

STRATFORD *TIMES*

VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 12

OCTOBER 31, 2025

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Youth are not 'the future' – they are 'the now'

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

When Margaret Smart's daughter was 14 years old, she would go to youth-led events and initiatives where adults would tell her and her peers, "You are the future."

"And she would come home and she would be livid," Smart, the executive director of the Local Community Food Centre, told a crowd of teenagers at Stratford City Hall on Oct. 24. "She'd be so angry and she'd say, 'I'm so sick and tired of you adults telling me I'm the future. I'm here now.'"

Smart's daughter is in her twenties now, but that sentiment was one shared by the youth of today that evening, when students from Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS), St. Michael's Catholic Secondary School and Nancy Campbell Academy gathered in the auditorium of city hall to mark the 80th anniversary of the United Nations' founding. They shared their experiences at their school's respective model UN clubs, trying to make a difference in their community and, most importantly, why what they do matters now, not just in the future.

"There's far too much bad press about high school students," St. Mike's teacher Mark Boersen said that evening. "... 'Oh, they just don't care. Oh, they're only worried about this and they're not really worried about what happens in the real world.' That's not true."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



Happy Halloween! Rosetta Krawiec, Scarlet Heaton and Maayan Heaton smile at the camera during the Downtown Stratford BIA's Halloween street event on Oct. 25. For more on the celebration, see our story on page 3.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

3.09% tax increase projected in 2026 draft budget

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The 2026 draft budget for the City of Stratford projects a 3.09 per cent tax increase – though that figure will likely change as deliberations get underway.

"In 2025, Stratford experienced some ups and downs economically," the budget overview included in the budget package reads. "While inflation dropped for many goods, some prices did rise. The city is still navigating the effects of new tariffs and ongoing labour

challenges but have made great strides in improving our city's asset management and planning with better data.

"Looking ahead to 2026, we're sticking with our multi-year budget, aiming for long-term stability through 2029 with more stable property tax increases," the overview continues. "The draft budget aims to maintain current service levels while keeping community needs in mind, balancing everything with a solid financial plan."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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Youth are not 'the future' – they are 'the now'

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

They're sitting here tonight, just some of them."

Arlo Dunham was one of those students. He relayed to the crowd how he started SDSS' model UN club by simply walking up to a teacher and asking if he could start one.

"A couple months later, we weren't just a club. We were standing right here at city hall, representing our school in Stratford's first ever UN conference," Dunham said.

As Dunham said, on May 30 the three high schools gathered for a UN conference where student delegates represented 19 countries in simulations. Students discussed pressing global issues, most notably the potential of universal basic income (UBI) as a response to increasing

automation, rising income inequality and poverty. Delegates engaged in moderated and unmoderated caucuses, as well as refined and finalized draft resolutions.

"Calling it a huge success would be an understatement," Dunham said. "It showed us that Stratford could not only host a meaningful academic event, but also bring together students from across the town to engage in a real-world discussions about the future of global policy. When we first started our club, it was just two members. ... It was humble beginnings, but this year, I'm excited to announce that we've grown to 22 active members at SDSS. That's a big leap, and it shows how much interest there is among students in learning about international diplomacy, leadership and global cooperation."

"It helps individuals with critical thinking skills, group, speaking, research skills, diplomacy and knowledge on our global events," said Matthew Corsaut, head captain of the St. Mike's model UN. "I decided to join this club because I love debating current events, and I believe discussing global policies at such a young age fosters a foundational philosophy to do as much good for people no matter the borders."

"Youth are the greatest source of hope for our



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Students from Nancy Campbell Academy perform the step dance at Stratford City Hall's auditorium on Oct. 24. Students from the local academy, St. Michael Catholic Secondary School and Stratford District Secondary School gathered to celebrate the UN's 80th anniversary that day.

planet," Charles Fitzsimmons, host of the evening, said, quoting UN secretary-general António Guterres. "... I can't help but think that Mr. Guterres, the secretary-general of the UN who I think is so distressed by the condition of the world and constrained in what he is able to do, and surrounded by complaints and bureaucracies and so on – I really wish that he had been here and able to sit with us tonight and hear these wonderful things that were said, because he has wanted to express to the youth of the world that they're the greatest source of hope. And I dare say he's not talking about when they

grow up. He's talking about now."

With files from Amanda Modaragamage, Times Reporter.

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To read more about Stratford's historic first UN conference, scan the code and scroll to page 12.

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3.09% tax increase projected in 2026 draft budget

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

This is the first year that the budget is dictated by Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma. Due to the strong mayor powers recently endowed to the Festival City by the Province of Ontario, the mayor sets guidelines for senior staff to adhere to when creating individual departmental budgets, like all strong mayor cities in the province.

To that end, operating costs are set to rise by about \$18 million next year, but with a \$14 million "bump in revenue" the levy impact is projected to be only a \$44 million levy impact. The capital plan is \$56 million and the total net draft budget is \$90,109,773.

All of that is before expansion initiatives, which have driven up the costs of previous budgets in the recent past with staff and service increases. This year however there is only one item, a "mini-x excavator" to the tune of \$90,000, or a 0.09 per cent tax levy increase.

At a 3.09 per cent increase, the 2026 budget is the smallest increase since 2021. Last year, council passed a \$86,038,828 budget that equaled a 5.46

per cent increase to property taxpayers.

For the average home, which is assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) at \$317,000, the proposed levy increase this year will raise property taxes by \$167.

Budget deliberations begin on Nov. 27 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and continue on Dec. 1 and Dec. 2. More meetings will be scheduled as needed.

City council, meeting as the finance and labour relations committee, will deliberate and provide amendments, though because of strong mayor powers the mayor has the authority to veto any amendments they make – unless a two-thirds majority vote of council overrides the veto. Mayor Martin Ritsma has previously expressed that he would not use the veto power.

Prior to deliberations, the public is encouraged to provide their feedback on the budget. Three pop-up events are scheduled this November and an open house will be held on Nov. 3 at Stratford City Hall's auditorium from 4-7 p.m.

To read the 2026 draft budget in its entirety, visit <https://tinyurl.com/5yakz5a5>

Trick-or-treaters of all ages roam the core for second Halloween in Downtown Stratford event

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Not even an hour into the early trick-or-treating and around 150 kids collected candy and other goodies during the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA)'s Halloween celebration.

The BIA held its second annual Halloween in Downtown Stratford event on Oct. 25. Families walked around downtown with kids and their caregivers in a variety of costumes ranging from Disney characters like Stitch and *Frozen*'s Elsa, to horror film characters like *M3GAN* to friends of *Sesame Street* like Elmo and Oscar the Grouch.

"We've had some great costumes. I'm amazed with how many parent costumes there are. Lots of them dress up and they're quite elaborate and (it) just makes it fun for everyone," said Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the BIA.

Dressed up like Ernie from *Sesame Street* at the Destination Stratford office, Pritchard mentioned he's always been a big fan of Halloween and would decorate the house

elaborately with smoke machines and the like with his wife.

"I just love Halloween and I just love seeing all the kids out," he said.

Over 55 Downtown merchants gave out candy and other items for any trick-or-treaters who stopped by for some early Halloween fun.

"It gives them a chance to come out in the afternoon when it is not dark and, thankfully, not raining. (They) come to the different merchants downtown so you know all the candy is going to be safe and they can just come out and have a good time," Pritchard said.

Last year, 207 kids participated in the first Halloween in Downtown Stratford event, and Pritchard predicted there were more trick-or-treaters this year.

Families also had a chance to complete a "Scare Bingo Card" and enter a contest for a pair of tickets to see *Annie* at the Stratford Festival.

Halloween celebrations in Stratford will come to a close on Nov. 1 with the annual Pumpkin Parade at Stratford City Hall.



Avalyn, Sophie, Ella and Harrison.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTOS)



Leo and Olivia Lamont have big smiles for some under the sea fun as Flounder and Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*.



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Annual community awards recognize hundreds of Stratford residents

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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Each October, Stratford city council recognizes those in the community that have achieved the extraordinary that year. This year was no different, when council recognized hundreds of recipients in a packed community hall of the Stratford Rotary Complex on Oct. 28.

For photos from the award presentations, see page 21. This year’s winners are:

Ted Blowes Award

Bruce Whitaker.

Community leader

Don Farwell, contributions in gardening and environmental projects.

Girl Guides

1st Stratford Guides – the Lady Baden Powell Award: Olivia Langille, Lily Bohnen, Avery Faulkner, Victoria Kroonen, Katelynn Gulikers.

12th Stratford Pathfinders and Rangers – the Canada Cord Award (Pathfinders): Rory Auster, Sophie MacAlpine. The Silver Trailblazer Award (Rangers): Mika Turner, Emelia Auster.

Beavers, Cubs and Scouts

Beavers, North Star Award: Dominic Ronnenberg. Cubs, Seenee Award: Myes Ngungu. Scouts, Chief Scout's Award: Emile Grimes, Phoenix Hutchinson, Zachary Myers, Chase Gordon-Edmonds.

Swimming

Amiera Black.

Bowling

In memory of Brian Hanly, Special Olympic bowler and community member.

Special Olympics Stratford and Area

Jane Larkworthy, 23 years with Special Olympics Ontario Stratford and Area, Mike Hitchcock, silver in 18-hole golf, Ross Snider, Special Olympics Ontario volunteer and golf caddy.

Disc Golf

Nate Framst, Canadian Mixed Amateur Disc Golf Championship.

Dance

Summer Emms for Team Canada, Dance World Cup (Spain). Second in Junior Contemporary category.

Senior Provincial Games

Angela Martin and Merlin Leis, gold medal in pickleball.

Fencing

Stratford Fencing Club athletes, Scott Bell and Cohen Bernard.

Kart Racing

Aristeides (Ari) Theodoropoulos.

World Triathlon Championship

Lauren Manders, first in Canadian Women division (Spain) and 10th fastest woman in 25-29 age group.

Ontario Music Festival

The Stratford Concert Band - Community Band (ages 19 and over), first class. Rachel Regier, self-accompanied pop voice advanced. Gordon Scot Miller and Gordon Paul Miller, adult and child contemporary piano duet, first.

Boys Baseball

Stratford Minor Baseball Association. Intercounty Baseball Association (ICBA), top association of the year, 2024.

13U "B" Provincial Championship. Coaches: Dan Patterson, Julie Strickler, Mike Atkinson, Luke van Kooten. Players: Louie Turpin, Oliver Strickler, Aaden van Kooten, Carl Daly, Marcus Atkinson, Logan Hodgins, Mateo Patterson, Beckham Skillings, Brandon Bast, Evan Wybrow, Lincoln Patterson, Sawyer Verspeeten.

14U "B" Provincial Championship. Coaches: Mark Price, Rick Boon, Corey Goebel, Jamie Antonio, Rob Mogk, Jamie Parr, Chris Musselman. Players: Max Barter, Jackson Goebel, Will Molenhuis, Marek Brander, Quintin Parr, Reid Musselman, Jake Price, Blake Mogk, Dexter Powell, Max Hughes, James Antonio, Carter Cook, Cole Morris.

Softball

Karlee Satchell, for national and international success.

Stratford Minor Girls Softball

The Stratford Flames U13, silver in provincials, Eastern Canadian silver medalists. Coaches: Barb Wilhelm, Tyler Canal, Courtney Canal, Ross Herold. Players: Abby Herold, Nora Frayne, Avery Kelly, Emry MacIntosh, Lauren

Masselis, Hallee Priestap, Avery Canal, Gracie Neumeister, Kiyah Marshall, Julia Glitz, Lela Pirki, Milana Verellen, Cassidy Koch.

