age.

One program that is available in both areas is the 211 community helpline. It is a free and confidential service that connects the caller to whatever social or community support they need.

Mackechnie is looking to cultivate new initiatives for fundraising for long-term needs when it comes to housing for both communities. Homelessness is one of the biggest issues in many places, and the United Way is committed to finding solutions. Some ideas include motorcycle rallies, bond campaigns and transitional housing.

The United Way is always looking for volunteers that share a vision of helping to create community connections and to help those who are struggling. Since 1887, The United Way looks at the biggest needs in every community. They have raised millions of dollars throughout the years. Though many things have changed over the years, the job of the United Way has not. Through mail campaigns, donors and businesses, relationships are built and challenges are met that help those who need it most.

Mackechnie spends two days a week in each community and keeps one day open for where he needs to be. Right now, St. Marys has 10 volunteers, but Mackechnie says he would like to see about five more come on board.

For more information on the United Way, email Mackechnie at dmackechnie@perthhuron.unitedway.ca.

Town of St. Marys recruiting election officials

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys is recruiting election officials to support the delivery of the 2026 municipal election.

Election officials play an important role in ensuring residents can cast their ballots in a welcoming, accessible and efficient voting environment. Successful applicants will work at polling stations during voting days on Oct. 7, 8, 9, 10 and 26.

The town is seeking candidates for two election official positions:

- **Access election officer:** Access election officers support the voting process by welcoming and directing voters, verifying identification, providing assistance and instructions, and helping ensure an accessible voting experience.
- **Ballot and revision election official:** Ballot and revision election officials assist electors, maintain accurate voter records, issue ballots, administer required forms and oaths, and help ensure election procedures are followed correctly.

Interested applicants are encouraged to submit an application online by Sept. 25. Applicants may be contacted by the municipality for a brief conversation regarding their qualifications and experience.

For full job descriptions and to apply, visit townofstmarys.com/electionofficial.

Questions regarding these positions or about the election can be directed to the clerk's office at 519-284-2340 ext. 212 or clerksoffice@town.stmarys.on.ca.

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS FOR ST. MARYS COUNCIL CANDIDATES!

With the municipal election on Oct. 26 just around the corner, the St. Marys Independent is asking you, our readers, to submit the questions you'd like the candidates to answer.

Send us your most pressing questions to info@stmarysindependent.com and we'll send them to the candidates and then we'll print their answers in an upcoming edition of the St. Marys Independent.



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Nine Fine Artists: 29 years of painting, friendship and keeping each other honest

DUNCAN MACDONALD

St. Marys Station Gallery



(PHOTO COURTESY OF DUNCAN MACDONALD)

What began as a lunch after an art exhibition in Port Stanley has grown into a 29-year friendship – one painting, critique and cup of coffee at a time – for the group known at the Nine Fine Artists.

Sometimes the most important thing an artist can have is another artist sitting across the room.

Someone who can look at a painting with fresh eyes. Someone who can say, "That works," when the painter is beginning to doubt it. Or, perhaps more importantly, someone willing to say, "Stop. Don't touch it anymore."

For the Nine Fine Artists, that kind of conversation has been at the heart of their relationship since 1997.

The group was born during a lunch at the Kettle Creek Inn in Port Stanley. Members of the London Brush & Palette Club had gone to see an exhibition in May of that year and decided to continue the conversation over lunch. Helen Bezeau Kajan suggested creating a smaller group of artists who could meet regularly, exchange ideas, discuss techniques and look at one another's work. Three other artists were invited to join. Two months later, the first meeting of what became known as the Nine Fine Artists was held.

The name has lasted almost as long as the friendship, and so has the basic idea. The artists meet in one another's homes, bringing along paintings, ideas and questions. They discuss exhibitions, materials and techniques, but much of the value comes from simply seeing how other painters approach the same problems.

The nine artists do not all paint the same way. Far from it. They work in oil, acrylic, watercolour and pastel. Their subjects, influences and styles differ, and those differences are part of what makes the group work. Rather than trying to bring everyone toward a single definition of what constitutes a good painting, the members have learned to appreciate the different ways each artist sees and works.

For one member, the pleasure is in the physical act of painting – putting colour on canvas.

"I like the painting process. Putting colour on canvas. Not so much the drawing."

That preference has led to conversations within the group about the value of preparation. Drawing can help establish proportions. An underpainting can establish the values – the light and dark structure of a work – before colour is applied.

Another lesson has become a kind of shorthand for the importance of understanding light. "To have light, there must be dark."

It is a basic principle, but one that can be easy to overlook. Highlights become meaningful because of the shadows around them. The dark passages of a painting can be every bit as important as its brightest areas.

For another member, however, the challenge is knowing when those rules should be set aside. Traditional instruction has its place, but different teachers can offer very different ways of approaching a painting. One approach is to break a painting into sections, completing one area at a time. Another is to avoid a detailed drawing altogether and instead concentrate on the relationship between masses, proportions, colours and tones across the entire surface.

What matters, the artist has learned, is discovering the method that allows the individual painter to work most effectively. That becomes particularly important when the goal is not precise realism, but the feeling of a place. One member describes having an intention that is less focused on total or detailed depiction

CONTINUED TO PAGE 11

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Nine Fine Artists: 29 years of painting, friendship and keeping each other honest

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

and more concerned with capturing a feeling or mood. There is admiration for the technical skill and realism evident in the work of fellow members, but an impressionistic or expressionistic approach can sometimes communicate more effectively.

That can mean resisting the temptation to make a painting technically perfect. Sometimes, making a painting "better" can actually make it worse, one might say. A painter may return to a work, correcting details and refining passages, only to discover that the freshness and feeling that attracted others to it in the first place have disappeared. Watercolour can make that dilemma particularly apparent.

A painting that looks unfinished to its creator may appear complete to someone else. That is where the group's critiques become especially useful. Members can bring in a work that is still in progress and ask the other artists a deceptively difficult question: Is it done?

Fresh eyes can provide an answer the painter may not be able to see alone. A former watercolour teacher described one member as an "intuitive painter," recognizing a tendency to be overly critical and to compare the work with that of others.

The advice was simple: sometimes, enough is enough. Knowing when to stop can be as important as knowing what to add.

The artist's intuitive approach does not mean abandoning traditional methods altogether. The basics remain important, and the painter continues to work representationally, with an interest in impressionist and expressionist approaches, particularly in landscapes.

But there are times when the process begins without a pencil line. A location encountered during a plein air painting session might provide the starting point. The artist begins with an idea, feeling or emotion and tries to remain in the moment rather than becoming overwhelmed by technical rules.

"Plunge in and hope for the best" is part of that philosophy. The group provides a useful counterbalance to that uncertainty.

Nine different artists mean nine sets of eyes, experiences and opinions. One person may notice a problem with proportion. Another may respond to the colour. Someone else may see that the painting's strongest quality is its mood and warn against changing it.

The critiques are not about forcing artists to conform. They are about helping them understand what they are already doing. That distinction has helped the group survive changes in membership and the evolution of individual artistic practices.

Over 29 years, the artists have changed. Their interests have changed. Their techniques have developed. Paintings that might once have seemed impossible have become part of their practices.

Yet the purpose of the group remains much the same as it was during that lunch in Port Stanley. The Nine Fine Artists also maintain an important social connection. Their meetings are not simply formal critiques. They are opportunities for friends to spend time together with people who understand the particular frustrations, discoveries and satisfactions that come with making art.

For artists accustomed to spending hours alone in front of a canvas, that companionship can be invaluable. The group has also continued to exhibit its work, looking for new venues where audiences can see the range of styles and approaches represented by its members.

As the Nine Fine Artists approach their 30th year, their longevity is perhaps their most remarkable achievement. There are plenty of reasons an artists' group might not last. People move. Interests change. Creative differences emerge. Meetings become difficult to schedule. This one has endured.

Perhaps that is because the group has never required its members to become the same kind of artist. Instead, it has given them something harder to find: a community where difference is useful.

One artist can teach another about drawing. Another can offer a lesson in colour or values. Someone can provide encouragement when confidence is low. And occasionally, someone can deliver the most valuable advice of all — put down the brush.

Twenty-nine years after Helen Bezeau Kajan first suggested the idea, the Nine Fine Artists continue to meet, paint, critique and encourage one another.

The artists may return to their individual studios alone, but they don't have to figure everything out alone. Sometimes the conversation simply continues on the canvas.

The Nine Fine Artists (in its current manifestation) comprises Debra Bailey, Gail Gifford, Helen Bezeau Kajan, Gayle (Culliton) Kumpf, Anne McLean, Susan Moore, Toni Ciantar Poole, Joyce Rintoul and Michele Stewart.

Please join us on Saturday, Sept. 19, from 1-4 p.m. at the St. Marys Station Gallery to meet the artists and celebrate the opening of this exhibition.

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Kinsmen Duck Race goes with the flow



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

The St. Marys Kinsmen Duck Race 2026 was held just past 11 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 12. While the original plan was to launch the ducks from the trestle, a strong south wind forced organizers to get creative and adjust the starting line to the base of the Little Falls.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Many residents got right down by the river to capture the photo finish that included 1,954 ducks and raised $6,072 for the community.



(LAURIE GRANT PHOTO)

The race route spanned from the Little Falls to Victoria Bridge.



(GORD BARNETT PHOTO)

Howard, the Duck! Howard Hallam won the grand prize of $2,000 when his blue duck crossed the finish line first. R. Craig won $750 for second and Robyn Cherewka took home $250 for third. The Lame Duck Prize (last duck to validly finish the race) was worth $100 to Jack Heinstock.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)



(GORD BARNETT PHOTO)

Curious onlookers surrounded the area, including these folks on Victoria Bridge who had a great vantage point for the finish line directly below.



(LAURIE GRANT PHOTO)

The Kinsmen had a strong contingent out to make the day a success, including Chris Swarthout (above left) and Bill Pickering (above right). Duck Race chairman Akshay Kumar said of the day, "The community embraced the event far beyond what we expected. We didn't anticipate so many people coming out, and everyone had a great time watching the ducks make their way down the river. None of this — the Duck Race, Summerfest, the Christmas tree removal, the winter lights, the Nourish Market, the electronics drive — would be possible without our community, our volunteers, and our donors, and we're grateful for their continued support."



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Become an **election official!**

The Town of St. Marys is hiring election officials to work at polling stations during the 2026 municipal election.

Dates:	October 7, 8, 9 & 10 (Advanced Voting Days)	October 26 (Voting Day)

Visit townofstmarys.com/electionofficial to learn more and apply online. Applications are due September 25, 2026.

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Don't forget about the Terry Fox Run in St. Marys Sept. 20



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Finish It! This is the returning motto from last year as we will meet again on Sunday, Sept. 20, for the 46th annual Terry Fox Run in St. Marys. The event starts at the local YMCA and participants can enjoy a lovely run, walk, or bike along the beautiful Grand Trunk Trail to the Broken Rail Brewery and back. The total route is about five kilometres round trip. Last year, the St. Marys community raised just over $18,760. Registration starts at 8:30 a.m. with an official start at 9 a.m. For more information, visit https://run.terry fox.ca/129749 or terryfox.org and search St. Marys. Pictured is a Terry Fox Run flag raising at St. Marys town hall recently.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Arlene Callender and Anna Doupe from the Terry Fox Run organizing committee in St. Marys were down at the Farmers' Market at Milt Dunnell Field on Saturday promoting this year's event.

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Kirkton Fall Fair draws crowds for family fun



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

The children's pedal tractor pull was a popular event at the 2026 Kirkton Fall Fair, giving some of the fair's youngest visitors an opportunity to compete.



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

Twins Revel and Rose Veldman pose in front of a colourful car painted by local children to promote the demolition derby at the Kirkton Fall Fair.



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

Identical twins Luke and Owen Balfour enjoy their first outing at the Kirkton Fall Fair.



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

A large crowd gathers to enjoy the popular tractor pulls during the 2026 Kirkton Fall Fair.

THANK YOU!

ST. MARYS ROCKIES

As the St. Marys Minor Baseball Association brings another successful season to a close, we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all of our generous sponsors and supporters.

The following individuals, organizations, and businesses provided valuable support through team sponsorships for our travelling and house league teams:

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- Happy Valley Health Team
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- Gray Ridge Eggs
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We would also like to thank the following organizations and businesses for their general sponsorship support:

- Hughes Electrical Solutions
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- St. Marys Dentistry
- Action Health Care
- St. Marys Kinnette Club
- Finnie's Distributing

St. Marys Minor Baseball Association is very fortunate to have such strong support from parents, grandparents, fans, umpires, sponsors, and the many volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes. Your commitment helps us provide a positive and memorable baseball experience for the children in our community.

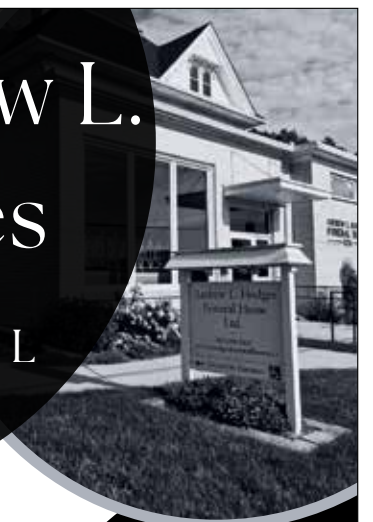
We would also like to recognize our coaches for the time, energy, and dedication they give throughout the season. Your commitment to teaching the game and supporting our players helps make baseball such a meaningful part of our community. We are grateful for everything you do to help our athletes grow, develop, and enjoy the game.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this season a success. We truly appreciate your support.

Sincerely, St. Marys Minor Baseball Association

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St. Marys Independent SPORTS

Lincs kick off season with feisty win in West Final rematch



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Ryan Hodkinson buries the first goal of the 2026-2027 season during the St. Marys Lincolns' home opener against the Stratford Warriors Sept. 11.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Newly minted captain Ryan Hodkinson, left, along with Owen Voortman, Owen Kalp and Jacob Montesi, who served as assistant captains last season, unveil the Lincolns' 2025-2026 Western Conference Championship banner before the Lincs' home opener Sept. 11 versus the Stratford Warriors.

SPENCER SEYMOUR
Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys Lincolns picked up right where they left off last season with a 5-3 victory over the Stratford Warriors in a fiery home opener between the Perth County rivals.

Head coach Jeff Bradley was thrilled with the team's progression after their second preseason meeting against the Warriors in which Stratford punished the Lincolns with their speedy transition game.

