

# Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

VOLUME 3 • ISSUE 15

DECEMBER 19, 2025

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## More bad news following Oxford County cyber attack

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Oxford County is advising the public that personal and private information collected by some programs and services was compromised as part of the County's cyber incident discovered in September 2025.

In a press release, the county said it has been conducting a comprehensive review of current and archived files and records to determine who was impacted and what types of personal information were accessed. While this work continues, the county is advising the public that personal information was accessed or acquired from some programs and services:

- Social housing and social assistance programs between 2020 and 2025, including Ontario Works, licensed childcare service providers, and childcare fee subsidy applications.
- Housing funding programs between 2022 and 2025, such as the Home Ownership Program, My Second Unit, or the Residential Repair Program.
- Job applicants who were selected for an interview at Oxford County.

Tech expert Carmi Levy said it's no surprise the county is dealing with latest announcement.

"This particular event in Oxford County follows a well-worn trajectory we have seen in other municipalities. It often takes time for the victims to do a full forensic analysis to better understand whether data was compromised as part of the attack and, more importantly, what data was included."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

### NORTHDALE ELEMENTARY FUNDRAISER

Blakely was one of the 160 people to attend a fundraising breakfast at Woodstock's Northdale Elementary School where Santa and Mrs. Claus made a visit. The event, sponsored by Tempo restaurant, raised \$1,500 for the school's food program.

## 2026 Oxford County budget passes with 5-plus per cent tax hike

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Oxford County Council approved the 2026 Business Plan and Budget last week, authorizing a total budget of \$406.1 million that includes a \$278.2 million operating budget and \$127.9 million in capital projects.

The amount of money collected through taxation is \$96.7 million resulting in a \$77 increase or 5.3 per cent for residents in the townships, including East Zorra-Tavistock. Homeowners in Woodstock will see a 5.2 per cent increase or \$69. The dollar figures are based on an average assessment of \$281,377.

The document was approved after a marathon meeting that saw seven councillors put forward 23 motions. Some were to add money to the budget but most were to take money out, mainly in the area of new employment positions being created at the county.

Several of the motions resulted in some heated debate including one put forward by Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie to hire a full-time grant coordinator position with a budget hit of just over \$100,000 for nine months of 2026.

"I think it will be positive and a great resource to help not only our advocacy work that has already brought in more money...but also to help our area municipalities to notify them of grants that are available," said Petrie. CONTINUED TO PAGE 4



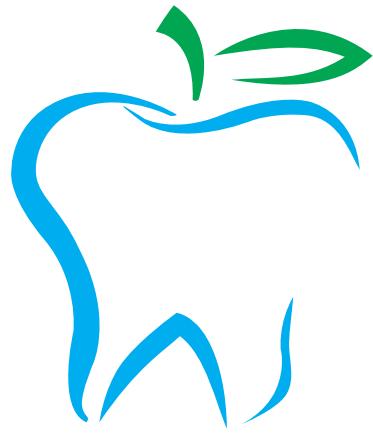
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# Personal and private information compromised for users of some services

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Levy said there is now a better indication of what the impact was and the county has released a comprehensive list of the types of information, the dates, as well as the effected platforms and services.

“At the very least, those individuals whose data was included, can begin taking appropriate cautions.”

The County is providing complimentary credit monitoring services to eligible individuals whose personal information was accessed or acquired in the County’s September 2025 cyber incident.

“If a resident believes they may have been impacted, based on the information outlined in the notice on our website, they should contact [privacy@oxfordcounty.ca](mailto:privacy@oxfordcounty.ca) and provide their name (first and last) and the name of the program and/or service they applied for, to inquire about their eligibility,” said County CAO Ben Addley.

Levy explained it can take days, weeks, or in this case, months, to fully understand the extent of the damage done and then to build an appropriate communication plan around it.

“There’s no indication the perpetrators of this attack were providing any additional pressure on the county but what is more likely the case is it took the county this long to figure out what happened and to figure out how to tell everyone what happened.”

Levy said anyone affected by the newest release of data breach victims needs to take it very seriously and take the appropriate steps to protect themselves.

“It is a very dangerous assumption to assume this data is not highly personal and highly damaging in the wrong hands. They should be acting to reduce their risk going forward. You can not afford to not take this seriously.”

He added information such as driver’s license, health card, other government issues identification and even information contained in a job application are highly damaging in the hands of a criminal.

“When the data is out there, it isn’t

just being used by those who stole it, it is also being sold to other criminals who will use it in subsequent identity thefts and financial attacks. The risk is significant and can not be underestimated.”

Anyone who’s personal health care information may have been accessed will receive direct notification from Oxford County by mail. The municipality has reported the latest incident to Ontario’s Information and Privacy Commissioner as required by law and is fully cooperating with the Office’s investigation into it.

Oxford County Warden Marcus Ryan said it is not the update he had hoped to deliver to the community.

“We appreciate the trust and confidence our residents and partners place in us every day, and we are working to maintain that trust by responding to this incident as fully and in as forthcoming a way as we can.”

He added through each step of the investigation, the county’s focus has been on people.

“Getting information to our residents and employees as quickly as we can and supporting those affected as we learn more.”

As required by privacy legislation, a formal notice with full details about the kind of information accessed has been publicly posted to [www.oxfordcounty.ca/notices](http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/notices) and [www.oxfordcounty.ca/it-incident-updates](http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/it-incident-updates). If you were part of these programs but do not have access to email, a printed copy can be requested by calling 1-800-755-0394.

Oxford County announced a technical incident relating to its information system on Sept. 10. It was confirmed to be a cybersecurity incident on Sept. 22 through the course of the county’s ongoing forensic investigation, which was undertaken with the support of third-party cybersecurity experts.

On Sept. 24, Oxford County informed the public it had reason to believe the personal information of current and former employees may have been compromised as a result of the cyber incident.



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## Echo

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# Heated debate and recorded votes highlighted last week's meeting

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Coun. Deb Gilvesy, also Tillsonburg Mayor, said she isn't confident there will be enough work for a full-time role.

"When you are writing grants you are still going to have to get your departments involved. If it's a grant for housing we would have to get the director's team involved to provide information. Finance is going to have their hands on every single grant. I have faith in the current staff to know how to fill out grant applications."

Woodstock Mayor and Coun. Jerry Acchione said the position falls in the nice to have category but isn't needed given today's affordability crisis.

"This is a hope and a prayer. We hope this person is going to bring in enough money. That is the definition of a nice to have. We have been tasked to tighten our belts. I don't understand what we're doing here all the time looking at these positions and hoping."

Petrie said he was a little shocked at the "Republican statements" from those opposed to his motion and added other municipalities are benefitting from hiring a similar role.

"There are many grants I know staff have to write and having to do that without a coordinated activity makes it more difficult to be able to put those in and make sure we are successful...The success rate is way higher and you have the ability to bring in way more money to the municipality so we don't have to tax residents!"

