

St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1292

Thursday, December 11, 2025

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'TIS THE SEASON

The Spirit of Christmas is alive and well with 18 homes in St. Marys taking part in the St. Marys Holiday Light Tour. One such home is the King residence at 42 Wilson Court, and their lights shone so bright that Santa himself arrived for a meet and greet on both Friday and Saturday night. He is pictured above with Korie King and Angelina Sicilia. For more coverage of Santa's visit, turn to page 3.

(MARK KING PHOTO)

Committee officially struck for New Community Commons at 14 Church capital campaign

Chair yet to be appointed; committee hoping for more community participation

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The work to help the Town of St. Marys raise funds in support of the New Community Commons revitalization of 14 Church St. N, the former Mercury Theatre, has officially begun after an ad-hoc fundraising advisory committee held its first meeting

Dec. 3.

Hosted at the St. Marys Public Library, the first committee meeting was attended mostly by St. Marys library board members, as well as library CEO Sarah Andrews, representatives from Friends of Library, St. Marys BIA board chair Megan Feeney and a few other St. Marys residents interested in

CONTINUED TO PAGE 8

Former deputy warden and West Perth deputy mayor accepts the gavel as Perth County warden

Dean Trentowsky and Sue Orr elected as Perth County warden and deputy warden respectively

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The 2025 deputy warden and deputy mayor of West Perth, Dean Trentowsky, has officially accepted the gavel and chain of office as Perth County's 2026 warden.

At the annual Perth County warden's election at the Arden Park Hotel in Stratford Dec. 4, Trentowsky – the only county councillor who put their name forward for warden – was officially acclaimed as the top elected official and CEO of the county. After officially accepting the chain of office and gavel from past warden Doug Kellum, Trentowsky delivered his first official remarks as warden, setting the tone for the year ahead.

"The year ahead sits like a blank canvas before us. The paints are set to one side, and the brush to the other. That canvas is waiting to be filled," Trentowsky said. "To borrow and adapt the Bob Dylan lyrics that were covered by The Grateful Dead, 'Some day, everything is going to be different when I paint my masterpiece.' Starting from here, from this moment forward, I invite everyone in this room to collectively

CONTINUED TO PAGE 9

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MLS

COMMUNITY

Getting in the festive spirt at the Winter Lights Night Market last weekend



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

Two horse-drawn wagon rides were touring around the flats during the Winter Lights Night Market..

WENDY LAMOND
Independent Reporter

On Dec. 5 and 6, the Town of St. Marys held a Winter Lights Night Market at Milt Dunnell Field.

The busy event was fun for all ages, including free horse-and-wagon rides, a firepit with free s'mores, food trucks and shopping from local vendors and artisans.

The following vendors were on hand over the weekend: Sunshine Cake Studio, Broken Rail, Stonetown Artisan Cheese, Aromatic Melts, Green Canoe Crochet, Cloth and Brush, John Muxlow Wood Turnings, Plush Toy Place, The Lucan Local, De Varenyk, Botanical Candles, Son of Mine Co., Stonetown Tallow & Glassy Girl, Lone Ark Woodworking, Grace & Greta Co., Permanent Jewelry by Kendyl MacIntyre,



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Eddie Glover and his dad, John Glover, had a great time cooking s'mores at the fire. It was one of the popular spots at the market.

Dani Elle Boutique and Stone Home Creatives.

There was a free shuttle from Milt Dunnell Field to the decorated King Family Christmas House, which hosted visits with Santa. Kids were able to deliver their letters to Santa right to the man in red themselves.

The St. Marys Kinsmen were collect-

ing toys and non-perishable food items for the Salvation Army. Families were also able to take in over 100 colourful holiday light displays spread throughout Milt Dunnell Field.

A big thank-you goes to the sponsors of the market: Tremblett's Your Independent Grocer, Andrew L Hodges Funeral Home and the St. Marys Kinsmen.



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Nataliia Shyshkiivska of De Varenyk was one of the vendors at the night time market selling some delicious Ukrainian traditional food.

7 Day Forecast

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The Hitching Post

SHUR-GAIN

Wednesday Dec-10th	Thursday Dec-11th	Friday Dec-12th	Saturday Dec-13th	Sunday Dec-14th	Monday Dec-15th	Tuesday Dec-16th
Snow/rain 2°C Feels like -4	Light snow -4°C Feels like -11	Sun & cloud -4°C Feels like -8	Light snow -7°C Feels like -14	Few flurries -9°C Feels like -18	Cloudy -8°C Feels like -15	Sun & cloud -6°C Feels like -9

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Christmas Fun at the King house over the weekend



Spending some time with Santa are the Anderson youngsters. From left to right are Beau, Bruce, Pete and Jack.



The Grinch wasn't happy that Santa arrived and kicked him out of his sleigh.



(MARK KING PHOTOS)

Santa posed with Grinch imposter Winston Westerveld.

MARK KING

Contributed Article

The King family, in partnership with the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys, once again welcomed the community to their display this year while hosting Santa for the weekend.

Children and adults were welcome to visit Santa, take pictures and drop off

their letters all while enjoying a cup of hot apple cider. The Kinsmen were on-site greeting all of the guests and also collecting toys or a non-perishable food item on behalf of the Salvation Army.

Over the past few years, this event has grown in popularity and is an extension of the Winter Market hosted by The Town of St. Marys at Milt Dunnel Field. A fun partnership has formed between

both events, which now combines them into one. The town generously provides a free Santa shuttle from the market to the Christmas House and back. This has created a one-of-a-kind Christmas experience and event for the entire community to enjoy!

The King family and The Kinsmen would like to thank Delmar Foods for donating all the apple cider and Cana-

dian Tire St. Marys for donating all of the candy canes for Santa to hand out. Also, a huge shoutout to the community for their generosity as they filled two large barrels full of food and toys and collected an additional \$349.50 in cash for the Salvation Army.

Merry Christmas!

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EDITORIAL

I think I’m ready for winter. Bring it on!

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

It may seem silly to say this when we’ve been blanketed with snow for several weeks, but I think I’m finally ready to admit winter is here to stay.

Though it feels like I only just admitted to myself fall had arrived and summer was over, I realized early on this year, after last winter’s deluge of snow and ice, the inevitable cold and snowy weather would arrive faster than I’d prefer.

In stark contrast to last winter, when Julia and I were forced to move at the end of January and we had no time to prepare our new home for winter, this year, we’ve done everything we can to prepare, no matter how much snow falls or how cold it gets.

Throughout the course of the year, and with the help of Julia’s dad, we made a few small but important upgrades to our home.

First and foremost, we built a new fence and gate, and installed a doggy door, that allows our dogs safe passage to and from the backyard to do their doggy business whenever they like. No more lacing up my boots, zipping up my coat and bundling up with gloves, toque and scarf to take them out when it’s cold enough to freeze tea as soon as it leaves the kettle (if you catch my drift).

Secondly, we reinforced our existing backyard fencing with wooden supports. It wasn’t long after we moved in last winter when we noticed the fences were leaning at an alarming angle – a problem that only got worse as the wind raged and snow continued to pile up. Whoever installed our fences used those stupid metal spikes to anchor the fence poles into the ground. We may need to replace our fence at some point, but for now, at least, we’re confident they’ll survive at least a few more winters.

We also got a new furnace. While this upgrade was more of a serendipitous hap-

penstance – it was replaced as part of an insurance claim for damage caused by ice damming last winter – we took the opportunity to pay a little more for a more energy efficient furnace that has already proved to be more effective at heating the house.

The permeation of snowmelt and groundwater into our basement was also something we contended with in the spring. While we weren’t in a position to dig trenches and install a sump pump as the house inspector suggested, I did take what I like to describe as a half measure by sealing the back wall of our basement with some waterproof paint. Sure, it’s not perfect, but I’ve already noticed our basement appears to be drier than it once was. We’ll have to wait see if it holds up against the spring melt, but I am confident the work I put in was better than doing nothing (which was my alternative at the time).

Finally, to prevent the ice damming that plagued so many homes this past winter and resulted in more than \$20,000 in repairs to our home (thank you, insurance), Julia and I installed heat-tracing cables along the back of our roof. The idea, according to one electrician I spoke with, is the heated cables keep ice from forming along the edge of the roof and inside the eavestrough and downspout. This allows melting snow to drain as it normally would instead of being forced by a build-up of ice caused by heat escaping from our kitchen into the cracks and crevices of our back wall, through our windows and into the basement as it did in February.

All of that combined with an electric snowblower gifted to me for my birthday, which has already made the job of clearing the driveway easier on my shoulder, has given me the confidence to declare our home ready for whatever winter may bring.

Now, let’s see what Mother Nature can throw at us to prove me wrong!

Overheard AT THE COFFEE SHOP

Sponsored by: *Tim Hortons.*
201 Queen St. E, St. Marys, ON 519.284.4555

Hands up if you
HATE the new
iPhone update!

Amazon driver wished
me a Merry Christmas;
it's like he thinks he
won't see me 10 more
times before Christmas!

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others?
Either email them to us at info@stmarysindependent.com with the title
"Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519.284.0041 or drop by the office to let us know!

Bravo	Boo
<p>We have 1 Bravo this week.</p> <p>1) Bravo to my barber (A.K) who tracked me down last week to return a \$100 bill I accidentally included in my payment for a haircut. Your honesty is sincerely appreciated!</p>	<p>We have 1 Boo this week.</p> <p>1) Shopping local would be a lot easier if deceptive techniques were not the norm on sale items at certain establishments.</p>
<p><small>*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.</small></p>	

Quote of the Week

"This year's WinterLights Night Market was truly magical down at Milt Dunnell Field. We saw fantastic attendance on both nights, significantly surpassing previous years, and the energy from our community and visitors was incredible. I'm so grateful to be able to help create an event that brings people together and welcomes tourists from near and far during the holiday season. Seeing everyone enjoy the experience is what makes it all worthwhile."

- Town of St. Marys tourism and events coordinator Morgan Easton on the success of the WinterLights Night Market.



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

St. Marys Independent

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Don't let the fear of losing be greater than the excitement of winning.

Stop worrying about what can go wrong, instead focus on what can go right.

The biggest lie about getting older is that growth and excitement end with youth.

It's not the situation, it's your reaction to the situation that makes the difference.

Spread cheer, not germs this holiday season

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

As the holiday season begins, Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is reminding residents of the actions they can take to reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19, influenza ("the flu") and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

There have been 13 respiratory illness outbreaks at long-term care and retirement homes in Huron-Perth since September, with two of those outbreaks currently ongoing, the local public health unit said in a press release.

"As more get-togethers and events happen heading into the holiday season, it is important to take precautions to reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses," HPPH medical officers of health Dr. Miriam Klassen said in the release.

"The best way to protect yourself, your family and the community is with immunization. In addition, stay home when sick and avoid visiting with those who may be at higher risk of severe illness due to respiratory viruses, including at hospitals and long-term care homes."

Ways to stay healthy and protect loved ones from illness this cold and flu season:

- Stay up to date on immunizations

- Wash hands often
- Stay home when sick
- Cover coughs and sneezes, and mask when needed
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and objects
- Improve indoor ventilation

All Ontario residents aged six months and older are eligible to receive influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. Residents should contact their health-care provider or local pharmacy to ask about receiving these vaccines.

Select high-risk groups are eligible to receive RSV immunization, including adults aged 75 and older. Eligible adults should contact their primary care provider about getting the vaccine.

Infants and high-risk children can get the RSV monoclonal antibody through hospital maternal child units and primary care providers.

HPPH is continuing to offer COVID-19 and influenza immunizations to children four years of age and younger who do not have a primary care provider. For more information and to make an appointment, contact the immunization team at 1-888-221-2133 ext. 3558.

To learn more about how to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, including information about immunizations, visit www.hpph.ca/illness.

STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



HOLIDAY BREAK DAY CAMPS

The PRC is offering a Holiday Break Day Camp weekdays on December 22, 23, 29, 30 2025 and January 2, 2026. These full-day programs are geared towards kids between the ages of 6 – 13 years old and include skating, crafts, outdoor play and more!

www.townofstmarys.ca/activenet

AN EVENING WITH AUSTEN EVENT

St. Marys Friendship Centre | Dec 16 | 6 - 8 PM

Join the St. Marys Public Library for a charming celebration of Jane Austen, filled with a lively discussion led by Professor Gabrielle Ceraldi, prizes, friendly competition and Austen-inspired delights!

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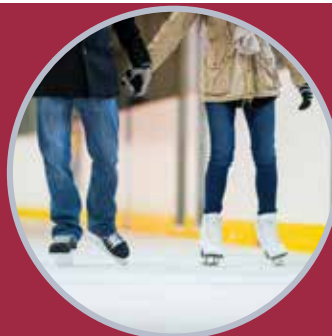
FREE FESTIVE SKATES

Pyramid Recreation Centre

Join free festive skate sessions this December at the PRC thanks to Optimists of Downie, Friends of the Library, and Queen St. Dentistry.

For dates and times visit:

www.discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays



CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAY SEASON

- WinterLights: Happening now until Jan 1
- Holiday Light Tour: Happening now until Jan 1
- Horse & Wagon Rides (6-8 PM): Dec 13, 20 & 24
- Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan: Dec 13

www.discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays



SHOWER PROGRAM

Pyramid Recreation Centre

This program provides free showers to those in need. Showers are private, secure and accessible for individuals of all abilities.

Visit Guest Services or call 519-284-2160



St. Marys Gives 2025

Won't You Be My Neighbour?



THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

St. Marys we **"CAUGHT YOU GIVING"** BIG TIME on Giving Tuesday, December 2nd!

There were 70 initiatives that "GAVE" to 30 different charities/organizations/families in our community! Together hundreds of people in St. Marys did something magical!

- Thousands of pounds of food were collected and donated!
- Baskets of socks, underwear and mittens were collected and donated!
- People gathered to make and share a meal in community!
- Thousands of dollars were collected and donated!
- Dollars were collected to help ensure pets have the care they need!
- Christmas cards were delivered and carols were sung!
- Our Green Bridge has been lit up for the holidays for the first time in decades!
- Boxes of hygiene products and baby needs were collected and donated!
- Toys, toys and more toys were collected and donated!
- This is just a "tiny" list of all of the magic that happened!

St. Marys, TOGETHER as a community, we did better than amazing, we showed up to help our neighbours and that matters!

On behalf of the St. Marys Giving Tuesday Committee, thank you from the bottom of our hearts! Better Together Always!