"In our preseason game in Stratford, even though it was an exhibition game, I thought it was quite telling of what the challenges would be going into the season opener," said Bradley. "We had a really good video session on Wednesday night and talked about how, in that preseason game in Stratford, we got really exposed and gave up a lot of odd-man rushes. That was the theme for our practice and video work Wednesday, and that was a big part of our meeting prior to the game, and I thought that was really the best part of our game."

While the Warriors still managed to create some chances in transition, Bradley detailed an "amazing transformation" between the Lincolns' second preseason game against the Warriors and their home opener.

"Obviously, you're going to give up odd-man rushes, especially against a team like Stratford that is so good in transition," Bradley said. "I think we gave up 12 or 13 in the preseason game in Stratford, and then only gave up four in the home opener. So, if we're able to take away the odd-man rushes like that, I think you're cutting off a leg there, and it gave us a really good opportunity to win that hockey game."

The bench boss added, while the experience of the group means there won't be a huge learning curve, there was still some familiarity to be developed amongst the returning and incoming players, a process that took a good step forward.

After the excitement of a pregame unveiling of the Lincolns' Western Conference Championship banner, the Warriors quieted the crowd at the Pyramid Recreation Centre when Colin Slattery tipped the puck past goaltender Brogan Colquhoun less than two minutes into the game to put the Warriors ahead 1-0.

The next four minutes and 39 seconds went down as the only stretch of the contest during which the Warriors led, with Ryan Hodkinson scoring to tie the game at one apiece before Blake Elzinga put St. Marys ahead 2-1, both of which came on five-on-three powerplays.

Frequent penalties were a story throughout the game, with a five-on-three man advantage for Stratford in the second period resulting in a goal by Drew Hodge. In total, the two teams combined to have 14 powerplays during the game.

Elzinga added his second goal of the game just a minute and 51 seconds into the middle frame, and just 27 seconds later, Owen Bruining potted his first Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) goal.

Bradley called Bruining arguably the team's biggest standout performer in his regular-season GOHL debut.

"I thought Owen (Bruining) was one of our best players, if not our best player," Bradley said. "I think his style of play could adapt to any league. He could play any level of junior hockey. He could play major junior if we wanted to, all because his style of play translates very well. He's physical, he's fast, he shoots well, passes well and he is incredibly intelligent. He's really a full package for us."

Defensively, Ronen MacFarlane delivered a masterful performance, displaying shades of Jacob Montesi and Owen Kalp with a strong, physical defensive style on the back end coupled with smart, simple and effective puck movement.

"For anybody coming into a new league, fresh off an injury like Ronen (MacFarlane) was, I think it's fair to expect that it's going to take a little time to get comfortable again," said Bradley. "But it took him not long at all. He was physical. He moves the puck very well, very hard, very flat. He's a very, very good player. We're very happy with the way Ronen played."

Bradley also praised Colquhoun's steady play between the pipes, as well as the excellent two-way play of Oliver Lacko, as being key factors in ultimately coming away with their first win of the season.

"I thought Oliver (Lacko) was fantastic. It's nice to have him back. He was just very good all over the ice. I thought Brogan (Colquhoun) played really well. Considering he hadn't played in a long time and only had one-and-a-half exhibition games, I thought he got comfortable pretty quickly and made some really big saves, especially in the third period to make sure we won that game."

Along with Hodge's powerplay marker, Grady Murphy also scored in the second for the Warriors to cut the lead to one, but Colquhoun and the Lincolns managed to fend off the Warriors, with Bruining scoring an empty netter late in the third to seal the victory.

The one lacklustre element of the Lincolns' otherwise strong start to the season was an excess of turnovers, which, while not uncommon for teams early in the year, is going to be one of the biggest focal points the Lincolns' will work to improve in the coming weeks.

"It was our puck management," Bradley said. "We'll do video on Tuesday about it as a follow-up video on our forecheck. We did turn the puck over too much. We had around 41 turnovers, I think, in our home opener, and that's a normal thing to see at the beginning of the season, so we'll be watching these first 10 games and see where the trend is at with the turnovers, but there's definitely more than we wanted, so that's the next thing we'll try to tackle."



Another great Favacho Fall Classic in the books



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Pictured from left to right are Don Van Galen, Peter Rice, Levi McCauley, Sidney Clark, Rob Favacho, Sandy Stephens and Adam Pallone. McCauley and Clark defeated Van Galen and Rice to win the gold medal in the Favacho Fall Classic tournament, hosted by the St. Marys Tennis Club Sept. 12. Stephens and Pallone earned the bronze medal.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTOS)

Pictured on the left, Levi McCauley stretches out to hit an incoming ball. On the right, Sidney Clark leaps up to deliver a serve. Clark and McCauley won the gold medal of the St. Marys Tennis Club's Favacho Fall Classic tournament Sept. 12, last defeating the duo of Don Van Galen and Peter Rice.

ANDREA MACKO

Contributed Article

Perfect weather and a busy season on the courts added up to a great doubles tournament, especially for the fresh faces hoisting the trophy for the first time at the Favacho Fall Classic, hosted Sept. 12 by the St. Marys Tennis Club.

Teens Levi McCauley and Sidney Clark have worked on their game all summer, and their efforts paid off in a final rematch against Don Van Galen and Peter Rice, who originally sent the young duo to the consolation round earlier in the day. McCauley and Clark had heavy competition in bronze medallists Adam Pallone and Sandy Stephens.

Tournament namesake and local tennis legend Rob Favacho was on hand to present the trophy and medals, and maybe a bit of sideline coaching throughout the tournament.

It's worth noting that the combined ages for the finals were 31 years of youth and energy versus 134 years of wisdom and "grandfatherly" Zen calm. Congratulations to all the participants, and a special thanks to the organizers and tournament marshal John Stevens.

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Bringin' The Heat, Snappers, Field of Queens win Ladies Slo Pitch titles



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured is the team of Bringin' The Heat, who captured their second straight 'A' division title during the St. Marys Ladies Slo Pitch League's Year-End Tournament. Bringin' The Heat won the 'A' division championship with a 12-2 win over the Free Agent in the final.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured are the Snappers, who won the 'B' division final. The St. Marys Ladies Slo Pitch League held their Year-End Tournament Sept. 11-12. The Snappers picked up a 3-2 win over the Wannabees to capture the 'B' division's top prize.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Last Tuesday at the Pot of Gold Mixed League at River Valley, Tony McEwan carded his first career hole-in-one. The ace happened on hole number eight and McEwan used his eight iron to sink the shot. Witness Kevin Edwards knew it was in right away but McEwan still wasn't sure and took his pitching wedge and putter thinking it had rolled to the back of the hole. Congratulations, Tony!



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured are the Field of Queens, who took first place in the 'C' division championship. The Field of Queens defeated 16-14 the Exterminators to win the top spot in the 'C' division of the Year-End Tournament, hosted by the St. Marys Ladies Slo Pitch League.

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St. Marys hosts Ontario Shuffleboard Association event



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Friendship Centre hosted a two-day tournament last week at the Lind Sportsplex in partnership with the Ontario Shuffleboard Association, with participants travelling from across Ontario to take part. Pictured above-right, Glenna Seguin and Marion Blake of St. Marys finished fourth place out of 16 teams in the Ontario "amateur" competition of the shuffleboard event held last Wednesday at the Lind Sportsplex. In the "Open" competition, St. Marys resident Herman Lansing teamed with Ontario Shuffleboard Association President Trevor Martin to take second place out of 29 teams, while Dotty Koert of St. Marys and her partner Bev Doyle finished in fifth place. Ann and Evan Engell finished first in the Open.

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MINOR SPORTS SCRAPBOOK



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Max Bilyea swings and registers a hit during a Stonetown Electric U11 HL Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Mary McCutcheon catches an incoming pitch during a Wildwood Care Centre U15 HPFL Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Ben Vanderploeg swings and records a hit during a Red Rock Construction U18 WOBA Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Addy Blake launches a quick shot towards the opposition's net during a U10 Girls Tier Three St. Marys Storm game.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Lena Thompson fires a long-range shot on target during a U18 Girls Tier One St. Marys Storm game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Finn Harburn steps into a long-range kick from outside the box during a U12 Boys Tier Two St. Marys Storm game.

MINOR SPORTS SCRAPBOOK



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Owen Gropp hits the ball into play during a Veterinary Purchasing Ltd. U9 WOBA Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Jovi Sass dashes towards first base during a St. Marys Building Centre U9 HPFL Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Ryan Spearin sends the ball flying through the air during a St. Marys Firefighters U11 OBA Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Luc Richardson hits the ball into the air during a Canadian Tire U13 OBA Red St. Marys Rockies game.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Benjamin Robson loads up a heavy shot toward the net during a U18 Boys Tier Three St. Marys Storm game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Paige Johnson speeds up the field while controlling the ball during a U15 Girls Tier Three St. Marys Storm game.

COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER: Present, not perfect – the realities of modern parenting

ALONA VASYLIEVA
Independent Columnist



(PHOTO COURTESY OF ALONA VASYLIEVA)

Parenting doesn't come with a manual, and age doesn't guarantee connection. A reflection on learning, listening and letting our children teach us how to navigate their fast-changing world.

I used to think that to be a good parent, you had to be smart enough, old enough and calm enough. I imagined a serene figure with all the answers neatly filed away in their mind. But over time, I've realized that perfection isn't the requirement; you just have to be present, and you will figure it out along the way – mostly while Googling things under the blanket at 7 a.m.

Parenting is a mission you can never be fully prepared for. No university degree or career experience prepares you for the moment an eight-year-old asks you with total seriousness, "Mom, why do we have eyebrows?"

At some point, I also thought that having kids at a younger age might be the magic trick to eliminate the generation gap – that being closer in age would automatically make you "cool" and naturally aligned. But life quickly proves that age is no guarantee of mutual understanding or emotional closeness. The gap isn't about birth years; it's about how willing we are to step into their world instead of forcing them into ours.

It is funny to realize that you have to teach your children about the world when, in many ways, they are already miles ahead of us. There is no standard manual to follow. Simply being older is no longer enough; you need solid, well-thought-out arguments to be persuasive. The old-school approach of "because I said so" simply doesn't work anymore. Modern kids demand references, peer-reviewed logic and preferably a short video as proof.

Every time I have to Google a complex concept just to translate it into kid-friendly terms, I discover that being a parent today means being a lifelong student alongside them. In fact, recent research shows that an average four-year-old asks over 400 questions a day. By age eight, the questions get fewer, but more complicated, moving from, "Why is the sky blue," to complex philosophical queries about fairness and time travel.

To better understand my son, I've found myself looking back at my own childhood, trying to remember how I felt and acted at his age. Growing up, sharing your thoughts and feelings wasn't common; in fact, it was almost embarrassing. Emotions were something you kept to yourself or dealt with quietly. That is why I feel so happy every time Alex openly shares his emotions, whether he is thrilled, frustrated, or confused.

As an only child myself, I grew up with the common myth that single children always grow up to be selfish. Naturally, raising an only child, you wonder if there's any truth to it. But watching my son, I see it's just another outdated stereotype. Kindness and empathy don't depend on how many siblings you have; they come from the emotional connection and example we set at home.

Learning to speak up about my own feelings has been a powerful lesson for me, too. It helps me process my emotions, and ultimately, it has made communication with Alex so much easier and more meaningful.

We often hear the old saying, "Don't parent your children, raise yourself – they will end up copying you anyway." I know it's true. They copy our phrases, our tone of voice and even our subtle habits. Psychologists call this mirroring, but parents usually call it an inconvenient reality check. If you tell them not to use screens at the dinner table, you'd better not be hiding yours under your napkin! But let's be honest, raising yourself while raising another human is far easier said than done.

Sometimes I wonder, does parenting style depend on the society you bring up your kids in? If we lived in Ukraine, would I be doing things differently? Culturally, different societies place emphasis on different skills – some on independence, others on academic discipline or emotional intelligence. But, regardless of geography, every parent in every corner of the world shares the exact same secret: none of us truly knows what we are doing all the time. We are all negotiating bedtime and trying to explain why sleep is necessary.

And then there is the matter of thinking speed. Whenever I catch myself talking to my mother, realizing I already know what she is going to say after her first words, it hits me; my son feels the exact same way when I talk to him. Yes, it works both ways, even with our children. Today's generation processes information at lightning speed. When we start a long lecture, their minds have already finished reading the executive summary and moved on.

While cultural contexts, societies and generations change, the core of parenting remains universal. Our real job isn't to slow them down, pretend to be all-knowing experts, or rely on age differences. Our job is to create a safe space where they can grow up wiser, kinder and more emotionally aware than we were at their age, even if it means searching the web together to figure out how the world works.

Straight From The Shelves

By Laura McAsh, St. Marys Public Library

The Friends of the Library Fall Book Sale arrives next week! Shop 1000s of used books, DVDs, CDs, puzzles, and more at the Lind Sportsplex (The Quarry) from Wednesday to Saturday. All items are available by monetary donation.

Got some last-minute items to donate? Please bring them into the Library, even if the sale has already started. If the items don't make it into this sale, the Friends will add them to the next one! Please note that we do not accept textbooks, magazines, or VHS tapes.

Up This Week

- Fri., Sept. 18: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Sat., Sept. 19: Dungeons & Dragons (10 a.m.)
- Mon., Sept. 21: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Tues., Sept. 22: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Wed., Sept. 23: FOL Fall Book Sale^ (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.), EarlyON Play & Read (9:30 – 10:30 a.m.), Mahjong~ (1-4 p.m.), Make and Take – Mandala Mug* (6-8 p.m.)
- Thurs., Sept. 24: FOL Fall Book Sale^ (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Fri., Sept. 25: FOL Fall Book Sale^ (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
- Sat., Sept. 26: FOL Fall Book Sale^ (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.), Edith's Storytime Adventures (10 a.m.)

***Registration Required**
~Held at the Friendship Centre (317 James St. S)
^Held at the Lind Sportsplex/The Quarry (425 Water St. S)

Ask the Arborist



By Joel Hackett • 519.272.5742 • jtsquote@gmail.com

Joel Hackett is a certified Arborist residing in the St. Marys area. Currently, he spends most of the year running Joel's Tree Service. For contact call 519.272.5742 or email jtsquote@gmail.com

Dear Arborist,

I recently contracted someone to do my trees. It's been a while but I have not heard from them. Should I follow up or just find someone else? Is it normal to have a long wait?

Thanks, T

Dear T,

I would definitely recommend following up. There has been a number of bad storms, tornado touch downs, and high winds. There is a lot of damage from the storms - trees falling down, broken, mangled, on houses, and across driveways.