The motion was ultimately passed by a vote of 6 to 4.

The total FTE increase for 2026 is 19.7. Of that, 17.1 will be funded through the Library levy, General levy, user fees and recoveries, and a 50/50 cost-shared provincial grant supporting paramedic services. The remaining 2.6 FTEs are funded through other grants.

The Gazette reached out to Coun. Phil Schaefer once the

budget was passed. He explained Oxford County provides many critical services like paramedics, housing, water and wastewater, just to name a few.

"All these critical services are experiencing increases in demand and consequently increases in funding requirements. Council provided a responsible budget to address these increased needs, and many needs from other departments, with a modest tax increase."

He added twenty-three amendments were tabled by members of council to amend the budget, and council robustly debated them to produce the approved budget.

"One of the things this budget provided was a plan to improve the ambulance response times in the northern part of the county, with funding for an additional ambulance and paramedics. The increased demand for all our services is occurring at a time of many challenges in our local economy, and that fact was not lost on council."

Schaefer, who did not put forward any amendments of his own, said there were many differences of opinion expressed during the budget debate, but each member demonstrated their desire to act in the best interests of all Oxford County residents.

Coun. Deb Tait, who holds the elected role of Woodstock City/County Councillor, put forward 11 of the 23 motions, all but one of which was to remove new hires from the budget. Two of her motions passed.

Tait, along with Coun. Jerry Acchione (Woodstock Mayor) and Gilvesy voted against the budget. Schaefer was one of seven members of council to vote in favour.

"I voted against the county budget as it is out of control," said Tait. "At the start of this term of council, there were 627 FTEs. Passing this last budget, county council has now added

over 100 new positions just this term. The sunshine list for 2024 was \$22 million for the county."

She added the economy is in dire straits and the increases in taxes the past three years is not sustainable or responsible governance for those who put their trust in their elected officials.

"With these increases year after year its making life extremely difficult for the citizens of Oxford County. I question what is it we doing for the taxpayer with all these increases? Councillor Bernia Martin (also a Woodstock City/County Councillor) mentioned a number of times during the meeting when adding more staff about life/work balance. That is a slap in the face for all those working in the private sector and not only do they have work whatever hours is required, but not all have a full pension or benefits on top of that."

In a press release, the county said the 2026 budget places strong emphasis on health care and housing. Key investments include \$400,000 for a Homelessness Support Services Fund and an increase of \$600,000 annually for needs across the housing continuum, from \$3 million to \$3.6 million.

Paramedic Services deployment and facilities review, ambulance investment, and paramedic staffing to maintain response times, and the launch of a traffic management and road safety service to respond to increasing community concerns about speeding and road safety.

As part of Oxford County's legislated requirement to provide annual funding to Southwestern Public Health, \$5 million coming from the tax levy represents an increase of 8.5 per cent over 2025.

The budget meeting can be watched at <https://pub-oxfordcounty.escrimemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=9e-d4a2cb-c2e4-4fca-a906-457c2201eea2&Agenda=A->

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## Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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# Woodstock man arrested following arson investigation

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A Woodstock man has been arrested in connection with a suspicious fire at a multi-unit residence in the city.

Emergency services responded to a fire at a multi-unit dwelling on Wilson Street on Dec. 10 at 2:30 p.m. All occupants were evacuated safely.

The following day, emergency crews were again dispatched to the same residence at 9:15 a.m. following reports of smoke coming from the building. This second fire was deemed suspicious and the Woodstock Fire Department called

in Woodstock Police.

As a result of an investigation, a 36-year-old male from Woodstock was arrested on Dec. 12 and has been charged with break and enter in a dwelling to commit an indictable offence and arson, disregard for human life. The accused was held for a bail hearing.

The first fire caused significant damage to the dwelling unit on the first floor, but firefighters quickly contained it to prevent further harm to adjacent units. The estimated cost of the destruction is approximately \$150,000 and the cause is under investigation.



(WOODSTOCK FIRE DEPARTMENT PHOTO)

This multi-unit residence as the site of a pair of fires recently, the first one being investigated by the Woodstock Fire Department. The second fire has result in charges against a city man.

# Oxford OPP briefs

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

## Pair of OPP officers injured after vehicles hit cruisers on snowy highway

Two Ontario Provincial Police officers were sent to hospital with minor injuries after their cruisers were struck from behind last Wednesday morning.

The officers were investigating a crash in the westbound lanes of Highway 403 at the Highway 53 exit, near Woodstock, when they were hit.

"We would just like to put out another reminder, the roadways are snow- and ice-covered," said OPP Sgt. Ed Sanchuk said. "You need to slow down."

He added when drivers see emergency lights, by law, they need to slow down and move over.

"If you can't move over safely, you have to reduce your speed. This is just common sense."

Oxford County was getting hit hard with snow as Environment and Climate Change Canada had issued a weather warning.

## 401 collision leads to serious injuries

On December 9, 2025, at approximately 6:37 p.m., Members of the Oxford OPP, Paramedic and Fire Services responded to a serious collision on Highway 401 on

Dec. 9. It occurred in the eastbound lanes, west of Oxford Road 3 in the Township of Blandford-Blenheim, involving a passenger vehicle and a commercial motor vehicle. The driver of the passenger vehicle was transported to an area hospital and remains in life-threatening condition.

The eastbound lanes of Highway 401 between Cedar Creek Road and Oxford Road 29 were closed for a period while members from the West Region OPP Traffic Incident Management and Enforcement Team investigated the collision. No word on any potential charges.

## Disturbance leads to impaired charges

A Zorra Township man is facing impaired driving related charges following a call for a disturbance.

On Dec. 14, at approximately 7:30 p.m., police were dispatched to a report of a disturbance on Delatre Street in Thamesford. Officers attended and spoke with a driver of a vehicle that had been involved in a single vehicle collision. There were no reported injuries but the 49-year-old Thamesford resident has been charged with impaired driving and dangerous operation of a vehicle.

The accused was released from custody and is scheduled to appear before the Ontario Court of Justice in Woodstock on Feb. 3, 2026.

# Woodstock Police Service briefs



(WPS PHOTO)

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

## Impaired driving charge laid following R.I.D.E. check

A Woodstock man did his best to avoid being caught but is still facing an impaired driving charge following a R.I.D.E. program conducted in the city.

Members of the Woodstock Police Service were conducting a Festive R.I.D.E. checkpoint in the area of Vansittart Avenue and Tecumseh Street on Tuesday night. While monitoring vehicles approaching, officers observed the driver and passenger of a vehicle switch seats prior to reaching the R.I.D.E. stop.

As a result of the investigation, a 36-year-old male from Woodstock was arrested and charged. He was released with a future court date and issued an administrative driver's licence suspension.

Festive R.I.D.E. programs continue throughout the month of December as part of ongoing efforts to increase impaired driving awareness and enhance public safety.

## Impaired driving charge laid following traffic complaint

A Mississauga man is facing impaired driving charges following a traffic complaint in Woodstock.