Hockey

Tessa Burdett, Ontario Women's Hockey Association, U18 National Team athlete

Jake Gansevles, Alliance Hockey 2025 Referee of the Year

Stratford Warriors

U18A Ontario Hockey Federation Championship. Coaches: Chad Smalley, head coach, Scott Siebert, manager, Scott Frayne, assistant coach, Brian Nigro, assistant coach, Brett Maguire, assistant coach/trainer. Players Nathan Siebert, Colin Schultz, Blake Hodgson, Austin Musselman, Dawson White, Dylan Abel, Jordan Keane, Josh Goodhue, Hudson Gordon, Rylan Deboeck, Cayden Bourassa, Finley Newton, Taten Mikel, Micah Westerhof, Charlie Holloway, Owen Hunt, Cameron Parsons, Jacob Curtain, Colton Thomson, Henry Tuer.

Soccer

Stratford Strikers, U14 League Championships. Coaches: Catherine Walsh, Scott Herman. Players: Ashley Van Straaten, Ava Langis, Bailey Fergus, Edie Murray, Elena Hogger, Grace Elliott, Hazel Shantz-Walsh, Jessica Blake, Kinsley McIntosh, Lilly Harrigan, Madison Brisbois, Myla Burdett, Payton Herman, Peyton Van Straaten, Peyton Ward, Reese Campbell, Ruby Munford.

Stratford Youth Soccer

Graham Bunting and Tony Hunter, for years of service.

Dragon Boat

Grant Borysiuk, Dragon Boat World Championships. Stratford Junior Dragon Boat Club, Dragon Boat World Championships: Alexandra Stephens, Daniel Bean, Laynee McIlwain, Avery DeWitt, Grace vanZandwijk, Daniel McArthur, Everett Weaver, Devin Keane.

Ritz Dragons: A Final and Community Cup Winner: Jaxon Martin, Phil Phillips, Clara Boersen, Sarah Beluzic, Jen Clements, Jodi McLean, Alex Boersen, Rhiannon Ball, Joshua Forbes, Erica Sayles, Adam Boersen, Bryan Tyler, Matt Theoret, Dean Heckman, Devin Keane, Mike Graff, Melissa Théorêt, Jen Sickinger, Kathleen Hickson, Nick Pauli, Claire Heckman, Keira Graff, Rebecca Gonser, Yanick Bourassa, Amanda Martin.

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Funded by the Government of Canada
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Councillors and staff defend continued expansion of Perth County Stewardship Program in 2026

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Though there was some concern about opening up the application period for the spring 2026 intake of Perth County's Stewardship grant program before the program is discussed and approved as part of the county's 2026 budget, several staff and councillors spoke in favour of the program aimed at increasing the county's tree canopy and improving the overall environment.

At a recent county council meeting, county resiliency and stewardship coordinator Hannah Cann presented details of the 2026 Perth County Stewardship Program, \$125,000 for which will be included in the county's 2026 draft budget – up from \$100,000 in the 2025 budget. The report was presented just over two weeks after its spring intake application period opened on Oct. 1.

"Normally, when staff comes to us and they want to have stuff in the budget, we have to give pre-approval, and I think that's one of those things because if staff's going out to tender for trucks or paving or any of that kind of thing, it comes to council first," said Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz, who represents Perth East on county council. "So, I think this is a little

premature. We haven't even looked at our budget, we don't know where our budget's at. We're also duplicating a service that's already offered by the conservation (authorities) and I think we're charging our ratepayers double – we're paying a levy to the conservation (authorities) and we're also paying for this.

"I also realize there's (an additional) \$25,000; I think that's another item council needs to talk about during the budget deliberation. We have an awful lot of items on our budget now, and our budget's getting higher all the time. I think this is a program we really have to look at during budget."

While both Ehgoetz and Coun. Sue Orr, a representative on county council for Perth South, expressed concerns around accepting applications for 2026 before discussing the stewardship program's future at budget time – especially if council opts to reduce funding or cut it altogether – staff explained the timing of the application period for spring intake is intentional.

CAO Laurie Wolfe told councillors applications for the spring intake need to be accepted from Oct. 1, 2025, to Jan. 30, 2026, to help inform 2026 budget discussions with information about how many applications have been made to each of

the four funding streams and how much funding is being requested, while also giving staff enough time to review each application before the spring planting season. She also noted that should council decide to cut the program during budget discussions, the county would inform applicants after that decision.

As for the notion that council might reduce or cut the stewardship program, deputy warden Dean Trentowsky, who also serves as chair of the county's agricultural working group – the committee that helped develop the program in the first place – spoke strongly in favour of continuing down the path of future program expansion.

"What do we say to the community after we went through extensive consultations to set this program up," he said. "We went through extensive consultation and discussion with the four conservation authorities that serve Perth County. What do we say to those people if we would decide to say, 'Oh, no. We're not doing that anymore. Sorry. We got you all onboard, we got you all working together cooperatively. Oh, no, we don't feel like doing it anymore.'"

"So, yes, we will have that discussion at budget and I look forward to that. In the meantime, I will point out in the 2022 Upper Thames River Conservation Authority watershed report card, it's not a very flattering picture. Regardless of anyone's opinions of the Upper Thames or the other three conservation authorities that serve Perth County, there is important work to be done and this ag. working group, through council, has endeavoured quite diligently to perform that work."

According to Cann's report to council, as of 2025, Perth County maintained only nine per-cent tree cover, with some wards reporting levels as low as four per cent. Existing woodlands are experiencing a significant decline in health due to the compounding effects of stressors such as invasive species, habitat fragmentation and ongoing land-use changes.

To date, the Perth County Stewardship Program has achieved significant ecological milestones, including the successful planting of 20,584 trees and the establishment of 31.234 kilometres of strategic windbreaks. Additionally, 38.85 acres of previously degraded marginal lands have contributed or are contributing to land restoration and biodiversity enhance-

ment. Collectively, these efforts are estimated to generate an annual carbon sequestration capacity of approximately 57,635.2 kilograms of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year, underscoring the program's tangible contribution to climate mitigation and environmental resilience.

Speaking to Ehgoetz's point about the program offering funding that already exists through the local conservation authorities, Cann told councillors conservation authority funding is under a lot of strain from the province, it does not offer consistency from year to year and many of the grant programs that exist have strict requirements precluding many of the smaller tree-planting projects that receive funding through the county's stewardship program.

While the stewardship program was initially launched to support tree-planting projects across the county through its four initial funding streams – land-owner, community, woodland and living snow fences – Cann said she has a six-year plan, developed in consultation with the agricultural working group, that will expand the program to offer funding streams that address other environmental concerns.

"It was the plan in the conception of our stewardship program to build upon the streams year over year as more funding was available," Cann said. "As the first year of funding was focused on tree planting and we blew through that funding very quickly with the applications received, we decided to open it up with more funding in 2025, again focused on tree planting."

"However, there is a six-year plan that I've crafted to implement more streams under the stewardship program's umbrella that encompass things that are included in Huron County and Wellington County's clean-water portfolios, including agricultural best-management practices, manure and waste storage decommissioning, well decommissioning, water quality and aquatic habitat restoration, private drinking water protection and infrastructure, invasive species and biodiversity enhancement, and climate resilience and stormwater and flood mitigation."

While the stewardship program's spring application period will remain open until Jan. 30, 2026, whether it will be funded fully as proposed by staff won't be determined until budget deliberations begin.



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Skeletons of Vivian Line returned for their 12th season

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The popular Skeletons of Vivian Line display was back for its 12th season, and this year's theme was The Skeletons Fall Fair – complete with a Ferris wheel installation.

The skeletons are said to have arrived last week aboard a vintage 1948 Greyhound bus. The rotating display ran from Oct. 18 to 31, marking 13 days of Halloween fun.

The season kicked off with an Ambassador of the Fair competition, where skeleton judges Simon and Howie selected this year's winner, who was announced the following day. On day three, the Fall Fair Grand Marshal was revealed – Carson Good, a special guest who previously won the Skeletons' "ideas" contest three years ago.

From there, the skeletons have been popping champagne to celebrate the Toronto Blue Jays' making it to the World Series, and embracing all things fall fair throughout the following days.

Not only is the elaborate display a community fundraiser, it's also designed to bring a smile to the faces of visitors, both young and old, said Melissa McKerlie, creator of Skeletons of Vivian Line.

"The whole point of the skeletons is

making sure we can bring a smile to the face of as many people as possible – it's to make people laugh and smile every day," McKerlie said. "The Skeletons of Vivian Line are all about bringing joy and making people happy."

The display grows more elaborate each year, but this season stands out as particularly special. McKerlie said she isn't sure if next year's can top it, though she wouldn't put it past the group of friends who gather each morning to help bring the display to life.

"We kind of always like to challenge ourselves in terms of creativity," she said. "And we like to challenge the skeletons, too – like, how high can we get them to jump?"

McKerlie notes it's not easy to come up with the unique displays, and she is especially thankful to local businesses, including Adams Building Supply–Shakespeare, who have offered help with discounts and support throughout the years.

"I've also been extremely grateful to local businesses who helped me out," she said. "They are fabulous in terms of supplying lumber and things so I can build the props."

The display can be viewed along Vivian Line throughout the week leading up to Halloween, including Halloween night. McKerlie also hinted at a possible collab-



The Skeletons of Vivian Line are back for another season, this time taking over The Skeletons Fall Fair. The spooky display features a Ferris wheel, a quilt judging contest, a rustic barn and jars of jam along with all the fun you'd see at the Stratford Fall fair earlier this fall. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

oration next year with the Stratford Fall Fair, which will celebrate its 185th anniversary.

Donations are accepted at the display and online, with every dollar going to Operation Smile Canada, a non-profit organization that provides life-changing surgery and healthcare to children born with cleft lips and palates.

This year, donations up to \$40,000 will

once again be matched by an anonymous donor, who first reached out to the family last year.

In 2024, the Skeletons of Vivian Line raised more than \$45,000. Since 2018, the display has raised over \$202,000 – enough to fund more than 840 surgeries. This year, McKerlie is aiming for another \$40,000 or more to help support Operation Smile Canada.

Advances in diagnosis bring new hope: Alzheimer Society Huron Perth to host Fall Dementia Education Night

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth is inviting the community to gather online for its annual Fall Dementia Education Night on Wednesday, Nov. 12 at 7 p.m.

The free virtual event, hosted on Zoom, will feature returning guest speaker Dr. Sharon Cohen, director of the Toronto Memory Program, presenting "What's New in Alzheimer's Diagnosis and Treatment."

"This year's theme, we're focusing on diagnosis partly because the speaker that we have, Dr. Sharon Cohen, is from the Toronto Memory Program – one of the leading research groups looking into advancements in diagnosis," said Jeanette Sears, the Alzheimer Society's public education coordinator. "Right now is a really exciting time in the area of diagnosis for Alzheimer's disease and dementias – all types of dementia. Everybody would absolutely love to find a cure. We will get there. In the meantime, we are hoping that improved diagnosis can lead to better treatment and improved research towards a cure."

Sears said diagnosis has traditionally relied on what doctors observe or what care partners describe, but new approaches could change that.

"What they're hoping is that we'll be able to use more solid biomarkers in the future," she said. "That will likely include blood tests, iris scans or cheek swabs."

Christy Bannerman, another public education coordinator with the society, noted the Toronto Memory

Program was approved this January to begin using blood testing for diagnosis.

"That was a really significant thing," she said. "A blood test is so much more simple. It can be done anywhere, and that makes testing so much more accessible."

For rural communities, this progress is especially important.

"If that testing is based on blood testing or cheek swabbing, that's really exciting for us," Bannerman added. "It might eliminate the very long waitlist to see a specialist and the intimidating drive to a larger centre. If we can do that in our local clinics, that's a real step forward."

Sears believes early diagnosis could also lead to better outcomes.