GIVING TUESDAY

SAVE THE DATE!
DEC 1
2025



For more information contact jdockertjohnson@gmail.com | www.CanadaHelps.org/en/givingtuesday

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Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Peter McAsh. Peter was born in Woodstock and grew up in Owen Sound. He attended University of Western Ontario for an undergrad and Bed. As a geography major he was hired in 1979 to teach computers at DCVI and never left. Peter is the proud parent of Laura, who is publishing a book available in January. He is the self-appointed IT person for Rotary Club of St. Marys. He has volunteered from day one with Nourish Market and also volunteers at the Community Closet. You will see him riding around town on his e-bike.

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

We caught you giving and this is why it matters



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Candice Harris and Judy Greig from Harris-Greig Automotive were caught giving. The garage held a silent auction with 38 items up for bid and all proceeds going to the ALS Society and Judy Grieg's sister, Jane, who is bravely fighting and living with ALS.

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Giving Tuesday on Dec. 2 was another one for the books. The efforts of the hardworking committee paid off in spades as the community banded together to make the day one to remember. There were over 70 initiatives by businesses and groups that benefited over 30 charities, organizations and individuals. “In true St. Marys fashion, the community came together for Giving Tuesday and gave of their hearts,” Giving Tuesday St. Marys committee member Julie Docker-Johnson said. “So many people benefited and not just the recipients. Those giving benefit as much as



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Glen Shackleton was caught donating to the Salvation Army Kettle on Giving Tuesday.

those receiving.” The Giving Tuesday committee will have a debrief in January and go over what worked and what didn’t. Planning will start in June for next year’s day. They will meet once a month from June to September and then twice a month leading up to it. This year’s theme of “Caught you Giving” was a huge hit and was a great way to get the word out for those who want to contribute but weren’t really sure how to get involved, said Docker-Johnson. It is great to see so many people going out of their way to help others, especially during the trying times we live in. It truly shows the strength and love of our great town.

WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

SPONSORED BY: The Wine Lab
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1. The Four Horsemen of the _____ appear in the Book of Revelation.
2. What is the 2nd largest Hawaiian island?
3. What year were seatbelts made mandatory in Canada?
4. What do Americans commonly call Emmental cheese?
5. The flowers on the St John’s Wort are which color?
6. Who originally sang “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”?
7. What year was the Toonie introduced?
8. What part of the body is affected by glaucoma?
9. What is the capital of Norway?
10. Which star guided the three kings to Baby Jesus?

This week’s answers are found on pg. 35

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BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

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Troyer's Spices donates \$751 worth of spices to The Local Community Food Centre for Giving Tuesday

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

When Dan Troyer, owner of Troyer's Spices in St. Marys, dropped off donations of spices and chives at Stratford's Local Community Food Centre, he saw the excitement from the organization.

"One of the ladies said, 'Oh, we just ran out of chives and so happy to see that.' We've got lots of chives, so they were very happy and excited," Troyer said.

He donated two baskets of spices with chives on top, worth \$751, to the Local Community Food Centre. The donations came from a Giving Tuesday campaign at Troyer's Spices where customers could purchase oregano, chives, onion powder, ground cumin and/or Spanish paprika to be donated to the Local Community Food Centre. For every donation, Troyer's Spices would add another.

"We're very happy with our customer turnout supporting the Local Community Food Centre. It feels great. It's definitely worthwhile," Troyer said.

The Local Community Food Centre, partnered with the United Way Perth-Huron, provides services such as kitchen skills, garden skills, community kitchens and meals, and low-cost community food markets, including the Nourish Market at the St. Marys United Church every first and third Thursday of the month from 2-4 p.m.

Margaret Smart, executive director of the Local Community Food Centre, said the generous donation exceeded her expectations.

"You can just imagine how that's going to impact both our ability. We then can put that towards food and we can also make that food delicious with all



their spices. It's incredible," she said. "We had such an incredible, generous Giving Tuesday. It was amazing to see."

The donated spices will be regularly used by chefs for the community meals provided by The Local. This past year, the organization provided 17,920 meals to members of the community.

"As we come into a new year, we have more and more people showing up for our community meals," Smart said.

There's also a growing need for the Nourish Market and Stratford's Community Access Markets, which provide food at wholesale prices.

"People are just so appreciating being able to access really good food at really affordable prices, so that's another place where some of that Giving Tuesday will help us to continue to support those markets because we sell our food at cost and so any donations go toward our operating costs," Smart said.

Knowing that times have been financially difficult for many, Smart appreciates the continued generosity of the community.

"I know that things can be tight right now for so many people, and yet the way that people continue to show up for one another and this whole Giving Tuesday is such an example of that," she said.

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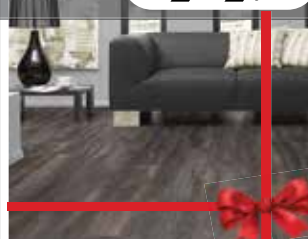
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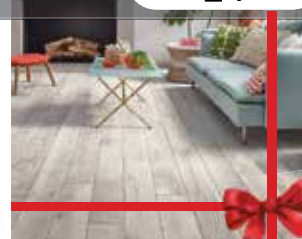
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WATERPROOF LAMINATE

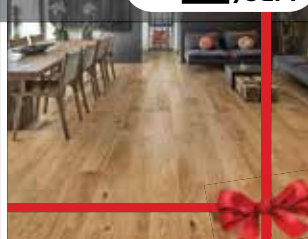
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HARDWOOD

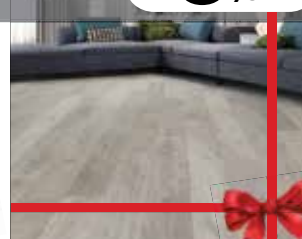
CLICK ENG. HARDWOOD

MODERN STYLES IN STOCK **\$299** FROM /SQFT



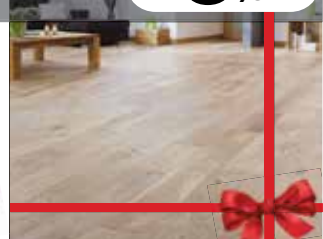
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3/4" THICK IN STOCK **\$399** FROM /SQFT



WHITE OAK HARDWOOD

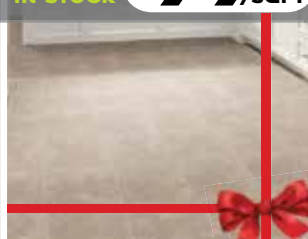
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Committee officially struck for New Community Commons at 14 Church capital campaign



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

St. Marys Public Library CEO Sarah Andrews (centre) and library board chair Dr. Cole Atlin (right) discuss the importance of developing a capital campaign for the New Community Commons project at 14 Church St. N that is primarily driven by the community.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

The New Community Commons capital campaign advisory committee held its first meeting at the St. Marys Public Library Dec. 3.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

supporting the cause.

"We're very excited to get this project launched," Andrews said, kicking off the meeting. "Across the street, (14 Church St. N) was purchased several years ago by the town, and (the library) was one of the first groups in town to be approached about it. We've had multiple years of discussing what we would potentially do with the space across the street, and we have a fairly well-developed plan that's come together, working with the town, to determine what allocations of space could happen.

"... That went to council and, just a few months ago, council gave us the go ahead for us to explore this project further, but one of the issues that was raised fairly quickly was what the cost of this project is going to be on the tax base, and we are trying to keep the tax base's debt on this as low as possible. So, it was suggested to (the library), as the anchor tenant of the building, that we perhaps launch a fundraising campaign."

With preliminary estimates as to how much it will cost the town to renovate the building's interior in accordance

with the Community Commons master plan approved by council in August ranging between \$4 million and \$5 million, and other potential funding sources identified including funding from the town's development charges reserve and as-of-yet unidentified government grants, Andrews said it will fall to the capital campaign advisory committee to come up with a fundraising goal, identify and approach potential donors for support, plan and host fundraiser events and activities, promote the campaign and celebrate contributions from the community, and encourage community buy-in for the project as a whole.

Though the committee does not have any real decision-making power of its own – it will make recommendations to the library board's fundraising committee, and the library board will consider and refine those recommendations before bringing them to council for consideration – Andrews and library board chair Dr. Cole Atlin said it is important for the capital campaign advisory committee to be primarily community driven to help residents understand the importance of the space at 14 Church St. N for the library and other town depart-

ments, organizations, businesses, services clubs and individuals.

"The library is bursting," Andrews said. "Based on a consultant's report, we need 2,800 more square feet than we have now, today, never mind in the future. The proximity of the project to our building is just so perfect because it means staff are not getting in vehicles to drive to the (Pyramid Recreation Centre) to staff space, or wherever. Other town departments are also pinched for space. The Friendship Centre can't program more than they do. There is a need for community space that is no cost or low cost for the Rotary Club or for knitting circles or for Amnesty International or the art group. The library is really the only space where people can meet.

"... The more space we have, the more the community is using us. We have quite a number of community groups that are accessing our space, and it becomes a matter of adult learning can't function when the classroom is being used by the Law Society of Ontario, so they have to go elsewhere or we have to decline the rental. If somebody wants to use the Makerspace and there's a confidential meeting with (the Canadian

Mental Health Association), they can't. So, we're to that point with library programs, generally, where we're out of space."

Though the committee opted not to appoint a chair at the Dec. 3 meeting in hopes the project can draw more interest and participation from the community at its next meeting, members did lend their support to the library board getting the ball rolling by approaching local insurance companies and banks, as well as services clubs, to try and solicit early financial commitments to the project.

The committee also discussed how donors, businesses, service clubs and other organizations might be recognized at 14 Church St. N for their contributions. While a number of suggestions were discussed, no decision was made.

The New Community Commons capital campaign advisory committee will meet again on Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. upstairs at the library. Members have once again extended an invitation to anyone in the community interested in supporting the project either by serving on the committee or supporting it financially.

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Former deputy warden and West Perth deputy mayor accepts the gavel as Perth County warden

Dean Trentowsky and Sue Orr elected as Perth County warden and deputy warden respectively



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Newly acclaimed Perth County Warden Dean Trentowsky delivers his first official remarks of the 2026 county council term.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Introduced by county clerk Tyler Sager (left), newly acclaimed Perth County deputy warden Sue Orr prepares to declare her oath of office.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Chair of the Perth County Past Wardens Association Bob Wilhelm (right) pins the past-wardens pin on past warden Doug Kellum.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

pick up that brush together, dive into the paints and, together, let's paint a picture in 2026 – a masterpiece we can all be proud of."

Also elected at the ceremony Dec. 4, county councillor and Perth South interim mayor Sue Orr took over from Trentowsky as deputy warden for the 2026 term of county council.

The warden's election is held annually on the first Thursday of December. The warden and deputy warden are elected by their peers on county council, which is made up of council representatives from each of Perth County's lower-tier municipalities – West Perth, North Perth, Perth East and Perth South.

Though it has been past practice for council to agree on their nominees for the position before the election, should there be more than one candidate for each position, councillors would vote

on their preferred options at the election itself.

The election is also an opportunity for local dignitaries to recommit to collaborating with Perth County council and staff on shared priorities in the year ahead. During this year's election, Perth-Wellington MP John Nater attended the ceremony virtually from Ottawa, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae delivered his congratulations to the new warden and deputy warden by video, and Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma and St. Marys Mayor Al Strathdee attended in person.

"I want to thank the County of Perth for your collaboration and partnership over the years," Ritsma said. "... When we talk about our relationship with the county, whether it's the shared services that we collaborate with, the trade and investment trips to countries like Japan, Germany and France, cultivating oppor-

tunities for both the county, city and St. Marys, or working together to promote PC Connect – the connection between the rural part of the county and our urban, and then the first and last mile to places like Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, etc. – we know that working together will benefit our residents and our businesses."

"We have a longstanding relationship with the county; we appreciate the partnership," Strathdee said. "As everyone knows – there's probably provincial legislation that passed this morning that no one knows what it means again – the change is rapid and very tough for staff. So, sincerely, we appreciate the efforts and emergency services and shared services. I also think that, given the changes in the political climate, now more than ever it's important that we work together to move forward because it seems critical mass is important for the

government when we talk about housing and grants and so forth. It's important more now than ever that we try and work together and be on the same page."

In addition to the local dignitaries, members of the Perth County Past Wardens Association were on hand to congratulate both Kellum on a job well done and Trentowsky and Orr on their new positions as the heads of council. Past warden, chair of the Perth County Past Wardens Association and Perth South deputy mayor Bob Wilhelm officially presented the past-wardens pin to Kellum in recognition of his service to the county.

Following the election, members of county council, county staff and special guests enjoyed a short reception before the first county council meeting of the 2026 term under the leadership of Trentowsky and Orr officially commenced.



Community Liaison Committee

The next Community Liaison Committee Meeting will be held on **Thursday, December 11th** at 6:00pm at the St. Marys Municipal Operations Center. Members of the public who wish to observe are welcome to attend.

Residents who wish to speak in front of the Committee may submit a detailed request in writing to the Committee. The request will be considered by the Committee and approved prior to the meeting.

Please submit all requests, questions, and concerns for the meeting to kara.pelissero@vcimentos.com by **Tuesday, December 9th at 10am.**

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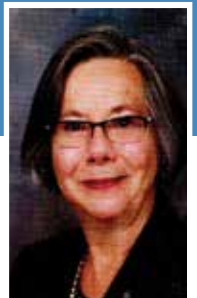
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Friends of the Library invites locals to free community skate events

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

Thanks to St. Marys' Friends of the Library (FOL), the community holiday spirit will take to the ice on upcoming free-skate days.

FOL has invited the community to join in on a free skate on Dec. 23 and 30 at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC) from 3-4:20 p.m.

"We've done this several times over the years, and it's always a great opportunity to get our name out there and remind people that we're here as part of the community," said FOL chair Reg Quinton. "It's also a chance for us to give back and show our appreciation. The library is an important community resource, and in the same way, the community is incredibly important to us."

Quinton said skating allows family members to gather during the Christmas break. He added sponsoring a free skate is a good way to appeal to locals who are off during the holidays.

Quinton explained the initiative appeals to two sides of the community; it appeals to those who want to support the St. Marys Public Library, as well as those who just want to get out on the ice for some great fun and exercise.

St. Marys BIA chair Megan Feeney, who has been an FOL member since

May, said it's the people on the board and volunteers that drive this initiative.

"There's so much passion and care behind it, and it provides a warmth for the community to embrace," she said.