On Dec. 13 at approximately 7 p.m., police received a report of a possible impaired driver at a gas station on Dundas Street in Woodstock. Officers attended the location and located the vehicle.

Police determined the driver was impaired by alcohol. Further testing revealed the driver's blood-alcohol concentration to be more than twice the legal limit.

A 56-year-old male from Mississauga has been charged with impaired driving and was released with a future court date.

## Woodstock Police assist OPP with arrest on outstanding warrants

A 34-year-old male was arrested in the area of Stafford Street in Woodstock on the afternoon of Dec. 15 as part of a coordinated effort involving the Ontario Provincial Police, the Woodstock Police Service, and the Woodstock Probation and Parole Office.

The arrest was made in relation to multiple outstanding Criminal Code offences, including theft-related charges, possession of property obtained by crime, and multiple counts of operating a motor vehicle while prohibited.

Members of the Woodstock Police Service Emergency Response Unit, K9 Unit, and uniform patrol officers assisted OPP during the arrest.

## Three impaired driving charges laid in three-day stretch

The Woodstock Police Service has laid impaired driving charges against three drivers in separate incidents over a three-day period, underscoring the continued risks impaired driving poses to public safety.

The first charge was laid on the evening of Dec. 10 when police received a complaint regarding a vehicle being driven erratically in the area of Dundas Street and Springbank Avenue. Police located and stopped the vehicle a short time later and charged a 36-year-old city man with impaired and dangerous driving after it was discovered his blood alcohol level was more than three times the legal limit.

Police received another complaint regarding a driver suspected to be impaired in the area of Devonshire Avenue on Dec. 11. Police located the vehicle, conducted a traffic stop and charged a 45-year-old male from Woodstock with impaired driving and impaired driving by alcohol and drugs.

The following morning, police observed a vehicle fail to obey traffic laws in the area of Perry and Main Streets and conducted a traffic stop. A 37-year-old male from Brantford was charged with impaired driving after having greater than three times the legal limit of alcohol.

All three men were released with a future court date.




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# Martin elected as new Oxford County deputy warden

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Woodstock City Councillor Bernia Martin has been elected buy her peers as Oxford County's new Deputy Warden, replacing Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie.

The role is up for grabs each year, unlike the warden, who serves a four-year term. Martin ran against Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione but won the vote by a 7-3 count. Martin elected not to address council following a six-plus hour budget meeting last week, but she did give the Echo a written statement.

"You may recall that in 2023 during the first year of this term of council, my surname was Wheaton. In October of that year a friend and I were discussing the role of Deputy Warden and the upcoming election for the 2024 year. She asked me if I had aspirations of running for the seat someday and I indicated that I would love to have the experience should my peers choose to elect me as their representative. Deputy Warden Wheaton, my friend said aloud."

Martin said in the moment of hearing those words their eyes met and they laughed because they heard the exact same childhood rhyme.

"Without skipping a beat I added, 'one fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish.' And then in unison we said, 'Deputy Warden Wheaton hears a Who!'"

She said it was in that moment she knew it was time to change her surname back to Martin because she knew she'd never be able to be serious at a council meet-

ing if elected as Deputy Warden Wheaton.

"Thanks Dr. Seuss. In all seriousness and with rhyming aside, I am delighted to have been nominated by my peers and I am humbled to have been elected to this position."

Martin said she has learned much from her fellow councillors and looks forward to a year of ongoing discussions, meeting preparations, and debate.

"I am very fortunate as a first-term councillor to have gained experience as the Chair of SCOR (South Central Ontario Region of the Economic Development Corporation) and as Chair of Southwest Public Health. These responsibilities have prepared me should the opportunity arise to sit in for Warden Ryan in his absence."

Outgoing deputy warden and Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie said it was an honour to serve in the role.

"I want to thank my colleagues at council for this amazing opportunity. It was a true pleasure to work with Warden Marcus Ryan. He made the role very easy, as he is a true professional who works tirelessly in his role for the residents of Oxford."

He added the time went extremely fast, but he will take many memories away.

"From chairing a couple of meetings to attending events representing Oxford, it was a great experience that allowed me to see more of this great County and meet more of the amazing residents that call it home. I gained further insight into what truly makes Oxford a place we are lucky to call home."

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# Woodstock City Council passes 2026 capital budget

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The 2026 capital budget with a value of just over \$38 million has been approved. Some of the initiatives included in the 2026 capital budget include an expansion of Southside Park to the south of Parkinson Road, starting with the construction of a paved multiuse trail, community garden and parking areas. Future phases of the expansion will include secondary trail connections, natural playground and outdoor education space. Funding to allow for the purchase of accessible surfacing to improve access to city events for people with mobility challenges was also approved as was the replacement of indoor turf at Cowan Park Sportsplex and construction of a new park in the Sally Creek neighbourhood.

Council also voted in favour of a motion from Coun. Kate Leatherbarrow to deferring funding for the demolition of 478-484 Dundas St. to 2027. Instead, \$50,000 was approved to allow for further investigation into alternate uses for the building which could include public washrooms, storage facilities, municipi-

pal space and a potential business incubator space. Demolition would have run the city close to \$500,000. The property was potentially going to be used for a city hall or Museum Square expansion. Leatherbarrow said the Tri-Star Liquidation building was purchased for about \$3 million and added it is worth looking at keeping it and looking at several uses.

"In the almost four years I have been a councillor we've seen many things change in our community and we are hearing a lot of what is on the horizon for the economy. It could be a 10-year plan or a 15-year plan, who knows, but I would hate to tear it down without investigating the potential of this building."

The motion was second by Coun. Bernia Martin who said she was curious to see if a consultant would look at using the building for municipal staff space or even a new council chamber.

"We are outgrowing this space. I know a motion has come forward to express other options but I would be curious what a consultant would propose for a building we now own. We did issue debt for this, I think it was \$2.75 million...

and will be asking our community to pay the interest on that debt for the next 19 years, I believe is the amortization on that one."

The city's Economic Development Officer said he didn't know the exact age of the building but it has been around for years, once housing a Woolworth's department store.

"It looks like it has a full basement to me, 8 or 10 feet in the north end. There is a conveyor belt that does down to the basement used for moving inventory in and out. The building has had a couple of fires over the last decade or so and parts of it have been repaired or replaced."

He added each floor measures about 11,000 square feet. Mayor Jerry Acchione said he was hesitant to support the motion at first glance, mainly because of his vision of a bigger and better Museum Square as part of Streetscape.

"Considering the needs and wants, I said it probably 300 times yesterday during (the county budget deliberations), we do have to look at things a little different now moving forward. We have this asset in hand and looking at what other uses could come, I am in favour of that."

Council also added \$5,000,000 as a placeholder to the 2027 capital budget forecast for the construction of a new outdoor pool with direction to staff to bring back a report to council with possible locations, costs and funding sources.