Naturally this kind of work gets prioritized, as it needs dealt with right away.

Sincerely, The Arborist

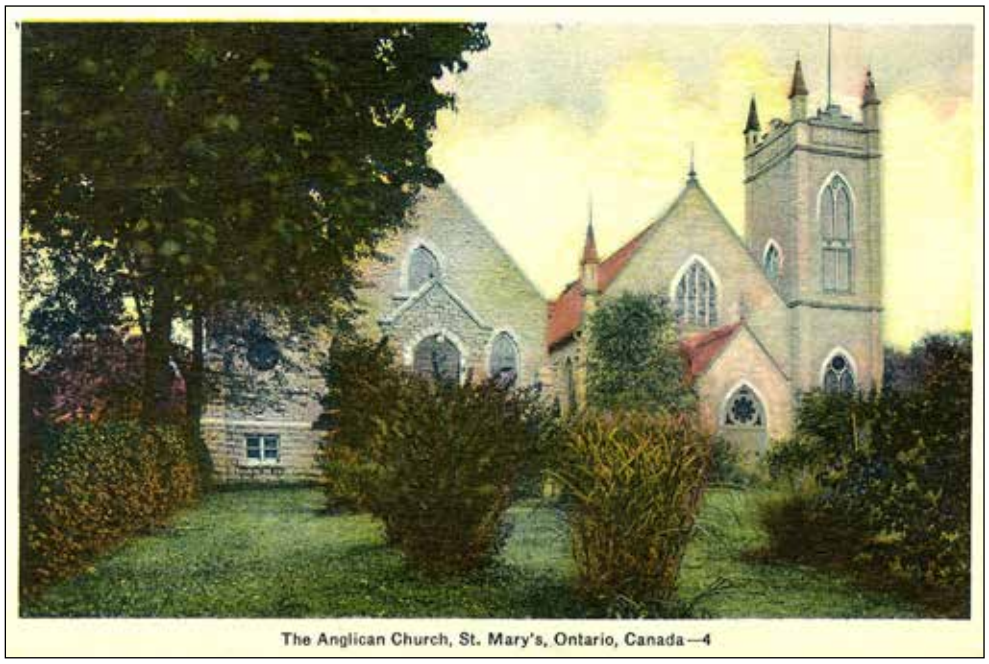
HISTORIC ST. MARYS: Adding colour

MARY SMITH
Independent Columnist

On Thursday evening, September 17, the St. Marys Museum's fall Speaker Series begins with a presentation on historic postcards, highlighting some of the most interesting examples in the Museum's archival collection. Today, we enjoy looking at the pictures on old postcards and tend to forget their very practical original purpose. They were meant to be used as an easy and attention-getting form of communication. While we can quickly contact friends and relatives using text messaging, snapchat or email, at the end of the 19th century a fast and reliable way to send a brief message was through the Canadian postal service. In St. Marys, a postcard dropped at the local post office in the morning was sorted and postmarked on the spot and, if the addressee was local, placed directly in that person's mailbox. The recipient could pick it up that afternoon – same day delivery! Out-of-town mail travelled by railway and several trains stopped in town daily. Mail for Stratford, for example, was taken to the St. Marys station, placed collected by an eastbound train, and dropped off in Stratford. It was a quick way of staying in touch with friends in towns and cities along the rail line.

Assistant Curator Abigail Parsons, who is leading Thursday's presentation, has found examples of the first postcards used in Canada, starting in the 1870s. These early cards were strictly practical – plain, buff-coloured stock, no pictures, with space for the address on one side and for a short message on the other. Because these cards cost just a penny to send, they were a cheap way to make contact. They were often used by businesses to place orders or to confirm delivery of products. Surviving cards can provide insight into commercial transactions of that time. From this practical but drab beginning, postcards began to evolve. Businesses wanted to add a logo or an illustration of their product and began to squeeze graphics onto the message side. In 1903, the Canadian Postal Service approved the divided back postcard with the message, address and stamp box on one side, leaving the other side completely free for an image.

This format launched what collectors refer to as the "Golden Age" of postcards. It coincided with new developments in photography and in printing, particularly the ability to add colour to what was originally a black and white image. For example, in St. Marys, photographs of the 1893 town hall made very popular picture postcards. The Museum's collection contains many examples, some taken very soon after it was built. With the earliest cards, before colour was added, anyone receiving a postcard showing this building would have an impression of its size and architectural style but could not know that the grey limestone had contrasting red-brown sandstone features. Of course, the lithographer might not capture these colours accurately. Some St. Marys street scenes from the early 1900s depict all the downtown buildings coloured an alarming orange. Another intriguing example in the Museum's collection is a postcard showing the limestone manor in Westover Park constructed with pink stone blocks.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF R. LORNE EEDY ARCHIVES, ST. MARYS MUSEUM)

Postcard view of St. James Anglican Church, ca 1910. Early publishers' attempts to add colour to black and white pictures did not always produce accurate results.

Picture postcards took another step forward in 1900 when the Eastman Kodak Company introduced the first Kodak "Brownie," a simple box camera costing only a dollar. Amateur photography became an affordable hobby. More people took more photographs, and more were printed on the face of private postcards. A few years later, Kodak introduced a slightly more expensive, but still affordable, small, folding, bellows camera that produced postcard sized negatives. At that time, even amateur photographers developed their own pictures. Kodak supplied them with special print papers, cut to postcard size with the standard postcard grid printed on the backs. Real photo postcards often provide glimpses of the photographer's day-to-day activities and interests and so are of special interest to social history researchers.

During these years, German postcards led the way in quality of colour reproduction and exported many pictures to overseas postcard publishers. World War I interrupted these trade transactions, but British and North American postcard producers stepped up and continued to improve their own reproduction methods. World War I, in fact, provided great opportunities for collectors of some specific postcard themes. As soon as war broke out, patriotic postcards became very popular. Postcard companies often just added national symbols to the pictures they had on hand. For example, the Union Jack or a sprig of maple leaves might now surround a picture of the St. Marys town hall. Real photo postcards had even more significance during wartime. The Museum's collection contains a photo card that Private William Near sent home to his family from France for Christmas 1916, posing in uniform in front of an ivy-covered wall. This photograph was printed on a postcard and sent off to Canada with a cheerful message. A few months later, William Near was killed in action. His name is on the cenotaph beside the town hall.

The increased use of the telephone after World War II meant fewer postcards in circulation. But picture postcards were still produced – some now in brilliant Kodachrome colours. Postcard collecting became a serious hobby, almost as popular as coin and stamp collecting. Local historian Larry Pfaff collects postcards relating to St. Marys and area. For the Speaker Series presentation, he prepared notes explaining what postcards can reveal about the history of our community's built heritage, sports and leisure activities, social groupings, gardens, and much more. For instance, in the early 1900s, when the quarries were still being worked, and Cadzow Pool still not built, where did people go swimming? Postcard views looking north from the Sarnia Bridge show a section of the Thames River, just upstream to the northeast, part of an old millpond, that was once a popular swimming hole. Helen Mills Wilson's father used to take her there to swim very early on summer Sunday mornings. "We'd be home before the good people of the town were awake!"

As Larry Pfaff points out, postcards provide a record of how local landmarks change. A series of postcards show what the old St. Marys Collegiate Institute looked like when it was built in 1875 and then how its appearance was modified with subsequent additions. Eventually, the original building was almost completely subsumed. St. James Anglican Church presents another good example of evolving architecture. The original plain, rectangular building was renovated in the mid-1880s. The roof was raised, buttresses built against the walls, and the entrance porch and gothic tower were added. In 1907, the parish hall was built on the north side of the property.

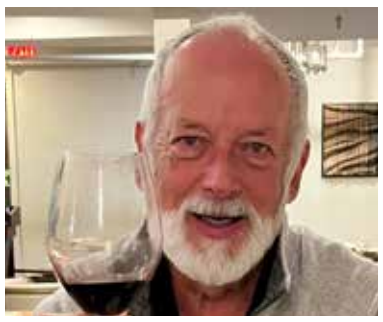
The Anglican Church has perhaps the most photogenic exterior of all the town's historic churches because it sits on well-maintained grounds at the top of a gentle hill, providing great sightlines from Church Street. Certainly, there are many postcard views of this church in the Museum's collection, including the one that is shown with this week's column. The postcard shows the parish hall and so must have been taken after 1907. There is also a glimpse of the elaborate garden on the grounds at that time. Information about the publisher is on the back: The Photogelatine Engraving Co. Ltd, Ottawa, Ontario – known as PECO to postcard collectors. This Canadian company was clearly still perfecting its colour reproduction techniques. Some colours on this card are slightly off register. The limestone walls of this church were always plain grey, and it never had that cheerful red roof.

However, recently the congregation decided to paint the front doors red, and these doors will be open this Sunday, September 19, when the church marks its 175th anniversary with an open house, tours of the complex and a concert in the sanctuary. Everyone is welcome. Why not make this Saturday a day of musical treats and enjoy two events in two historic churches! After the concert at St. James in the afternoon, spend the evening at First Baptist Church listening to even more great music, a fundraiser for TriCounty Foodgrains Bank, a wonderful cause.

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Why the world comes to Stratford



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

As we sat in the Festival Theatre waiting for the lights to dim, I found myself wondering about the hundreds of people sitting around us. Where were they from? How many had travelled north across that now-controversial border?

It's easy to forget that familiar old Stratford is one of the key tourist destinations in Canada. But it certainly is, with multiple thousands of visitors coming to the community every season.

Once the play started – that fantastic, hilarious, energetic musical called *Something Rotten* – those thoughts disappeared,as I surrendered to the sheer delight of the performance. But a few days later, the question popped back into my head.

So, I went to the source. I emailed Stratford Festival publicist Helena Turpin and asked two questions: "Where do Stratford audiences come from?" and "How many tickets does the theatre sell?"

I found the answers fascinating and I decided to share them with you, including a full list of the nations represented in those audiences.

The answer to the second question is uncomplicated. In 2025, the Festival sold 482,000 tickets. Many of those are to locals, but that also represents a heck of a lot of tourists.

And I find the information about where these people come from to be very interesting. Helena told me that my question about country of origin was not something she had seen before, and that she was intrigued by the data she accessed through the online ticketing system. She called the findings "interesting and inspiring." I agree.

So here, stats and trivia lovers, is a full list of the countries from whence came Stratford Festival attendees this year. Top two, not surprisingly, are Canada and the United States – still sharing culture despite all the controversy.

After that, Helena shared the list in alphabetical order. People came to Stratford from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Malawi, The Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, New Zealand, Panama, Peoples' Republic of China, Portugal, Qatar, Singapore, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

And while the theatre is undoubtedly the biggest draw, there is so much more about Stratford to enjoy. This summer, we have attended outdoor concerts, we have picnicked beside Lake Victoria, we have dined in local restaurants, relaxed in pubs and enjoyed walks along the water, parks and streets boasting amazing front-yard gardens. And we attended plays.

The two most recent we took in have reminded me of the sheer excellence of Stratford theatre. This was most obvious because, in the case of both plays, somebody didn't show up.

The plays were *The Tempest* and *Something Rotten*. Both are on the classic thrust stage of the Festival Theatre – and two more different uses of that space cannot be imagined.

Both are brilliantly staged with great performances, but some of those performances were especially noteworthy because they were carried out by understudies.

Most impressive was the work of Ben Carlson in The Tempest. Carlson, who usually plays a lesser character, was elevated to the lead role of Prospero because he is understudy to Geraint Wyn Davies, who was unavailable.

I don't know about you, but when I see that dreaded slip of white paper tucked into the play brochure announcing an understudy, I feel let down.

Wrong. Carlson was amazing. He carried out his new duties flawlessly and convincingly. His interactions with Marissa Orjalo, who played the exotic spirit, Ariel, were emotionally moving. Altogether, an amazing accomplishment.

You might think that *The Tempest* – Shakespeare's final play written solely by the bard – and *Something Rotten*, a musical written only a decade ago – would have nothing in common. Essentially, that's true, except for the whole understudy thing. Because again, when we saw this terrific musical, one of the lead roles – Portia – was played by an understudy. And again, Michelle Bardach, stepping into the role, was amazing. No offense intended to the usual actor, but I can't imagine a finer portrayal of the character.

Something Rotten is actually something unusual in that it was presented at Stratford only two seasons ago. But it's back and I'm glad; it has become one of my favourite musicals ever. The entire cast is terrific, including the astonishing dancers put through their paces by the great Donna Feore, who both directed and choreographed the play. And I confess a special affection for Dan Chameroy, who plays the entirely outrageous Nostradamus, and my friend, Steve Ross, whose Shylock comes to a much better end than Shakespeare ever imagined.



(DARIANE SANCHE PHOTO)

Members of the company, *Something Rotten,* including Dan Chameroy, third from left.

I'm going on at this length about understudies because I think this is strong evidence of the excellence of productions at Stratford. This quality is maintained without missing a beat. And quality is the reason people have come from 30 countries or so to our part of the world.

Now that fall is upon us, we locals still get the opportunity to take in some of the finest theatre in the world. *The Tempest* is on stage through Oct. 24; *Something Rotten* runs through Oct. 31.

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.



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

The great Fiona Reid as Gonzala and David Collins as Alonso with members of the company in *The Tempest.*



(PHOTO COURTESY OF STRATFORD FESTIVAL)

Ben Carlson, who stepped in without a misstep as Prospero in *The Tempest.*



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

The great Fiona Reid as Gonzala and David Collins as Alonso with members of the company in *The Tempest.*



(PHOTO COURTESY OF STRATFORD FESTIVAL)

Michelle Bardach, brilliant understudy as Portia in *Something Rotten.*

FROM THE GARDEN: There's a fungus among us!



NANCY ABRA
Independent Columnist

I can almost hear that childhood chant, there's a fungus among us, when I spotted clusters of various fungi in the lawn and the nearby shade garden. Back then, it was a silly rhyme whispered whenever something looked a little odd, moldy or stinky. However, I never liked it or thought it was funny when it was aimed at people.

The flat, round, golden coloured fungi looked like small stepping stones in the lawn. And in the spruce lined shade garden, clustered patches of three different types of fungi were growing throughout, like miniature statues hidden amongst my shade-loving plants.

There is a moment in early September when the garden quietly shifts. Moisture lingers, shadows deepen, cooler nights evolve and unexpected shapes appear where a couple of days ago, there were none. That teasing phrase, 'there's a fungus among us' now feels like an invitation to look closer at the secret world working quietly under our feet.