"I hope people come out and have some fun with their families and friends," added Quinton. "We'll have volunteers on hand to share information about the Friends of the Library for anyone interested in getting involved," said Quinton. "To get involved, people can stop by the library, send us an email, or find us on Facebook; we're always happy to welcome new volunteers."

Quinton said FOL started over three decades ago with friends sitting around a table with a mission to help the library. He added the group has grown over the years, but the (friends) aspect of the group continues to remain as a major value within the FOL's structure.

"We host book sales in the spring and fall, and we also hold monthly socials at the library," he said. "Throughout the year, we're involved in all sorts of little projects to support the library. They often come to us for help with funding or events, and we're always happy to step up."

"Our mission has always been to support the library through advocacy and fundraising."



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Megan Feeney, St. Marys BIA board chair and Friends of the Library (FOL) member, and Reg Quinton, FOL chair, at the Pyramid Recreation Centre.

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Library drop-in programs bring social interaction and build new friendships

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

There's always something to do at the St. Marys Public Library thanks to the diverse array of drop-in programming available nearly every day of the week.

The St. Marys Public Library runs drop-in programs for locals to enjoy, from the weekly Wednesday Mahjong nights to the monthly Write of Way. Programs offer the community a variety of activities to indulge in.

Library clerk and programming/marketing department facilitator Laura McAsh said the drop-in programs offer locals an opportunity to leave the house and socialize with each other. She said members of the Mahjong group have formed strong friendships by gathering weekly.

"They really just bonded over this game, and they bring snacks to the sessions, which is fantastic," said McAsh. "From a social aspect, these drop-in programs are very beneficial. A lot of people say that they will make a special trip out of the house to come to these meetups."

McAsh said the library will launch a BeaverBot Cutter Crafts for children to



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

A sneak peek at the Wednesday Mahjong nights at the St. Marys Public Library.

use in the Makerspace. Debuting on Dec. 23, the BeaverBot is a safe, easy-to-use cardboard cutter, helping kids make their crafts in a safe environment.

BeaverBot drop-ins will be from 1-7 p.m. on Dec. 23 and from 10:30 a.m. to 4

p.m. on Jan. 2, 2026.

"It's a very innovative and great way for kids to make crafts. Seeing how that goes, we'll move forward with it in the new year as well," said McAsh. "It's always exciting to introduce something

creative that gets kids engaged and using their imagination. The goal is to keep offering fresh, hands-on activities that bring families together and make learning fun."

Starting on Jan. 10, 2026, the library will bring back its Dungeons and Dragons program, which will run every Saturday at 10 a.m. McAsh said that program is newcomer-friendly, allowing new players to learn from the group about the rules of the game.

Learn to Play Bridge will run every Monday starting in January from 1-3 p.m.

"It's run by an experienced Bridge volunteer," said McAsh. "It's such a rewarding game once you've learned the basics and start to master it. There's a real sense of accomplishment that comes with it, and it's also a great way to challenge your mind, meet new people and enjoy a few hours of friendly competition each week."

The next Edith's Storytime Adventures will run on Jan. 17, 2026, at 10 a.m. and will continue on one Saturday every month.

'Not Ok': Optimism Place urges families to look out for loved ones this holiday season

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Independent Reporter

The holiday season is often seen as a time of joy and togetherness. But for many people living with domestic violence, it can bring added stress, isolation and an increased risk of harm.

Donna Jean Forster, executive director of Optimism Place, says the holidays are an important time to check in on family and friends who may be struggling. She says silence is never the right response when you're concerned about someone's safety, and learning how to reach out can make a difference.

"An abusive pattern is isolation, so being able to break that isolation by having people be comfortable talking about it is vital," said Forster.

While emergency shelter is available when needed, Forster said most women access Optimism Place's services without entering shelter.

"For the most part, the people we serve don't ever come into shelter, and they can access supports from their home," she said. "Even if it's an abusive relationship, we can still go to where they are and serve them that way."

The holidays can also create natural moments for private conversations with loved ones. Forster is asking area residents to pay attention to how partners interact.

"People are often on their best be-



haviour when they're in a family setting sometimes, but I think there are things that you can notice in relationships," she said. "Like, how do they talk to each other? How does he speak to her? Is he putting her down? Is he not letting her talk to other family members? Is he questioning her right after she talks to someone else? Is he controlling what she eats or how much she eats? Is he paying extra attention to her? Does he want to keep her separate from her family members? Those are some of the initial early signs to watch for."

To build a safer community, Forster says learning how to talk to loved ones and creating space for honest conversations is essential.

Four steps to support a loved one:

1. Ask them to reflect on whether their partner:

- Puts them down, embarrasses them or shames them
- Prevents contact with family or friends, or interferes with work
- Leaves them "walking on eggshells" about where they are or who they're with
- Accuses them of cheating or checks their phone
- Threatens to harm themselves, them, children, family members or pets

2. Listen without judgment

- The instinct may be to encourage them to leave, but Forster says the most important first step is to listen and validate.
- "I'm so sorry this is happening to yo," is often the safest response, she notes.

Keep the focus on their feelings and needs, not on their relationship status.

3. Create a safety plan

- Work together on a plan that might include a code word to signal danger, a safe place to go, emergency contacts, possible transportation and financial supports. A safety bag can include toiletries, medications, identification, a phone charger and a change of clothes.

4. Guide them to support

- Optimism Place offers a 24/7 support line at 519-271-5550 for women, family members and friends. Staff can provide shelter, transportation, legal support, referrals and safety planning. Calling can provide guidance on what steps to take next.

Optimism Place launched its "Not Ok" campaign on Nov. 25 to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, kicking off 16 days of global activism. The long-term campaign highlights warning signs of intimate partner violence.

"Our staff are available all the time to answer these calls," Forster said. "And we would rather answer these calls to support people than have people uproot their lives and have something really terrible happen. Being able to support people early and often is really important."

For more information on how to help someone, visit itsnotok.ca/i-want-to-help-someone/. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.

Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation recruiting new board members

SPCCF needs four to six board members to help with philanthropic giving

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation (SPCCF), an organization dedicated to philanthropic giving and serving as the steward of funds earmarked for local charitable causes, is looking for new board members to support its mission across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County.

For more than 20 years, the SPCCF has supported charitable organizations through grants made possible by the responsible management of endowment funds. As the foundation continues to evolve to meet emerging needs, the board is looking for people who bring insight from community involvement, hands-on experience and a willingness to think creatively about local challenges and opportunities.

“We’re really open to four to six (new board members) at this time, and actually, if we have candidates who are really qualified, it could be more than that,”

said Lee Anne Andriessen, a director on the SPCCF board and chair of the governance and nominations committee. “We do have some retiring directors, so we’re trying to stay ahead of the game in terms of being prepared that way. We’re actually operating at a minimum amount of directors and we’d like to get into a higher number. Sadly, one of our directors passed away in July – Don Hathaway passed away – so we were really sad about that.”

“Typically, directors are at that retirement age and everyone takes on so much to some degree. A lot of them have already given three to four years, so it’s fair when people want to move on to other things.”

SPCCF board members are volunteers and they typically meet six to 10 times annually, though Andriessen says participation goes beyond the boardroom as she and her fellow members serve on committees of the board, attend funding announcements and other events, and work within their own community con-

nections to identify potential donors, as well as charities and other organizations that could benefit from the funding SPCCF has available.

Andriessen said the board is seeking members with experience that complements the work SPCCF does, whether that’s legal, insurance, finance, or business, experience working with charities and non-profit organizations, a background in long-term planning, policy development and governance, community leadership, and everything in between. While she says candidates are not required to demonstrate experience in all of these sectors, the board is looking to build a team in which each of its members bring something different to the table.

“We’re also looking for people who have their finger on the pulse of the community and what our needs are because our foundation gives money away – we grant out money,” Andriessen said, noting SPCCF manages and grows funds totalling \$10 million. “So, it would be

nice to know, from other people’s perspective, what is top of mind. Is it housing, is it food security, is it youth? ... Some people who work in different aspects of community life have a really good way of drilling down into what’s needed.”

While Andriessen says it can be easy to find potential board members in Stratford, she’s hoping to see applicants from both St. Marys and across Perth County.

“It is a county foundation that actually allocates money across the county, from North Perth to St. Marys, Perth East, Perth South, West Perth,” she said. “We need to have voices from all those corners because when you have voices from all those corners, you have a better sense of what are those needs, and also knowing people who can contribute to foundation financially, too.”

Interested applicants are being asked to fill out an online application form at spccf.ca before 5 p.m. Jan. 5, 2026, and selected candidates will be contacted for an interview.

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Salvation Army prepares for Christmas Hamper handouts

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

For those who want to register for a Christmas hamper, the Salvation Army is encouraging locals to sign up sooner rather than later.

The Salvation Army Stratford-St. Marys Regional Community Ministries Christmas Hamper handouts will take place at St. Marys United Church, 85 Church St. S, from Dec. 16-22. The final date for registration will be Dec. 22. Those who wish to have a hamper delivered to them can contact the Friendship Centre at 519-284-3272 and Friendship Centre volunteers will arrange for a delivery date and time.

Salvation Army community and family services manager Jennifer Morris says people who would like a hamper are encouraged to register as soon as possible due to possible item shortages. The food bank will be closed throughout December but will remain open to accepting donations. People looking to collect items from the food bank can

only do so by registering for a Christmas Hamper.

A Christmas Hamper packing event took place last week, which had community volunteers, Salvation Army staff and St. Marys Rotarians packaging food and toys to prepare for distribution. Hamper boxes were donated by Cascades Containerboard Packaging.

"The Christmas energy our volunteers bring was truly inspiring. It's amazing to see everyone come together with so much heart and joy," said Morris. "I've always loved Christmas myself; there's just something about the atmosphere, the kindness, the generosity, the sense of togetherness that makes it so special."

"One of our clients told me that what we do here is her Christmas, and that really stayed with me. It's moments like these that remind me why we do this, to make sure everyone feels a bit of warmth and care during the holidays."

Morris is hoping the Christmas Hamper program will support around 130 local families.



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Community volunteers come together on Dec. 2 to pack hampers for locals in need.

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St. Marys council approves updated emergency response plan

Last plan update was approved in 2020

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

During a special meeting of council Dec. 2, St. Marys council approved an updated version of the town's emergency response plan.

The Town of St. Marys' emergency response plan is a public document that provides guidance to town decision makers as to when an emergency is declared and by whom, how to manage the response and communicate with the public, and when to declare an emergency over. According to a report to council by director of emergency services and Fire Chief Phil West and asset management manager Jeff Wolfe, the town partnered with Perth County and its four lower-tier municipalities in 2021 to hire a consultant to review their emergency management plans.

From that review, several recommendations were made to improve compliance and consistency between neighbouring municipalities. One of the recommendations was related to updating the town's emergency response plan so it is consistent with the requirements of the Incident Management Sys-

tem (IMS) and is similar to the plans of neighbouring municipalities to optimize cooperation during an emergency.

"Our document was written very much the same as our neighbours' documents were written," Wolfe said. "We all sort of work together to come up with a template so that when, inevitably, we're responding to an emergency and it's not specifically geolocated to St. Marys, people from Perth South can help us and we can help them, and when we're going through it, it's going to be a very similar read so we're not trying to learn something necessarily new. We basically know where all the information is located within the document and what to expect the document to require of us when we're helping each other."

Though the plan includes confidential appendices that contain names and cell phone numbers of people who would be contacted in the event of an emergency, as well as other detailed response information, which are updated on a weekly or monthly basis whenever that information changes, the public portion of the town's emergency preparedness plan hasn't been updated since 2020.

Included in that portion of the plan, in

accordance with the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, is:

- Guidance on when the town would call together its emergency control group;
- Considerations for declaring an emergency;
- Roles, responsibilities and expectations of staff and third parties in an emergency;
- Guidance on how the emergency operations centre operates during an emergency;
- Hazard identification and risk assessment of potential emergencies the town may encounter;
- A list of critical infrastructure supporting the community;
- Contact information of relevant people and organizations to be called upon in an emergency;
- Financial recovery options available through the Province of Ontario; and
- Program administration aspects related to ensuring compliance with provincial legislation.

"It's a document that was meant to be written in a way that's easy to understand, it's easy to follow, it answers the questions that (we would) typically have

at a high level when (we're) trying to respond," Wolfe said. "What it doesn't do, though, is get into sort of the very minute details of an operational requirement during an emergency. So, it's not going to tell community services at the (Pyramid Recreation Centre) where to set up tables; they're going to have all that type of information separately from a document like this."

"This very much guides us when something comes up and we're not really sure whether to consider it an emergency, and how to start our response. It's mostly revolving around a higher-level response where it's guiding our management of how we're supporting emergency response."

Keeping this emergency response plan up to date, along with public-awareness efforts and annual emergency exercises and training, is legislatively required by the province, Wolfe said.

To read St. Marys' emergency preparedness plan in its entirety, visit www.townofstmarys.com/home-property-roads/emergency-preparedness/emergency-response-plan/.

St. Marys Museum hosts holiday open house



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

The St. Marys Museum held their annual holiday open house on Sunday, Dec. 7. Pictured above are Emily Taylor, acting curator and archivist, and Amy Cubberley, director of culture, tourism and engagement, on hand to direct the activities which included a silent auction, crafts for children and refreshments of hot apple cider and cookies.

Koats for Kids a huge success for the community



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Marlene Forman and Evelyn Albers show just a few of the coats that were donated through the Lions program, Koats for Kids. The storefront at 83 Queen St. W is still open until Dec. 13 for those in need of some warm winter coats, mitts and hats. According to Albers, there were more coats for the younger kids donated this year, which was needed. The Lions Club was very happy with how many coats, mitts and hats were dropped off at the banks and then generously cleaned by Forman at Cascade Cleaners.

Crafting Swiss-inspired excellence at Stonetown Artisan Cheese

GARY WEST

Independent Reporter

Stonetown Artisan Cheese has become one of Perth County's standout agricultural success stories – a farm-based operation where Swiss tradition, Canadian craftsmanship and premium Holstein milk come together to create some of the province's most distinctive artisan cheeses.

Located just west of St. Marys near Rannoch, Hans and Yolanda Weber have built their business from the ground up since immigrating from Switzerland in 1996. With generations of dairying and cheese-making knowledge behind them, they brought both passion and purpose to their new life in Canada.