The projects identified in the capital budget support the maintenance or replacement of existing assets as well as funding for new or growth-related capital assets. Funding for capital budget projects comes from a variety of sources including a contribution from the operating budget, reserve funds, debt and various capital grants.

Although changes were introduced in 2023 under the strong mayor legislation that shifts the authority of the budget to the head of council, Acchione provided direction to staff to prepare and present the budget for council's consideration, consistent with the city's historical budget process. The operating budget process will begin in February 2026, and more information is available at [www.cityofwoodstock.ca/budget](http://www.cityofwoodstock.ca/budget). The capital budget meeting can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jk-MyY9hpktc>.

## Oxford County announces new Director of Financial Services

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Carolyn King has been appointed as Oxford County's new Director of Financial Services and County Treasurer. She has served as the county's treasurer since July 2025.

King joined Oxford County in 2011 as a Financial Analyst and advanced to management, currently serving as Senior Manager of Financial Services. In this role, she has overseen payroll, asset management, financial reporting and planning, and accounting. She holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Wilfrid Laurier University and is a Chartered Professional Accountant.

In her new role, King will lead Oxford County's Financial Services team, overseeing a full range

of financial services, including accounts payable and receivable, payroll services, purchasing services, financial analysis and reporting, and departmental financial support. King will also lead the County's \$400 million annual budget and oversee the County's \$4 billion Asset Management Plan with a team that additionally supports the Asset Management Plans of four area municipalities. King will also continue to build relationships with Oxford's local area municipalities and collaborate on setting Oxford County's Tax Policy.

As Director of Financial Services, King will guide Oxford County's long-term financial strategy by working closely with Council, senior leadership, municipal partners and community members to foster fiscal responsibility and transparency.

A long-time Oxford County resident raising her

family locally, King brings both deep financial expertise and a strong commitment to supporting the County's continued growth and success.

"Oxford County has established strong financial policy and performance, which has allowed us to maintain an AAA credit rating," said County CAO Ben Addley. "It is our strong financial practices that lay the groundwork for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future. Carolyn's contributions and achievements over the years have demonstrated her ability to lead us through the increasingly complex demands of municipal fi-

nancial management."

King said she is honoured to take on the role and is looking forward to continuing responsible financial stewardship.

"Oxford County is at an exciting stage of growth and change, and I look forward to leading our finance team in developing innovative, forward-looking strategies that support sustainable community development. Together, we will ensure responsible stewardship of public resources while enabling initiatives that strengthen the County's future prosperity and resilience."

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will be offering Communion.

# Grassroots group unhappy with 2026 Oxford budget

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A community group representing county residents delegated to Oxford County Council during last week's budget meeting, asking for a zero per cent property tax hike. Along with a presentation outlining the reasons why, Stand4Oxford presented council with a petition signed by 1300 people.

"Our most recent campaign, Enough is Enough, began speaking with our friends and neighbours in all eight municipalities of Oxford about affordability and taxation," said spokesperson Marie Russell during her delegation to council. "What we've heard from people is they're overwhelmed, they're anxious and are expecting better from all levels of government."

Russell added affordability isn't just a political buzzword but also a Canadian crisis and added holding the line at a zero per cent tax increase isn't unrealistic. She did not lay blame on county staff or elected officials for today's cost of living, but she did point a finger at the province for a lack of funding.

"It's important to acknowledge the difficult position municipalities have been placed in by the ongoing provincial downloading and Oxford is no exception. Housing, long-term care, ambulance services and infrastructure demands continue to land at your feet with insufficient funds to address those needs."

Despite the group's support for incurring additional expenses at the municipal level, Russell revealed three requests to council during the budget process.

"We are asking staff to categorize all budget lines as core, important or deferrable, and we ask that council communicate clearly to residents which projects are discretionary and which are essential so people can understand where their tax dollars are truly going."

Stand4Oxford also asked the county to develop and implement a standard practice where municipalities and residents receive clear breakdowns of cost drivers in a public, plain-language summary.

"Showing core versus non-core spending, year-over-year changes, mandated versus optional services and major cost drivers.



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

Signs like this one can be seen across Oxford County as the group Stand4Oxford continues to lobby area municipalities for zero tax increase budgets.

This kind of public budget documentation is increasingly common across Ontario and it greatly improves public understanding," explained Russell.

The group's third request concerns Oxford County's involvement in the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, a Canadian climate-action initiative that supports local governments in planning and implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change.

"We ask that staff produce a climate budget summary and that they publish a report linking PCP milestones and budget allocations."

Several councillors responded to Russell's presentation including Coun. Deb Tait.

"I have been screaming at the top of my lungs for a couple of years now about the taxes so I am glad to see someone from the public has come forward. It is very impres-

sive, the number of people who have signed your petition."

She added people are struggling with affordability and pointed to the 300 homeowners in the City of Woodstock who have defaulted on their municipal tax bills.

Coun. Deb Gilvesy commended Stand4Oxford for getting involved with the political process.

"I'm glad you came to council. For years we've had no one here on budget day...I also think every level of government should be taken to task and should be looking for savings and efficiencies."

Coun. Jerry Acchione said while he isn't convinced a zero per cent budget is doable, he added elected officials need to be aware of what they are spending money on and what the need is versus the wants.

"Thank you for being here...and making people aware of the importance of today's meeting, plain and simple...Nobody seems to care until they get that first tax bill and

that's always frustrating."

Russell's presentation was made before council debated the budget and approved a plus-five per cent increase. Stand4Oxford released a statement following the meeting.

"Stand4Oxford is deeply disappointed by council's refusal once again to rein in spending and provide real relief to Oxford County taxpayers. While a few councillors—Mayor Acchione, Mayor Gilvesy, and Councillor Tait—showed genuine appreciation for residents' concerns, the majority chose the same familiar path of higher costs, more consultants, and little acknowledgement of the financial pressures facing families, seniors, and local businesses."

The three above-mentioned councillors voted against the final budget document. The statement added residents came to council in good faith, offering constructive solutions and asking for responsible stewardship during a time when many are struggling.

"Council's decision signals a disconnect from the realities in our community, and people are noticing."

The group also made it quite clear 2026 is an election year at the municipal level and advocated for change.

"Oxford County deserves leaders who listen, who lead with transparency, and who put the public interest ahead of bureaucratic expansion. Stand4Oxford will continue to engage, inform, and mobilize residents who expect better from their elected representatives. The message from the community is growing louder. We are paying attention," added the statement."

Stand4Oxford's vision statement said it "brings together engaged residents to support local governance that reflects the priorities, values, and needs of our community. We encourage transparency, responsible budgeting, and active participation in decisions that affect the future of Oxford County."

Russell concluded her presentation with a plea for members of council to take to heart.

"We are just coming today, with all due respect, asking you to do what we are doing in each and every one of our households. Thank you."

## Post-budget commentary by members of Oxford County Council

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Echo reached out to each member of council following the spirited debate last week to get their thoughts when they had some time to reflect on the final budget. Only five of ten elected officials responded and here are their replies.