"If they can diagnose earlier in the disease process, that might affect treatment as well," she said. "If people are diagnosed earlier and get some of those newer medications earlier, it might change the progression of the disease."

Both coordinators said past Dementia Nights have left people feeling encouraged.

"We're working towards the day where we'd love to see a world where there's a cure to Alzheimer's and other dementias," Bannerman said. "Every time we hear from these prominent researchers, we learn a little bit more – it's almost within reach."

Registration for the Fall Dementia Education Night is free and open to everyone at www.bit.ly/Dementia-Night2025. For more details on programs and upcoming events, visit www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth.

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Optimist Club of Stratford launches Healthy Bodies, Healthy Learning program

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

After learning more about a growing need within the community, the Optimist Club of Stratford is donating \$5,000 to each of Stratford's 11 schools to help ensure children arrive at school ready to learn – without the barriers of hunger or lack of proper clothing.

The club recognized the challenges facing students and is making donations to all public and catholic elementary schools (Kindergarten to Grade 8) in Stratford. The initiative aims to ensure that every child arrives at school fed, warm and cared for.

This need will be a major focus for the 2026 Optimist year, according to the club.

Stuart MacCuaig, a member of the Optimist Club of Stratford, said many families are struggling with economic uncertainty as the cost of living continues to rise.

"One of the number one things we heard from schools on a regular basis is that kids are showing up without enough food in their stomachs," said MacCuaig. "Kids are also showing up with canvas running shoes on a rainy day, or a coat that's too big and too thin for colder weather – or no mitts."

"We saw this need and really wanted to



Members of the Optimist Club of Stratford present a cheque representing the total \$55,000 donation that will be divided among 11 Stratford schools through the club's new Healthy Bodies, Healthy Learning program.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

focus on it and help in any way we can," he added.

Shannon Hughes, principal of Hamlet Public School with the Avon Maitland District School Board, said the support will make a significant difference for students and families.

"On behalf of the families of Hamlet Public School, I extend our deepest thanks for the incredible generosity and support through the Healthy Bodies, Healthy Learning initiative," said Hughes.

"Their commitment to ensuring that every child arrives at school ready to learn,

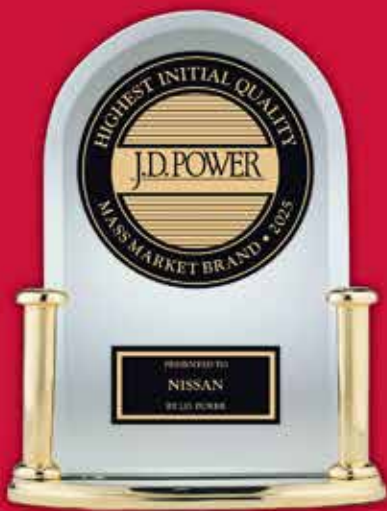
fed, warm and cared for reflects the very best of community partnership. This \$5,000 contribution will make a meaningful difference for our students and families who need it most. We are truly grateful for their kindness, compassion and action. We are proud to partner with an organization that shares our belief that every child deserves the chance to learn and thrive."

The funds will primarily be used for food and clothing – including breakfast or snack programs, grocery gift cards, and warm, dry clothing such as coats, pants, mitts, hats and footwear for children in need.

Although the program is still in its early stages, the Optimist Club welcomes feedback to help improve the process and better understand local needs.

The Optimist Club of Stratford is part of a worldwide service organization that works to make the future brighter by bringing out the best in children, youth and their communities.

Donations to the Optimist Club, specifically for the Healthy Bodies, Healthy Learning program, can be made through the club's website at stratfordoptimist.com or by emailing stratfordoptimist@gmail.com.



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Stratford-Perth Archives invites residents to discover more about veteran ancestors

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Stratford-Perth Archives is inviting the public to attend an upcoming speaker session with author and historian Eric Edwards, who will discuss how to use service records to learn more about First World War veterans.

The presentation is set for Tuesday, Nov. 11, from 2-4 p.m. at the Stratford-Perth Archives, 4273 Line 34.

Those interested in learning more about their heritage and connecting with veteran ancestors are encouraged to attend. The session aims to make the archives approachable and accessible for anyone

curious about local history.

Edwards wants to help people feel more comfortable searching through archival material and will share how he's learned to navigate historical records to uncover connections to his own family and others.

His presentation will provide a grounding in how to read and gain valuable information from a First World War Canadian soldier's service file. He will also provide worksheets to help attendees navigate files more effectively.

"It's going to be more of a technical overview of how to navigate service files," he said. "When you open up a service file, they can be anywhere from 15 to 200 pages, and they're not in any logi-

cal order, so this can be confusing."

Edwards will also tell the story of how he used the service records of a Stratford man who once lived in the home where he now resides. Through his research, he learned that Dave McDonald lived in the house from 1922 until his death in 1968. McDonald, he noted, was an "average man" who served in the war.

"He went about his business after serving in the war, got wounded twice, got in trouble – actually pretty significant trouble," said Edwards. "He raised a family, had children and contributed to Canada's social, political and economic fabric."

Drawing on examples from the service record, the presentation will help attend-

ees better understand the types of information that can be found in these fascinating documents.

The session will offer helpful insights into what can be discovered and used as a springboard for further research into the people who served Canada during this sweeping world conflict.

To learn more about Edwards and his research, visit his blog and Facebook group about the 18th Battalion at 18thbattalioncf.blog.

Registration for the event is free. Email archives@perthcounty.ca or call 519-271-0531, ext. 259 to register. The deadline to register is Tuesday, Nov. 4, at 4 p.m.

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United Way Perth-Huron joins Ultimate Burger Battle

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

For the first time ever, United Way Perth-Huron will be participating in a tasty fundraiser that's sure to please burger enthusiasts.

United Way's Ultimate Burger Battle kicks off Nov. 1 and will run for the full month. Participating local restaurants will create a new burger for the event and \$2 in proceeds from the sale of the burger creations will support local United Way programming.

Both Gilly's locations in Stratford and St. Marys, Demetre's Family Eatery, Bentley's, 53 North Restaurant, Foster's Inn, Romeo's Corner Café and Best Western Plus the Arden Park Hotel will be participating. Bentley's will have their "gouda cause" burger made with Mountin oak gouda cheese, house-made bacon onion jam, truffle aioli and lettuce on a beef patty topped with a brioche bun. Gilly's cowboy burger comes with smoked cheddar, brisket, smoky barbecue sauce, onion tangles, lettuce, tomato, house-made sauce and pickles on a six-ounce beef patty.

Diners can scan a QR code in the restaurant to vote for their favourite burger. United Way will then award the restaurants for people's choice burger and the most burgers sold.

"It's an invitation to make a new burger and then getting in a good spirit of fun and flavour to win," said Sonya Heyen, manager of resource development and communications.

The Ultimate Burger Battle began as an initiative by United Way Thunder Bay, and has since expanded to other chapters such as Oxford, Middlesex-Elgin, and now Perth-Huron.

"We're always in the business of fundraising and so if it worked for our neighbours and it sounds fun, we're into it," Heyen said.



Bentley's entry for the Ultimate Burger Battle, fittingly, is called the "gouda cause burger."

Heyen added that the event is a chance for Stratford's renowned hospitality scene to show their burger-making skills and creativity.

"Stratford is actually uniquely positioned with lots of world-class chefs and restaurants. Inviting them to have a little bit of competition, I think they're itching for that," she said.



Gilly's will be serving the "cowboy burger" for the Ultimate Burger Battle. (SONYA HEYEN PHOTOS)

Campaign chair and realtor John Wolfe was instrumental in getting the restaurants involved in the Ultimate Burger Battle.

United Way is still looking for more restaurants to be part of the Ultimate Burger Battle, and will be accepting requests to participate by email via sheyen@perthhuron.unitedway.ca until November.

Volunteers start work on urban forest at Catharine East Memorial Garden

FELICITY SUTCLIFFE

Guest Contributor

Stratford residents may have noticed a lot of activity at the bottom of John Street recently. Garden Stratford, officially known as the Stratford and District Horticultural Society (SDHS), is rejuvenating the Catharine East Memorial Garden. They are planting native trees, shrubs and perennials to attract birds and other pollinators to an urban forest where they will find food and protection.

On Oct. 20, the first phase of the planting took place with more than 20 volunteers on hand to plant over 500 perennials, trees and shrubs.

In 1990, Garden Stratford was given a legacy in memory of Catharine East. This legacy was originally used to build the Catharine East Memorial Garden. Thirty-five years later Garden Stratford is keeping her legacy alive by creating an attractive public space that showcases the importance of using native plants to support birds and pollinators in an urban setting.

Garden Stratford is working with the City of Stratford, the Tri-County Master Gardeners, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and members of the city's energy and environment committee to make this a community garden that educates and delights its visitors.

The basic garden was designed by Kevin Kavanagh of South Coast Gardens. Kavanagh works with Birds Canada to promote bird friendly gardens all over southern Ontario. Detailed plantings were further developed by Elizabeth Spedaliere, a master gardener and owner of Blue Beech Design.

This is a three-year project. There are plans to develop walking paths with an educational component next year. Project-leads envision this garden as an important community resource.

Garden Stratford will be inviting the public to an open house at the garden in the spring.



Volunteers were on hand on Oct. 20 to help plant over 500 perennials, trees and shrubs for an urban forest at the Catharine East Memorial Garden on John Street.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. Which monster is said to transform during a full moon?
2. What is a group of witches called?
3. What year did It's the *Great Pumpkin*, *Charlie Brown* first air?
4. Which famous Halloween movie features the line "Do you like scary movies?"
5. Vincent Price provides the spooky monologue in which popular Halloween song?
6. What creature is known for being tall, thin, with a featureless white face, long arms, a black suit and is said to teleport?
7. What do zombies eat?
8. What does the Grim Reaper usually carry with him?
9. Camp Crystal Lake features in which horror movie?
10. "Who you gonna call?"

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

Live training exercise improves coordination, communication and collaboration between Stratford emergency services

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Nearly 100 local firefighters, police officers, paramedics, other emergency workers, city officials and volunteers participated in a live emergency training exercise in Stratford on Oct. 23, aimed at providing hands-on experience with a collaborative disaster-response effort.

Planned by Stratford deputy fire chief and community emergency management coordinator Richard “Andy” Anderson with the help of Calian Group, a Canadian company that provides health, training, engineering and IT services to private and public sector organizations, the day-long simulated exercise was designed to test the City of Stratford’s emergency response plans, and help those involved practice and prepare for real-life disasters.

Speaking with the Times before the exercise, Anderson said this particular exercise – the first live exercise undertaken by the city in the past 10-15 years – was meant to simulate a tornado touchdown across a section of Romeo Street South, making a direct impact at River Gardens Retirement Residence, strewn tree limbs and debris across the road, damaging passenger vehicles and toppling a school bus, and damaging key infrastructure like water and hydro.

“I’ve been working with (Calian Group),” Anderson said. “I’m the boots on the ground. I select the area, I select the type of exercise ... and they build it in the background. ... I’ve got actors for walking wounded, I’ve got a couple of vehicles we’re going to be able to turn over, so we have that live portion that brings this training to life.”

While volunteers from River Gardens and students from St. Michael Catholic Secondary school acted as victims with specific injuries, city officials and leadership from each of the city’s emergency services were stationed at an emergency operations centre at the Stratford Rotary Complex to lead and coordinate the ground response.

Throughout the morning and in the



Stratford firefighters and police officers stabilize a toppled school bus before rescuing those inside during a simulated emergency exercise Oct. 23.

midst of pouring rain, emergency workers were directed to respond to car accidents, rescue those in danger and coordinate medical care for those with serious injuries. Other local agencies like Canadian Red Cross and Salvation Army were on hand to assist the victims, while tow trucks and city buses were available to move damaged vehicles and transport people to emergency shelters.