After purchasing their farm, the Webers established a modern free-stall barn and milking parlour and began producing high-quality milk from their purebred Holstein herd. But from the start, they held onto a bigger dream: crafting artisan cheeses on-farm using recipes and methods inspired by their Swiss roots.

In 2015, that vision became reality when they constructed their cheese plant and retail shop just steps from the barn – close enough for Grade A milk to be piped directly into production at peak freshness. They also recruited a Swiss cheese maker to help refine their techniques, setting the foundation for the handcrafted

cheeses now synonymous with the Stonetown name.

The early years required grit, patience, and a belief in the product.

"If it was easy, everyone would want to do it," Hans Weber says, reflecting on the determination it took to build a market for farm-made cheese.

That commitment is now unmistakably reflected in their products – including Wildwood, a signature Swiss-inspired cheese made entirely from milk produced right on the farm. And this year, Stonetown earned national attention when Wildwood received top honours in its category at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto, a recognition that underscores the quality and craftsmanship behind the Weber family operation.

The Royal results were a proud moment, but Hans Weber emphasizes that the heart of their business remains the same: tradition, consistency and making cheese that customers love. The on-farm retail store has become a favourite stop for locals and visitors, especially during the holiday season when Stonetown assembles hundreds of gift baskets and boxes filled with artisan cheeses and local products. The Webers invite customers to visit, sample their cheeses and learn about the craft that has shaped their journey from Switzerland to Perth County – and continues to define their family-run business today.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The Stonetown Artisan Cheese team stands with Wildwood, the Swiss-inspired cheese that earned top honours in its category at this year's Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. From left, Ramon Eberle (head cheese maker and part owner), Christine Stevens (customer service) and owner-cheesemaker Hans Weber.



To St. Marys with Love fosters community and festive spirit



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTOS)

The St. Marys with Love community dinner was held at the Pyramid Recreation Centre on Sunday, Dec. 7. Over 400 people attended to enjoy the excellent food and entertainment. Special thanks go to Rev. Gwen Ament and Dave Steward along with the 80 volunteers who made this event such a success. Three special volunteers, pictured above right, were Perth-Wellington MP John Nater, his daughter, Ainsley, and Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae.



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Perth South council makes annual Christmas bonus for township staff policy going forward

Full-time township staff to receive \$100; part-timers get \$50

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In recognition of the hard work township staff put in each year, Perth South council has turned a nearly 15-year tradition of giving staff annual Christmas bonuses into a policy that will see that tradition continue without council approval going forward.

At the Dec. 2 council meeting, Perth South councillors considered formalizing the township's practice of awarding Christmas bonuses in the amount of \$100 for permanent full-time employees and \$50 for permanent part-time employees into policy.

"After discussing this with Mayor (Sue) Orr, she had indicated that it's good to maybe change our way of doing the Christmas bonus for staff so that it doesn't have to come to every meeting each year at the end of the year," township clerk Lizet Scott told councillors. "... This is an item that council, since I've been here since 2011, has granted each year."

Each year, council has considered and approved a staff Christmas bonus as a gesture of appreciation for municipal

staff. This bonus is paid on the final pay of the year. Historically, the bonus was \$50 for permanent full-time employees and \$25 for permanent part-time employees, but in 2020, council increased the bonus to \$100 for permanent full-time staff and \$50 for permanent part-time staff.

The total budget for Christmas bonuses each year since 2020 has been \$1,400.

"The point of the bonus, which I think everybody agrees on, is that staff will feel valued and stay longer, work better and speak positively," Orr said. "It's not the size of the bonus, it's the message that the work is noticed."

"So, we're not disagreeing that everybody gets this bonus, it's just the conversation we have every year. ... We've been doing this since before 2011 and we've never said no."

Speaking in favour of the staff recommendation, Coun. Jaime Martin also noted the importance of this bonus in helping to retain staff, and suggested a formalized policy would make the process more efficient for council and staff.

Deputy mayor Bob Wilhelm and Coun. Jim Van Nes, on the other hand, noted they were a little concerned about

taking the decision to award a bonus to staff each year away from future councils, with Van Nes noting he enjoys the annual conversation about how much council values staff.

Ultimately, council voted to approve a

staff Christmas bonus policy.

"And Coun. Van Nes, you are quite welcome to put your comments forward (about staff) on the last day (each year)," Scott said, laughing, after council voted to approve the policy.



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STRATFORD NISSAN



80 coyote sightings and encounters reported in first year of Perth County tracking and education program

No formal predation program to manage coyote population recommended at this time

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Residents of Perth County's four lower-tier municipalities, Stratford and St. Marys reported a total of 80 coyote sightings and encounters in the first year of Perth County's coyote tracking and public-education program.

After county council instructed staff early last year to launch and promote a web portal at www.perthcounty.ca/coyotes, which was officially launched in November 2024, that includes both a coyote-sighting form allowing residents to report coyotes online, and information on how to safely live alongside coyotes and what to do during a coyote encounter, county staff presented the data collected as of Oct. 31 of this year to county council at its regular meeting Dec. 4.

"Since launch, we've received over 3,000 views to the page and the form linked on the page offers residents an easy way to report sightings and provides public information on how to safely coexist with coyotes," county communications officer Sarah Franklin said. "... As of Oct. 31 this year, 80 sighting

reports were submitted; 72 of those were considered to be sightings, eight encounters (with people or pets) and zero concerns about sick or injured animals.

"Reports came in from across the county with higher numbers in more populated areas, likely as there are more people present to observe them."

Some of the reports submitted through the county website indicated sightings or encounters with multiple coyotes. Additionally, reports could be submitted by multiple people who saw the same coyote.

Breaking those numbers down further:

- The highest number of individual coyotes seen in a single month was 80 in November 2024 with 28 reports submitted online;

- The lowest number of coyotes reported in a single month was zero in August 2025 with no reports submitted; and

- There were 38 coyotes sighted in North Perth, 53 in Perth East, 14 in Perth South, 20 in West Perth, 43 in Stratford and three in St. Marys;

Additionally, in the eight reported encounters with coyotes:

- Coyotes observed near chicken en-

closures commonly resulted in an interaction with a pet;

- There were two reports of a coyote observed in close proximity to a home – in one instance, the coyote had to be verbally discouraged from moving closer;

- There were two reports of a coyote moving towards a dogwalker in an urban area; and

- There was a close encounter with a coyote when a person was hiking on a local trail, but they were able to scare the animal away with loud noises.

Prior to the launch of this program by the county, there was no method for tracking coyotes in Perth County except for when farmers reported coyote interactions with livestock through the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program run by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

"I wonder if, down the road, there is an avenue we should be looking at further, and I guess my question is, are there any counties surrounding us that actually have a bounty or some type of reimbursement for coyotes?" Coun. Walter McKenzie asked.

In response, county CAO Lori Wolfe said council had considered a formal

program for the management of coyotes last year prior to council approving the tracking and public-education program. At the time, she said the county did not have enough data to justify a predation program similar to the one in Huron County.

While both Wolfe and McKenzie suggested that, should coyote sightings and encounters escalate in future years, there may be cause to consider such a program, Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz cautioned against offering a bounty on coyotes.

"A bounty could bring a lot of problems," she said. "When you put bounties on them, you have people coming into the area, coming onto people's property. Sometimes they just cut the ear off of the animal to prove that they got it and leave the carcasses all over farmers' properties. Bounties will cause a whole lot of issues."

Ehgoetz did note that coyote hunting is permitted in some areas of the county, and both her husband and Coun. Jerry Smith cull between 40 and 50 coyotes each year.

Perth County Holstein Club draws strong crowd despite stormy weather



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A large group of Perth County Holstein breeders gathered at the Vink family's dairy facility for the meeting and election of directors.

GARY WEST

Independent Reporter

Members of the Perth County Holstein Breeders' Association gathered recently for their annual meeting at the impressive new robotic dairy facility operated by Brian, Cory and Claire Vink of Vinksland Holsteins near St. Paul's Station in

Perth South.

Despite stormy weather, the turnout was exceptional with breeders from across the county taking the opportunity to tour the modern barn and connect with fellow producers.

County Holstein clubs across Ontario exist to promote the breeding and sale of

registered Holstein cattle while fostering cooperation, friendship and shared learning among members. They support the work of the Ontario Holstein Branch and Holstein Association of Canada, and place a strong emphasis on youth engagement through programs such as 4-H dairy clubs.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A high-quality TMR ration is mixed daily to support strong production in the Vinksland herd.

The current Perth County Holstein Breeders executive includes past president TJ DeWit, president Sjoerd Kemmere, first vice-president Luis Velazquez and second vice-president Geoff McMullen. Emma Payne continues to serve as club secretary and may be contacted at infopchc@gmail.com.

St. Marys Rotarians return home after Kenya trip



St. Marys Rotarian Peter McAsh feeding a rhino.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



Members of the Rotary Club of St. Marys in Kenya.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

Local Rotarians arrived back in Canada recently after a successful Kits for Kenya project.

Kits for Kenya is an international Rotary Club of St. Marys initiative where local Rotarians travel to Mugoiri Secondary School, located north of Nairobi, Kenya. Departing early last month, six Rotarians and four of their spouses flew across the world to improve the school's bathroom, paint classrooms, set up a computer lab and distribute laptops as

well as feminine hygiene products.

The project was pitched by longtime Rotarian and project leader Andrew Middleton, who saw a need to improve the quality of life for the 450 students between the ages of 12 and 16 of Mugoiri Secondary School.

"Two years ago, I was in Kenya and I have good friends there. We visited the school that they went to, and the washrooms were worn down with holes in the ground," said Middleton. "My friend, who's an accountant, does a lot of non-profit work in Kenya, and I put the budgets together, and I brought the

idea to the Rotary Club, and it took off."

The Rotarians stayed with Middleton's friends across from the school for 10 days. After completing the projects, the group ventured to safari parks and stayed on the coast for three more days.

"We distributed textbooks and it was such a positive experience for both the Rotarians and everyone we visited," said Middleton. "A group of ladies from St. Marys made feminine hygiene products for the students and generous donations even provided laptops for the computer lab. Seeing all of this come together left me feeling incredibly warm and fuzzy

inside."

Middleton lived in Nigeria for 12 years, where he helped build wells for the locals and form connections. During the Rotary Trip, Middleton said the group saw lions on a safari, which he explained is rare, as they tend to hide away.

"I'm already planning to go back next November," said Middleton. "The Rotary members are always eager to be involved; it's something that really brings us together. Everyone who goes comes back with their heart a little fuller."

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Town of St. Marys Fire Department starts 12 Days of Holiday Fire Safety campaign

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The St. Marys Fire Department is launching its annual 12 Days of Holiday Fire Safety campaign to remind St. Marys residents to take proper fire-safety precautions and stay fire safe this holiday season.

From Dec. 12-23, the fire department will promote a different fire-safety theme each day, with tips on what residents can do to keep the holidays fire safe. Holiday fire safety tips can be found by following the Town of St. Marys on Facebook and X.

“The holiday season is always a challenging time for the fire service. Unfortunately, we often see more dead-

ly fires during this period,” said St. Marys Fire Chief Phil West in a press release. “The best protection is prevention. If people make fire safety a priority in their homes, many tragedies can be avoided.”

The St. Marys Fire Department is encouraging families to follow the 12 Days of Holiday Fire Safety across the town’s social networks and to pay attention to the tips and advice that can keep families safe this season.

Schedule of topics:

- Dec. 12: Holiday Lights
- Dec. 13: Tree Watering
- Dec. 14: Candles and Decorations
- Dec. 15: Smoke Alarms
- Dec. 16: Carbon Monoxide Alarms
- Dec. 17: Extension Cords

- Dec. 18: Kids in the Kitchen
- Dec. 19: Home Fire Escape Plans
- Dec. 20: Cooking
- Dec. 21: Heating Sources
- Dec. 22: Smoking
- Dec. 23: Lithium-Ion Batteries

Ontario Fire Marshal data indicates that November through January sees the highest number of residential fire deaths, with cooking as the leading cause of home fires and careless smoking the top cause of fatal ones. Last holiday season, 24 fatal residential fires resulted in 26 deaths. Residents are urged to test smoke alarms monthly, replace batteries annually and install new alarms every 10 years to help prevent avoidable tragedies.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ST. MARYS FIRE DEPARTMENT)

Santa stopped by the St. Marys firehall to help the firefighters promote a fire-safe holiday season in St. Marys.

Little Stone Tech Co. seeking feedback to tailor 2026 services

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

The owner of a local tech company that opened in the summer wants to know what the most pressing technology issues in St. Marys are so he can adjust his services to cater to local customers.

Little Stone Tech Co. is gathering feedback from St. Marys residents until the end of December to plan for the new year. The tech business is looking to tailor its services towards what residents in

the area need and which tech problems they’d like to have fixed the most.

Founded by Ryan Wilson, Little Stone Tech Co. opened in the summer of 2025 and provides digital life skills, troubleshooting, tech support and device set-up and training. Wilson focuses on a client-first approach, which he said is needed in the tech industry, and wants to promote digital literacy.

“I wanted to start this company to empower the people, to give them solutions to the problems that’s not just a techni-

cian coming in, fixing something and then giving them the bill,” he said. “It’s more about helping everybody understand why it breaks and being a lot more client centric.”

As of the new year, Little Stone Tech Co. will have been open for six months. So far, the reception has been positive. Wilson is hoping to collect feedback to better understand residents’ tech concerns.

“This is another way of trying to hone in on the key pain points people have

with technology here in St. Marys and building on that so we can offer a very efficient and optimized service for the community,” Wilson said.

Little Stone Tech Co. is hoping to integrate some of the feedback into the website and use that as a main source of information, rather than social media.

For more information, visit littlestone-tech.co. Feedback can be sent to r.wilson@littlestonetech.co or via the Little Stone Tech Co. Facebook page.

Serving up holiday treats for a good cause



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Some young entrepreneurs were on hand at Riverwalk Commons on Saturday during the Holiday “Old Soul General Store” pop-up open house. Aurora Darling, Raina Woodman and Maggie Barton were serving up delicious hot cocoa, apple cider and goodies. The stand was by donation. The girls raised \$50 for the St. Marys Salvation Army and \$50 for the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Well done, ladies!