### Marcus Ryan – Oxford County Warden and Zorra Township Mayor

Ryan, who voted in favour of the budget, said he was disappointed with the overall tone of the meeting.

"I take some blame for it and at one point I did interject in the meeting to say let's be careful of our language. It is our job

to disagree with each other and debate. There are reasonable things about which reasonable people can disagree and that's frankly our job, but when we get heated, we are sending a tone for our staff and for our community that I don't think is helpful."

Ryan explained he approaches every budget with the lens of sitting down with a neighbour or someone at the arena and how he would talk to them about it.

"For people in Woodstock, for instance, they are going to see a \$69 a month increase for the average assessed home. That works out to \$6 a month which is about two double doubles a month...almost exactly half of that is long-term care, paramedic services and South West Public Health which, in my opinion, should not

be on a property tax bill."

He added when housing is added in, it amounts to 65 per cent of the increase to taxpayers, another line item that should not be included in a municipal budget.

"Ontario is the only province in Ontario where housing is funded by municipal property taxes. So, if you take all of those out, instead of \$69 dollars you are left with \$15, a two per cent increase which is almost exactly what inflation is."

Ryan said unless people want the county to cut core services, it is difficult to come up with a smaller tax hike. He added some of the newly created position at the county will pay dividends.

"Some of the positions approve included an energy analyst. We spend millions of dollars a year on electricity, gas, diesel,

propane, etc. Analysing that, saving one per cent on that, you are going to pay for that person's salary."

### Jerry Acchione – Woodstock Mayor

Acchione, who voted against the budget, said elected officials have a responsibility to residents to prioritize needs over wants. "Every dollar we allocated should have reflected what is essential for the community, not simply what is desirable. Our residents are tightening their belts, and I feel they expect their municipal leaders to do the same, especially this budget cycle. I don't feel that was done at County Council on Wednesday by increasing their levy by nearly \$7 million dollars that every resident of Oxford County is going to feel."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 9

# Descending voters felt more could have been cut

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

He added in these challenging economic times, with direct local impacts like the shutdown of production at CAMI, fiscal prudence is not just good governance, it's a necessity.

"We know many people have found themselves suddenly out of work and there is no certainty about when things will turn around or if more ripple effects might still be coming. Our focus must remain on maintaining core services and supporting stability for our residents, rather than adding discretionary items that increase financial strain even further."

## Deb Tait – Woodstock City/County Councillor

Tait was critical of the warden's public comments that the tax increase was only \$77 per residence outside of Woodstock and \$69 in the city which is only two Tim Hortons coffees per month.

"Only people who can afford to buy coffee at Timmies use that type of financial reasoning. Same as saying that spending an extra \$100,000 is a very small percentage of a \$400 million county budget. You can make any expense sound small enough if you compare it to a giant number. What he didn't say was that when you add a \$77 in-

crease to whatever the tax increase for the township or cities, you get a tax increase that is more than a day's take home pay for many people."

She said with the recent closure of Cami, statistics show for every job lost in manufacturing or the car industry counts for eight jobs lost with the trickle-down effect. "We are in dire economic times and the increases in taxes the past three years is not sustainable nor is it responsible governance for those that put their trust in their elected officials. With these increases year after year its making life extremely difficult for the citizens of Oxford County. I question what it is we doing for the taxpayer with all these increases."

She added Coun. Bernia Martin mentioned a number of times during the meeting when adding more staff about life/work balance concerns.

"That is a slap in the face for all those working in the private sector and not only do they have work whatever hours is required-but not all have a full pension or benefits on top of that."

## Deb Gilvesy – Tillsonburg Mayor

Gilvesy, who voted against a number of new jobs at the county, is having a hard

tough stomaching tax increases year over year.

"I'm disappointed that the county levy began at 7.3 per cent and ultimately rose to 7.7 per cent, resulting in a 5.3 per cent tax increase for all residents outside Woodstock, and 5.2 per cent for Woodstock due to their independent library service."

She added recent tax hikes by the county are far beyond economic reality.

"With the loss of a major employer, residents choosing between food and heat, and rising reliance on food banks, this was the time for fiscal restraint, not further pressure on ratepayers. The path forward must focus on core services and essential infrastructure, reinforcing discipline and accountability."

Gilvesy said staffing growth at the county has outpaced actual population growth by more than threefold.

"As of gate keepers of the public purse we must listen to what our constituents are saying and what I am hearing does not align with an over 5 per cent tax increase. For these reasons and more, I could not support this budget."

## Phil Schaefer - East Zorra-Tavistock Mayor

Schaefer, who approved the budget, said

Oxford County provides many critical services like paramedics, housing, water and wastewater, among others, and he defended voting in favour of the budget.

"All these critical services are experiencing increases in demand and consequently increases in funding requirements. Council provided a responsible budget to address these increased needs, and many needs from other departments, with a modest tax increase. Twenty-three amendments were tabled to amend the budget, and council robustly debated these to come up with the approved budget."

He added the budget provided was a plan to improve the ambulance response times in the northern part of the county, with funding for an additional ambulance and paramedics.

"The increased demand for all our services is occurring at a time of many challenges in our local economy, and that fact was not lost on council. There were many differences of opinion expressed during the budget debate, but each member demonstrated their desire to act in the best interests of all Oxford County residents."

Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie did send an email saying he didn't have anything to add to his thoughts during last week's budget meeting.

# Two Lighting of the Lights Displays Stolen from Victoria Park

KYRAH SMITH

*Echo Correspondent*

On Friday, Dec. 12, two beloved displays from Ingersoll's annual Lighting of the Lights were discovered missing, just weeks after the festive event started on Nov. 22.

Although details surrounding the incident remain limited, Town of Ingersoll Parks staff are encouraging residents to

remain vigilant and report any information that may help locate the missing exhibits. The displays taken are Winnie the Pooh and Tigger, both favourites among visitors to the seasonal showcase.

"These displays are installed with care by our Parks staff, who work incredibly hard each season to build, maintain, and repair the Festival of Lights for everyone to enjoy," explained Emily Ripert, Communications Officer for the Town of Ingersoll.

soll.

Lighting of the Lights is a free, family-friendly event enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Many of the displays are made possible through the generous sponsorship of local businesses, while others are dedicated in memory of loved ones who have passed, adding a deeply personal meaning to the festive tradition.

"This is an extremely disheartening situation," said Ripert. "If you happen to see

these missing displays or have any information, please reach out to the Victoria Park Community Centre."