Following the live portion of the exercise, which closed Romeo Street South to traffic for most of the morning, the exercise was continued as a tabletop simulation back at the emergency operations centre, where officials coordinated the medium to long-term response to the tornado touchdown.

Speaking with the Times after the exercise, Anderson said the exercise was a complete success.

“I think it went extremely well,” he said. “Of course, there was a lot of coordination; a bus flipped over, two cars crashed, we brought tree limbs out onto the street. ... Once we had all that placed and we said, ‘Ok, the exercise is starting,’ I can tell you ... everything just fell into place exactly as I pictured it. We made

no hiccups, there was nothing out of the ordinary. Police, fire and ambulance; they worked extremely well together. ... For something this large, it was fantastic.

“One of the Calian guys was on the ground with me and he said, ‘I am hard-pressed to find anything wrong with what happened today.’”

There was a similar sentiment among the exercise’s other participants. Both Stratford police acting deputy chief Mark Taylor and Perth County Paramedic Services deputy operations chief Tristan Barter expressed how seamlessly each service and organization communicated and worked with one another, building a whole new level of confidence in the city’s emergency response and disaster-relief frameworks.

“Yesterday’s event allowed us to work with a more robust team of City of Stratford departments, ensuring seamless communication and resources when an event such as this arises,” Barter said. “The results of the exercise brought to light the importance of granular details in regards to communication and teamwork. The constituents of the City of Stratford can sleep soundly knowing that this team

has the opportunity to practice and hone their skills even further in this area of emergency management.”

“It was excellent; well done,” Taylor added. “I’ve got to give kudos to Andy Anderson, who set it up. The work that was put into it; it’s pretty hard to make a training live event as real as possible, but I think he managed to pull it off. Every time we do a live event like this with so many different agencies, it’s a good opportunity for collaboration with other community services and partners. When you’re working with the paramedics and the fire and police on scene, and you’re dealing with the injured people, dealing with weather and so many different things, things can go wrong. ... So, knowing we can get that unified command together and make decisions as a group instead of making them individually means everyone is making good decisions.”

Mayor Martin Ritsma also shared his insights from the training exercise with the Times, suggesting the live experience put those lessons learned through the city’s traditional tabletop emergency exercises into practice successfully.

With the amount of information coming into the operations centre during the exercise, Ritsma said city staff had the opportunity to test their ability to ensure the right information gets to the right people while keeping lines of communication open with the public.

“I am proud of the energy and seriousness that everyone brought to the event. Even though it was a live exercise, it felt like we were responding to a real-life situation,” Ritsma said. “I am confident that we could, as a municipality, respond to a real-life emergency situation; to provide safety and support during that time for our residents. That is the number one responsibility of a mayor and municipality, to ensure the safety of your residents and your workers.”

One initial lesson the mayor said the city will take away from this exercise is the need to consider how volunteers from the community can be rallied and coordinated to assist with disaster-relief efforts in the days that follow.



Police and firefighters respond to a staged car crash caused by a tornado during a live, simulated training exercise on Romeo Street South Oct. 23.



Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma and other city officials work to coordinate a disaster response at an emergency operations centre inside the Tim Taylor Lounge at the Stratford Rotary Complex during a simulated emergency exercise Oct. 23.

(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)

Live training exercise improves coordination, communication and collaboration between Stratford emergency services



Stratford firefighters rescue a stranded and injured victim – played by a St. Michael Catholic Secondary School student – from the forest behind River Gardens Retirement Residence during a simulated emergency Oct. 23.



A Stratford firefighter helps a St. Michael Catholic Secondary School student, acting as an injured victim, from the back of a school bus toppled by a tornado during a live, simulated, emergency response exercise in Stratford Oct. 23.



Perth County paramedics load an injured victim – played by a St. Michael Catholic Secondary School student – into the back of an ambulance during a simulated emergency exercise Oct. 23. (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)

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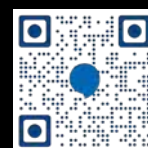
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STRATFORDTIMESSPORTS

Blake reaches a milestone, and Warriors get three out of four points in the weekend

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

Warriors' defenceman Matthew Blake recently played his 100th career game in the Greater Ontario Hockey League. Veteran of three years with St. Thomas and Stratford, Blake says he is glad to be part of the league.

"It's an honour. Between my time in St. Thomas and here, I've been very grateful to my teammates and coaching staff for letting that happen. Overall, it's an honour

Stratford Warriors						
2025-26 Stats						
(as of October 27, 2025)						
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS	
Colin Slattery	F	12	4	6	10	
Quinn Kipfer	F	12	3	7	10	
Max Wildfong	F	12	5	4	9	
Jack McGurn	F	12	3	6	9	
Rhyse Brown	F	12	1	7	8	
Lucas Minard	F	12	6	1	7	
Jonas Schmidt	F	7	3	4	7	
Dominic Marshall	F	12	4	2	6	
Grady Murphy	F	11	4	0	4	
Aaron Green	D	6	2	2	4	
Dax Vader	F	12	1	3	4	
Matthew Blake	D	10	0	4	4	
Joseph Curtin	D	11	0	4	4	
Will Coward	D	12	0	4	4	
Evan Arnold	F	4	3	0	3	
Hayden Frayne	D	11	1	2	3	
Coen Galbraith	F	11	0	3	3	
McQuen Haylock	F	12	0	3	3	
Mateo Craievich	D	10	0	2	2	
Drew Hodge	D	12	0	2	2	
Beckham McLeod	D	3	0	0	0	
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%			
Noah Bender	4-1-0-1	1.77	0.934			
Gage Hurst	2-0-0-1	0.96	0.965			
Connor Davis	1-1-1-0	3.34	0.841			

in this, in a good league like this," Blake said.

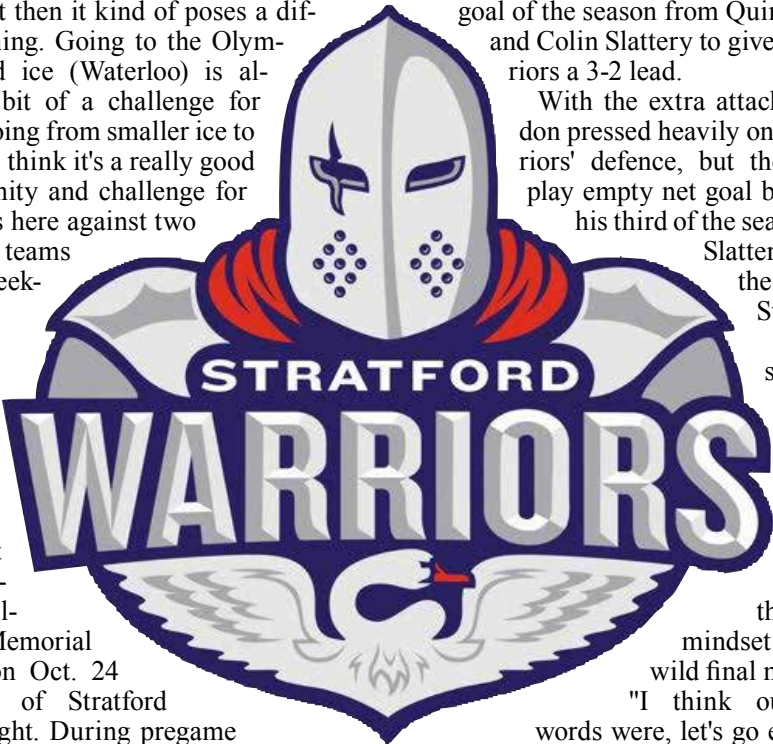
In preparation for the big week ahead, head coach Dave Williams says the team has practiced well and looks forward to the challenge of playing two of the top teams in the Western Conference.

"I thought we had a good skate here to-night. You know, our guys practiced really hard, so I thought our compete-level practice was really good. We got a tough weekend with London at home and heading to Waterloo, kind of two different things," Williams said.

"London's obviously been really good here to start. Waterloo are off to a good start, but then it kind of poses a different thing. Going to the Olympic-sized ice (Waterloo) is always a bit of a challenge for teams going from smaller ice to big ice. I think it's a really good opportunity and challenge for our guys here against two good teams this weekend."

Stratford hosted the London Nationals at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Oct. 24 as part of Stratford Aces Night. During pregame warmups, the Warriors wore purple warmup uniforms in honour of the Knox Presbyterian Church Cancer Centre Mission. The uniforms are to be auctioned off at the next home game against Chatham on Nov. 7.

After a scoreless first period, Dominic Marshall scored his fourth goal of the season from Coen Galbraith at 4:13 to give the Warriors a 1-0 lead. London would tie



the game on the power play with 1:45 remaining in the period.

The Warriors retook the lead 93 seconds into the third period on the fifth goal of the season by Lucas Minard from Will Coward and Rhyse Brown. The score remained 2-1, but the Warriors fell into penalty trouble late in the period, and the visitors capitalized with their second powerplay goal, this time with 2:57 remaining.

Just as the game was destined for overtime, the Nationals conceded a penalty, and the Warriors took advantage. On the powerplay with 68 seconds remaining in regulation, Max Wildfong set the Allman Arena crowd into a frenzy with his fifth goal of the season from Quinn Kipfer and Colin Slattery to give the Warriors a 3-2 lead.

With the extra attacker, London pressed heavily on the Warriors' defence, but the powerplay empty net goal by Kipfer, his third of the season from Slattery, sealed the win for Stratford.

Minard spoke to the Times post-game and explained the team's mindset in the wild final minutes.

"I think our exact words were, let's go end it. So that's kind of the only thing we had in mind there, was that we had a chance to win the game and put out there to win it," Minard said. "We just tried to do whatever we could to do, and it happened."

Wildfong agreed with his teammate's sentiments, especially with the closing seconds as London pressed for an equalizer.

"We just had to bear down those last couple of minutes. We found a way to shut the game down," Wildfong said.

Williams said the team played well enough to win but knew the result could've gone the other way, given the uncharacteristic miscues.

"I thought it was a little scambly. I thought the game was at an okay pace, a little scambly. I thought we had some moments. I think we've been pretty good defensively so far this year, but I thought tonight we did have some moments where we had prolonged time in our own zone," Williams said.

"Against good quality teams like London that have really good skill, we're going to have to focus on stalling some pucks a little faster and shutting down

offensive opportunities five on five in the defensive zone."

The Warriors travelled to the Waterloo Memorial Recreation Centre for the weekend matinee matchup against the Siskins on Oct. 26.

In the first period, the Warriors struck first with a powerplay goal from Rhyse Brown, his first of the season, from Dax Vader and Will Coward at 6:16. Stratford extended their lead to 2-0 early in the second period with their second powerplay goal of the night, this time on the sixth goal of the season by Minard from Slattery and Kipfer.

But for the second straight game on the road, the Warriors were unable to hold a multi-goal lead. Waterloo started their comeback in the mid-way mark of the second period and tied the game with 8:44 remaining in the third period to force overtime.

For the third straight road game, the Warriors ended up in a shootout. After five rounds of shootout hockey, the opposition got the better of the goaltending duel for the second straight time, this time pulling out a win over the Warriors.

In his third career start in the GOHL, Gage Hurst had another solid performance between the pipes for Stratford as he stopped 32 of 34 Waterloo shots. In his three starts with the Warriors, the Royal Oak, Mich. native has posted a 2-0-0-1 record with a 0.96 goals-against average and a .965 save percentage.

"I thought I played all right – a lot of stuff to improve on. I think overall, it was an alright game," Hurst said. "The boys played great in front of me; unfortunately, what happened in the shootout. But, yeah, I think overall, it wasn't a bad game at all."