Community support for the food bank



(PHOTO COURTESY OF MARG MCDONALD)

As in previous years, St. Marys Ford collected non-perishable food items for the Salvation Army food bank during the recent Santa Claus parade. Pictured, from left, are Ang Edwards, Charlene Van Veen and Marg McDonald from St. Marys Ford with their collections. St. Marys Ford would like to thank everyone for their support and would also like to inform them that the Salvation Army will be accepting food donations at both Foodland and Your Independent Grocer on Saturday, Dec. 13 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

St. Marys Independent **SPORTS**

CBHFM announces Jack Graney, Tip O'Neill award recipients



(SEATTLE MARINERS PHOTO)



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

The Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame (CBHFM) recently announced Josh Naylor as the winner of the Tip O'Neill Award and Hazel Mae as the recipient of the Jack Graney Award.

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

Seattle Mariners' star first baseman Josh Naylor (Mississauga, Ont.) and Sportsnet reporter Hazel Mae were recently announced as winners of the Tip O'Neill and Jack Graney Awards by the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (CBHFM).

The St. Marys based shrine presents the Tip O'Neill Award annually to the Canadian player judged to have excelled in individual achievement and team contribution while adhering to baseball's highest ideals.

Naylor, who topped Canadian major leaguers in multiple offensive categories in 2025, is a second-time winner of the award. He also captured the honour in 2023.

He staved off strong competition from fellow major leaguers Nick Pivetta (Victoria, B.C.), Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (Montreal, Que.) and Cade Smith (Abbotsford, B.C.) to secure the honour.

"Josh Naylor was outstanding in both the regular season and postseason in 2025," said Scott Crawford, the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame's director of operations. "His combination of power and base-stealing ability made him one of the biggest offensive threats in the majors, and his energy and passion for the game of baseball is contagious. He also continues to be a wonderful role model through the many charities he supports."

Splitting his season between the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Mariners, Naylor topped all Canadian major

leaguers in batting average (.295), RBIs (92) and stolen bases (30). He also finished second among Canuck big leaguers in hits (160), runs (81), home runs (20), doubles (29) and walks (48).

Naylor was at his best in September with the Mariners battling for the American League West division title when he hit .364 and had a .982 OPS in 22 games.

In 2025, he also became just the fourth first baseman in Major League Baseball (MLB) history and the second Canadian to record 20 home runs and 30 stolen bases in the same season – Larry Walker, Maple Ridge, B.C., was the first with the Colorado Rockies in 1997.

In 12 games in the postseason, Naylor batted .340 with a .966 OPS and led the Mariners with 16 hits. He also set several Canadian postseason records, including becoming the first Canuck to have four three-hit games in the same postseason. In Game 2 of the American League Championship Series, he belted a two-run homerun to become the first Canadian to homer against the Blue Jays in Canada in the postseason.

Along the way, Naylor became a fan favourite with the Mariners and following the season, the team re-signed him to a five-year contract.

The 2025 campaign was Naylor's seventh in the majors. After honing his skills with the Ontario Blue Jays and Junior National Team, Naylor was selected 12th overall by the Miami Marlins in the 2015 MLB draft.

During his career, Naylor has supported numerous charities.

"To be honoured with this award is ex-

tremely humbling," said Naylor. "I am very thankful and honoured. I will continue to work and play hard to be a great example for the younger generations."

The CBHFM also announced Mae as the Jack Graney Award recipient for 2025, which is awarded annually to a member of the media who has made significant contributions to baseball in Canada through their life's work.

"Hazel Mae has set the bar extremely high for Major League Baseball's in-game reporters," said Crawford. "For many years, her in-depth player interviews and in-game insights have often been the highlight of Sportsnet's Blue Jays coverage, but her impact on baseball in Canada reaches far beyond her work on the field. She has been a tremendous ambassador for baseball across the country."

Born in the Philippines, Mae grew up in Toronto and got her start in sports journalism at the campus radio station at York University.

Her professional career in the Toronto sports media began in 2001 when she was hired to anchor the morning edition of "Sportsnet Central" and was the host of "Jzone," a weekly show devoted to the Blue Jays.

Prior to the 2004 season, she accepted a position in Boston as the lead anchor on the New England Sports Network's (NESN) Sportsnet desk. She also hosted "The Ultimate Red Sox Show," which was NESN's weekly Red Sox show and was part of the Sox broadcast team in 2004 when they captured their first World Series in 86 years.

In 2008, Mae was the first on-air talent hired by the MLB Network where she worked on the Emmy Award-winning studio show, "MLB Tonight," and hosted a program called "Quick Pitch," while also working as a sideline reporter for "Thursday Night Baseball."

In September 2011, she returned to Sportsnet to anchor the 6 p.m. edition of "Sportsnet Central." Four years later, she began her current job as in-game reporter during Toronto Blue Jays telecasts. She also serves as guest host of "Blue Jays Central" throughout the season and has become the go-to reporter for in-depth interviews for Sportsnet's Blue Jays coverage.

In recent years, she has also worked for TBS as an in-game reporter during the post-season.

Over the years, she has also generously lent her talent to numerous charitable events across the country as an emcee.

"Thank you to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame's Board of Directors and selection committee," Mae said. "Joining the distinguished group of Jack Graney Award winners leaves me feeling deeply humbled and profoundly grateful. This group includes incredible writers, broadcasters and storytellers whom I have long admired, been inspired by and proudly call colleagues and friends. While each of us reached this milestone through our own very unique path, we all share a common passion and unwavering love for the game, and for this great country. Words cannot begin to express how honoured I am by this recognition."

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Lincs riding high with trio of victories over Chatham, Sarnia

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys Lincolns have points in five straight games, including wins in each of their last four, after running the table in a stretch of three games in four days, including a pair of wins over the top-ranked team in the West that cemented the Lincolns as a top team in the conference.

The Lincolns began their jam-packed schedule with a visit to Sarnia to take on the lowly Legionnaires, who, as of the Independent's press time, have yet to win a game this season, having lost all 27 games they've played this year.

Blake Elzinga recorded a hat-trick, while Lincoln Moore and Owen Voortman broke out of scoring slumps with goals of their own. Ethan Weir and James MacGregor also found the back of the net and Vaughn Barr made 23 saves to secure the shutout as the Lincolns won 7-0.

Just 24 hours later, the Lincolns went from the last-placed team in the West to the first-placed Chatham Maroons, who made their first trip to St. Marys since they won Game 7 of the 2025 Western Conference Final.

For the second straight game, Weir scored the lone goal of the first period to put St. Marys ahead 1-0 at the end of one period. Carter Chadwick answered for Chatham on the powerplay just one minute and 28 seconds into the second frame, but the Lincolns retook the lead just under three minutes later when Devun Colebrook one-timed a great feed from Chase McDougall.

Head coach Jeff Bradley credited McDougall for his strong performance throughout the night.

"I thought Chase (McDougall) had a really good bounce-back game," Bradley told the Independent. "He started to not only use his body to be a little bit more confident, but we're asking him to shoot the puck more. He was getting some shots on, but he also made a really nice play to Devun on his first goal of the game, so we were really happy to see what Chase was able to accomplish (on Friday)."

Colebrook fired home his second goal of the game 12 minutes later on a powerplay after a brilliant setup by Voortman, who pulled multiple Maroons on the ice towards him before dishing the puck to Colebrook who had an open net to one-time the puck into.

In the third, Moore made it two straight games with a goal before Jaxon Priddle cut the lead back to two. Oliver Lacko iced the game with an empty netter late in the third to secure a 5-2 win for the Lincolns. Brogan Colquhoun made 21 saves in the winning effort in goal.

While very pleased with his team's defensive play, Bradley noted their play



Owen Voortman backhands the puck past goaltender Andrew Gaulton during the St. Marys Lincolns' 7-0 win over the Sarnia Legionnaires on Dec. 4.

with the puck, especially early in the game, left a bit to be desired.

"I'm really happy with how we defended. I thought we did very well and didn't give them much at all, and our priority is always to defend and limit chances, but we struggled with the puck. It was a bit of just not clicking and some poor decision-making and lack of focus with the puck. It's a good thing they can defend because, if they hadn't, that game could have been an ugly one for sure.

"It seemed like we wanted to give them the puck more than we wanted it, so I thought we made it tough on ourselves in the first period," Bradley continued. "But I thought we limited that in the second period, and we were much better with the puck in the second and then were able to carry that over into the third. There was definitely more good than bad from everybody."

In all three games, the Lincolns continued to see an uptick in their even-strength scoring from the rest of the first half of their season, something the bench boss explained has been a point of emphasis in recent weeks.

"We definitely needed it," Bradley said of the increase in even-strength offence. "We can't just be grinding out these 2-1, 3-2 games all the time. Those can't be the only wins we're getting, although it's good to know we can win games like that. We have to score some goals, so hopefully these last few games have started a trend that we can continue."

Lincs hammer Maroons on the road

Despite the game ending in just a one-goal deficit, the Lincolns justifiably left Chatham, one of the most hostile arenas to play in as the visiting team, feeling as though they had systematically dismantled the top-seeded squad in the confer-

ence.

"We went right at them," said Bradley. "That's like a really tough place to play and Mike (Herman) and I were talking on the bench; even when we were up by two and three goals at different points in the game, it never felt safe and Chatham managed to get it back to within a goal. But you look at the shots and how we played and I thought we deserved to score a lot more."

Bradley detailed how the Lincolns exploited holes in the Maroons defensive-zone coverage, leading to a large amount of high-danger scoring chances.

"We had a gameplan and we executed it really well. Chatham has some really skilled defencemen, but we wanted to make sure pucks are getting in behind them. And we found that on Friday, the chances Chatham had were ones we gave them, so we didn't want to give them opportunities with turnovers or mistakes. So we talked a lot about puck management and I thought we did an outstanding job of that."

It took the Lincolns, who were completely dominant for the first 40 minutes, just 45 seconds of the opening period to find the first goal of the contest, with Colebrook continuing his hot streak and putting the Lincs ahead 1-0. Colebrook now has goals in three of his last four games.

A powerplay led to the ninth of the year for Weir, who is now on a four-game goal streak and five-game point streak, at the 4:29 mark of the first. Moore then increased his scoring streak to three straight games with a laser beam into the top of the Maroons' net exactly nine minutes later, a goal that chased Chatham starter Viljami Kukkola from the net with six and a half minutes left in the

opening frame.

Bradley said the hot start to the game set an important tone for the rest of the night.

"It was nice to get on the board so early and then chase their goalie like that," said Bradley. "We were really confident going into the game. We know we're a good team, but Chatham is also a really good team and you just never know what's going to happen. Chatham is the kind of team who could have an off game and still be lethal.

"They've got some guys who can really put the puck in the net and we saw them score a couple goals out of nowhere. So, we respect them and we know they're a really good team, but we're a pretty good team, too, and our guys take that personally and they want to show how good they are."

Kaden Sienko finally stopped the bleeding for Chatham before the end of the first, but the Lincolns restored their three-goal lead less than four minutes into the second when Callum McAuley tipped a point shot by Luke McMillan past Blake Verberne, scoring his first goal as a Lincoln in his debut.

McAuley was acquired from the Northern Ontario Junior Hockey League's (NOJHL) Soo Thunderbirds, where he served as captain this season and scored 12 goals and 22 points in 22 games.

Powers said the acquisition of the speedy 19-year-old from Timmins makes the Lincolns' forward group one of the deepest in the league.

"Callum (McAuley) has speed to burn and skill to both put the puck in the back of the net and to make others around him better," Powers said. "He increases our pace of play and allows us to have four number-one-calibre lines. He also adds to our veteran group and makes us a much harder team to match up against."

Chatham's two-goal response came after McAuley's goal, first off a misplay by Colquhoun which Alexander Lisi knocked into the open net, and then with Aidan Edwards blasting a loose puck into the St. Marys net to cut the deficit to one.

Despite the pair of goals by the Maroons, the second period was dominated by St. Marys, with Verberne making at least three saves on one-timers right in close to his net, as well as several other quality scoring chances for the Lincolns.

A great defensive stick play at the Lincolns blueline late in the second by Declan Ready led to a two-on-one for St. Marys, with Ready wiring the puck past Verberne to put the Lincolns back ahead by two. Lisi tallied his second of the night in the third, but the Lincolns fended off the Maroons' comeback and hung on for the 5-4 victory, and in doing so, won their fourth in a row.

U10 A Boys represent Canada, win CCM Nations Cup

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Dunny's Source For Sports U10 A Boys St. Marys Rock captured gold while wearing a Canadian jersey as one of the Canadian teams competing at the CCM Nations Cup in Detroit, Mich., held Nov. 28-30.

According to head coach Rod Harrison, the Rock was the talk of the tournament by the final day.

"We're super proud of the boys," Harrison said. "To dig in and compete in five games over three days, and to bring it every single time, was really impressive. There were people talking about how good we were, so we developed a good following by the end of the weekend. It was a proud moment to see a lot of the things we've practiced come out, and their effort and how they never gave up. And with Canada on the front of the jersey, it was easy to motivate the boys to do it for the front of the jersey and for the guy sitting next to you."

The Rock was incredibly dominant during the four-game round-robin, scoring 23 goals and not allowing a single goal during the first four games. Harrison noted the team's goaltending was stellar and backstopped a great performance by every St. Marys skater.

"Our goaltending was unreal," Harrison said. "We were pretty dominant most of the time, but both guys made the big saves we needed them to. They were a bit of a game-changer at times. Our breakout was good, our neutral-zone play was good and our forecheck was pretty much unstoppable. We gave teams no time and space. Our F-three was jumping on the far side, our F-two was taking the walls away and our F-one was hard on the puck."

St. Marys emerged as the top Canadian seed and took on the top American seed, Toledo Cherokee, in the gold-medal game. After Toledo opened the scoring at the 8:37 mark of the first period, it took just 31 seconds for the Rock to respond, with Nicholas Madsen firing



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Dunny's Source For Sports U10 A Boys St. Marys Rock won the gold medal while wearing Canadian jerseys at the CCM Nations Cup Nov. 28-30 in Detroit, Mich., including a 5-3 win in the finals and shutting out opponents 23-0 in four round-robin games. Pictured laying in front, from left to right, are Everett Douglas and Jack Becker. In the middle row, from left, are Quinn Stewart, Ben Hemstock, Zac Bes, Brody Pearson, Ryker Harrison, Callum Palmer, Landon McIntosh, Max Bilyea, Maclean Ross, Zach Rasenberg, Jacob Zwambag, Nicholas Madsen and Carter Van Wieren. In the back row, from left, are Chris Van Wieren, Drew Pearson, Rod Harrison and Dan McIntosh.

home an unassisted goal to tie the game 1-1. Just over four-and-a-half minutes later, Zac Bes put St. Marys up by a goal, with the lone assist by Jacob Zwambag.