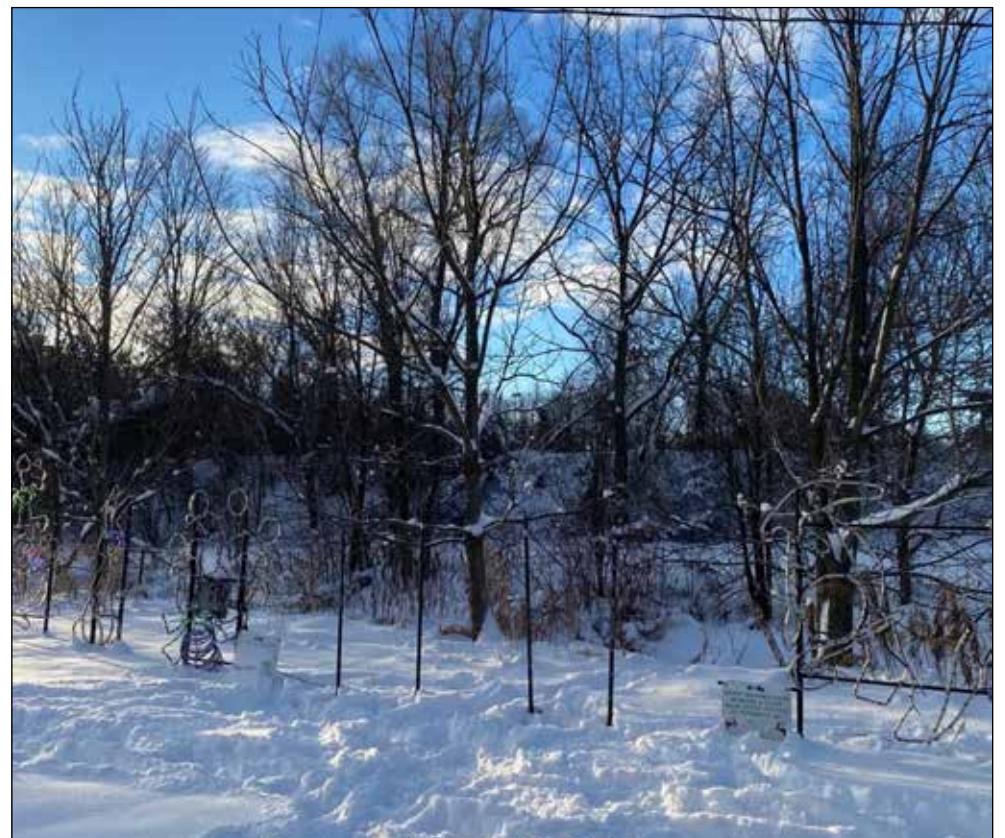
Anyone with information regarding the missing displays is asked to contact the Victoria Park Community Centre at 519-425-1181 ext. 0 or the Oxford OPP.

Police said the theft occurred between the evening of Dec. 11, and the morning of Dec. 12 between the approximate hours of 8 p.m., and 8 a.m.



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Missing Lighting of the Lights Displays Winnie the Pooh and Tigger.



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Ingersoll's Lighting of the Lights Displays MIA.



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(LEE GRIFFI PHOTOS)

**TEMPO SPONSORS WOODSTOCK SCHOOL FOOD FUNDRAISER**

One of the city's most popular restaurants sponsored a breakfast fundraiser at Woodstock's Northdale Elementary School last Saturday. Owner and chef Simon Mathias, pictured with his wife Paige, donated the eggs, sausages and pancakes for the event while Early Bird Coffee supplied the java and several city businesses donated raffle prizes. The event would not have been successful without the generous donation of time from parents and teachers. Santa and Mrs. Claus were also on hand for the morning, handing out candy canes and pencils while posing for photos. A total of \$1,500 was raised for the school's food program. Mathias is planning to hold the event again in 2026.



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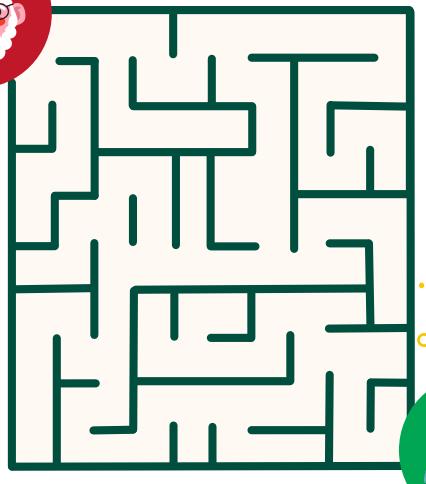
# Happy Holidays

from all of us!

Merry Christmas

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3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

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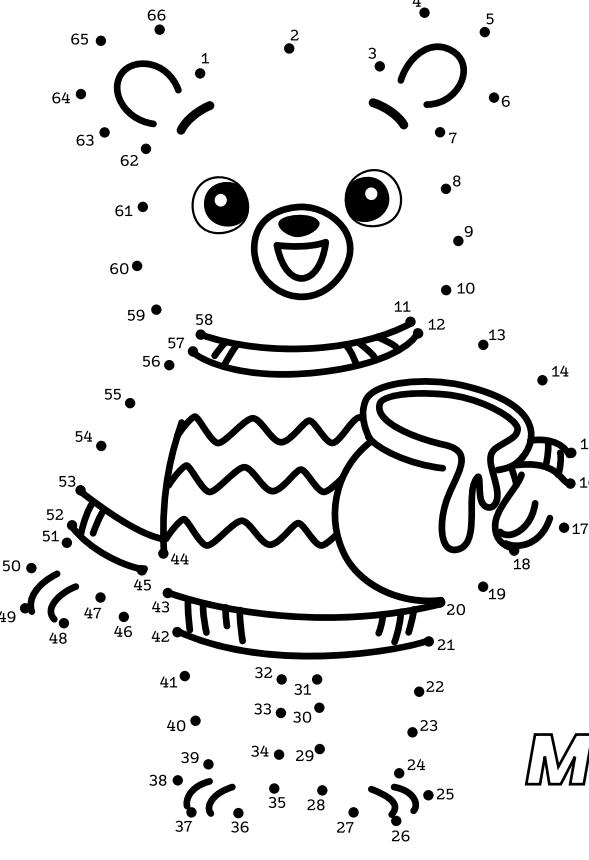


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# Christmas comes alive in downtown Woodstock

Downtown Woodstock wrapped up a joyful season of holiday programming as Christmas in the Square brought hundreds of residents and visitors to Museum Square on Dec. 12, 13, 19, and 20. Hosted in the heart of the city, the event delivered four days of festive fun, family activities, and community engagement.

This year's event runs from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Friday evenings and from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. Each date welcomed enthusiastic families ready to enjoy the charm of downtown under sparkling holiday décor. Museum Square served as a lively gathering space, complete with cozy lighting, festive displays, and music that set the tone for an unforgettable seasonal experience. Children were especially thrilled by the free train cart rides, which departed from Mu-

seum Square and traveled along a cheerful route through the downtown core. The ride quickly became a favorite attraction, encouraging families to explore the area and take in the holiday atmosphere.