Williams credited the team for picking up another three or four points over the weekend but would like to score more when the team is at full strength in a five-on-five situation, as they scored twice in the two weekend games.

"We got three out of four points on the weekend. I think you'll always take a little comfort. If you have weekends where you get three out of four, it's usually going okay for you," Williams said.

"We don't score an even-strength goal. So, when your power play gets you two, you should be able to find at least one on the five-on-five. ... You're just rolling the dice a little in the shootout. Any team can win. I would have liked to see us hit the net with a five-on-five."

The special teams had mixed results over the weekend. Stratford's powerplay was effective, scoring four goals on 10 attempts (40 per cent), but the penalty kill was ineffective, with a 71.1 per cent success rate.

The Warriors have picked up a point in six straight contests with a record of 4-0-2 in the streak.

GOHL Western Conference Standings							
(as of October 27, 2025)							
Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
Elmira Sugar Kings	12	2	0	0	24	74	30
Chatham Maroons	11	2	0	2	24	73	43
London Nationals	11	5	0	0	22	68	51
St. Marys Lincolns	10	4	1	0	21	55	33
Waterloo Siskins	7	2	3	1	18	41	35
Stratford Warriors	7	2	1	2	17	41	27
St. Thomas Stars	8	5	0	1	17	59	48
LaSalle Vipers	6	8	2	0	14	49	63
Komoka Kings	6	7	1	0	13	45	57
Strathroy Rockets	4	9	1	0	9	51	62
Listowel Cyclones	4	9	1	0	9	30	46
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	14	0	0	0	21	95

Irish get throttled by Jets and drop a heartbreaker to Killer Bees

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Leading up to games against the Strathroy Jets and the Alvinston Killer Bees, two of the Stratford Irish's rivals, owner and head coach Marco Alexander shared his thoughts with the Times for the two games ahead.

"We've got some guys that got some bumps and bruises, so we're going to have to try and figure a way to try and squeak one out on Friday night. It's great to be home on Saturday. Saturday night versus Alvinston, they're a powerhouse team, a very good team. It's an unbelievable rivalry," Alexander said.

"Every time they come to our barn, it's a tough game, and every time we go to their barn, it's a tough game. We're really looking forward to getting home on Saturday and squeaking out a win."

The undermanned Irish travelled to Strathroy for an evening matchup with the Jets on Oct. 24.

Strathroy jumped to a 4-0 lead with a pair of goals in the first and second periods. Stratford's starting goaltender, Marek Pavlas, was relieved for Zach-

ery Weir after the fourth Strathroy goal. Jaden Peca scored his first of the season to put the Irish on the board with less than six minutes remaining in the second before the Jets responded with a power-play goal over ninety seconds later.

Thomas Maia scored his second of the season before the end of the middle frame to give Stratford some life heading into the third. Matthew Fuller scored his second of the season to cut the deficit to 5-3, but the Jets sealed the win with 57 seconds left on an empty net goal. Maia led the Irish with two points in the game, while Pavlas got credited for the loss as he allowed four goals in sixteen shots in over 22 minutes of play before being pulled for Weir, who made sixteen saves in relief.

On Oct. 25, the Irish hosted the Alvinston Killer Bees in a battle for first place in the Northern Premier Hockey League (NPHL) Gateway Division of the Metropolitan Conference at the William Allman Memorial Arena.

Stratford got off to a strong start with the goals from Luca Marandola and Montgomery just 41 seconds later in the

first period. Alvinston got one on the board with 3:45 left, but Peca responded with two seconds left to close the opening twenty minutes with a 3-1 Irish lead.

A two-on-one pass from Matthew Barnes to Brady Hunter gave the Irish a commanding 4-1 lead midway through the second period.

But the turning point of the game came several minutes later, as the Irish got into penalty trouble, resulting in three straight penalties in under a minute and consecutive five-on-three penalty kills. The Killer Bees seized the opportunity and scored twice with the man-advantage on three attempts and climbed to within a goal heading into the third period.

Alvinston tied the game with 13:58 remaining in the third period and took the lead for the first time with 6:55 left. But the Irish refused to go down and were on the six-on-four power-play with 48 seconds in regulation. With twenty seconds left, Stephen Pierog sent the Irish fans at the Allman Arena into a frenzy and sent the game to overtime and assured the home side at least a point.

In overtime, the Alvinston Killer Bees

scored the winner with 5:15 remaining and escaped the arena with the additional point to keep their undefeated record intact.

After the game, both Marandola and Weir shared their thoughts on the disappointing result.

"We played our game. We were buzzing, had the lead, and did our job. We played a good, hard game tonight. We got to the right areas, and we just had an unfortunate result," Marandola said. "But we can't beat ourselves up. Still played a good game."

"I think the team played well against Alvinston. They're a really good team, and we came out strong and unfortunately, just a weird second period with some calls that didn't go our way, led to us being down a man for quite a bit and opened the door for them, but I thought we still came back to tie," Weir said. "It was awesome. The boys fly hard to-night."

This week, the Irish play their lone game of the weekend at home ice on Nov. 1 against the Orangeville Blitz at the Allman Arena. Game time is 5:30 p.m.

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PINPALS

Thomas Holland 136
Gregory Jones 102
Emily Jones 111

BOWLASAURUS

Dominic Rowe 111
Owen Farthing 101
Evangeline Butcher 124

PEEWEE & BANTAMS

Frankie Lindsay 81, 222 double
Lincoln Butcher 101
Stella St. Pierre 114, 303 double
Scarlett Ilman 225 double
Coen Everitt 254 double
Leo Parker 107
Wesley Adair 104
Noah Saunders 112
Roland Rains 176
Patrick Adair 408 triple
William West 87
Rilynn Bennett 101
Kellar Hvidsten 100
Spencer Koyle 104
Connor Tiegs 164
Talia Klomp 166

JUNIORS

McKenna Morris 193, 474 triple
Abby Smith 150
Tyler Koch 163, 437 triple
Brent Louwagie 198, 525 triple
Sydney Shillolo 177
Myla Douglas 189, 463 triple
Austin Janmaat 151
Hugo Black 208, 467 triple
Peyton Boyles Keating 312, 632 triple
Anna Ward 159, 458 triple
Brianna Bauer 154, 428 triple
Charlee Koyle 160

Lauren Furtney 175, 483 triple
Hayden Martin 181, 482 triple
Ryan Scheerer 173
Arik Scheuermann 153

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Austin Bauer 245, 543 triple
Jake Sippel 184, 456 triple
Zachary Clarke 216
Dominic Boyles Keating 266, 626 triple
Alex Ward 244, 667 triple
Sydney Smith 180
Wiatt Robinson 185

Payton Petrie 207, 591 triple
Payton Kainz 231
Owen Martin 210, 582 triple
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Claire Turner 194

Devon DeYoung 199
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Wayne Schmidt 80
Phoebe Bootsma 147
Leah Akroyd Snider 122
Sarah Anne Doucette Snow 97
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Courtney Moore 149
Michael Ambrozic 107
Thomas Planke 130
Sidney Martin 121
Mike Keleman 136
Nicholas Graham 190

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LOW KMS - 44,497 KM + HST & lic.

2022 Toyota RAV4 Hybrid SE AWD



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STRATFORD NISSAN



Stealing the Sky a passion project for actor/director Megan Follows and actor/writer Marie Dame

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Film Festival will screen the film *Stealing the Sky* Saturday, Nov. 8 at 4 p.m. The Q-and-A following features actor/director Megan Follows and actor/screenplay writer Marie Dame. This highly anticipated event is an excellent opportunity to further explore the intertwined story in the film and the process of filmmaking.

Stealing the Sky is an ensemble comedy directed by and co-starring Follows and Dame in which the various characters staying in a loft are forced to face their identity, connection and loss as the loft is slated for demolition. Fact and fiction unite to inspire this screenplay by Dame as the loft she once owned and loved, but now demolished, was home to many interesting characters and stories.

"The core of it is my life. The loft where the movie primarily takes place was my loft and I did rent it out as an AirBnB for extra cash, and I did have a myriad of people from every kind of socioeconomic and cultural world stay there and I thought I just had to write about this, it was just too kooky. The building was slated for demolition, and we had to get out of there. In fact, two days after we wrapped, we got the eviction notice," said Dame.

"This is a project that has been near and dear to my heart for many, many years. Twelve years. We had been working on it in different iterations, trying to do it as an anthology series. First of all, it was kind of inspired, before the pending and looming threat of eviction came in, it was really something we were exploring; a super-host element because Marie had a very successful AirBnB situation going and she had a rating of super-host," said Follows.

Although the initial vision was for an anthology series, the story ultimately morphed and into feature film. It had extremely strong visual elements in it. Above and beyond the beautiful human interactions, one of the biggest characters in the piece is the city of Toronto itself: the changes, the houses no longer there,



The creative team of Megan Follows and Marie Dame, also co-stars of the film *Stealing the Sky*, will be appearing in Stratford for a Q-and-A following the screening of the film by Stratford Film Festival.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

the cranes.

"In the course of taking it from anthology series super-host to *Stealing the Sky* the world changed along with it, where suddenly there was this housing crisis and more and more buildings were going up stealing the sky, so we kind of morphed it being about that as well," said Dame.

While this is not the first time that Follows has assumed the role of director, this was the first time she navigated the complexities of the dual role both before and behind the camera in an independent feature. Her style is to give specific detailed direction along with allowing freedom of interpretation. As an actor herself, she senses what her cast needs.

"I'm a huge believer in the detail. My heart and soul is with actors. What was so beautiful was we loved this script, and we had such wonderful playful, fun, interesting layers to play with. It's what actors want and need. You've got the structure but the freedom and that's a testament to our story," said Follows.

"I would also like to add, that because Megan is an actor, there was this respect for the actors that you don't always have. There was an understanding. There was one scene where I am crying alone in the apartment and Megan knew, because she is a great actress, she knew what was needed and the atmosphere to make that possible. There was a consideration that ran through the entire movie," said Dame.

Dame has also found that this script for *Stealing the Sky* has changed her approach to storytelling. With the complexities of multiple arcs and the subtlety to bring it all together, she learned a lot over the course of working on this project.

There is also a lot of humour in the film which is intentionally scripted, "It's one of the beautiful things of the piece. I think where Marie and I have a shared vision is this juxtaposition of humour and pathos and the balancing act. It is woven into the story. It is the highs and lows. It's the absurdity. It's laughing at yourself and all that richness," said Follows.

Dame hopes that audiences take away hope. A quiet hope. She wants everything that she writes to end in a glimmer of hope because that's how she sees the world. The audience may feel that sometimes things are hard, but in the end, there is a glimpse no matter how small.

Follows hopes the audience sees that they are not alone, just on the other side of the wall is someone else who may be experiencing something similar. One is not as alone as one might think.

"Be open to reinvention. The truth is life is ever-changing. We have someone who has been in a building for many years with a routine and all of that is threatened and she has to change but doesn't know where that is going. The world is changing whether we like it or not and it's about how we step into it and who we become in the face of that change," concluded Follows.

For more information about the film *Stealing the Sky* or to buy tickets for the screening, visit stratfordfilmfestival.com.

Mike's Lanes High Scores: October 20 -26

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ADULT LEAGUES

MEN'S

Martin Van Bakel 814 triple
Don Clark 353, 829 triple
Brad McIntyre 335, 851 triple
Monday Seniors
Marlene Crerar 207, 208, 608 triple
Steve VanKlooster 218,225, 625 triple
Brian Wagler 258,244, 650 triple

V-ETTES

Mary Ridell 217
Wednesday Ladies
Margaret Dickson 202
UNITED LEAGUE
Autumn Stadlander 208
Robert Anderson 226

MONDAY 5 PIN

Kurtis McSwain 320, 765 triple

NEWS AND TOURNAMENTS

This past weekend the lanes hosted the

Festival Classic tournament with eight teams entered. The winning team was +144 over average. Congratulations to the winners.