Toledo scored the only goal of the second frame, tying the game at two apiece heading into the third. Before four minutes had passed, the Rock had tallied two goals in 34 seconds, firstly with an unassisted goal by Max Bilyea, then by MacLean Ross with assists going to Quinn Stewart and Carter Van Wieren. Landon McIntosh added an unassisted goal, with Toledo managing to bring the game back to within two.

Harrison credited the team's puck movement and ability to handle a physi-

cal championship game en route to their 5-3 gold-medal-winning victory.

"They moved the puck really well. They were passing it, playing as a team and protecting each other. There were a couple of scrums where it was good to see our boys helping other guys out. And then some of our bigger guys, like Carter (Van Wieren), Zach (Rasenberg) and Ryker (Harrison), when it got physical, they stepped up and showed them that we were bigger and stronger, but I was trying to harness them and just focus on playing hockey and not getting caught up in the silliness.

"They just kept bringing it, which traditionally, when we get into that physi-

ical style of game, sometimes we fade away," continued Rod Harrison. "But we just elevated our game and kept taking it to them. A couple of guys got injured, but they stuck around and fought through it and pushed through some of the dirty hits."

Rod Harrison also noted the team showed great composure in a loud, boisterous environment.

"A couple of our guys got overwhelmed a little bit by the energy in there, but they really bounced back," he said. "They pushed through and they played hard, and that's the kind of resilience that we've built into the boys over the last year and a half that we've had them. Our team identity is to be a pest, and we never gave up and never went away.

"A couple of boys on the bench said, 'I think we have more fans than the Lincolns.' They were just caught up in the moment, and as much as it was a distraction, I was impressed they went out there and did the job they needed to. We were pushing them to concentrate on the task at hand and they did that. They jumped over the boards, got in the zone and really harnessed the energy."

Arguably, the most vital key to the team's success, the coach said, was every member of the Rock contributing precisely what their team needed from them.

"Everyone had a job, whether it was a wall chip, a good pass, a hard back-check, a big energy play, or goals or assists," said Rod Harrison. "There was no individualism at all. We really preach to them to stay within their comfort zone; don't try to do too much. We had secondary scoring all the way through the tournament. I don't think anyone took any shifts off the whole weekend. We had guys who make a really good wall play in the defensive zone that creates time and space, or a guy has a strong forecheck; those guys deserve just as much recognition and credit as those who score."



Photos with Santa

Photos by Jayne Fuller at The Flower Shop and More Ltd.

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Granton's Ava Wilder wins title at Tulsa horseback riding competition

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

Ava Wilder, a 10-year-old from Granton, along with her horse, Visa, won the championship jacket in the youth walk trot ranch trail class at the Color Breed Congress in Tulsa, Okla., from Oct. 31 to Nov. 8.

Wilder also competed in the ranch ideal, ranch riding and two ranch rail classes, placing third in one of them. Wilder also came in third in the western showmanship class.

Sherry Garrett, Wilder's mother, noted she and Wilder's coach, Chanda Burke, both could tell the sport was a serious passion for Wilder when she first started riding horses at just two years old. Wilder, who rides at DDD Quarter Horses in Thorndale, told the Independent her love of horseback riding grew very quickly.

"I have always loved riding horses," said Wilder. "I always knew it was the right sport for me. It's the best sport ever. I love riding because it's just me and my horse; nothing else matters. Some of my favourite memories include being at the barn – lessons with my coach, visiting in my free time, camp, preparing for horse shows, being covered in dust, or drenched in sweat at horse shows. As long as it's horse-related, there's nothing I'd rather be doing."

Four judges are tasked with judging each class and the announcer announced the placings under each judge. This is how Wilder learned of her championship victory, which she noted became clear after the first three judges put her in the top spot.

"By the time they called the third judge's placings, I was so excited because I knew I won," Wilder said. "This judge had placed me first and I had been first under the first and second judges too. This is the biggest show I've ever competed in and going up against older riders from places like Texas, Montana and Oklahoma and coming out on top

felt amazing."

According to Wilder, the consistent training and preparation by her coach made her feel very positive going into the competition.

"Heading into the Color Breed Congress, I was nervous and excited. I have been riding Visa for at least five years, so I am very comfortable and confident when we go into shows together. I have two lessons a week, and in the weeks before the show, I was riding even more often. My coach, Chanda (Burke), is awesome and has done so much to prepare me and Visa for this show, so even though I was nervous, I felt like we had a good chance."

Wilder also recounted many different aspects of getting to the competition and celebrating her success upon returning home.

"Thinking back on my first Tulsa show experience, a few things stand out. Leading up to the show, all of the excitement and prep – packing, making plans, practicing, getting my show clothes ready and making sure Visa was ready. Every time I was at the barn, we were talking about Oklahoma and that got me so excited. Next, the drive – it was the longest drive of my life. It was about 18 hours over two days, and then the same on the way home.

"When I think about my accomplishments, being the champion in my trail class was the highlight," Wilder continued. "I won the Color Breed Congress champion jacket and I'm proud to wear it. Something else that I will remember is showing at 10:30 at night for one of my classes; I was so tired."

Being at the event for well over a week, Wilder described having plenty of fun, both in and out of the framework of the competition.

"Being invited to be a part of this show team is something I will never forget. We all cheered each other on and helped each other throughout the show. The downtime was fun too; we rode



(PHOTO COURTESY OF COLOR BREED CONGRESS)

Ava Wilder, a 10-year-old native of Granton, pictured with her horse, Visa, won the championship jacket at the Oct. 31 to Nov. 8 Color Breed Congress horseback riding competition in Tulsa, Okla.

around the grounds on electric scooters. It was a huge facility and we took our golf cart and the others brought scooters that made the trip back and forth from the barn to the trailers fun.

"I loved taking Visa out for walks and play time after showing was over," added Wilder. "It was nice to have the

free time with Visa. And now looking back, I'm so thankful that Chanda put so much work into getting both me and Visa ready for the show. I feel so lucky that I got to do this show with Visa; it wouldn't have been the same with any other horse."



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(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Mason Krauskopf saves an incoming shot off the rush during the U9 MD Boys St. Marys Rock last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Nick Ehgoetz one-times the puck up the ice during last Saturday's U9 LL Boys Red St. Marys Rock game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Luka Verkuyl rockets a long-range shot on goal during the A.N.A.F. U15 A Boys St. Marys Rock game last Wednesday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Keira Pfister slides the ring towards the opposition's net during last Saturday's Synterra FUN3 St. Marys Snipers game.



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)
Hudson Monteith loads up a shot from the blueline during last Wednesday's St. Marys Firefighters U13 A Boys St. Marys Rock game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Logan Masselis blasts a slap-shot from the point during the Social Thirty-One U11 A Boys St. Marys Rock game this past Monday.



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COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER:

Homesick, not adapted: My Canadian Christmas vs. my parents' digital wedding

ALONA VASYLIEVA
Independent Columnist

It’s internationally known that Christmas is a family-oriented holiday. Back in Ukraine, after tying the knot, I never quite grasped the frantic, must-see-everyone-at-the-same-time urgency. I mean, we’re all adults, right? We can schedule a visit! My parents lived miles away and, frankly, I thought the whole mandatory gathering was a bit of a formality. Why stress when you can just plan to see everyone any time? (Spoken like a true pre-immigrant who took family proximity for granted).

Now that I’m here in Canada surrounded by sparkling snow and the sweet scent of hot chocolate, a strange feeling has crept up. It’s not just “nostalgia,” which sounds a bit too poetic for the sheer, gut-punching reality of missing my people. No, the word I’ve finally learned – a word that perfectly defines this current emotional state – is homesickness.

So, I’ve been channelling my inner social butterfly by hosting an impressive number of December gatherings, attempting to keep my brain too busy to overthink how far away home is. Wish me luck.

Homesickness is apparently a natural, albeit slightly rude, part of the immigrant starter pack. You arrive thinking, “Right! I shall succeed! Everything will be smooth sailing soon!” But success, unfortunately, doesn’t magically teleport your family across the ocean.

I know some foreigners try the multi-generational immigration shuffle, bringing parents, in-laws and maybe even a distant cousin’s hamster. While the sentiment is lovely, forcing another fully grown adult to move countries is like trying to put a cat in a tiny sweater – it might work for a minute, but I don’t believe in the long-run success!

Then you think, “Okay, I just need to adjust.” But seriously, why does nobody put an expiration date on this “adaptation” phase? Is it six months? Four years? Do I get a certificate when I’ve officially “adapted?” The suspense is killing me!

Luckily, we live in the glorious age of technology! We can video-call our families across the ocean, which is a lifesaver. Speaking of technology, allow me to introduce you to the digital marvel that is Ukraine’s special app, Diia.

Imagine if the government merged My Service Canada Account, your provincial health card/digital ID, your driver’s license and various municipal services into one,



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The tiny, scheming Elf on the Shelf has anarchy in store for Lego City this Christmas!

single, highly secure and unbelievably user-friendly app. That is Diia. The goal? Digitise 100 per cent of government services and finally banish bureaucracy to the deep, dark corners of history.

It’s completely paperless and safe – data isn’t stored in the app but is pulled securely from government registries when needed. And your digital signatures refresh every three minutes, so no copying! During driving, if you have your license on Diia, you don’t need the physical card. What a relief to eliminate that frantic license-check pat-down before leaving the house!

But wait, there’s more! You might think I’m joking, but you can actually get married through the Diia app. You initiate an online proposal, your partner accepts and then you have a sweet, 30-minute video ceremony with an official. The digital marriage certificate appears in your app within a day.

This brings me to my current, deeply personal reason for homesickness. My parents, who both work for the state-owned railway company, were once required to legally divorce because of an anti-corruption rule about spouses not working under each other’s authority. Yes, you read that right – a divorce for formality!



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Kyiv lights up for Christmas, a brilliant, bittersweet memory for newcomers celebrating their holiday season far from home.

Well, guess what? They just decided to remarry through the Diia app!

I know, it sounds absolutely bonkers. But living under the daily stress of war circumstances makes Ukrainians do some truly surreal things. So now I have one more reason to miss home; I won’t be able to attend their wedding! Though, to be fair, an online wedding is hard to attend even if you’re next door.

A digital ceremony for the ages. All I can do now is raise a glass of Canadian eggnog to my digitally remarried parents and keep hosting parties until my homesickness takes a holiday!

Also, our Elf on the shelf keeps me busy. There’s this quiet, bittersweet feeling that this might be the grand finale tour for our little North Pole informant. This could be Alex’s last year of truly believing in the magic, the mischief and the overnight voyages back to Santa.

So, I’m going out with a bang! This year, the Elf isn’t just sitting – he’s plotting, he’s scheming, he’s going to stage a hostile takeover of the Lego City! Because if I have to get up at 5 a.m. to move a doll, he’s going to earn his reputation as a tiny, felt-covered agent of joyful, pre-Christmas anarchy!

Straight from the Shelves

LAURA MCASH
St. Marys Public Library

Have you ever heard of a BeaverBot? No, it’s not the robot creature from Pixar’s upcoming movie “Hoppers”. It’s a blade-free automatic cardboard cutting tool! BeaverBots use a one-way cutting feature that allows for safe and efficient cutting, providing a creative solution for young inventors and crafters alike. Plus, its one-button operation makes it easy to master, allowing children 3 and up to get in on the fun.

Come try out Bucky the BeaverBot at our upcoming “BeaverBot Cutter Crafts” sessions! Drop into the Library to make a gingerbread house on December 23 (1-7 p.m.) and a mask on January 2 (10:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.). These drop-in

sessions are free to attend, and there is no registration. Adult supervision is required for children 10 and under.

Up This Week
Fri., Dec. 12: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sat., Dec. 13: Open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Mon., Dec. 15: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Tues., Dec. 16: Tuesday Book Club* (11:00 a.m.), An Evening with Austen – Celebrating Jane Austen’s 250th Birthday*^ (6-8 p.m.)
Wed., Dec. 17: EarlyON Play & Read (9:30 a.m.), Mahjong! (1-4 p.m.), Books & Brews* (7 p.m.)
Thurs., Dec. 18: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
*Registration Required
^Held at the Friendship Centre in the PRC (317 James St., St. Marys)

Ask the Arborist

By Joel Hackett | 519 272 5742 | jtsquote@gmail.com



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How do you keep the snow from damaging shrubs, and breaking them?

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winter into a more conical or pyramid shape to shed the snow.
Sincerely,
The Arborist
Joel Hackett is a certified Arborist residing in the St. Marys area. Currently, he spends most of the year running Joel’s Tree Service. For contact call 519 272 5742 or email jtsquote@gmail.com

HISTORIC ST. MARYS: Theophilus Tyrell Garner (1862-1907)

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

A recent presentation on the history of our local limestone quarries, sponsored by the St. Marys Museum, included a discussion of the difficult conditions faced by quarry workers. Before there was workers' health and safety legislation, men worked long hours with little in the way of protective equipment such as hard hats or steel toe boots. There was little formal training for the use of new machinery. Quarry work was not only noisy, dusty, and back breaking, it was also dangerous. The quarry history presentation gave examples of accidents that claimed the lives of local quarrymen. One occurred on April 13, 1907. The manager of the Horseshoe Quarry, T. T. Garner, had a terrible accident and did not survive.

Theophilus Tyrell Garner was born on January 31, 1862, in St. Marys, the youngest of William and Mary Ann Garner's seven children – six sons and one daughter. His father, William Garner, had been born July 21, 1815, in Thetford, Norfolk, England. William was trained as a cooper, an important trade in the days when casks of various sizes were used to store and transport many products. William married Mary Ann Harmon and the young couple immigrated to Canada ca 1837. They settled first in Brantford where their first son, Joseph Stokes Garner, was born in December 1838. The Garners moved to Woodstock in 1844 and then to St. Marys by 1859. By the 1861 census, they had six children – Joseph, George, Sarah, Thomas, William, and Arthur. Theophilus's birth completed their family.

In May 1860, William Garner started a cooperage in St. Marys, just west of the Grand Trunk Railway switch at Elizabeth Street. When they were old enough, William trained his sons to be coopers and by 1860, Joseph and George worked along with their father in his thriving business at the "Switch." William Garner was soon able to expand his business. An advertisement in the St. Marys Argus in September 1864 announced that his steam powered factory manufactured bedsteads, table legs, wagon wheels, and banisters as well as barrels. Depending on the season, he employed up to 50 men, supplying all the local flouring mills and the other mills in Perth County. Garner was a strict Methodist and did not approve of drinking liquor. Although his factory produced "tubs, meat barrels, flour barrels and all kinds of cooping," he would not supply containers for beer or whiskey.