Fungi are not plants. They are decomposers and thrive in shady, moist, organic-rich garden pockets as they feed on decaying matter. Their 'mushrooms' are the fruiting bodies. The real organism is the mycelium network which are webs of tiny thread-like fungal cells hidden beneath the soil of my shade garden. These networks connect the roots of plants and trees. They move water, carbon, nitrogen, and minerals between the plants. They break down dead leaves, wood and other organic mater, turning decay back into rich, fertile soil. Fungi cannot make their own food, so they trade water and minerals from the soil in exchange for sugars produced by plant photosynthesis. https://fungi.com/blogs/mycelium-articles/the-mycelium-network-connects-us-all

My shade garden of tall, old spruce and hostas is the perfect home for fungi. The recent rains have triggered the fruiting, and the spruce trees create the ideal microclimate while the organic matter of hosta litter, needles and decaying cones feed them. This garden has become one of my favourites on our property as it 'sprouts' special fungal neighbourhoods every early September.

There are over 5,000 fungi species documented across the province of Ontario. There are hundreds of edible fungi species such as Chanterelles, Chick of the Woods, Morels, Oyster Mushrooms and my dad's favourite, the Giant Puffball. In September, Dad would trek back to our woods and would show up a couple of hours later with his arms laden with giant snow-white puffballs. Mum would fry large slices of this fruited fungus in lots of butter and serve them up as a treat for supper. They had a dedicate mushroom taste with a rich buttery overtone, most likely influenced by the half pound of butter Mum used.

Before you start harvesting the shady parts of your garden or go foraging in woodland areas for supper, use a reliable local fungi field guide or consult an experience mycologist. There are hundreds of poisonous fungi, including several deadly ones, thriving among the other species. Never eat an unknown mushroom. Thousand of varieties have never been tested for toxicology and many toxic or deadly look-a-likes mimic edible species.

It's funny how a garden can bring back the gentlest parts of childhood — not the teasing or the awkwardness, but the curiosity. The part of us that paused, looked closer, and wondered what small miracle had appeared overnight.

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Riddles

I'm born wearing green, grow old wearing gold, and when the wind calls my name, I let go. What am I?
A leaf

I have many teeth but cannot bite. In the fall, I help clean up what trees leave behind. What am I?
A rake

I wear a cap but have no head. I fall from above but I'm not rain. Someday, I could become a giant. What am I?
An acorn

I'm full of holes but I'm not broken. I'm orange, I have a face, but I cannot see. What am I?
A jack-o'-lantern

I get shorter as fall goes on, but nobody is cutting me. What am I?
Daylight

The colder it gets, the more of me you put on. The warmer it gets, the more of me you take off. What am I?
Clothing

You can hear me crunch, but I'm not food. You can walk all over me, but I don't complain. What am I?
Fallen leaves

I'm planted in the ground, but I'm not alive. I have a head but no brain, and I guard a field without moving. What am I?
A scarecrow

I'm hidden inside something orange. There can be hundreds of me, but we all fit in one place. Take me out, roast me, and I become a snack. What am I?
Pumpkin seeds

- Word Search -

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Ivy Smith (10)

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ROSA

Our Pet of the Week is Rosa, a sweet four-year-old pup who knows exactly what she likes! Her absolute favourite activities include taking beautiful walks down Lovers Lane with Lori the dog walker, and scoring a tasty "Timbit" treat from the Tim Hortons drive-thru. While she is definitely not a fan of the local rabbits, she is a wonderful friend to her cat sibling, Rocky. Rosa is completely adored by her proud owners, Daisy and Kathleen!



Thorndale News

A section within the St. Marys Independent



Passing the plate at the Thorndale Family Restaurant

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

While there is no formal tradition for marking the sale of a restaurant, the idea of "passing the plate" feels fitting in Thorndale – a symbolic handoff from one set of caring hands to another.

Since 1988, George and Anastasia Mouselimis owned and operated the Thorndale Family Restaurant on King Street. The dedication and welcoming atmosphere they built with an emphasis on family made the restaurant a gathering place for generations of local patrons.

On Sept. 1, the Mouselimis family "passed the plate" to the new owners, Keshav Grover, his wife, Mahima Sharma, and Maninder Singh, with his wife, Gunit Gandhi.

"Together we are excited to begin this journey as the new owners of the Thorndale Family Restaurant and to be part of this smalltown community," they said. "We believe a family restaurant is more than a place to eat, it's where families, friends and neighbours come together."

Grover and Singh plan to honour the restaurant's long history while bringing fresh ideas, passion and experience. Both are graduates of the Fanshawe College culinary management program. Grover's culinary career has exposed him to a wide range of cuisines, flavours and techniques, while Singh's background in food and hospitality, including work in area restaurants has given him insight into diverse cuisines and day-to-day restaurant operations. Together, their training and experience form a strong foundation for introducing new dishes while respecting the traditional favourites the community loves. They also plan to extend the restaurant hours to serve the community for more of the day.

"We are excited about the future," Grover and Singh said. "Our goal is to grow the Thorndale Family Restaurant while keeping the family friendly atmosphere this community values. We are grateful for the warm welcome we have received and look forward to building relationships and making this a place the community can truly be proud of."



(CONTRIBTUED PHOTO)

Thorndale Family Restaurant has changed ownership. Pictured from left to right are former owners George and Anastasia Mouselimis alongside new owners Gunit Gandhi, her husband, Maninder Singh, and Keshav Grover. Grover's wife, Mahima Sharma, was absent when this photo was taken.

Thames Centre Fire Dept. issues order to close for Trails End Market

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Thames Centre Fire Department (TCFD) has served an Order to Close for the Trails End Market, located at 4370 Dundas St. E. in Thorndale.

The order was reviewed and approved by the Office of the Fire Marshal. Copies of the Order to Close shall be posted at the premises.

Following multiple inspections of the property by TCFD and other regulatory safety agencies, and in consideration of the serious fire and life safety deficiencies identified at the premises, inspection orders were issued pursuant to Section 21 of the Fire Protection and Prevention Act.

Under the terms of the Order to Close, the building is to remain closed until the corrective actions set out in inspection orders have been satisfied. The fire department will require a follow-up inspection before authorizing the premises to be reoccupied.

"The Thames Centre Fire Department recognizes that the closure of a building is a serious measure; however, the conditions observed during inspection process require such a response due to the fire and life safety concerns identified. The life safety of the public, the vendors and the regular occupants of the building remains the fire department's highest priority," the TCFD said in a press release.

A previously existing building at the same location, then known as the London Sales Arena, was destroyed by a serious fire in 1993. The current structures in place at 4370 Dundas St. E. exhibit many of the same issues identified when the previous building was destroyed in 1993.

Ride for Pitt Hopkins stops in Thorndale

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

On Sunday, Sept. 6, 85 bikers rumbled down King Street to Mount Olivett 300 Lodge on Harrison Street, a stop of the Ride for Pitt-Hopkins organized by the Thames Valley Masonic Riders Association.

This Freemason motorcycle club's charity of choice is Pitt Hopkins Syndrome and participants from across southern Ontario and as far away as Detroit, Chicago, Kentucky, Tennessee and New York joined in the rally.

This year marks the Thames Valley club's eighth Ride for Pitt Hopkins fundraiser which supports 14 Ontario families affected by Pitt-Hopkins Syndrome.

Pitt-Hopkins Syndrome (PTHS) is a rare genetic disorder affecting brain and nervous system development. It can delay walking and speech, and impair communication and social skills. Though there is no cure, treatment can manage symptoms and improve quality of life. Life expectancy is generally unaffected, but respiratory complications can be life threatening; survival depends on symptom severity and access to care.

From Mount Olivett 300 Lodge, the bikers rode west to Graham Family Eco Park on Medway Road for a barbecue, live music, raffles, an auction and socializing. Last year's rally raised about $20,000, and organizers hope to match that amount this year to support their Ontario families affected by Pitt-Hopkins.



OBITUARY

Sweeney



Lois Ann Sweeney (Webb) born Dec 22, 1928 near Thorndale, Ontario, one of nine children of Sylus and Minnie Webb.

Lois passed away peacefully September 8, 2026 at St Marys, Ontario. Lois was predeceased by her loving husband of 53 years William (Bill) Lorne Sweeney. Lois is lovingly remembered and survived by her daughter Elaine Harding (Peter), grandson Matthew Harding (Giselle) and great grandsons Kai (15) and Chance (9). Lois was born and grew up on a small farm near Thorndale, Ontario moving to St Marys when she married Bill in 1948.

Lois enjoyed interacting with the people of St Marys while she worked at Stewarts Grocery Store and Staffen Food Market. She loved going out dancing with Bill on Saturday nights, spending time with friends playing cards, painting, knitting, tackling a crossword puzzle and walking her dog, Riley.

She and Bill especially enjoyed their winters in Florida and camping with their grandson Matthew at Ipperwash on Lake Huron. Lois was always open to going out for chicken wings and a draft beer.

Special thank you to Sharone Esson and Cathy and Rob Taylor for their friendship and support and to the amazing team at Fairhill and Kingsway Lodge.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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Solutions on pg. 31

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

CELEBRATION OF LIFE

CELEBRATION OF LIFE



Darrell "Darry" Thomas Baechler

The family of Darrell "Darry" Thomas Baechler, who passed away on August 17, 2026, will have a Celebration of Life Open House at the Goderich Legion, 56 Kingston St, Goderich, on

October 5, 2026 from 1 – 4 pm.

All are welcome to attend.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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We thank each and everyone of you for your presence. We were tickled that you could meet or revisit our daughters and their families. River Valley was an ideal venue and the food and service were superb!

Ian and Cheryl McKay

THANK YOU

The St. Marys Kinmen, the St. Marys Lions, Stratford Rotary Club, and the Optimist Club of Downie would like to thank all of the businesses that sponsored and donated to our fourth car, truck, tractor, and motorcycle show in St. Pauls on Saturday, September 12, 2025.

It turned out to be a glorious day. We had 64 cars, 18 tractors, 20 trucks, and 4 cycles. We raised over $800.00 for the Rotary Aqua Box program, $260.00 for the St. Marys youth center, and $260.00 for St. Marys Salvation Army food bank. A table full of food went to Holy Trinty food bank in Stratford.

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Applicants should have road maintenance and construction knowledge, experience in equipment operation and maintenance and a valid "DZ" license. This position is subject to weekend and winter scheduling and some emergency call-out.

The 2026 salary range for this position is **$27.73 – $34.67 per hour** based on a 40-hour work week.

The Township of Perth South offers excellent benefits and a competitive compensation package. For a detailed job description of this position, please visit www.perthsouth.ca

We thank all candidates for their interest, however, only those applicants selected for an interview will be contacted.

Interested candidates are invited to submit a detailed resume expressing their interest to the undersigned clearly marked as "Equipment Operator" by **Thursday, Sept 24, 2026.**

Ken Bettles, Director of Public Works
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PRC & Friendship Centre events – See the Stonetown Crier on Page 5

St. Marys Public Library events – See Page 22

FRIDAY, SEPT 18

- A.N.A.F. meat draw – 6 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs St. Thomas Stars at the PRC – 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, SEPT 19

- St. Marys Farmers Market at Milt Dunnell Field - 8 a.m. to Noon. United Way Perth-Huron campaign kick off at the Market, Breakfast sandwiches available by donation
- Local author book fair & vendor market at the Legion – 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- St. James Anglican Church 175th anniversary open house – Tour 1 p.m., Concert 2 p.m.
- St. Marys Station Gallery opening reception of "The Nine Fine Artists" exhibit – 1-4 p.m.
- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw – 5 p.m.
- First Baptist Church evening of music in support of Tricounty Foodgrains Bank – 7 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs Woodstock Navy Vets at Reeves Community Complex – 7:45 p.m.

SUNDAY, SEPT 20

- Terry Fox Run – Official start time is 9 a.m. from the YMCA

MONDAY, SEPT 21

- Community Dinner at the St. Marys United Church – 5 p.m., Sponsored by Sunset Diner

WEDNESDAY, SEPT 23

- Friends of the Library fall book sale at the Lind Sportsplex – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- St. Marys United Church strawberry supper – 5:30-6:30 p.m., Take out only, $25. Call for tickets – Cindy Jones 519-284-2704 or church office – 519-284-3016
- Falstaff Family Centre film screening & conversation on AI – 6:30-8:30 p.m.

THURSDAY, SEPT 24

- Friends of the Library fall book sale at the Lind Sportsplex – 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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Looking Back



AMY CUBBERLEY

Independent Columnist

King defeats Meighen

25 years ago (2001)

Specifics of the Avon Maitland District School Board's new Code of Conduct haven't yet been outlined to students of St. Marys DCVI, but students have been forced to adopt to a document which is being rolled out in conjunction with the Code: a new school-wide dress code. Two significant stipulations in the new dress code are the prohibition of hats during the school day, and a prohibition on allowing undergarments to be visible.

George and Marjorie Whittaker were the speakers, with a wonderful display of birds, animals and fish at the September meeting of Lakeside Women's Institute. George Whittaker's part-time taxidermy hobby has become a labour of love that now nears a full-time job.

50 years ago (1976)

A school bus with 50 student passengers and a truck collided at Elginfield Friday morning, but no major injuries resulted. Lucan OPP reports that a school bus, headed for Medway Secondary School in Arva, driven by Walter Wallis of R.R.#1 Granton, was turning from Highway 7 south on to Highway 4 when the collision occurred.

The Town of Goderich is in somewhat of an uproar concerning a mistake in a release from the Ontario Treasurer saying the Salt Town had the highest municipal tax increase in Ontario this year at $148. Turns out the increase was not even close to that figure but the incident led to this reporter asking Deputy Clerk-Treasurer Bob Cousins what the '76 tax heist averaged out to in St. Marys. The answer was $60. This puts us a lot higher than Rainy River with a $5 increase, but a bit better than Hamilton's average increase of $81.

75 years ago (1951)

Three years ago, the Town of Listowel built a new high school to accommodate 340 pupils, which was deemed ample to handle the upper school students of that bailiwick for some years to come. They disposed of the old school in the meantime. Today, with an enrolment of 382 students and more in prospect, that half million-dollar structure is overcrowded and it looks as though the town will have to build an expensive addition.

The new tennis courts on Water Street South have been getting plenty of use this month. Many younger players are beginning to get that tennis notion.

100 years ago (1926)

Rev. and Mrs. Homer Brown and three children of Chengtu, West China, arrived home last week from the Orient on furlough and are at present visiting Mr. Brown's old home at Brown's Corners. They came via the Mediterranean and England and spent some time en route.

Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, leader of the Conservative Party, suffered defeat at the polls on Tuesday.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Eddie Vedder
2. ChatGPT
3. Soccer (football)
4. TikTok
5. PlayStation 2
6. Gotham City
7. Disney
8. Barbie
9. 1998
10. The speed of sound

SUDOKU ANSWERS

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

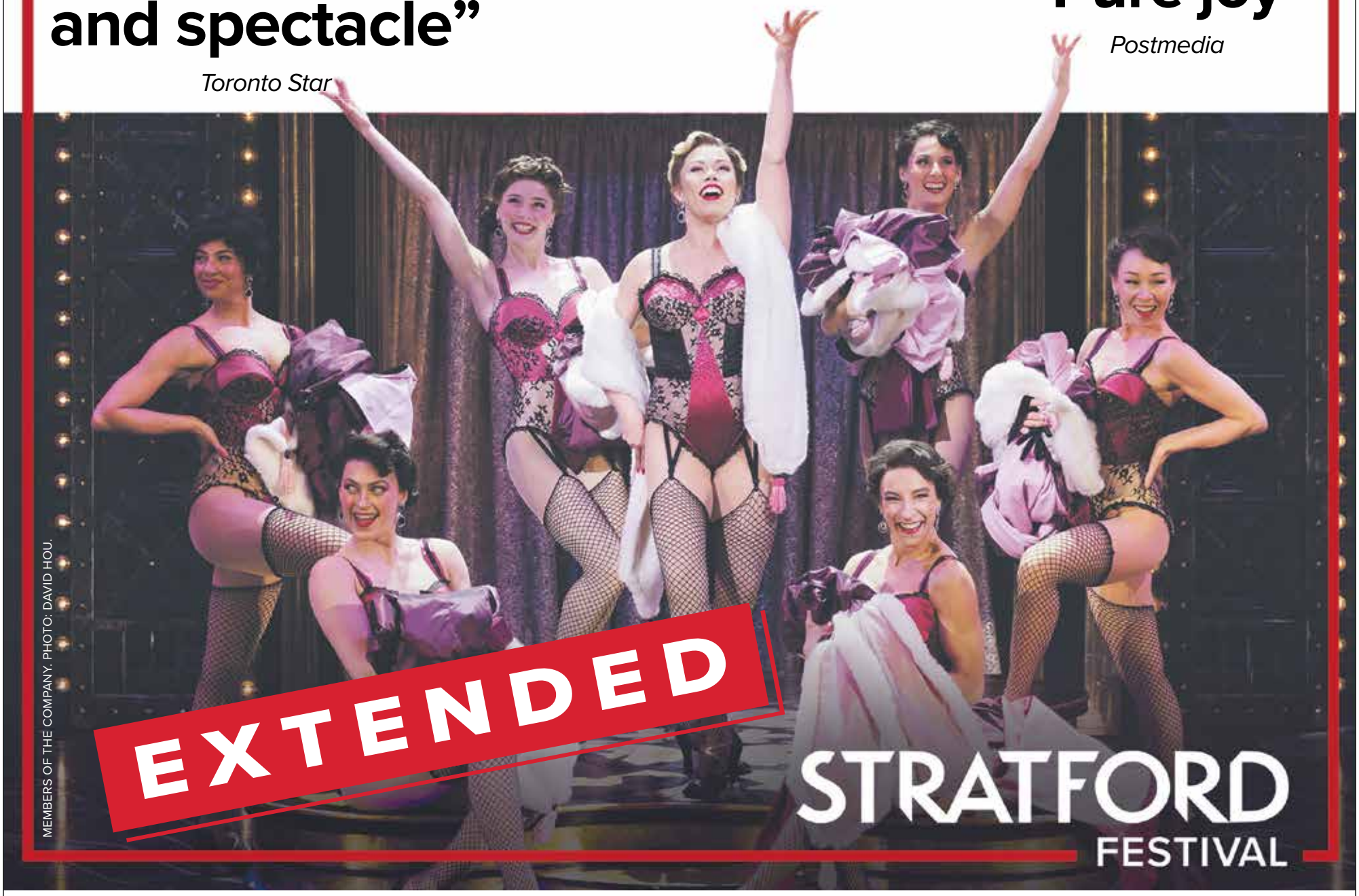
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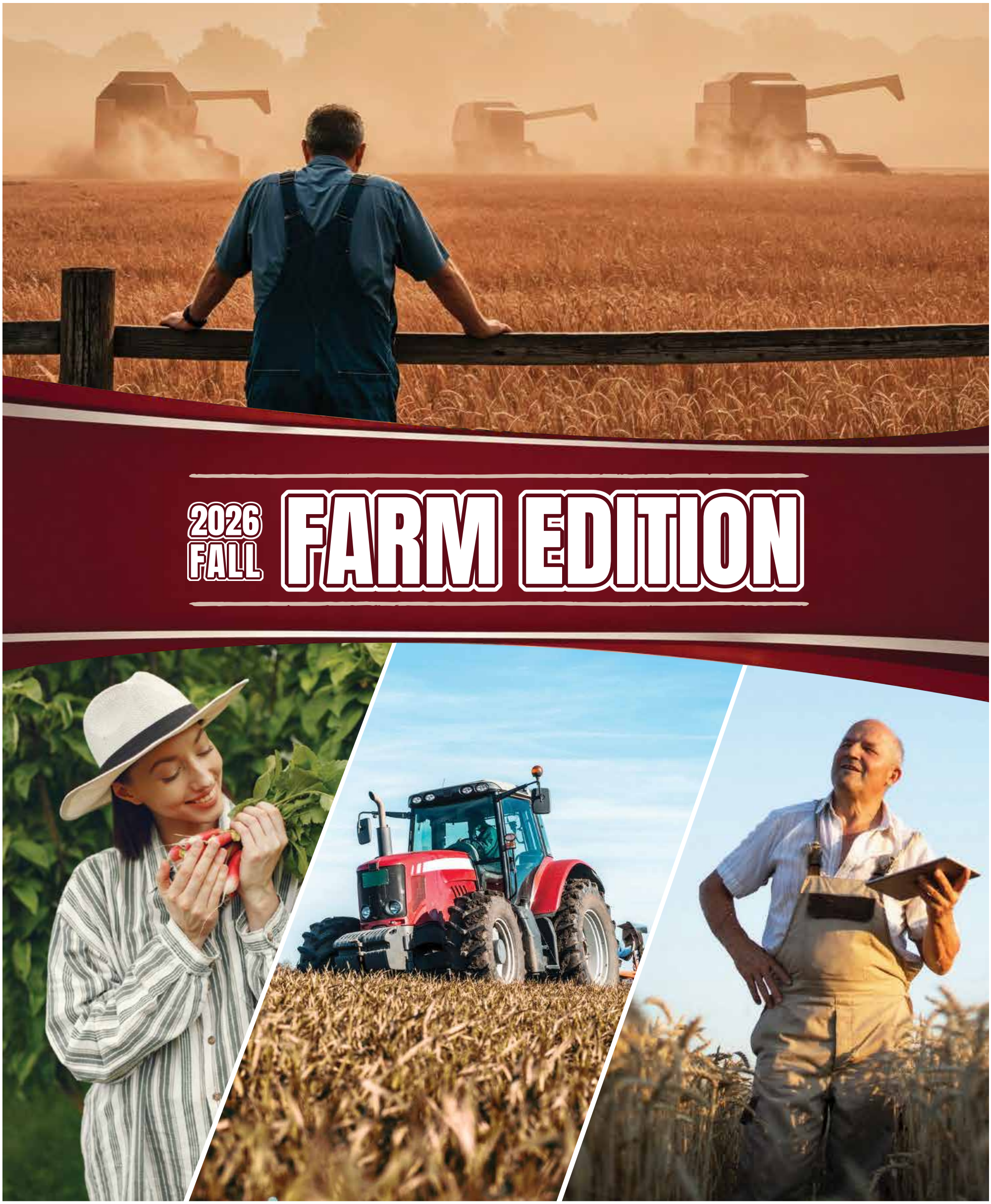
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2026 FALL FARM EDITION

From 2,000 bulbs to 40,000, Perth South flower farm continues to bloom



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Perth South's The Crazy Glad Lady, Laura Hardeman Good, stands in front of her flower field where she planted 40,000 gladiolus bulbs earlier this year, which are now in full bloom.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

The Crazy Glad Lady sells cut gladioli of all different colours from her roadside stand near St. Pauls in Perth South.

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

What began with 2,000 gladiolus bulbs and a couple acres of farmland near St. Pauls has blossomed into 40,000 flowers planted each year and a roadside business with customers who come from near and far to "pick their own rainbow."

For the past 19 years, Laura Hardeman Good, better known as The Crazy Glad Lady, has grown gladioli on her Perth South farm, selling the colourful cut flowers from her roadside stand and at the St. Marys Farmers' Market.

The business began when Good's youngest child was about 18 months old and she was preparing to return to work.

"We had just bought a new farm and I'm like, 'Do you think I could have a couple of acres? I'm going to try something,' " Good recalled.

The choice of flower came partly from the annual decoration service at nearby Avonbank Church. Good's mother-in-law would purchase flowers to decorate family graves, and Good wondered if she could grow them herself.

"I don't know that it ever turned out to be a savings for her," she joked.

What started with 2,000 bulbs grew year after year until Good reached the roughly 40,000 she plants today.

Those bulbs go into the ground over five or six plantings each spring, sometimes before her husband has planted his corn. This year, Good was planting in mittens.

Flowers generally begin appearing around mid-July and continue until frost, ideally carrying the season through Thanksgiving.

Good waits until each stem has three blossoms before cutting, giving customers a more colourful display than gladioli typically harvested earlier for wholesale markets.

At the height of the season, as many as 30 pails of flowers can line the roadside stand, with colours ranging from white and pink to deep reds and nearly black.

"When they're doing well, when they're in full flush, we have everything," Good said. "When you come, you get to pick your own rainbow. You get to take home what calls to your heart."

Growing that rainbow isn't without its challenges.

Tiny insects called thrips can burrow into the flowers and damage blossoms, while fusarium, a type of fungi, can kill plants after they emerge. Gladioli also require significant crop rotation, with Good saying she generally cannot plant them on the same ground again for about seven years.

That means finding new areas among the farm's wheat, corn and soybean rotation each season, preferably close enough to the road for passing motorists to enjoy the view.

And plenty stop.

Along with local customers, Good has welcomed people travelling through Perth County and even customers who made the drive from Toronto during the COVID-19 pandemic simply to buy flowers and bring some colour home.

"Just a chance to make somebody's day feel a little better, actually," Good said of what her flowers provide.

That idea inspired this year's "A Little Gladier World" campaign. Good offered four to six dozen flowers to people with ideas for sharing them with others, including residents of local nursing homes.

The inspiration came from a small rock someone once left at her stand bearing the message, "Today is a good day to be happy."

"I really like that they bring so much joy to people's lives," she said.

For Good, that connection is what has kept a small experiment growing for nearly two decades.

"It makes me really happy," she said. "I love it."

The Crazy Glad Lady sells gladioli seasonally from her roadside stand near St. Pauls and at the St. Marys Farmers' Market. Good can be reached at crazygladlady@gmail.com or 226-927-7963, and The Crazy Glad Lady can also be found on Instagram.





Becoming part of a dairy farming team: An inside look at Kirkton Vet Clinic's dairy veterinary services

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

Dr. Robyn Elgie, a dairy veterinarian with the Kirkton Vet Clinic, said the practice is unique compared to other veterinary care.

A dairy veterinarian will travel to see their clients regularly, usually every two weeks, to check for pregnancy, milking parlor protocols, medical treatment as needed and disease-prevention initiatives like vaccine protocols.

"You get to know the clients that you work with really well because you see them all the time and you definitely become part of their team on the farm and their advising committee that they have and they get information from," said Dr. Elgie.

The Kirkton Vet Clinic will also have emergencies every day, so there must be a block of time in her schedule left open and free from pre-booked appointments for her to travel as far as an hour and a half one way.

In addition to Kirkton and surrounding areas, Dr. Elgie travels as far as Parkhill and Sarnia to treat the cattle at farms in those areas, as there is limited access to veterinary treatment there.

"That didn't always used to be the case. … Every small town had a clinic that did both large and small, but just the way that the livestock industries have gone and there's less livestock farms in those areas than there used to be, it just didn't support large animal (veterinary care) out there," she said.

The Kirkton Vet Clinic is a large veterinary clinic that can accommodate out-of-town clients.

"Nowadays, farmers are really good and we spend a lot of time teaching them on how to do a lot of treatment and techniques on their own or at least in the interim until we get there, and educating them on detecting things early on in the process so that if it does take a bit of time to get intervention there to help, then we haven't lost time by just not checking the animal soon enough," said Dr. Elgie.

Dairy veterinary practices, such as disease prevention, are an important role in agri-food production and for large animal care.

"Every large animal veterinarian that's in that agricultural space cares pretty strongly about food safety and producing the best quality food that we can, so that's one aspect of it is making sure we are preventing disease as much as possible – so helping farmers have access to vaccines and to use them appropriately so they can get the most out of them, but also on the other side of just the care for the animals," Dr. Elgie said.

The personal connection between the dairy vet and their patients is what drove Dr. Elgie to the speciality, and she also enjoys the drives out to the farms.

"It can be long days and lots of driving, but your office is the countryside and living in Ontario, we get to see a lot of beautiful scenery," she said.

More information about the Kirkton Vet Clinic can be found online by visiting kirktonvetclinic.com.



(DR. ROBYN ELGIE PHOTO)

Dr. Robyn Elgie is a dairy veterinarian with the Kirkton Vet Clinic. She travels to dairy farms in the area and as far as Sarnia to provide care to cattle.

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Come visit McCully's Hill Farm and bring the whole family!

EMILY STEWART
Independent Reporter

There's always something to do at McCully's Hill Farm, whatever time of year it is.

The farm runs a pancake brunch on Saturdays and Sundays in March where guests can enjoy pancakes, baked beans, sausage and McCully's maple syrup. McCully's will partner with organizations like the Optimist Club and Lions Club, as well as local schools, to raise money for charities like the Ronald McDonald House.

The maple tours also run in March where visitors can take a wagon ride to the top of the hill to meet farm animals, and then through the sugar bush and to the sugar shack to learn about maple syrup production.

"We meet a lot of people who remember making maple syrup with their grandparents or with their dads just boiling it on a small scale or some of them, on a large scale, but they're removed from it now so it's nice for them to come back and see it," said owner Dennis Aarts. "It's just a real Canadian thing. It's fun and unique so people really enjoy that."