Owen M - 204, +26
Bradey B K - 236, +32
Dominic B K - 235, +44
Jason M - 226, +35
Zach C - 200, +4

The Master Bowlers of Ontario ran the first Teaching Masters event at Echo Bowl

in Branford on the Thanksgiving weekend. Eight bowlers from Zone "C" including two from Mike's Bowling Lanes. POA event - 98 bowlers. Stephen Mitchell was 52nd with +4 and Larry Palmby was 55th with -1. Scratch men 38 bowlers- Mitchell was 19th with a six-game total of 1306. Brackets were set in POA and Scratch Final bracket in POA. Palmby made it to the final in game six, winning +23 to +13. Congrats to both.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT GRANTHAVEN.COM

When Saturday morning was the main event; Remembering the Hilarious House of Frightenstein

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Remember a time when Saturday morning programming captivated our youth, before cartoons were available at a moment's notice? Re-engage your inner child with this documentary about the cult Canadian classic, *The Hilarious House of Frightenstein*, which aired beginning 1972.

The film, *Behind the Castle Doors: The Hilarious House of Frightenstein*, will be screened Saturday morning (of course), Nov. 8 at 10 a.m., as part of the inaugural Stratford Film Festival. Reminiscent of the times, there will be a cereal bar stocked with sugary cereals.

Following the screening there will be a Q-and-A with the directors Tammy Heisel and Morgan Baker. The film was produced in 2025 and premiered at the Hamilton Film Festival earlier in October. This is also the debut film for Heisel and Baker, who have been lifelong fans of the cult classic.

"I have always been a big fan of the show. I grew up watching it. Morgan and I have a TV show that we cover nerdy culture, and one day we saw that Mitch (Markowitz), the associate producer of *Hilarious House* was a guest at Forest City Comic Con here in London. For me, I've interviewed a lot of people, and this was the one that I thought I just had to meet. I arranged an interview and we became friends. He's led such an interesting life that I said to him I would do a documentary about him one day," said Heisel.

Fast forward a month later and Markowitz called Heisel and asked when they would be starting so she turned around and called Baker and told him they had a



Just one of the many films featured at the inaugural Stratford Film Festival Nov. 6-9, *Behind the Castle Walls: The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* screens on Nov. 8 at 10 a.m. in Stratford City Hall. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

documentary to make. At the beginning, they thought they had a sense of the story they wanted to tell but that evolved over time.

"The more people that we met, the concept started to change and evolve and include more people. We were able to locate a camera operator from the show as well as three of the writers. We were able to do interviews with them and get their background and perspective as well, not to mention the people that wanted to share their own experiences watching it. Next thing we knew we had a feature length documentary," said Baker.

The project took three years to complete with early hurdles given that they were in the tail end of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Working with archival materials to try and present it in such a way that it still looks good, given it was filmed

in standard definition at the time, was another hurdle. Searching for the perfect clip to support the storytelling was rewarding and re-energized their commitment to the project and reminded them why they were doing what they were doing.

"The original camera operator, Dave Cremasco, had 600 plus behind the scenes photographs that he took while he was working and that in itself was such luck. People haven't seen these so that's how we got photos of Billy Vann getting his make-up on or what the sets look like standing back. Some of his photos are floating around on the internet but they aren't credited. A lot of people don't realize that Dave is the one that took all of those pictures. There are stills and stills and he just gave us use of everything," said Heisel.

This film will be nostalgic for many, but also of interest for those that are new

to the show with behind-the-scenes footage and stories, "The behind-the-scenes production stories and easter eggs when watching something. It's the TV magic that goes into a production," said Baker.

"And Vincent Price was a part of it and people still recognize that name. People say, 'Vincent Price was in it? Wasn't that a small Canadian show?' and we get to explain that in the film. And of course, how Billy did ten different characters and the story behind that," adds Heisel.

The film includes interviews with fans, celebrities and employees of the show. Each one was a treasured experience for the filmmakers and they feel each one helped tell the story that they wanted to tell.

It was an unbelievable experience when the film opened in Hamilton and the audience reaction was overwhelming to them. People laughed at the right parts, at parts they didn't expect, and commenting when a character came on. They applauded throughout the credits and it was a full house.

"They didn't want to leave. Mitch stays and signs posters afterward and people brought in things they had or t-shirts. The comments that followed on social media, we thought we could only wish for that response. One said, 'Thank you for making it.' One said, 'Billy Vann would be proud. For first time film makers too,'" said Heisel.

The trailer for the film has been viewed over 311,000 times at the time of writing, even though it has only been released for a couple of weeks. To view the trailer and to buy tickets for *Behind the Castle Walls: The Hilarious House of Frightenstein* visit stratfordfilmfestival.ca

Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance honoured with Provincial Conversion Rate Award for organ donation rates

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance (HPHA) is proud to announce that it has been recognized with the Provincial Conversion Rate Award from Ontario Health's Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN) for the fifth time.

HPHA is one of 50 hospital partners across the province to receive a 2024/25 TGLN Hospital Achievement Award, the largest number of hospitals ever honoured in the history of these awards.

Each year, these awards recognize hospitals that meet or exceed Ontario's targets in key areas of the donation process. The Provincial Conversion Rate Award celebrates hospitals that achieve or surpass the 63 per cent conversion rate target, which represents the percentage of potential organ donors (patients who pass away in a hospital setting and are deemed medically suitable for donation) who go on to become actual donors. The HPHA

achieved an impressive 100 per cent conversion rate, highlighting the exceptional collaboration between HPHA and TGLN.

In 2024/2025, HPHA supported one organ donor, resulting in the donation of five organs for transplant and saving four lives. Additionally, 17 tissue donors generously enhanced the lives of many others through their life-changing gifts.

"We are incredibly proud of our team's ongoing commitment to organ and tissue donation," said Lynanne Mason, vice president partnerships, transformation and chief nursing executive at HPHA. "This recognition from TGLN reflects the compassion, collaboration, and professionalism of our staff and physicians who support patients and families through one of the most meaningful and selfless acts of care. Together, we are helping to save and transform lives across Ontario."

Talk to your family about your donation decision and visit www.BeADonor.ca today to register or learn more.



Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance (HPHA)'s Lynanne Mason, vice president partnerships, transformation and chief nursing executive, Tyson Sjaarda and Laurie Foster, surgical team members, Dr. Catherine Barry, internal medicine and physician chair of HPHA's organ and tissue donation committee and Sarah Harmer, director of patient care, present the Provincial Conversion Rate Award at Stratford General Hospital. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Ready, Set, PLAY! returns with a learn and perform opportunity for all ages

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

After a successful event at the Stratford Perth Museum last summer where an arts open house provided mini workshops to interested participants to try out art, dance, acting and fencing (to name a few), the Ready, Set, PLAY! initiative is returning with a new opportunity. Producer Pat McKinna is putting a call out to any non-professional for a learn and perform production of the comedy musical, *Damn Yankees*.

Anyone who has ever wanted to sing, dance, or act is invited to a free workshop to come and hear the music, learn about the story and even try a dance move or two. This co-production by Ready, Set, PLAY! and Infinity Dance is intended as a family friendly experience for kids beginning age seven through to adult.

"Ready, Set, PLAY! is a new initiative to try and encourage non-professionals to not just go and enjoy the arts. ... It is intended to give people a way to participate in the arts," said Pat McKinna. Participation can be in the form of performances, workshops, or artwork for set design for example.

"I'm on a little crusade to use the power of the arts to encourage kindness in society because it seems more and more that everybody is angry at something or somebody. The one thing I hope that everyone who

participated in Anne of Green Gables two years ago felt was they all got something from it and that they were a team. That's the power of the arts," she said. "The sense of pride from trying something they always wanted to do came from overcoming something they weren't sure they could do."

Choosing the show *Damn Yankees* is not a political statement, more of a wink. This musical with a baseball theme is one many Blue Jay's fans may find inspiring. It is about baseball, temptation and true love with great songs and fun choreography.

Infinity Dance will provide choreography support for the production with as much dance as participants want to learn. There will not be auditions, anyone interested will be welcome to participate. Along with Jeanine Henderson-Kitching of Infinity Dance, the other creatives on the team so far are Barbara Dunn-Prosser (choral and voice teacher), Paul Shilton (music director) and Keith Thomas (vocal coach).

The workshop will be held Sunday, Nov. 16 at Community of Christ Church, 226 Forman Ave. at 2 p.m. Learn more about the story and learn the song, "You Gotta Have Heart," and try out a few dance moves. No skill is required, just bring enthusiasm and a willingness to learn.

For more information and to register for the free workshop visit mckinnamanagement.com.



Learn and perform the story of *Damn Yankees* with your family or friends. No skill required. Contributed photo.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Branch 008

COMING EVENTS

Sunday Nov 2 Sunday Nov 9 Tuesday Nov 11 Wednesday Nov 12 Friday Nov 21 Sunday Nov 30 Wednesday Dec 10 Saturday, Dec 20	Remembrance Sunday Drum Head Service, 804 Ontario St, 1:30 p.m., all welcome "Lest We Forget" Roast Beef Dinner, Take out 4:30 p.m., Dine in 5 p.m. \$25 (tax included) Call for reservation Frank 519-271-9669, Pearl 519-273-0457, Legion 519-271-4540 Remembrance Day Service at the Cenotaph Ladies Auxiliary Lasagna Luncheon. \$16 Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservation Friday Night Euchre, \$20 per team. Call Dave 519-703-6544, Anne 519-301-0914 or the Legion 519-271-4540 to register your team Christmas Gala - oven roasted turkey, honey glazed ham, salad and dessert bar. Dine in ONLY, 5 p.m., \$30 adults, \$15 6-14, 5 and under eat free. Call for reservation Frank 519-271-9669, Pearl 519-273-0457, Legion 519-271-4540 Ladies Auxiliary Luncheon. \$16 Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservation Christmas meat draw, doors open at 2 p.m., meat draw starts at 4 p.m.
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Tuesday Morning Buddy Check, 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. OPEN to all Veterans Widows and First Responders

Friday Afternoon Weekly Social 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Saturday Afternoon Meat Draw doors open at 2:00 p.m., meat draw starts at 4:00 p.m.

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Prolific Canadian filmmaker Larry Weinstein explores enlightenment in *Beethoven's Nine: Ode to Humanity*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Filmmaker Larry Weinstein has made over 40 award winning films and is considered by many to be the preeminent music documentarian. His film, *Beethoven's Nine: Ode to Humanity*, will be opening the Stratford Film Festival with a screening, Q-and-A with Weinstein, and opening night reception on Nov. 6 at 7 p.m. in Stratford City Hall.

When first approached about making a documentary celebrating the 200th anniversary of the 1824 premiere of Beethoven's 9th symphony: Ode to Joy, Weinstein was reticent. Certainly, it was ground-breaking work for the time, but he thought anniversaries come and go, and further, he had already done a film on Beethoven's life called *Beethoven's Hair* and felt that it sufficiently told the story of the musician's life.

"It wasn't until I kind of rejected it, but then I thought, actually, it's kind of interesting that Beethoven's 9th symphony was really very different because it had words. No symphony had been set to poetry or used a choir before. The reason he did that was he was interested in using Schiller's words which were very much the product of the enlightenment. What if I were to make a film, these days, when the world needs enlightening and so much horrible things are happening. Why



Canadian filmmaker Larry Weinstein releases his most personal documentary yet as he slipped from his role as director to subject midway through filming – once the Oct. 7 attacks in Israel took the lives of his sister and brother-in-law.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

not make a film with a political slant in a way but in terms of humanity?" explained Weinstein.