By the mid-1800s, industries in this part of Ontario were almost without exception steam driven. Like William Garner's, all major factories, mills and workshops had large steam engines. Water was heated to produce steam and so heating the water meant that fuel and fire were also part of the operations. Mills and factories were hot and dusty – perfect conditions for combustion. There was an active and dedicated fire brigade in St. Marys from the very beginning of the settlement. But although the volunteers did their best, in the 1800s their equipment was basic and often unreliable. Records show that almost every flour, saw



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ST. MARYS MUSEUM'S COLLECTION / R. LORNE EEDY ARCHIVES)

Workers stand near the wreckage of the derrick that fell into the quarry, fatally injuring its operator, T. T. Garner, in April 1907.

or planing mill in St. Marys experienced a fire at least once in its history and several were eventually destroyed by fire.

William Garner's operations were no exception. In fact, his works seemed to have been particularly fire prone. In January 1862, his drying kiln burned. Garner had the kiln repaired or rebuilt. But in March of the same year, in January 1863, and in February 1864, the kiln was destroyed again. For Garner, repairs to the damage caused by fire to this vulnerable part of his operations seemed to have been the cost of doing business and each time he made repairs and upgrades. But a fire in October 1882 delivered the final blow. The largest building, Garner's sawmill, was totally destroyed. Rather than rebuilding, the Garners sold their business to another cooper, F. W. Butcher, in 1884. Deciding that property development was a safer business venture, they built four brick cottages where their sawmill and cooperage had been.

When he was 16, William's youngest son, Theophilus, (nicknamed "Nob" or Theo) also started learning the cooperage trade. But when his father sold the business, Theo, 22 years old, had to look elsewhere for work as a cooper. It was important to work because, in November 1882, Theo had married Maria Dickinson. She had recently moved with her parents from a farm in Blanshard Township to a house near the Methodist Church in St. Marys. The Dickinsons, like the Garners, were members of the Methodist congregation and the young couple probably met at church. Their only child, Myrtle Lauretta, was born in 1886. For a short time, the Garners left St. Marys for work opportunities. According to the 1891 census, Theo, Maria, and five-year-old Myrtle were living in Mount Forest in Wellington County. They lived next door to Theo's older brother, George, and his family. Both Garner men were working as coopers.

In 1891, Maria's father died, leaving her mother alone. That may have been a factor in their decision to move back to St. Marys to stay. Theo worked at F. W. Butcher's cooperage for a few years and then, in 1897, he opened a furniture and undertak-

ing business on Queen Street. He ran that business for seven years while also becoming involved in the operations of the Horseshoe Quarry as a major stockholder. In a complete change of occupation, in 1904 he became the quarry manager.

The accident occurred on a Saturday when the quarrymen were engaged in hoisting rock from the quarry floor. Garner was operating the hoisting machinery – a derrick connected to a steam boiler, resting on a platform at the edge of the quarry wall. As a heavy load was being hoisted, about halfway up, the main cable got twisted and

the mechanism stuck. According to the report in the St. Marys Journal, "Garner tried to straighten it by jerking the lever up and down. In a moment, the cable gave way, causing the load to swing out and all the other guy ropes to give way. Immediately the boiler, platform, derrick, and everything crashed over the side of the quarry down to the rocks below."

Theo Garner was "thrown headlong" into the quarry, landing on the rocky floor. When his men reached him, he was still alive but unconscious and terribly injured. As well as many broken bones, he had a fractured skull. He was taken to his home on Church Street where he was attended by two local doctors, both of them his friends. However, his injuries were too severe for him to recover, and he died early Tuesday morning. Theo Garner was mourned by the whole community. As the Journal stated, "He was of a bright, jovial disposition and was widely respected and beloved." He had served on town council and the volunteer fire department. He was a member of both the Masonic Lodge and the Independent Order of Foresters. A talented musician with a deep bass voice, he was the "leading spirit" of the local male quartet. He had been a choir master for 20 years, first with the Methodists and then with the choir at the First Presbyterian Church.

Theophilus Tyrell Garner's funeral was held on Thursday, April 18, 1907, and was "largely attended." His wife, Maria, and his daughter, Myrtle, survived him, as well as his five older brothers and his sister. They had "the heart-felt sympathy of everyone."



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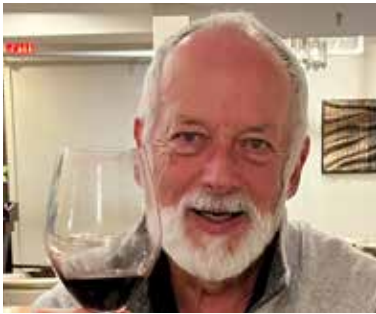
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St. Marys, Ontario

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Travelling through 12,000 years in a few footsteps



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

As we were slowly making our way to the summit of the citadel in Antequera, Spain, we encountered an unexpected figure: an elegantly robed, Moorish aristocrat. And, it turned out, that was exactly who he was – for the moment, anyway. He was an actor in character for a television show being filmed in a site that includes elements dating back thousands of years.

This juxtaposition of a 21st century TV crew and ancient ruins seems an apt symbol of the complexity you'll find in Antequera, one of the many interesting places we visited during our Senior Discovery Tours sojourn in the Costa del Sol.

I am always fascinated by places where you find layer upon layer of history. I have to say that few have more on display than Antequera.

Let's start back as far as history will allow us to go – with the Lovers' Rock. As you stand on the hilltop that is home to the Moorish Citadel, you have a view of a rock formation that looks remarkably like the profile of a man's face. In most circumstances, it would be called

"The Sleeping Giant," but there is a legend attached to it that gives it its actual name, the Lovers' Rock. The name comes from a story in which a Muslim girl and her father's Christian slave boy fell in love, fled the city, were pursued by her father and chose to leap to their deaths together rather than be separated.

However, while the rock may owe its name to this story, its historical significance dates back many centuries before the (probably fictional) lovers' leap.

If you shift your focus to a spot closer to the citadel, you will see a UNESCO World Heritage Site that was created in the Neolithic era (10,000-2,000 BC). This is the locale of the Dolmen of Menga, "an important masterpiece of megalithic architecture" that served as a spectacular tomb millennia ago. The Dolmen can be visited today.

Turning away from the view of the dolmen, the Lovers' Rock and the ancient city panorama, we walked past ancient walls and began the climb to the top of the citadel.

Even here, there was an intriguing mix of historical eras. The walls were built by the Moors – the Muslim conquerors of southern Spain who ruled here for more than 700 years, finally defeated in 1492. The citadel dates back to the 11th century.

However, we couldn't help but notice that the walls included some features that were clearly older – they were stone tablets from the time of Roman

rule in Antequera. The Romans were here from a couple of centuries BC until the fifth century, and evidence of Roman times is everywhere in Antequera, including built into the Moorish walls.

Higher up, at the top of the citadel, there is an impressive, excavated Roman tomb.

And, back to the view of the dolmen and the Lovers' Rock, what we didn't notice when we were gazing back into the Neolithic age were excavations closer at hand that had revealed an extensive Roman bathhouse.

All of this time travel can be a bit overwhelming, but the solution is close at hand in the Municipal Museum of Antequera. This truly excellent, 5,000 square-metre museum carries visitors through the history of the city and also presents some modern elements. The museum boasts that it's where "the Roman past comes to life and the cultural present awaits you."

Antequera's rich history is well presented, of course, including an indoor restoration of a Roman tomb, and its cultural heritage is celebrated with paintings and sculptures dating back through the city's complex past. One of the best examples is a delicate sculpture of the head of the goddess Venus from the Roman era. Even better, a unique, life-size bronze of a young man, also from the time of the Romans.

Moving ahead several hundred years, I was especially impressed with an ethereal, life-sized statue of St. Francis of Assisi created in 1665 by Pedro de Mena.



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

An unexpected Moorish aristocrat roaming the citadel in Antequera.

But the museum comes as advertised, bringing visitors right up to date with the current artistic accomplishments of this part of Spain. The museum's art collection includes 692 works by 34 different artists. Not all are on display, of course, but you can actually see most of them if you visit the museum's excellent website, museoantequera.es/en/. And yes, that gets you the English site.

One current Antequera artist who captured my attention at the museum was Cristobal Toral. The museum has an extensive collection of his paintings, many of which include dramatic images of – wait for it – luggage! A biography accompanying a Toral exhibition

at the museum explained he is intrigued by the fact that "humanity is essentially nomad ... the continuous transit of human beings. ... For this reason, Toral has chosen the suitcase to be an icon of our time."

And there we were, facing an artistic expression of "our time" only steps away from Neolithic, Roman and Moorish times. What more could any would-be time traveller wish for?

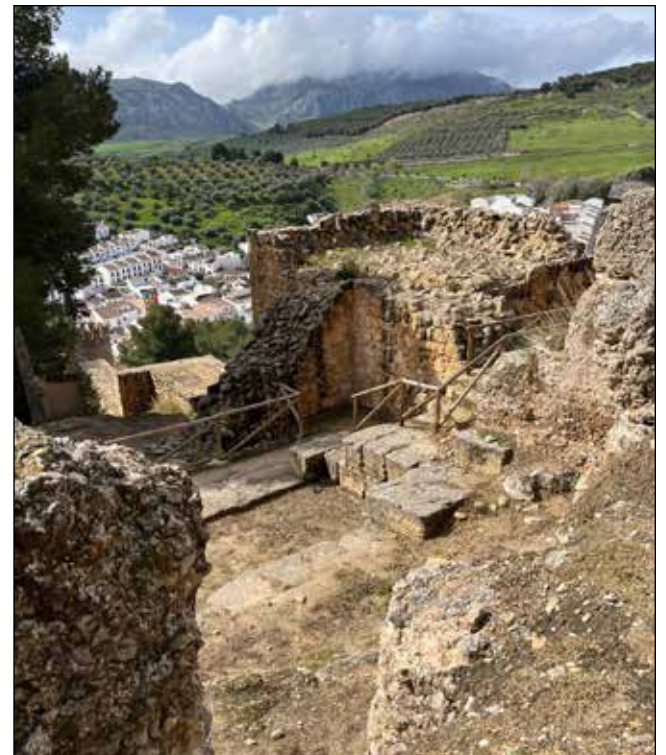
Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@gold-en.net.



Walls of the citadel and a bell tower, built as part of a Catholic chapel constructed in 1582.



Recently excavated Roman baths in Antequera with the Lovers' Rock in the distance.



A Roman tomb on the heights of the Moorish Citadel.

EAT AT OUR HOUSE: Easy holiday breakfasts or brunches



LAUREN EEDY

Independent Columnist

The following are easy-to-make recipes that are perfect to serve for a holiday breakfast or brunch, saving you the time to spend with loved ones and enjoy a relaxing morning you deserve. Happy Christmas!

Croque Monsieur casserole

Prep: 5 minutes; Cook: 40 minutes; Chill: 30 minutes or overnight; Serves: 8

6-8 regular sized croissants (I used ones that were a day or two old to hold up in the liquid mixture.)

4 large eggs
1 cup half and half or whole milk
1 ½ - 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
Pinch of salt
8 oz good quality deli ham
6 oz shredded Swiss or gruyere cheese (I used Stone-town Cheese Wildwood)
Powdered sugar for dusting

Method:

-Lightly coat nine-by-six-inch-deep baking dish with butter or cooking spray. A nine-by-11-inch pan can also be used.

-Tear croissants into bite-

sized pieces and place in prepared dish. Cut or tear ham into thirds and nestle around the croissants. Sprinkle on shredded cheese.

-In a small bowl, whisk together eggs, half and half, Dijon, and salt. Pour over croissants. Cover with foil and chill in refrigerator for 30 minutes or overnight.

-Heat oven to 350°F. Place covered casserole in the oven and bake for 20 minutes. Remove foil and continue to bake for another 20 minutes until cheese has melted and dish has a golden top.

-Remove from oven and let rest for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with as much powdered sugar as your heart tells you and serve.

*Casserole can be kept, cooked, in refrigerator for up to a week. Reheat leftovers in oven or microwave. Casserole can also be frozen up to three months if wrapped tightly after baking.

Four-ingredient crème brûlée French toast bake

6 Brioche rolls
500 ml fresh custard (Devonshire cream) store bought
½ cup butter, softened
3/8 cup light brown sugar

Method:

-Preheat oven to 350°F.
-Slice buns into bite-sized pieces.

-Mix softened butter and brown sugar together then spread on each side of brioche.

-On medium heat, fry brioche in a frying pan until caramel-

ized. Set aside to harden.

-Pour ready-made custard into the bottom of an oven-proof dish, top with caramelized brioche pieces and sprinkle with brown sugar.

-Bake for 10 minutes. Serve warm with optional fruit.

Orange pecan coffee cake (paleo, GF, DF)

Prep: 15 minutes; Cook: 27 minutes; Cool: 20 minutes; Serves: 12

3 large eggs, room temperature (or egg substitute)

1/3 cup orange juice, room temperature

2 tsp grated orange zest (1 large orange)

¼ cup coconut oil, melted and cooled, or melted ghee or butter

½ cup pure maple syrup or organic coconut sugar

1 tsp pure vanilla extract, almond could work here too

2 cups blanched almond flour

¼ cup tapioca flour or arrowroot

¾ tsp baking soda

2 tsp cinnamon

½ tsp ginger

¼ tsp allspice

¼ tsp sea salt

1/3 cup chopped pecans

Pecan Crumb Topping

¾ cup blanched almond flour

6 tbsp ghee, grass-fed butter or coconut oil, cold and cut into pieces

2 tsp cinnamon

1/3 cup maple syrup or coconut sugar

½ cup pecans, chopped

1/8 tsp sea salt

Drizzle

2/3 cup organic, powdered sugar



(LAUREN EEDY PHOTO)

This Croque Monsieur casserole is the perfect mix of decadent and easy-to-prepare for a holiday breakfast or brunch.

3-4 tsp fresh orange juice or a bit more to get right consistency

Method:

-Prepare crumb topping first. Place all ingredients in a medium bowl and blend using a pastry cutter until crumbly consistency is achieved. Do not use a food processor. Once crumbly, set aside in fridge.


-Preheat oven to 350°F and line a square baking pan or cake pan with parchment.