During the summer, McCully's runs a day camp for children involving nature hikes, visits with farm animals and games.

Schools will also take tours during the spring and fall.

"School tours are a really good opportunity. We try to let the kids interact with the animals in a safe way. We have some animals that are used to being handled and stuff like that, so it's pretty exciting for them," Aarts said.

Throughout October on Saturdays and Sundays, McCully's runs the Harvest Festival which features a tractor-drawn wagon ride to see farm animals, the popular pumpkin catapult, a straw tent for children to play in, a corn maze and a horse-drawn wagon ride through the forest to see fall foliage.

"Usually, the forest is decorated Halloween-ish, so you could say it's a bit of a haunted forest," Aarts said.

Lucid Musings Photography runs Santa photos in McCully's greenhouse in November, with proceeds supporting the local food bank.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

McCully's Hill Farm, located just outside of St. Marys, is a year-round stop for locals looking to reconnect with agriculture and have some good, old-fashioned seasonal fun.

In addition to activities, McCully's runs a year-round store with items like homemade sweet and savory pies, tarts and cookies, preserves, soups, stews and chillis, as well as seasonal produce and meats. For example, the store will sell fresh turkeys for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"We try to source everything as locally as we can, but of course you can't get local peaches and stuff like that, so same thing with our ingredients, we try to get things as locally sourced as we can," Aarts said.

The store also carries products from other businesses like Kintore Coffee Co., Sheldon's Berries, Barrie's Asparagus, and Heeman's Greenhouse in Thorndale. McCully's will also get peaches from Niagara and apples from Blanford-Blenheim.

"We've got a lot of good relationships with local places and I think that's important."

More information can be found online by visiting www.mccullys.ca.





45 years of caring for animals: Dr. Larry Joosse retires after long veterinary career

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

For many St. Marys pet owners who have brought their animals to the St. Marys Veterinary Clinic (SMVC), Dr. Larry Joosse has been a familiar and caring presence.

Known to many simply as Dr. Larry, Joosse has spent decades caring for animals and building relationships with their owners. After a veterinary career spanning 45 years, Joosse is hanging up his stethoscope and calling it a day.

Growing up in Grimsby, Joosse initially thought about becoming a doctor before developing an interest in wildlife. He began studying fisheries and wildlife biology but remained interested in medicine. By his second year at university, he had decided to become a veterinarian.

Joosse completed his Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Guelph and graduated from veterinary college in 1981.

During his final year, one of his rotations involved two weeks of farm-service calls. Through a mutual colleague of Dr. Rob Bell, Joosse learned the St. Marys clinic had room for two veterinarians interested in working in the farm sector.

That February, Joosse drove through a snowstorm for a 15-minute interview with Dr. Ken Schiedel and Bell.

The surrounding farm community caught his interest, but so did the opportunity to care for pets. Joosse and his wife, Patsy, whom he met at school, moved to St. Marys.

Veterinary medicine looked much different in those days. An emergency phone line for after-hours calls was set up in the veterinarians' homes, and their spouses often answered those calls. The veterinarians had their own vehicles and each handled farm calls.

As the clinic's companion-animal practice continued to grow, Joosse gradually spent more time caring for pets. His last farm call was sometime in 2008, and he eventually worked exclusively at the clinic.

Caring for pets also meant helping families through some of their most difficult moments.

Asked how he dealt with the emotional days when clients had to say goodbye to a beloved pet, Joosse said having other veterinarians around for support made a difference. Talking with colleagues helped, as did in-person meetings with other veterinary groups.

The trust he developed with clients over the years also helped.

When asked what has changed most during his career, Joosse pointed to both farming and the increasingly important place pets hold within families.

"The farms have gotten bigger and bigger and pets became more part of the family," he said. "I have also seen a big change in the support staff structure. When I started, there was one vet technician and five vets."

Technology has also transformed veterinary medicine.

Joosse remembers when blood samples had to be sent away for analysis, with results sometimes taking four days or longer. Today, in-house equipment can provide results in 15 to 25 minutes. X-ray technology has advanced considerably, and the clinic now has a handheld ultrasound machine.

While those advances can contribute to higher costs, they also allow veterinarians to make more accurate diagnoses and receive results much faster.

When asked what advice he would offer young veterinarians beginning their careers, Joosse emphasized the importance of continuing to learn and leaning on others during difficult times.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Dr. Larry Joosse is retiring after 45 years in veterinary medicine, much of that time spent caring for farm animals and family pets in the St. Marys area. Joosse joined the St. Marys Veterinary Clinic after graduating from veterinary college in 1981 and built lasting relationships with generations of clients, colleagues and their animals.

"Keep learning, keep your passion. If you have a rough day, talk to your colleagues, family or friends," he said.

Over 45 years, Joosse also encountered his share of unusual patients.

The clinic even made the Kitchener news one year after someone found a stray iguana in St. Marys and brought it in for care.

"I knew nothing about iguanas," Joosse recalled with a laugh.

Something many people may not know about Joosse is he also visited local public schools to teach children about caring for animals. Sometimes he brought along his dog and pieces of medical equipment, explaining his job and answering the many questions students had.

He also served on the executive of the Kitchener Veterinary Academy for many years.

Now, Joosse is looking forward to having more time with his wife, Patsy, their two children and four grandchildren.

He considers himself fortunate to have essentially enjoyed two careers in one, first working alongside farmers and their livestock and later focusing on the pets that increasingly became members of the family.

Asked what he will miss most, Joosse didn't hesitate.

"I will miss the people and the pets," he said. "My work family has been great over the years, my own family has been wonderful and the community is so great."

It doesn't take long at the clinic to understand how highly Joosse is regarded by those who worked alongside him.

Schiedel, who worked with Joosse from the beginning, described him as an exceptionally caring veterinarian.

"He was always the most caring person in a clinical environment saturated with caring people and despite getting older, Larry was eager to learn and stay current with the best and most updated treatment options for his patients," Schiedel said.

Nancy Riddell began working at the clinic as a high school student and went on to work with Joosse for roughly 40 years.

"After more than 40 years, it is difficult to put into words what Larry has meant to me, to veterinary medicine and to the St. Marys community," Riddell said.

She remembers when Larry and Patsy arrived in St. Marys in 1981 and she was working at the clinic after school and on Saturdays, never imagining those shifts would lead to more than four decades of friendship, laughter and memories.

Riddell said what she admired most was Joosse's compassion.

"He never just saw the animal in front of him – he saw the person who loved that animal. He understood that pets are family and he cared about the whole family. That kind of compassion cannot be taught from a textbook. It is simply part of who Larry is."

Over the years, Riddell said they encountered enough interesting patients and characters to fill a book, something the two often joked about.

"There have been crazy days, quiet days, difficult days and plenty of laughter," she said. "When I think about more than 40 years of working together, it isn't one moment that stands out. It's all the little things – the conversations, the familiar faces, the problem-solving, the laughter and simply knowing that Larry was there."

Lisa McEwan, who worked with Joosse for 38 years, said his booming laugh, endless smiles and quiet steadiness made him an anchor for those around him at the clinic.

"It was an absolute privilege to learn from and work alongside this amazing, selfless man whose love for his career, his co-workers, his clients and especially his patients was palpable every day," McEwan said.

Karen Whittaker, who also worked with Joosse for 38 years, said Dr. Larry, or Dr. J, made a 45-year career in veterinary medicine look easy.

" 'Do what you love, love what you do' is Dr. J, whether he was advocating for our pets or problem-solving medical cases," Whittaker said. "He brought calmness and empathy along with familiarity in all he did. He may have hung up his stethoscope for the last time but the impact he has made at SMVC and our community will last forever."

Veterinary technician Katie Avery also reflected on Joosse's dedication and passion for his career.

"Your patience, dedication and passion towards your career was so admirable. Working alongside you for many years was such an honour," Avery said. "The people and animals in our community were fortunate to have you as their vet. Your family was blessed to work with you, and you will be missed here dearly."

After 45 years, it is easy to see the difference Joosse has made to his colleagues, clients and the countless animals he has cared for.

While retirement means hanging up his stethoscope, the relationships Joosse built with animals, their owners, his colleagues and the wider St. Marys community will remain an important part of his legacy.

St. Marys Farmers' Market remains rooted in local food and community

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

More than three decades after the first vendors set up shop in a downtown parking lot, much has changed at the St. Marys Farmers' Market.

But according to St. Marys Farmers' Market Association chair Ann Slater, what matters most has stayed remarkably consistent.

"The same commitment to providing local food to local people and supporting local farmers and local food artisans; that's stayed the same," Slater said.

The market dates back to 1992, when the Town of St. Marys invited Farmers' Markets Ontario to give a presentation on starting a farmers' market. By the first Saturday in July, a volunteer board had opened the market in the town-owned Jones Street parking lot.

Slater was among those original vendors and remains the only vendor who has been there since the beginning. Sheldon Berries joined in 1993 and has also remained a longtime fixture.

Over the years, some vendors have used the market as a starting point for businesses that eventually grew beyond it, while others have come and gone as their circumstances changed.

"It fluctuates," Slater said. "I've learned over the years not to get too wound up because new people pop up."

The market continues to welcome new vendors, particularly farmers and growers. It remains a producer-based market, meaning resellers are not permitted and at least 50 per cent of its vendors must be farmers or growers selling what they produce themselves.

Beyond farmers, the market includes local food producers and artisans selling everything from baking, preserves and crafts to meat, fruit and vegetables.

Vendors generally come from within 35 kilometres of St. Marys, though the association board can make exceptions for products that aren't otherwise available locally.

That focus, Slater said, gives people an opportunity to meet those producing their food while providing small agricultural businesses with direct access to customers.

"It's a way to introduce people to your product," she said.

The biggest change over the market's history has been its location.

After nearly three decades on Jones Street, pandemic restrictions forced the market to move to Delmar Foods in 2020. Slater said it was the first farmers' market in Perth County to reopen that spring after organizers worked with public health to develop a safe way of operating.

The following year, the market moved to Milt Dunnell Field, where the town made improvements to accommodate it, including expanding and eventually paving the parking area to improve accessibility.

The location has helped reinforce another important part of the market's identity: it isn't just somewhere to shop.

"I think it builds community," Slater said. "It strengthens us to be part of a vendor community rather than just ourselves."

It also creates a community among shoppers.

On Saturday mornings, people often linger after shopping to talk with friends, have coffee or take their purchases to nearby picnic tables while children play at the park.

"It becomes part of their routine," Slater said.

That community atmosphere has increasingly included special events.

The market held a pet day this summer and temporarily relocated downtown during the Stonetown Heritage Festival. This fall will see the return of two popular traditions.

Apple Pie Day invites residents to enter homemade pies, preferably made using market or Ontario apples. Slices are sold following judging while whole pies are auctioned, with proceeds supporting the market.

Harvest Soup Day follows Thanksgiving, with retired local chef Chris Wolf using ingredients from market vendors to prepare soups that are sold as another fundraiser.

The outdoor market's 2026 season continues Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon at Milt Dunnell Field through Oct. 31. Indoor markets are also planned following the outdoor season.

For Slater, however, the market's longevity ultimately comes back to the same idea that inspired its creation in 1992.

"I think our being producer-based, we've stuck to that," she said. "Producer-focused, community-focused."

More information about vendors, events and the market is available at stmarysfarmersmarket.ca.

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Huron, Perth honeybee hive losses lower than many areas

JOHN MINER

Contributed Article

When it comes to beehive losses, Huron and Perth county beekeepers can consider themselves fortunate compared to much of the province.

According to a spring survey by the Ontario Beekeepers Association, the winter hive losses in the region that includes Huron and Perth averaged 17.6 per cent, the second lowest losses in the province.

But beekeepers in some other regions reported losing more than half their hives, including Northeastern Ontario, Greater Toronto and Hamilton area and Central Ontario. Only Northwestern Ontario had lower losses than Huron and Perth.

The overall average loss for Ontario was 45.3 per cent.

South Huron beekeeper Aaron Neeb calculates that to break even, beekeepers can only afford to lose up to 20 per cent of their hives over winter.

"Hive loss is a serious issue for the beekeeping industry," he said.

Neeb said the lower losses this past winter for the Huron and Perth region, which also includes Grey, Bruce and Wellington counties, is extremely positive news for beekeepers in the area.

Last year, the beekeepers in the region weren't as fortunate, reporting losses of 39.5 per cent.



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

South Huron beekeeper Aaron Neeb says the lower winter hive losses is extremely good news.

The top reasons for hive losses, according to the Ontario Beekeepers Association survey, were winter weather, small clusters going into winter and queen issues.

Beekeepers reporting overwinter success attributed their lower losses to effective Varroa mite control, good sized clusters going into winter and effective fall feeding of their bees.

The mites are a serious issue for beekeepers, requiring regular monitoring and sometimes multiple treatments, Neeb said. Populations can grow exponentially during a season.

High mite levels can cause viruses and diseases that are difficult to eliminate.

To recover from losses, some beekeepers split surviving hives into two colonies, but that is a bit of a catch-22.

"Yes, you have a new hive, but it is not nearly as strong as it would be if left as a single colony. This can result in lower honey yields and, for some beekeepers with pollination contracts, fewer viable colonies to provide for pollination," Neeb said.

An added issue is that by the time fall arrives, beekeepers have two colonies that require supplemental feed and treatments to make it through the winter.

Ontario beekeepers also try to recover from hive losses by importing queen bees from places such as Hawaii, California, Chile and New Zealand. The downside is these bees are less likely to survive Canadian winters than queens reared in Canada, Neeb said.