He then thought to go after the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra founded by Canadian/Ukrainian conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson, whom he knew, and wondered at the possibility of them performing music of his choosing. Coincidentally, Wilson was getting her orchestra together in light of the Russia-Ukraine war. Her orchestra immediately came back and said not only would they do it, they would be in Warsaw and filming of a performance would

be agreeable.

Originally, the theme was to be about the enlightenment ideals and the things that inspired Beethoven, that gave him the reason he wanted to do that piece, and the reason he was who he was. That interested Weinstein but months after they started filming, the Oct. 7 attacks in Israel happened and all of a sudden the documentary became personal. His sister and brother-in-law had been killed.

Weinstein felt traumatized, facing the worst of humanity. After much convincing, he decided to appear in his own film for the first time ever.

"Once we started, I felt like this is a real commitment, this is a way I can talk about my sister and this is something very special, eye opening. It does relate to our film, and it does relate to the themes of the film, and my sister embodied enlightenment in her own way. She always fought for peace

and worked with young children to help ease their trauma and was all about mindfulness and meditation. She loved music and the power of art and wrote haiku every morning. She very much embodies all the things I was inspired by to make this film," said Weinstein.

Remaining objective as a filmmaker while in a subjective situation meant staying out of the editing room at the instruction of his cameraman and editor. Together they conspired and cut the interview before showing it to Weinstein to review. Prepare to be moved.

The film features nine diverse culturally significant voices assembled that each in their own way make an enlightened contribution of humanity. It follows unique individuals, including Ukrainian musicians, a deaf composer, a Polish rock star, a best-selling author, a legendary cartoonist and Weinstein himself.

"Because the film has so many war themes, we thought maybe we should choose someone lighter, that's when we chose (cartoonist) Charles Shultz, which I like very much. I like the idea of Schroeder who introduced Beethoven to so many people who wouldn't have known Beethoven. So, it's a matter of seeming organic," said Weinstein.

He concluded that the 9th symphony is a love letter to humanity, which was Beethoven's way of saying "Let's be brothers and sisters and hold each other and try to listen to our better angels."

"That's what I hope, that people will see despite all the darkness we can push through and see the light," said Weinstein.

For more information about *Beethoven's Nine: Ode to Humanity* or to buy tickets for the screening, Q-and-A and opening reception visit stratfordfilmfestival.com.



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Stratford City Council Annual Community Recognition Awards



Amiera Black was recognized during the annual Community Recognition Awards on Oct. 28 for her outstanding performance in swimming. Black qualified for the 13th World Down Syndrome Swimming Championship in Mexico in 2028 and will represent the British National Down Syndrome Team this November. She has also been selected to participate on the Special Olympics Team Alberta for nationals in 2026.



Dominic Ronnenberg, Myes Ngungu, Emile Grimes, Phoenix Hutchinson, Zachary Myers and Chase Gordon-Edmonds were recognized during the annual Community Recognition Awards. Ronnenberg received the Beavers North Star Award, Ngungu received the Cubs Seeonee Award, and Grimes, Hutchinson, Myers and Gordon-Edmonds were honoured with the Scouts Chief Scout's Award (names not in order).



The 13U Boys B basketball team was recognized for winning the provincial championship. Coaches are Dan Patterson, Julie Strickler, Mike Atkinson and Luke van Kooten. Players are Marcus Atkinson, Brandon Bast, Carl Daly, Logan Hodgins, Evan Wybrow, Louie Turpin, Oliver Strickler, Aaden van Kooten, Lincoln Patterson, Mateo Patterson, Beckham Skillings and Sawyer Verspeeten (names not in order).



The Stratford Flames 13U team won silver at the Eastern Canadian Softball Championship. Coaches are Tyler Canal, Courtney Canal, Ross Herold and Barb Wilhelm. Players are Avery Canal, Nora Frayne, Julia Glitz, Abby Herold, Avery Kelly, Cassidy Koch, Kiyah Marshall, Lauren Masselis, Emry MacIntosh, Gracie Neumeister, Lela Pirkli, Hallee Priestap and Milana Verellen (names not in order). (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

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Opinions

WEB-CRAWLING ON A TILT



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

It has been one of the most beautiful falls I can remember. After the summer's gasping heat and drought, the cooler temperatures have been welcome and the trees have been gobsmackingly gorgeous!

It's hard now to recall the suffocating heat of the summer, or the field after field of pointed corn stalks, trying to preserve what little moisture they had, or the plants and trees that succumbed. The forest fires have receded, leaving us stories of homes, habitat and biodiversity lost, and huge plumes of smoke that even those south of the border complained were ruining

their summers.

But we can look to better times with this beautiful autumn – can't we? Maybe, but we need some climate warriors to help us. The heat and the drought that were so much a part of last summer came from us. It came from the growing blanket of CO2 surrounding the planet. It came from every fuel emitting vehicle, from every oil refinery, from every plastic manufacturing industry, from every forest fire, and from every war zone. We learned earlier that carbon entering the atmosphere doesn't go away for thousands of years – and we keep adding to it.

That blanket of greenhouse gases is making the planet hotter, disrupting life on the planet and weather patterns. Scientists have begun talking about tipping points – what's that? A tipping point is a massive change in society, in science. Remember when everyone smoked? Research and social pressure combined to alter that acceptance of smoking – a tipping point was reached to change behaviour. Tipping points are considered to be irreversible.

A similar process is happening with global warming. You may have heard news reports that the coral reefs of the planet have reached a tipping point. They have been dying back to a point where they are not expected to recover. The increased heat and the acid content of the waters from carbon absorption were too much for the coral reefs. A tipping point has been reached. Coral reefs are home to incredible biodiversity important in the oceans' food chains. They also create living barriers near land masses that prevent coastal erosion.

But that doesn't affect us! Stratford is a bit warm, but we're fine. Wait, are there any tipping points that we need to watch for? There is one that we all need to monitor. We know trees are important as carbon sinks. They take in CO2 and give us oxygen to breathe. One of the world's largest carbon sinks, the Amazon Rainforest, is rapidly approaching a tipping point. "Even with all the deforestation, (it) stores more than 150 billion (metric) tons of carbon," Brazilian climate sci-

entist Carlos Nobre warns. That deforestation of the Amazon could push this globally important ecosystem past the point of no return. Nobre estimates that a tipping point could be reached if deforestation reaches 20-25 per cent or global heating rises to 2-2.5 degrees Celsius (above preindustrial levels). Today 18 per cent of the Amazon has been cleared and the world has warmed by 1.5 degrees Celsius and is on course to reach its tipping point by 2050.

If we reach that tipping point, the absence of the Amazon carbon sink will escalate the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, increasing global warming considerably. In addition, Indigenous peoples have warned that vast stores of carbon and methane exist in the peat lands in the Ring of Fire area. Increased carbon released to the atmosphere from mining and road-building would be devastating, but even more dangerous is the methane. Methane lasts a shorter time in the atmosphere, but is 80 times more powerful in trapping heat than carbon.

I guess one could say, "You think it's hot now? Just you wait." If we care about the future we are creating, there is a part to play for everyone: seek alternative transportation, refuse plastic, plant for nature and reduce consumerism. Each of us can do something – however small, however big – and each of us can speak, to our neighbours, to our families, to power. The time is now.

UPDATES:

1. Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of Oct. 25, 2025: 425.19 ppm. This is the highest it has been in millions of years, significantly above the pre-industrial level of around 280 ppm.

2. Give nature a chance to find shelter in your winter garden. Leave plant stalks and leaves to shelter helping insects and pollinators – but clear your sidewalks for the snowplows.

Sheila Clarke is a Stratford advocate for the environment, of our community and of our planet. She is a member of CFUW Stratford, Stratford Climate Momentum, and the Perth County Sustainability Hub.

Repeal Bill 5, part two: Endangered species



ANITA JACOBSEN

Guest Columnist

The nest was huge! In the top of the tallest tree in the woodlot, close to the edge, was the nest complete with an eagle perched within, its white head shining in the sunlight. It was the first bald eagle I had ever seen. It was also one of only three bald eagle pairs left in southern Ontario in the early 1980s.

Historically bald eagles were common in southern Ontario, until the advance of land-clearing for agriculture in the late 1880s which virtually wiped them out. Legislation allowed numbers to recover to about 100 breeding pairs in the 1950s but then came the widespread agricultural use of Dichlo-

rodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), an insecticide, and the numbers of eagles crashed again. Eagles eat fish, not insects, but DDT ran off fields and into waterways, where it was absorbed by fish and other aquatic organisms. In every step up the food chain, the chemical's concentration increased, causing eagle eggshells to thin so drastically they could no longer successfully incubate them.

The bald eagle was one of the first species to be listed in Ontario's original Endangered Species Act in 1973. With this protection, and a continent-wide ban on DDT, bald eagles started to make a slow recovery, and by 2008 there were about 45 breeding pairs in Ontario. In 2022, over 2,600 bald eagle nests were identified in Ontario, and after 50 years its recovery was so successful that it was removed from the endangered species list. Currently in Stratford, I can regularly see eagles soaring overhead and can visit several nests throughout Perth County.

This is a remarkable success story, but not one I'm convinced could happen today. Though bald eagles are no longer considered endangered, they remain a species of concern, and humans con-

tinue to pose the largest threat to their existence. Expanding human populations and associated disturbance can impact the availability and suitability of bald eagle habitats, and their breeding and overwintering habitats are particularly vulnerable to urban expansion and shoreline development.

When bald eagles were protected by the Endangered Species Act, not only was it an offence to willfully kill, injure or interfere with the birds or their nests, it also prohibited damaging or destroying critical nesting or feeding habitat. The act provided a legal framework for conservation efforts, with penalties for violations, and established an independent committee (COSSARO) to assess the status of species.

However, with the passing of Bill 5 (the Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act), the Endangered Species Act is no more. It is being replaced by the Species Conservation Act, which has much weaker protections for vulnerable species. For example, the definition for "habitat" would only apply to an eagle's nest, not the area it needs for hunting, and only while the nest is occupied, leaving much of their habitat un-

protected. For eagles, who reuse their nests for years, the limited protections offered by the act leave migratory pairs at risk of having nowhere to come back to nest. And if biologists determine that eagles or any other species are under threat of extinction, the species will no longer be put automatically on the list of species at risk. Instead, it will be up to the discretion of politicians behind closed doors, many of whom have little science background to determine whether a species is deserving of protection.

Disturbingly, Bill 5 also allows for the creation of Special Economic Zones, areas and companies that members of the cabinet can exempt from applicable laws, with the aim of speeding up major resource and infrastructure projects. Any laws pertaining to protecting vulnerable species or impacts on the environment can be set aside if the project is deemed economically important.

So why should we be concerned about the changes to the Endangered Species Act or what happens bald eagles or other vulnerable species. The reason is that we are all part of a limited ecosystem. The Earth and its resources

are not infinite, and every person on Earth depends on a healthy functioning ecosystem for their continued existence. We all have a responsibility to be good stewards of our resources and to ensure the viability of all other organisms. If we ignore this, we are on the road to ecological collapse, and humanity will be the ones to suffer.

Unfortunately, Bill 5 ignores this reality and turns its back on our collective responsibility to care for the environment we share with a myriad of lifeforms and on which we depend for our own survival.

For more information visit repealbill5.ca

Submitted by Repeal Bill 5, a local coalition of advocates dedicated to repealing the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, on behalf of Anita Jacobsen. Jacobsen is a zoologist and educator who worked as a biologist, teacher, and then as head gardener for many years at the Stratford Festival. She has a lifelong interest in birds and the natural world and currently is involved with volunteers in Stratford to limit invasive species and promote biodiversity in the park system.