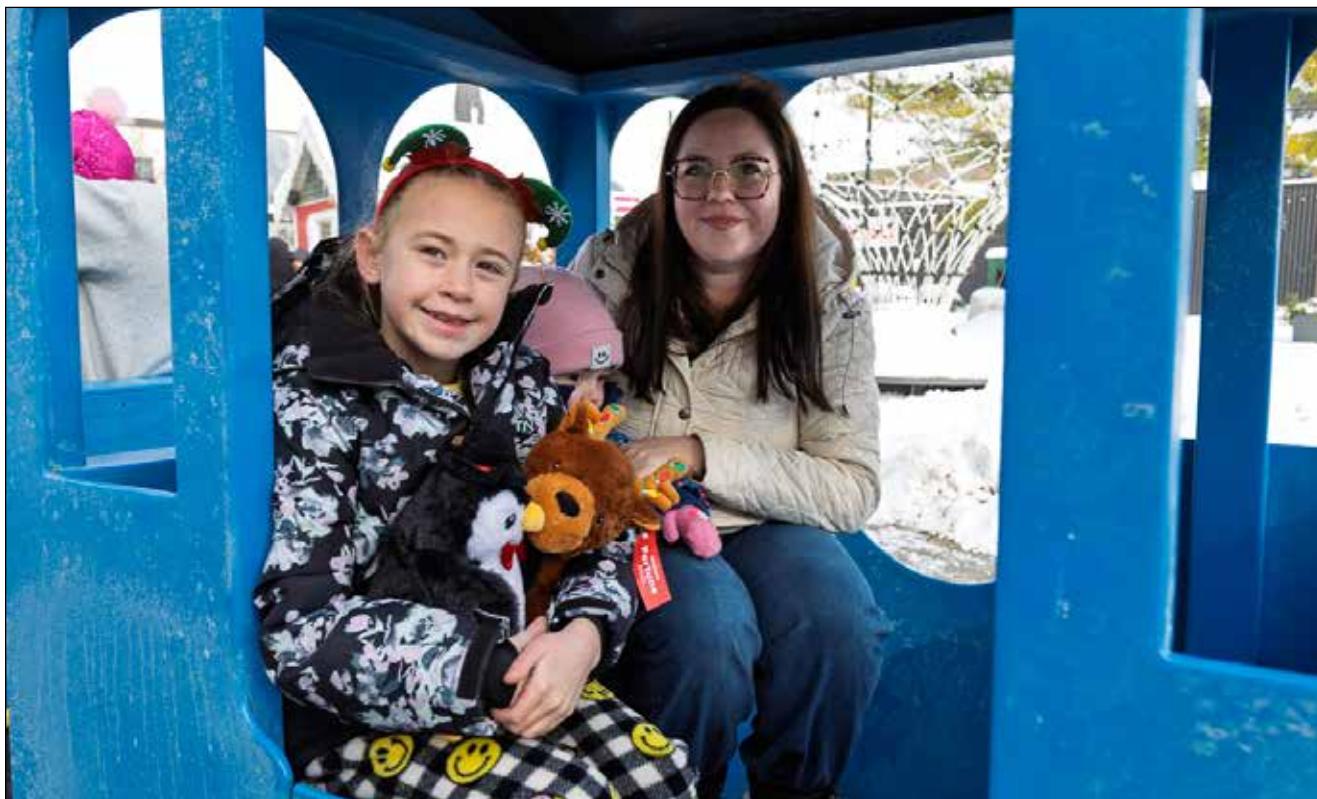
Another major highlight was Santa's House, where visitors enjoyed a personal meet-and-greet with Santa. Parents captured heartwarming photos, while volunteers and members of the Woodstock Camera Club helped ensure families received memorable holiday keepsakes. The whimsical setup, complete with festive decorations, added to the excitement for young attendees.

Between activities, many families extended their visit by exploring the thriving businesses located throughout downtown. Attendees shopped for last-minute gifts, visited season-

al pop-ups, and enjoyed warm drinks and treats from participating cafés and restaurants. The event successfully supports local merchants while fostering community connection and holiday spirit.

Christmas in the Square once again demonstrated Woodstock's commitment to cultivating vibrant, family-friendly events in its historic downtown. The program provided accessible entertainment for all ages and created a festive environment that celebrated both the season and the community's unique spirit.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Snuggling in tight, the Fowler family shared smiles on the free cart ride through Museum Square.

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# Community Gathers as Beachville Museum lights up for the Holidays

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

On Dec. 5, Beachville officially kicked off the season with its much-anticipated Light Up the Museum event, bringing residents together for a festive evening filled with lights, music, and community.

The free event began at 6:30 p.m., with families and friends gathering in the museum courtyard despite the chilly December air. Ahead of the official lighting, Museum Curator Stephanie Radu addressed the crowd.

“We really appreciate your support of this institution, our local history is so, so important, and we’re grateful you’re able to join us this evening.”

Radu continued offering heartfelt thanks to the many volunteers whose dedication made the event possible, as well as to the generous sponsors whose donations helped bring the displays to life.

South West Oxford Mayor David Mayberry and Zorra Mayor Marcus Ryan also shared a few words, echoing their appre-

ciation for the volunteers and extending warm holiday wishes to everyone in attendance. Their remarks were met with applause from the growing crowd, setting the tone for the evening ahead.

At 6:45 p.m., anticipation peaked as a countdown from ten began, with voices of all ages joining in. As the final number rang out, the museum and surrounding grounds burst into a dazzling display of twinkling Christmas lights. Cheers erupted as the illuminated scene was revealed, made even more magical by a special guest appearance from Santa Claus himself.

Festive music filled the courtyard as children lined up for photos with Santa, while others enjoyed the hot cocoa and apple cider bar. The museum doors were also open throughout the evening, allowing guests to explore the exhibits and warm up indoors.

With plenty of holiday cheer, Lighting Up the Museum once again proved to be a beloved Beachville tradition; one that celebrates not just the season, but the community behind it.



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

“Santa's Workshop” One of the festive displays from Beachville's Light up the Museum Event.



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(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Beachville Museum and grounds all lit up for the Holidays at this year's event.

**Merry Christmas**  
*and Happy New Year*

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# City church holds Christmas event

The Church of the Epiphany at 560 Dundas Street in Woodstock hosted its annual Christmas Bazaar on Saturday, Dec. 6, running from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The event brought together hundreds of attendees who enjoyed a day filled with holiday spirit, homemade comfort foods, and a wide variety of handcrafted and curated goods. Shoppers moved from table to table, exploring everything the bazaar had to offer, starting with the much-loved Attic Treasures section, where unique collectibles and vintage items awaited new homes.

The Baking Table offered a delicious assortment of seasonal favourites, including homemade candies, shortbread, shepherd's pies, turkey pies, Christmas puddings, and preserved goods, all of which sold quickly as visitors stocked up for the holiday season. The church hall was filled with an impressive showcase of crafts, jewelry, and displays from 11 talented vendors, making

it an ideal destination for those seeking one-of-a-kind Christmas gifts.