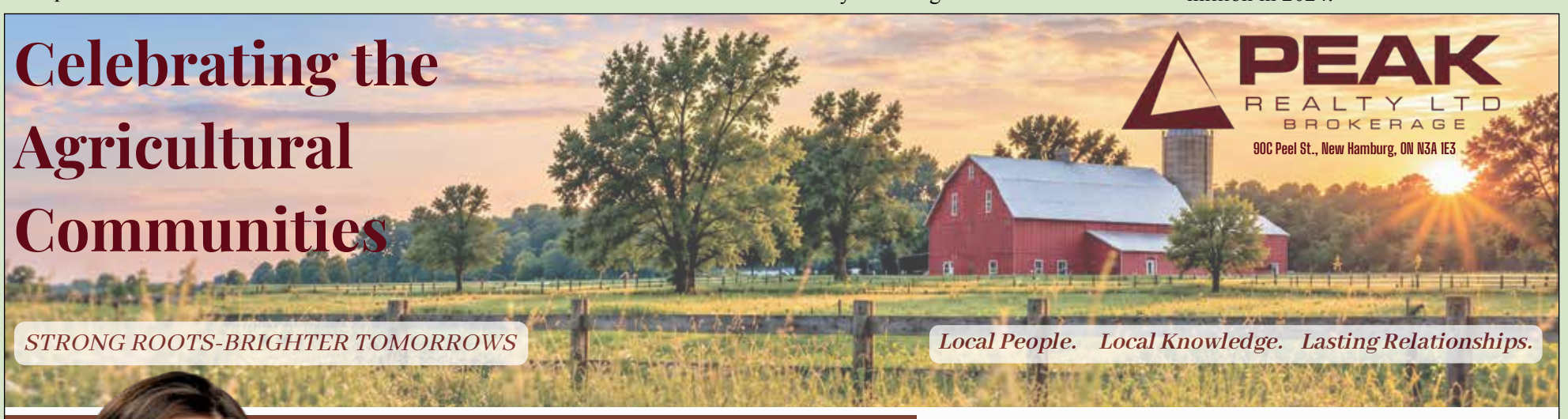
A positive development for Ontario beekeepers, according to the provincial association, was the registration this spring of new mite control products.

Another initiative was announced by the University of Guelph – the Low Varroa Growth breeding program that aims to build resistance to the mites.

The research involves sampling hives twice in a season to compare mite levels and then selecting the ones with lower mite numbers for new bee colonies.

The Ontario Beekeepers Association is also calling for investments in research and extension to help beekeepers be more resilient in the face of high winter losses.

Ontario's beekeepers produced $40.8 million of honey last year, up from $33.4 million in 2024.




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Oversupply and trade issues drive down dry bean prices for Ontario growers

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

The 2026 Ontario Bean Growers annual general meeting was held in Stratford earlier this year, where dry bean growers from across the region came together to discuss growing concerns around exports, particularly trade, transportation and domestic demand.

Alvin Klassen of Dry Bean World outlined current challenges as Canada continues to navigate overproduction of black beans and ongoing tariff changes that are limiting trade and creating uncertainty for growers.

"In the last five years, we've experienced several severe ups and downs in commercial markets related to supply and demand, with the influence of producer and dealer pricing," said Klassen.

Despite steady global demand for dry beans, many growers are finding it harder to turn a profit.

Prices across North America have dropped sharply in recent years – in some cases by nearly half – while input costs such as fuel and fertilizer have remained high.

"Throughout North America, we are now sitting where bean prices are half of what they were three years ago, and the cost of production hasn't gone down at all," said Klassen. "In fact, seed pricing hasn't gone down, and it's making it very difficult to sustain production."

The issue, Klassen said, comes down to supply and demand. A strong harvest has left a surplus of beans in storage – known in the industry as "carryover" – giving buyers less incentive to pay higher prices.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

A fresh mixed bean salad is one of the many ways Canadians are encouraged to get more beans in their diet during the Ontario Bean Growers Eat More Beans campaign.

At the same time, export challenges and limited processing options in Canada are making it harder for farmers to move their crops efficiently, adding further pressure to an already strained market.

Jeff English of Pulse Canada said the organization is working to increase domestic consumption through its "Love Canadian Beans" campaign, which aims to raise awareness that many beans sold in stores are grown in Canada and encourage more people to include them in their diets.

"It's not about telling people how to eat but showing them how beans can be incorporated into everyday foods we already know and love," said English. "It's about giving some familiarity to supporting what we see as a great, sustainably grown Canadian crop."

English added advancements in bean-processing technology could also help grow the domestic market.

"Now that we have companies extracting proteins and starches from pulse crops, we should have an opportunity to put more protein into different foods – not necessarily calling them beans, but using them as a high-protein ingredient," he said.

Bill Rosenberg, parliamentary assistant to the minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness, also addressed growers, highlighting the significant role Ontario's bean producers play in the province's agri-food sector.

"Our agri-food sector now generates around $52 billion in annual GDP," he said. "This is why Ontario is known around the world for safe, nutritious and delicious food.

"Eighty to 90 per cent of the beans grown here in Ontario are exported around the world, and that is something to be proud of," he added.

Overall, the message to growers was clear: while global demand is growing, the industry must navigate trade instability, supply chain risks and the need to build stronger domestic markets to remain competitive.





Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers welcome new strategy aimed at helping farmers

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

With the ever-changing climate for food producers across Canada, including trade shifts, global conflicts and climate change, prices on Ontario produce continue to rise. In response, the federal government has launched Canada's first-ever National Food Security Strategy.

"Too much of what we grow is processed elsewhere, and too many Canadians still rely on imported food at higher prices," said Prime Minister Mark Carney. "Canadian farmers deserve more options to sell their produce, and Canadians deserve more options for where to buy their food."

The National Food Security Strategy includes a $3.2-billion investment over 10 years with a strong focus on strengthening Canada's food system through a mix of production, infrastructure and regulatory changes aimed at reducing reliance on imported produce, especially in winter.

"This is a significant and forward-looking investment that will directly benefit greenhouse growers across Ontario and Canada," said Richard Lee, executive director of Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG).

"The Strategy acknowledges the essential role our sector plays in producing fresh, nutritious, safe vegetables year-round, while reinforcing Canada's position as a global leader in greenhouse vegetable production, reducing reliance on imports and strengthening supply chains."

A specific $750-million investment in controlled-environment agriculture (CEA), which includes greenhouses and indoor growing systems, aims to help growers build or expand greenhouse facilities, adopt new growing technologies and produce more fruits and vegetables year-round.

The strategy also aims to support more food processing closer to where crops are grown, meaning infrastructure to turn raw produce into packaged goods locally, reduced transportation costs and reducing spoilage and emissions from long-distance shipping.

The plan also hopes to reduce bottlenecks from farm to processor to retailer and help independent growers and vendors access markets more easily by supporting infrastructure for storage, transport and distribution.

One key point outlined in the plan notes the government is actively looking to cut regulatory barriers, or "red tape," aiming to help speed up approval for fertilizers and crop protection tools, ease the movement of goods across provincial borders and streamline agricultural regulations throughout the country.

"Through this made-in-Canada approach, we will process more of what our farmers grow here at home, creating jobs, driving economic growth and strengthening Canada's food self-sufficiency," said Heath MacDonald, Canadian minister of agriculture and agri-food.

"By reducing red tape and helping innovative businesses get projects off the ground faster, we will unlock new opportunities for farmers, food processors and entrepreneurs across the agri-food sector."

OGVG says this support will help stabilize food prices in grocery stores, expand producers' market access and reduce the dominance of a few large retailers across the province.

"With the support outlined in this strategy, the greenhouse sector will be able to grow more food more efficiently, and at a lower cost," added Lee. "This benefits not only our farmers, but also Canadian families who are looking for affordable, locally grown food options year-round."

Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers is a not-for-profit organization representing greenhouse farmers who grow tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers in Ontario. With a commitment to innovation, sustainability and food safety, OGVG members supply fresh, high-quality vegetables to Canadians year-round.

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Agricultural drones take flight after Health Canada pesticide approval

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

A Health Canada approval allowing pesticide application by remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS), commonly known as drones, was granted in June, allowing farmers and small businesses across southwestern Ontario to spray pesticides in accordance with the Pest Control Products Act and the Pest Control Products Regulations.

While Canadian farmers have been able to use drones for mapping, scouting and crop monitoring, the major regulatory hurdle has been using them to apply pesticides.

Now that new approvals have opened the door for drone-based pesticide applications, small business owners such as Justin Shieck, owner and operator of Norfolk Drone Services, say they believe farmers can now utilize the technology for greater efficiency.

Shieck was initially taken off guard when he read the report stating that pesticide spraying via drone technology was approved back in June, something he thought he wouldn't see until next year.

"There weren't even signs that this was going to happen by the fall. … We were taken completely off guard about the approval."

Shieck says countries like China, the United States and Australia have been using drone technology in the agricultural sector for around 15 years, and yet Canada is just starting to see the value after getting feedback from competing countries.

"In the States, drones are treated as another aircraft," he said. "What got me into this business was really watching how fast it expanded across the States and seeing YouTube video after YouTube video and news article after news article showing small businesses booming, with young 20-year-olds and different age groups of farmers enjoying what they're doing and bringing a cheaper solution for farming."

Shieck says he believes farmers throughout Canada will soon own and operate drones, similar to the way they own tractors, combines or other farming equipment. He says in farming, timing is everything when it comes to spraying pesticides or fertilizers.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Justin Shieck, owner and operator of Norfolk Drone Services, demonstrates agricultural drone technology. The June Health Canada approval allowing pesticide applications by remotely piloted aircraft systems opens new opportunities for farmers and agricultural businesses.

"Do I see every farmer owning one, like a Swiss Army knife in their toolbox? One hundred per cent because farming comes down to timing," said Shieck. "Especially if you're deploying it out of the back of your barn, you can hit timing windows when you really need to."

Compared to small conventional tractors, drones can cover more ground in less time, at about 40 acres per hour; however, large self-propelled sprayers can cover more than 80 acres per hour. These large sprayers are often hard on fields and don't allow for the same mobility as a drone.

The Health Canada report noted that drone application is often the most practical option when fields are soft, wet or too difficult for ground application equipment; when pest outbreaks occur late in crop growth; or for areas that are either too large or inaccessible for ground application.

"If it's been raining a lot, I don't think anyone's pulling a rig through a field," said Shieck. "Then once a canopy gets high, you can't really spray beans or corn because it's too tall. In the fall, I really see drones tackling the heavy canopies where you're not getting that 25 per cent loss from driving over your beans."

Though Canada is behind in its approval, Shieck says it's not all bad news, and being able to track and assess what's happening in other countries before the Health Canada approval has benefited the budget.

"Canada is cautious," he said. "We take a more science-based regulatory approach than most places, and they do it for safety reasons. I would say it's not a horrible thing that we were behind. Watching and allowing other countries to spend a lot of money on research while we sat back and collected data was valuable. Now we have some brands approved, and we're not wasting that time or money on the trial and error they've already gone through."

The report notes that the approval also aligns Canada with other countries like the United States and Australia, helping Canadian agriculture stay competitive internationally during times when competitive prices are key.

"Using RPAS to apply pesticides can make farming more efficient by helping farmers protect crops while using fewer inputs such as pesticides and other resources needed for crop production, including labour, fuel and equipment use," read the report. "This will support food security and help keep food affordable."

Drone operation is regulated by Transport Canada, whereas the regulation of pesticides is under the jurisdiction of Health Canada. Transport Canada considers aerial drones to be aircraft, and all pilots must understand and follow Canadian Aviation Regulations.

The data show that the risks of applying pesticides by RPAS are generally similar to those of conventional aerial application. However, drones also have the potential to apply pesticides very precisely, similar to some ground-based spot treatments.

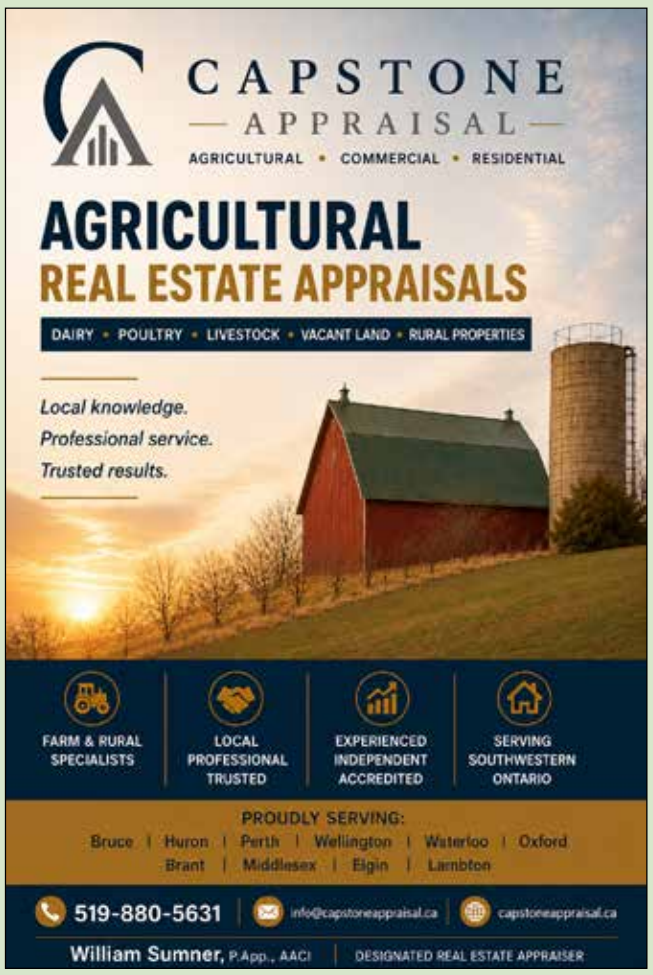
Health Canada also concluded that pesticide residues on food crops resulting from RPAS applications are not higher than those resulting from conventional application methods, making foods as safe as with conventional applications.

Shieck's company, Norfolk Drone Services, offers agricultural drone services focused on precision spraying, spreading and mapping. Its main agriculture-related services include aerial spraying, granular spreading, mapping and aerial imagery, as well as drone sales, support and training.

The cost of a drone package varies, but Shieck says it is generally around $40,000 to $50,000 and includes multiple batteries and packages, including spray equipment that can be used for pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides and biological products.

Shieck encourages anyone interested to visit his website or reach out to him directly at www.norfolkdroneservices.ca.





Autonomous robots aim to cut nitrogen fertilizer needs

JOHN MINER

Contributed Article

If Maize Runner succeeds, corn growers will be able to cut the amount of nitrogen fertilizer they use while boosting yields.

Maize Runner is a fifth-generation robot that is currently being tested on more than 3,000 acres on 31 farms across Ontario by Waterloo-based Upside Robotics.

The idea behind the lightweight solar-powered robot is to regularly spoon feed nitrogen to corn plants throughout the growing season, matching the growth requirements of the plant.

At present, farmers using current fertilizer application equipment can make one or two nitrogen applications during the season, but much of the nitrogen is gone by post-tassel when the corn plant still requires about 40 per cent of the nitrogen.

In contrast, Maize Runner can apply fertilizer throughout the growing season, covering between 20 to 25 acres a day.

The autonomous robot typically applies fertilizer for about four hours before returning to a base station to recharge, refill and head back out again. It can run 24-7.

"We are hoping to get to a point where one robot by itself can manage at least a 100-acre field, making weekly applications," Upside Robotics agronomist Tanya Franklin told participants attending the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association farm day at the Huronview Demo Farm near Clinton.