Over \$1,000 was raised for Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth by the Community of Christ Church's breakfast on Oct. 26. The cooks in the kitchen on Sunday included Chef Robert Smith, Sally Sarachman from the hospice and church pastor Scott Brookshaw, who coordinates the meal along with church volunteers and local egg farmers. (GARY WEST PHOTO)



The Perth County Holstein Club held another successful annual awards banquet last week in Mitchell, where many awards were given to area farmers by directors of the club. Pictured here are directors Joel Hartman, Stefan Weber, Emma Payne, Geoff McMullen, Andrean Cnossen, Sjoerd Kemmere, Heather Robinson, TJ DeWitt, Trevor Willows and Luis Velasquez. (GARY WEST PHOTO)

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Monday, November 3; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford

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Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

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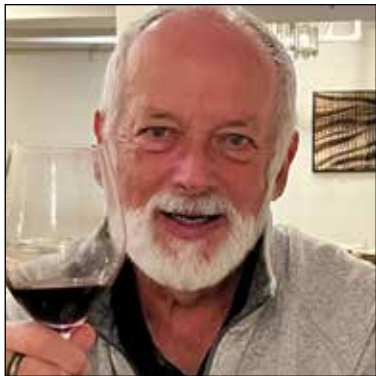
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Surviving the scam epidemic



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

Make no mistake: I love travelling in Europe. Just in the past year and a half, we have visited France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. We hugely enjoyed our time in all of the above, and plan to return to Europe soon.

But there is one thing we consistently encounter there that never seems to come up on visits to Canadian cities. Again, in the past year or so, we have spent time in Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Saint John, Saint John's, Sherbrooke, Halifax and all points between, and here's what we never saw: a sign saying "Pickpockets are active in this area."

I'm not saying Canadian communities are crime-free, or that there are no scams happening here, but on-the-street tourist scams seem to be almost epidemic in some European cities.

Believe me, I am not saying



The Opera House in Paris – the site of the "gold ring" scam that almost convinced the author.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

don't go, but I do suggest caution, common sense and a certain amount of preparation.

And just so you know, this stuff really happens. For instance:

We were in Paris a couple of weeks ago, strolling in front of the Opera House. A woman was approaching us on the crowded street when she suddenly reached down, picked up what appeared to be a man's gold wedding ring and immediately offered it to us. "This," she said in very passable English, "is your lucky day."

We looked confused because we were!

"I cannot keep this," she said, "because my religion forbids me to wear jewelry. So please allow me to give it to you, with my blessing."

We voiced our objections, but she placed the ring in my hand and began to walk away. We looked at each other, bemused to say the least. Then she returned. "Perhaps you could buy me a coca cola or something as a thank you," she said.

I cottoned on. "No, we don't want the ring." She became adamant. I bent down to put the ring back on the sidewalk; she

intercepted my hand. I dropped the ring into her palm, and as she protested, we turned and walked away.

In immediate hindsight, we realized this had been some kind of scam, though I had never heard of this particular ploy.

Turns out, as a travel writer, I probably should have. According to my internet search, "The lost gold ring scam is one of the oldest and most famous tourist scams in Paris. Trusting tourists are the best mark for this deception." The internet description was a virtually word-for-word script of our experience. It predicted the scammer would have asked for more money in return for a completely worthless ring, and might have made quite a scene if we resisted.

Ah, so after all my travels, I qualified for the "trusting tourist best mark" award. Only slightly embarrassing! But at least we escaped unscathed.

More through luck than sense, we also avoided some scammers in Spain a few months ago. These were again women, this time insisting that we accept a sprig of rosemary as a gift. Turns out, according to our Spanish guides, if you take it, they

will demand payment and it can become a highly embarrassing scene.

It was even somewhat embarrassing when we declined because they were quite rude in their response.

In some cases, there is a secondary purpose to these approaches – the women with the rings or the rosemary may be distracting you so their accomplices can work their pickpocket magic.

Warnings against pickpockets are everywhere, even in the most holy sites – like Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, a church where, because of incredible crowds, pickpockets can find their own version of paradise.

One fairly recent scam involves young people carrying survey clipboards. They are working for the tourism board, they say, and would like to ask you a few questions. Heck, doesn't everyone love to offer our opinion? The problem is either an accomplice is lifting your wallet while your attention is on the survey person or, in the case of the really experienced crook, she is actually opening your purse directly under the survey clipboard. We have seen these folks in action, too, though we were never directly approached to take a "survey."

The advice from our guides is simple, though not foolproof. Don't carry excess cash or passports on you. Leave them in your hotel safe. Men should have their wallets in a front pocket. Women should keep their handbags closed and zipped up. Don't wear your best jewelry in public. Don't hang a bag on the back of a chair in a café. And so on.

Personally, I would suggest if you are travelling as a couple or a group, one should take the pictures while others keep a close eye – better still, hand – on any valuables.

Again, this is not a knock on travelling to Europe. We love it – the art, the food, the architecture, the history, the people, the scenery, the whole deal. I come home educated, entertained, refreshed, invigorated and, I think, a better citizen of our complicated world. You can, too. Just keep one hand on your valuables, and don't accept unwarranted gifts!

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.

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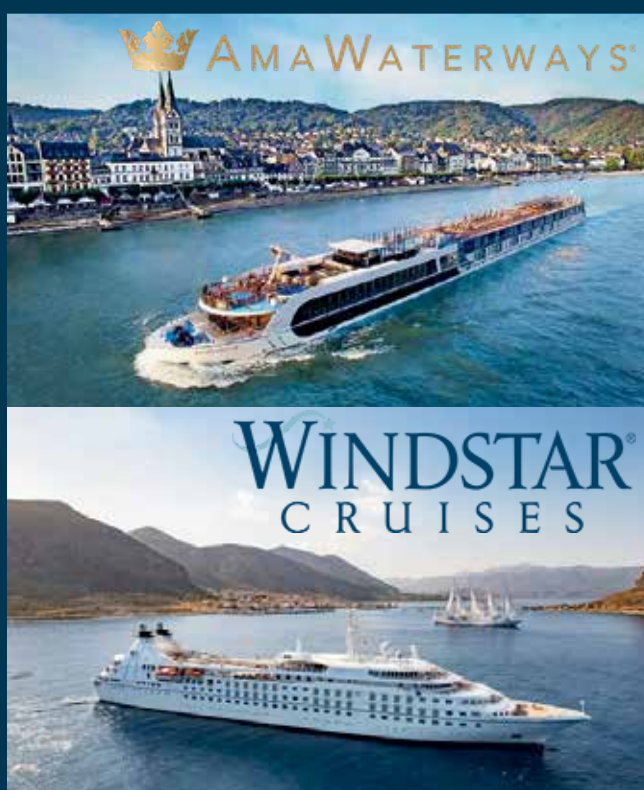
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Riddles

Why didn't the skeleton go to the party?
He had no body to go with.

What do you call a witch who lives at the beach?
A sand-witch.

Why did the vampire read the newspaper?
He heard it had great circulation.

What's a ghost's favorite dessert?
I scream!

Why don't mummies take vacations?
They're afraid they'll unwind.

What kind of music do skeletons love?
Heavy metal.

What's a zombie's favorite snack?
Finger food.

Why did the ghost go into the bar?
For the boos!

How do you fix a broken jack-o'-lantern?
With a pumpkin patch.

What's a vampire's least favorite food?
Steak.

Why are graveyards so noisy?
Because of all the coffin.

Sudoku

			2		1		8	7
9			3	5				6
7								3
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Solutions on page 27

Pet of the week



SCOUT

Scout is an affectionate and gentle kitten with a heart full of love and curiosity. This sweet boy is always ready to snuggle, play, and follow you around like your tiny shadow. Pick him up, and he'll start purring instantly and then melt right into your arms for cuddles.

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- PUMPKIN
- GHOST
- COSTUME
- CANDY
- WITCH
- SPIDER
- HAUNTED
- SKELETON
- MONSTER
- BAT
- MOON
- TRICK OR TREAT
- ZOMBIE
- CAULDRON
- VAMPIRE

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OBITUARY



COLIN DOUGLAS (DOUG) LAMONT FRASER

Doug Fraser, aged 85 of Waterloo, formerly of Stratford, passed away peacefully on Saturday, October 18, 2025 at Columbia Forest Long Term Care.

Born on October 29, 1939 in Winnipeg, son of the late Charles and Corrine (Lamont) Fraser, Doug will be dearly remembered by his children Lisa (Shawn) McEwen, Alan Fraser and Margaret (Brandon) Fraser. He was a caring grandfather to Ben, Anika, Sadie and Audrey. Doug is also survived by his brother Ian Fraser and his wife Don Marie as well as nephews Scott and Jeff Fraser.

He is predeceased by his cherished wife (Elizabeth) Susan (Evely) in 1994 after 31 years of marriage.

Shortly after graduating from the University of Manitoba in 1962 (with a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy), Doug met Susan. They soon married and started their family in Winnipeg.

Doug's career was in hospital pharmacy (in Winnipeg, Brandon and Kingston) and he retired from his position as Director of Pharmacy at Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital after 15 years. He later opened a successful bed and breakfast in Stratford called Fraser House, which he ran with great pride for 13 years before moving to Kitchener in 2010. He was a gentleman, and a dedicated father who had many interests, including winemaking, Celtic and folk music, long distance running and bike riding. On his 60th birthday he rode 60 km to mark the occasion.

Our dad was the #1 fan of LL Bean plaid shirts, Sherlock Holmes, the Dad Joke, astronomy, fudge and the occasional cigar. He also loved spending time with his family and his cats Amy and then Nicky.

His family wants to thank all of the caregivers at Breithaupt House in Columbia Forest Long Term Care in Waterloo ON. Special thanks to Wendy Oakes who was such a kind and caring constant during the nearly 8 years that he lived there. Although he struggled bravely with Parkinson Disease for many years, he was always cracking jokes - when anyone offered him a cookie, he would always say "Is the Pope Catholic?"

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Parkinson Society Southwestern Ontario (<https://psso.ca/how-to-help/donate/>) directly or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario St., Stratford. 519-271-5062

Doug will be laid to rest with Susan in Avondale Cemetery, Stratford ON.

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OBITUARY



MARILYN ELAINE DIMEO

Marilyn Elaine Dimeo, having endured health issues for the past eight years, our mother Marilyn passed away peacefully on September 30, 2025. Daughter of the late Edward and Grace Barry (Davis), big and caring sister to the late Robert and the late Carol Ann. Mother to Carol Dimeo (Mike Travis) and Mary Dimeo (Ken Orser). After being born and raised in Peterborough, Marilyn ventured to many different cities. Over the years she lived in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, London, Vancouver, and lastly and longest in Stratford. Marilyn lived a fiercely independent life, relying on her strong intellect, pragmatism, and tenacity through several challenging times. In her work life and volunteer work, Marilyn worked in a variety of roles, all centred around her remarkable ability to write and communicate. After a successful career, our mother's second act was not an idle one. She ran a B&B in Stratford for several years thoroughly enjoying meals, great conversations and the intelligent rapport she had with many repeat guests, many who became dear friends. She could always be found with a book or three on the go, a comprehensive to-do list in the making, and a dog or two underfoot. She spent time working on her manuscript, doing crosswords, listening to opera, and travelling to far flung locales, including East Africa and an extensive tour from Beijing to Hong Kong. Our mother thoroughly enjoyed attending live theatre, and was convinced that maple syrup made everything better. We are very grateful for the attentive care that the health care staff at Kingsway Lodge in St. Marys provided in Marilyn's final years. It provided immense peace of mind knowing that our mother was safe and well taken care of. In her final days, we are thankful to the kind doctors, nurses, and all support staff at St. Marys Memorial Hospital. To honour our mother's wishes, cremation has taken place, and there will be no service. Private family interment in Avondale Cemetery in Stratford. Online condolences at www.hodgesfuneral-home.ca.

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