-In a large bowl, whisk to-

gether eggs, orange juice and zest, coconut oil, sugar, vanilla or almond extract and set aside.

-In a separate bowl, combine the flours, baking soda, salt, spices and pecans. Stir into the wet mixture to form a batter.

-Transfer all the batter into prepared baking pan. Sprinkle crumb topping evenly overtop and bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out with crumbs only. Allow to cool on a wire rack for 20 minutes before drizzling icing.



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Riddles

Why did the girl bring a ruler to bed with her?
She wanted to see how long she slept.

If you have a referee in football and an umpire in baseball, what do you have in bowls?
Goldfish.

Why was the calculator sad?
Because it had too many problems to solve

What can you serve but never eat?
A tennis ball

How did the telephone propose to his girlfriend?
It gave her a ring

Why do mathematicians like airlines?
They use Pi-lots.

Which letter of the alphabet keeps us waiting?
Q. (queue)

What's black and white and red all over?
A sunburned zebra

If there was a spelling test, which animal would win?
The bee

What do you call a bunny with fleas?
Bugs Bunny

What do you call a lazy baby kangaroo?
A pouch potato

- Word Search -



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PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

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

- Pick a tree
- Decorate
- Hang garland
- Make a list
- Prepare budget
- Invite guests
- Mail cards
- Shop
- Plan a menu
- Order turkey
- Bake cookies
- Houseclean
- Wrap gifts



The Riddle Kid OF THE WEEK

What did Santa need when he hurt his ankle?



A candy cane!

Brendan King (6)

Hey Kids... Every Riddle Kid that appears in the paper gets a FREE MILKSHAKE at the Sunset Diner!

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic is pleased to be the sponsor of the

PET OF THE WEEK



EVERY PET DESERVES A WARM HOME THIS CHRISTMAS!

Consider adopting a new pet into your home to enjoy the holidays. You could also consider donating to your local animal shelter. Your gift of food, toys, or time can make a world of difference to pets waiting for a home. Let's spread the holiday spirit — one wag, one purr, and one good deed at a time.



WILLOW AND PIPER

Our Pets of the Week are Willow and Piper. Willow is a short-tailed tabby pixie-bob maine coon mix and Piper is a big lovable ball of white fluff. Coincidentally, they have the same names as the dogs featured last week. They are both 11 years old and are owned by Morgan Houston.



Thorndale News

*A section within the
St. Marys Independent*



THE ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT AND ITS WEEKLY "THORNDALE NEWS" IS AVAILABLE WITHIN THORNDALE AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:

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Giving back to support the community in Thorndale

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

After American Thanksgiving and Black Friday, which has been adopted here in the retail world, there is Giving Tuesday.

Promotional campaigns for educational programming, marketing appeals

for non-profit groups and organizations have flooded television networks and social media, all in good faith to reach out for financial assistance for these reputable causes. But "giving back" is also important to groups and organizations in local towns and communities where we reside.

Since Dec. 1, the owners of Sassy's in

Thorndale have been donating a portion of sales on various takeout items. Their 13 days of holiday giving menu runs until Dec. 13. Each day featured a meal item that helps support local groups and area schools.

"The community of Thorndale welcomed us in the summer of 2023," said Sassy's owner Priyank Shah. "The com-

munity has supported us in every aspect and we at Sassy's want to give back to our local groups. That is why we created our 'giving back' takeout menu. Thanks to everyone who has helped us to grow over the last couple of years and, in this venture, help us to give back."

Thorndale Optimists continue to support the local Salvation Army



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THORNDALE OPTIMIST CLUB)

Bill Tipping of the Thorndale Optimist Club presents the club's annual donation to Raeanne of the St. Marys Salvation Army.

Get your tickets for Thorndale Dinner Theatre's production of *A Murder of Scarecrows*



(NANCY ABRA PHOTO)

On Dec. 6, members of the Thorndale Dinner Theatre troupe sold tickets for their dinner theatre featuring performances of *A Murder of Scarecrows*, a comedic whodunit by Pat Cook with meals prepared by various local community groups in February. Additional in-person ticket sales will also take place on Dec. 12 after the Santa Claus Parade and at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre Dec. 15 from 10 a.m. until noon, Dec. 16 from 5-7 p.m., Dec. 17 from 6-8 p.m. and on Saturday, Dec. 20 from 10 a.m. until noon. Tickets can also be purchased at Thorndale Hardware. For more information, contact Matthew@mittleaccounting.ca.

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OBITUARY

Martin



We are sad to announce the passing to eternal rest of Melvin "Emerson" Martin on Friday, December 5th, 2025. (Born November 26th, 1930).

The beloved husband of Nora Martin (Steinacker) for 74 years. Dearest Dad to Dennis Martin, London; Barry Martin (Barb), Guelph;

Nancy Johnston (Randy), London and Barb Lesmeister (Fred), Thamesford. Proud Grandpa of Jessie, Angela, Amanda, Chris, Geoff, Claire, Tyler, Eric, Michelle and Rachael and Great Grandpa of Caleb, Alyx, Rylan, Emerson, Luna and Summer. Second son of the late Melvin Martin and Nellie Martin (Sheldon). He was predeceased by Earl (Alice); Jean (Harry); Peg (Wilfred); Helen (Wilfred); Lois (Stewart). Survived by sister in laws, Lorene Morrice, Thelma Smith, Hazel Hislop, Ruth McMahon and Jody Connor. Also predeceased by in law parent, Milton and Dora Steinacker; brother in laws, Art Connor, Gordon Morrice, Ernie Smith, Michael McMahon, and Joe Hislop.

Emerson was a retired employee of St. Marys Cement Co. 1952-1987. He loved his family dearly and enjoyed helping with family projects, golfing, automobiles and gardening. He had a great sense of humour even as he was confined to his bed.

A private funeral with family and friends will be held with burial in St. Marys Cemetery. The family extends their heartfelt thanks to the staff at Jessica's House Hospice, for their loving care of both Emerson and Nora. Expressions of sympathy may be made to Jessica's House Hospice, 70776 Exeter, Ontario, N0M 1S1 or online at www.jessicashousehospice.ca or to Bethel Church, 2988 Ontario Street, Stratford, ON N5A 6S5 or online at www.mybethel.ca. Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

OBITUARY

Luyten



LUYTEN: Wilhelmus Gregorius "Bill" Luyten of RR 6 of St. Marys

Bill passed away peacefully at St. Marys Memorial Hospital on Saturday, December 6, 2025 at the age of 72. Beloved husband of Elaine (Dietrich) Luyten for 30 years. Stepfather of Bradley Ryan, and the late

Deane Ryan (2007). Dear brother and brother-in-law of Gregory Luyten, Catherine and Ron Vandinther, Johanna Clement, Annalise and Charles Linklater, Louise and John Fewer, Peter Luyten, Sylvia and Ron Walker, and Karen Dietrich. Fondly remembered by many nieces and nephews. Predeceased by his parents Adrian and Johanna Luyten, sister Maria Luyten, and brother-in-law Lawrence Clement.

Visitation will be held at Haskett Funeral Home, 456 Main Street South, EXETER on Wednesday, December 10th from 4 – 7 PM.

Bill's Funeral Mass will be held at Precious Blood Catholic Church, 200 Sanders Street West, EXETER on Thursday, December 11th at 11 AM. Private family interment Exeter Cemetery.

Donations to the Canadian Cancer Society would be appreciated by the family. Condolences may be forwarded online through www.haskettfh.com.

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THANK YOU

Robinson

Thank you to all our family & friends and to the St. Marys Memorial Hospital medical personnel for helping us through a very trying time this year.

Merry Christmas and best wishes for a wonderful 2026.

Paul and Sue Robinson

Christmas at McCully's

Christmas Trees have arrived

We have fresh cut Balsam and Fraser Fir ranging from 5' to 9' tall. Prices start at \$47.50

Photos with Santa

Lucid Musings Photography will be back at McCully's for family Christmas photos on Dec. 13 and 14 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Cost is \$15.00 and a donation to the local Foodbank.

Christmas Baking

Give McCully's a call to order your Christmas baking. We have fruit pies, including pumpkin pie, maple butter tarts, apple crisp and a variety of cookies.

McCully's Christmas Gift Baskets

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Local school boards highlight strengths amid Ontario's low math scores

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Independent Reporter

After recent reports that nearly half of Ontario's Grade 6 students failed to meet the provincial standard in math, the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) and the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) say it's not all bad news.

Ontario Education Minister Paul Calandra released the latest Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing data, noting only 51 per cent of Grade 6 students met the provincial standard in math this school year.

"When I got results, it frustrated me and made me quite upset," Calandra said during a press conference early this month. "If we were doing it right, then we wouldn't have 50 per cent of our students not meeting provincial benchmarks."

In a media release, the HPCDSB said 68 per cent of its students in the primary division met the provincial standard in math, 55 per cent of junior division students met the standard and 51 per cent of Grade 9 students achieved the standard.

The AMDSB reported that 67 per cent of Grade 3 students met the provincial math standard, 52 per cent of Grade 6 students met the standard and 47 per cent of

Grade 9 students met the standard.

Though math scores throughout the province were not as strong as expected, both AMDSB and HPCDSB say results show improvement that exceeds provincial standards in reading, writing and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

The AMDSB reported improvement across all eight measures, with some increasing by as much as 11 per cent over the previous year.

The HPCDSB said it is proud of its ongoing focus on student achievement, which continues to be reflected in test results. The board also reported having one of the highest participation rates in the province.

Both boards note these results are just one of many assessment tools used to measure and support student achievement. They add that the data represents a snapshot in time and is most useful when examined as part of long-term trends.

"Our EQAO results reflect the hard work of students and staff as they continue to progress toward excellence in literacy and mathematics," said Mary Helen Van Loon, chair of the HPCDSB. "We are proud of their achievements but recognize there is still work to be done. As a board, we remain diligent in our efforts to provide the support and resources necessary to reach these goals."

Looking Back

AMY CUBBERLEY

Independent Columnist



3 p.m. troubles

25 years ago (2000)

James Westman, son of Doris and Eldon Westman, will be joining the St. Marys Children's Choir for "Welcome Yule", a choral Christmas celebration on December 10. Westman, a former member of the choir, has been singing professionally since he was 11.

Town operations manager Bruce Grant outlined some accomplishments within the town during the past term at last week's Council meeting. Grant highlighted work on the west end sanitary sewer project, the Water Street bridge, Church Street reconstruction, the Junction Station, railing installed on the Sarnia Bridge, landscaping at the Arthur Meighen gravesite, as well as planting 1916 trees on Town property.

50 years ago (1975)

Board of Works personnel, busy cleaning off a stretch of downtown sidewalk following a sand-blast job on the premises, made it clear they had no intention of making such a thorough downtown sidewalk scraping a regular job. They were not creating a precedent it was stressed, adding that the owner of the building would be charged for the time spent on the job.

Cy Cline's Stonetown Antiques store has a large display of hand tinted prints by Hope Haines of St. Marys, which is attracting a great deal of attention.

West Ward school in St. Marys, which closed last June, will soon be up for sale. St. Marys Town Council has indicated that the town can make use of the former school. A possible future home for Day Care is one considered use.

75 years ago (1950)

At about 3 p.m. Sunday afternoon, a car driven by Mr. Norris of Stratford, while backing into the yard of Beaver Lumber, crashed into the entrance door to the company's office. The car bumper and fender smashed the heavy plate glass door and lodged in the door sills. It required the assistance of jacks to get the car free from the door frame.

The annual Rotary Club Santa Claus party for boys and girls in St. Marys and district is to be held on Friday, December 22 at the Lyric Theatre according to the Club's Community Service Chairman, Ralph Ainslie.

100 years ago (1925)

Chief William Moyes of the St. Marys Fire Brigade received a cheque for \$25 this week from the Board of Managers of the First Presbyterian Church for the excellent work done in saving the church during a recent fire caused by the steeple being struck by lightning.

About 3 p.m. on Wednesday morning Alvin Dunseith, baker at Thames Valley Bread Co's plant, was met with a painful incident. The night policeman was making his rounds through the alleyway and dropped in to see the night shift at work. Just as he was leaving, he was called by Mr. Dunseith who had just started the bread weighing machine and had accidentally got his finger of his right hand caught in the knives of the machine. The policeman hurriedly notified the other employees who were upstairs and also called a doctor. Mr. Dunseith was forced to stand with his hand in the machine until the men released him with wrenches.

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Solutions on pg. 35

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2	1	9	6	3	5	4	7	8
6	7	4	9	8	2	1	5	3
9	3	1	8	5	6	7	4	2
7	5	8	1	2	4	6	3	9
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THE WEEK AHEAD

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PRC & Friendship Centre events - See the Stonetown Crier on Page 5

St. Marys Library events - See Page 26

Friday, Dec 12

- Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon
- A.N.A.F. meat draw - 6 p.m.
- Thorndale Lions Club Santa Claus parade - 7 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs St. Thomas Stars at Joe Thornton Community Centre - 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec 13

- Salvation Army food drive at Foodland and Your Independent Grocer - 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Ultimate Foot Care open house at 194 Queen St W - 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Amnesty International Write for Rights event at the Library - 10:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.
- McCully's Hill Farm photos with Santa - 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., \$15 and food bank donation
- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw - 5 p.m.
- Coca-Cola holiday caravan at Milt Dunnell Field - 6-9 p.m.
- Stratford Concert Choir's Messiah at Avondale United Church, Stratford - 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, Dec 14

- Breakfast with Santa at St. Marys Legion - 8 a.m. to Noon, Advance tickets available at the Legion
- McCully's Hill Farm photos with Santa - 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., \$15 and food bank donation
- Christmas Hoedown at St. Michael Catholic School, Stratford - 2 p.m.
- Stratford Concert Choir's Messiah at Avondale United Church, Stratford - 3 p.m.
- Avonbank Community Church candlelight service - 7:30 p.m.

Monday, Dec 15

- Community dinner at St. Marys United Church - 5 p.m., Sponsored by the United Church

Tuesday, Dec 16

- Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee - 10 a.m. to Noon
- St. Marys Legion cribbage - Starts 7 p.m. sharp
- Christmas Hoedown at Ailsa Craig Rec Centre - 7 p.m.

Thursday, Dec 18

- A.N.A.F. sausage on a bun lunch - Noon to 1:30 p.m.
- St. Marys Nourish Market at St. Marys United Church - 2-4 p.m.
- Flower Shop & More Santa meet-and-greet with photoshoots - 5-7 p.m., \$15

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