The field results from the nitrogen robot application have been positive with some farms cutting their nitrogen applications by as much as 70 per cent and maintaining yields.

Upside Robotics was co-founded in 2023 by Jana Tian, a chemical engineer, and Sam Dugan, who grew up on a farm and trained in mechatronics at the University of Waterloo.

The first two generations of robots developed by Upside Robotics, Buddy and Marley, were driven by an Xbox controller that required an operator to walk behind the robot through the whole field.

"We put in about 30,000 steps a day to get those applications done," said Franklin.

There were also significant issues with motors quitting. By the end of the season, co-op students literally hooked up a harness to the robots and dragged them through the field to get the nitrogen applied, she said.

Last year, the liquid fertilizer tanks mounted on the robots above the computers and electronics leaked.

"We were blowing up robots daily," Franklin said.

The robots also relied on GPS and field maps to navigate between the rows. The maps turned out to be out by as much as 150 centimetres, causing the robots to trample the corn.

"We actually had to shut down the entire fleet for about two and a half weeks at the beginning of the season."

This year's robot model, Maize Runner, no longer relies on planting maps to manoeuvre between the rows.

It is equipped with front and back cameras, a multi-spectral camera, canopy camera, temperature and humidity sensor, magnetometer and gyroscope. Data is collected metre-by-metre as the robot moves through the field.



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

Speaking at the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association farm day at the Huronview Demo Farm, Upside Robotics agronomist Tanya Franklin describes how the Maize Runner robot can cut nitrogen fertilizer requirements. The solar powered autonomous robot covers 20 to 25 acres a day.

"It's really cool, the amount of data that we're gathering on plant health, on how weather conditions affect things," said Franklin.

The base station for the robot is equipped with a rainfall sensor and temperature sensor. If it is going to rain within two hours, robots at the base station can no longer go to the field and robots in the field are programmed to return to the base.

If the base station detects rain, the robots in the field are automatically shut down and stay in place in the field until it dries out enough that they can start back up, return to the station and recharge.

Franklin said she doesn't have a price on the robot system yet.

"We know we want to sit in a spot where we can get the hardware reliable enough that when we sell it to you, you don't really have to do anything with it for about three years at least.

"Year one, at minimum, it breaks even. Year two and three are for profit. That is the goal."

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Ontario soybean farmers face price pressure as China shifts buying and Brazil ramps up production

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

Ontario soybean farmers are watching global trade negotiations closely as uncertainty around exports – particularly to China – adds to price pressure in a market already facing strong global crop supplies.

Brazil is expected to have a record soybean harvest in 2026, a development that analysts say will weigh on prices worldwide.

"There's forecast to be record production in Brazil, and when there's strong production, that has downward pressure on price," said Brian Innes, executive director of Soy Canada. "That's the first thing to watch for prices in 2026. The second is what happens globally with geopolitics and tariffs."

Innes said changes in trade relations between major economies – especially the United States and China – can have a direct impact on the prices Canadian farmers receive.

"Due to the Trump administration, tariffs on soybeans have changed," he said. "One thing to watch for in 2026 is how the situation between the U.S. and China evolves, and how the situation between Canada and China evolves. That can have an impact on price if tariffs change."



(PAUL NELSON PHOTO)

Grant Haven Media reporter Amanda Nelson grew up on a farm in Chesley, two hours north of Perth County. Her mother and father, Elaine and Paul Nelson, still grow soybeans on their 200-acre farm, pictured here.

More than 70 per cent of Ontario's soybean crop is exported, with prices shaped by global demand, particularly from China. While China historically sourced much of its soybeans from the United States, it is increasingly turning to Brazil due to generally lower prices.

The Canadian and U.S. soybean markets are also closely linked through cross-border trade and processing, which could impact prices for Canadian farmers.

"Products flow back and forth across the border," said Innes. "For example, Ontario soybeans are shipped to Michigan, processed into soybean meal and then shipped back into Ontario. Soybean meal and soybean oil trade back and forth across the border, and that's why prices are very linked."

Soybeans are priced on global benchmarks – particularly U.S. futures markets – meaning Canadian prices move in step with broader world trends.

"The price that Ontario farmers see is based on what conditions Canada faces when exporting to the world, including China," said Innes. "In the past, the difference between Michigan and Ontario was largely tied to exchange rates, but now, with global trade disruptions, Canada and the U.S. face different tariffs and different market conditions."

Despite growing competition from lower-cost producers, Innes said Ontario remains well positioned as a high-quality soybean supplier.

Ontario is a global leader in identity-preserved and food-grade soybeans, a niche market that allows farmers to compete on quality rather than volume alone.

"We're living in a time of unprecedented global uncertainty, and if market conditions change for Canadian soybean exports, that will have an impact on price," said Innes. "But Canadian soybeans have been flowing under strong export conditions for some time, and that has meant strong demand for Ontario soybeans."

Waghorn Stephens



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FCC renews partnership with Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing

Parternship to support National Farmer Wellness Network and Crisis Line

CONTRIBUTED

Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) and the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing (CCAW) have announced a renewed partnership to sustain and expand the National Farmer Wellness Network (NFWN) and National Farmer Crisis Line, 1-866-FARMS01 (1-866-327-6701).

The renewed investment of $1.8 million over three years ($600,000 annually) will allow the program to continue providing tailored, no-cost mental health and crisis support to Canada's farmers, farm families and agricultural workers.

"The response to the National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line since its launch has confirmed what we always knew. There is a deep and urgent need for mental-health support that speaks the language of farming," said Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing CEO and lead scientist Dr. Briana Hagen. "FCC's renewed investment means we can continue building on this foundation, reaching more farmers and agricultural workers who need immediate, culturally informed support. This partnership is about more than a phone line; it's about ensuring Canada's agricultural community knows it is seen, valued and never alone."

Since launching in February 2025, the National Farmer Wellness Network Crisis Line has connected agricultural workers across Canada with licensed mental-health professionals trained through the Canadian Agricultural Literacy Program (CALP), specialists who understand the unique pressures of farming life. The renewal ensures this vital service continues uninterrupted.

"Farming and ranching asks a lot of people," said FCC president and CEO Justine Hendricks. "Behind every operation are individuals and families managing uncertainty, long hours and immense responsibility. That's why FCC is proud to continue its support to the National Farmer Wellness Network so farmers and farm families have access to trusted mental-health support from professionals who understand the unique realities of agriculture, whenever they need it."

Farming remains one of Canada's most demanding occupations. Financial volatility, geographic isolation, unpredictable weather and the emotional weight of caring for land and livestock create compounding mental-health pressures that general support services are often ill-equipped to address. The NFWN Crisis Line was built specifically to meet farmers where they are, and this renewed commitment ensures it will keep doing so.

"Renewing this commitment means that farmers and farm families across Canada can continue to count on us, not just in a moment of crisis, but as part of an ongoing network of care," said NFWN chief programming officer Deborah Vanberkel. "The trust that agricultural communities have placed in this program is something we do not take lightly. With FCC's continued support, we are able to grow that trust and deepen our reach into every province."







Can seasonal patterns help inform fertilizer purchasing decisions?

LEIGH ANDERSON

Farm Credit Canada

As producers turn their attention to the 2027 growing season, buying fertilizer remains one of the most important and uncertain crop input decisions.

The return of Chinese fertilizer exports has improved supply prospects for some nutrients, but ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the potential for disruptions to trade through the Strait of Hormuz continue to create upside price risk. At the same time, energy markets and global trade flows remain important drivers of fertilizer costs.

Against this backdrop, one question consistently comes up: How should producers approach fertilizer purchases in an increasingly uncertain market? In this report, we examine current fertilizer market conditions and explore how historical pricing patterns can help inform purchasing decisions amid ongoing uncertainty.

Fertilizer markets are sending mixed signals

Current market indicators highlight the diverging outlooks for nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers heading into 2027. Urea prices in the U.S. Gulf fertilizer market have retreated significantly from the highs reached earlier in 2026 and now sit roughly 15 per cent below pre-conflict levels, while DAP prices at New Orleans (NOLA) remain approximately 25 per cent above pre-conflict levels. The contrast highlights the different forces shaping nitrogen and phosphate markets. Unlike nitrogen and phosphate, potash prices have remained comparatively stable over the past year.

While Canadian fertilizer prices generally follow U.S. Gulf and NOLA benchmarks, transportation costs, exchange rates, regional supply-demand conditions and retailer inventories can influence the extent and timing of price changes. As a result, declines in benchmark prices do not necessarily translate into equivalent reductions in Canadian fertilizer prices.

Nitrogen markets easing, but risks remain

Part of the decline in urea prices reflects the seasonal slowdown that follows North American planting, a period often referred to as the summer lull in fertilizer markets. Prices have also softened due to the return of Chinese urea exports after several years of limited participation in global markets, improving product availability and easing pressure on nitrogen prices.

However, lower nitrogen prices should not be mistaken for lower risk. The Middle East remains a critical supplier of fertilizer products, feedstocks and energy, while the Strait of Hormuz remains a key global trade route. Any disruption to regional trade flows, shipping routes or natural gas markets could quickly reverse recent price declines.

Phosphate markets remain fundamentally tight

Phosphate markets continue to tell a different story. Elevated costs for sulphur, ammonia and natural gas – the primary inputs in phosphate production – have squeezed producer margins. So much so that in some cases, phosphate production has even been curtailed. With the Middle East accounting for nearly half of global sulphur trade, ongoing conflict in the region risks further increasing phosphate production costs and constraining supply.

Also supporting phosphate prices is the uncertainty surrounding Chinese exports. While lower U.S. tariffs on Moroccan phosphate may encourage some additional North American imports, they are unlikely to materially loosen global market conditions. Chinese export policy remains a key watch item heading into 2027.

Managing uncertainty through purchasing decisions

With fertilizer prices remaining difficult to predict, many farms are focusing on timing of purchases as a risk-management tool. Most farms know their expected crop rotation and fertilizer requirements well before spring, and while prices remain uncertain, historical seasonal patterns can provide useful context for purchasing decisions.

Nitrogen exhibits the strongest seasonality of the major fertilizers. Over the past five years, Canadian retail prices have typically been the weakest during late summer and fall before strengthening into the spring application season, with average values peaking in April and May.

Phosphate displays a more moderate but still noticeable seasonal pattern. Prices for Canadian farmers tend to be relatively softer during the second half of the calendar year before gradually strengthening ahead of spring seeding.

In contrast, Canadian potash retail prices have exhibited relatively modest seasonal price fluctuations in recent years, giving producers greater flexibility to manage cash flow.

After summer fill programs, farmers are typically left weighing purchases between fall and spring application windows. Those with storage capacity may be able to separate purchase timing from application timing, while others may use supplier programs that allow fertilizer to be priced ahead of delivery.

Recent experience highlights why these decisions matter. Many producers viewed fertilizer prices as unattractive during summer fill programs last year, resulting in limited uptake. Fall fertilizer application was also weaker than normal, pushing a larger share of fertilizer demand into the winter and spring months.

Fertilizer purchasing decisions should also be considered alongside grain marketing plans. As discussed in our recent grains and oilseeds report, historical crop pricing patterns can help inform grain marketing decisions amid market uncertainty. Locking in favourable crop prices can help offset higher fertilizer costs and improve margin certainty heading into 2027.

Bottom line

Geopolitical events this past year have highlighted how quickly fertilizer market conditions can change. Historical pricing patterns suggest nitrogen and phosphate prices often strengthen into the spring application season, contrasting with potash prices which tend to show greater stability. While there is no guarantee markets will follow their typical seasonal path, the latter can be useful in guiding fertilizer purchasing decisions.

Many producers appear to be taking a wait-and-see approach as fertilizer markets move through the fall and into the new year. Given the uncertainty that remains, a phased purchasing strategy may be worth considering. While it will not always result in the lowest price, it can help balance opportunity, risk and flexibility.



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OFA urges farmers to put safety first

CONTRIBUTED

Ontario Federation of Agriculture

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is encouraging farmers, farm families and rural communities to make safety on the farm a priority all year long.

To support farmers with practical tools and information, OFA has released a farm safety fact sheet, designed to help identify risks, start conversations and strengthen safety practices on farms of all sizes and types.

"The farm is more than a workplace, it's also home," said farmer and OFA executive member Paul Maurice. "Safety starts with planning and awareness, not luck. Taking the time to think through tasks, identify risks and put simple precautions in place can make all the difference in preventing injuries and making sure everyone comes home safely at the end of the day."

Common farm safety risks include long days and fatigue, heavy machinery and moving equipment, time pressure from weather and field conditions, road travel with slow-moving vehicles, multiple people working closely together, or working with animals that can behave unpredictably. When fatigue sets in or distractions creep in, the risk of injury rises quickly.

"Simple actions like wearing high-visibility gear, maintaining equipment, or taking an extra moment to assess a task can help prevent life-changing accidents," said Maurice. "Farm safety is everyone's responsibility, and it starts with each of us knowing what to do to stay safe."

A few top farm safety tips:

-Keep equipment fixed and up to date.

-Take a break when tired or fatigued, and don't cut corners when in a rush.

-Shut down equipment before making adjustments or dislodging a blockage and keep safety guards in place.

-Don't let kids play around work sites or near equipment.

-Have a first aid kit and emergency contact numbers handy and take a charged phone when heading out for the day.

-When frustration hits because of breakdowns or long hours, take a breath, step back and reassess before moving on.

The full fact sheet is available at ofa.on.ca/resources/tips-for-staying-safe-on-the-farm.

Farmers and rural residents can also access practical safety gear through the OFA online store, including high-visibility vests and farm safety signage to improve awareness around equipment, roadways and farmyards. Visit store.ofa.on.ca/collections/all.

To learn more about farm safety, visit agsafetyweek.ca.

National survey of farmer and rancher mental health now open

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

Staff Contribution

A survey of farmers and ranchers across Canada is now open, asking those in the agricultural sector about their mental health experiences.

The survey is being conducted by the University of Guelph in collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing (CCAW), making it the third national survey of its kind to be conducted through the partnership.

Through the survey, farmers and ranchers from all regions and commodities in Canada are able to share their experiences related to stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, resilience and coping.

Once the survey is completed, the results will help to provide insights into mental health in agriculture through comparisons to national surveys that were completed in 2016 and 2021, helping to identify trends over time.

According to the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing, broad participation is essential to ensuring the findings reflect the diverse realities of farming and ranching across Canada to help inform future research, programs and policy.

The survey is confidential, and no identifying information is collected as part of the process.

For more information or to complete the survey, visit ccaw.ca.

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