Throughout the day, volunteers greeted guests with warmth and enthusiasm, creating an atmosphere that embodied the spirit of the season. Guests enjoyed a delicious lunch in the bustling dining area. For an affordable \$12, visitors were served hearty soup and sandwiches, followed by their choice of homemade Christmas pudding or apple crisp, accompanied by tea and coffee. The lunch service became a social highlight, offering a chance to relax, visit, and share in the community fellowship.

Organizers were pleased with the event's success, highlighting the strong turnout and the enthusiasm of both volunteers and attendees. The annual Christmas bazaar remains a cherished tradition in Woodstock, supporting the church's ministries while bringing the community together in a spirit of holiday warmth and connection.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Karen, showcasing her Embroidery and Quilting work, greeted eager shoppers during the Bazaar.



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# Santa visits local service club's breakfast

On the morning of Dec. 6, the Optimist Club once again brought holiday joy to Woodstock by hosting Santa's Breakfast at St. David's United Church, 190 Springbank Ave. From 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., families gathered for a morning filled with celebration, good food, and meaningful community support.

The event transformed the church hall into a festive gathering place, complete with holiday décor and a welcoming atmosphere created by dedicated volunteers. Guests were treated

to a delicious breakfast, and children were especially delighted by the opportunity to visit Santa Claus and share their Christmas wishes.

The steady stream of families demonstrated the community's enthusiasm for the long-standing tradition. In keeping with the Optimist Club's commitment to supporting local youth, a portion of the proceeds was donated to the School Breakfast Program, helping ensure that students across Woodstock have reliable access to nutritious morn-

ing meals. Organizers emphasized how critical these funds are for supporting young learners and thanked attendees for making this contribution possible.

The Optimist Club extended its appreciation to all who participated, including volunteers, sponsors, and the staff of St. David's United Church. The event not only provided an enjoyable morning for families but also strengthened the spirit of giving and community connection that defines the holiday season.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



A warm welcome from Carrie and Mrs. Claus greeted guests as they arrived for breakfast and a cheerful visit with Santa.

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Surrounded by Izzie, Nevaeh, Ryder, Emma, and Jack, Santa enjoyed a cheerful gathering with the young visitors.

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# Unique Christmas traditions around the world

Christmas celebrations span the globe. According to a 2025 report from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are roughly 2.6 billion Christians worldwide, a figure that undoubtedly contributes to the popularity of Christmas. Christianity continues to have the most adherents of any religion in the world, and the Christian population is expected to top three billion before 2050.

Christians bring unique cultural touches to their Christmas celebrations each year. Celebrations vary widely, and here's a look at some notable Christmas traditions across the globe.

## Yule Goat

The Yule Goat is a Christmas tradition in Sweden. The goat is believed to be an invisible spirit that ensures that Yule preparations are done correctly. A popular theory connects the goat to the Norse god Thor, who rode a chariot pulled by two goats.

## Krampus

While many people celebrate the benevolence of Santa Claus, some celebrate a much grumpier alter-ego of sort. Krampus is a man-goat, half-demon monster who punishes misbehaving

children at Christmastime, says Britannica. He is the evil companion of St. Nicholas, and is believed to have originated in Germany. His name comes from the German word "krampen," which means, "claw."

## Christmas chicken

Christmas Eve is a popular romantic occasion for couples and families in Japan. In addition to gift-giving and a romance, many people choose to feast on a meal of KFC fried chicken and strawberry shortcake for dessert.

## Roller-skating to Mass

In the city of Caracas, Venezuela, it's customary for Christmas Eve celebrants to roller skate to early morning Mass. Known as "Misa de Aguinaldo," these special church services take place on the days leading up to Christmas, with the most festive held on December 24. On this day, the streets of Caracas are closed to automobiles, enabling revelers to cheerfully skate to church.

## Mumming

In Newfoundland, Canada, celebrants known as mummers dress in elaborate disguises featuring mismatched clothing and whimsical accessories. The mummers obscure their identities and

visit neighbors' homes during the 12 days of Christmas, performing songs, skits or dances while others attempt to guess their identities.

## Spiderweb decorations

Individuals in Ukraine decorate their Christmas trees with artificial spider webs. This tradition is inspired by a tale of a poor widow and her children who didn't have money for tree ornaments.

Upon waking up on Christmas morning, they found their tree covered in sparkling, glimmering spider webs that resembled tinsel. A spider had spun the beautiful display as thanks for finding shelter and warmth in the family's humble abode. Today's spider webs symbolize unexpected blessings and gratitude.

Plenty of unique touches set Christmastime celebrations apart across the globe.



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*Merry  
Christmas*



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Wishing all my clients, family, friends, and colleagues a SAFE, JOYFUL, and MEMORABLE HOLIDAY SEASON. May you enjoy time with loved ones and find moments for REST, REFLECTION and REJUVENATION.

As I celebrate 20 years in real estate, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my clients for your LOYALTY, TRUST and continued SUPPORT. I am truly grateful for the meaningful relationships built over the years and for the privilege of helping you navigate your real estate journeys.

Warmest holiday wishes,

**Alison Willsey & Family**

# Fun ways to enjoy the start of winter

Winter begins on December 21 and ends in March 2026. Many people lament the arrival of winter, perhaps thinking the colder temperatures and shorter hours of sunlight will compromise their chances to

have fun. Even though particularly chilly thermostat readings or stormy conditions can hamper some plans, when people dig deeper they may find that even the coldest days present opportunities for enjoyment.

When winter begins, the following activities can make for an entertaining way to celebrate the arrival of the season.

- Build a snow creation. Use the first significant snowfall of the season to organize a snowman, snowwoman, or snow-animal-making event or contest. Waterproof gloves are a necessary piece of equipment, as are buckets for moving snow, shovels, carving and shaping tools (which can be plastic cutlery), and accessories to dress up the final product.
- Go sledding on the best hills. Sledding is a popular wintertime activity that doesn't require too much equipment. Sleds can be purchased at sporting goods stores or toy stores. Sledgers of all ages should consider wearing helmets to protect against injury if they will be traversing especially steep hills.
- Host a winter block party. Many cities and towns across North America participate in WinterFest events, which run the gamut from food and craft festivals to sporting events. Individuals can take cues from these type of activities and plan neighborhood festivals right on their streets. Neighbors can wheel out their fire pits or utilize outdoor pro-

pane heaters to keep spots cozy. Hot cocoa and cider stations and warm treats can keep everyone from feeling too cold. Electric slow cookers can keep everything from soups to chilis to stews warm and participants can enjoy a buffet of hearty foods.

- Visit an ice rink. Whether a rink is indoors or outside, ice skating is a quintessential wintertime activity. Skaters of all skill levels can take to the ice and enjoy some exercise and laughs. Check local rink schedules to take advantage of open skate times when hockey games or practices are not dominating the ice.
- Mark the winter solstice. The winter solstice, also known as the start of astronomical winter, is the shortest day of sunlight on the calendar. It occurs when either of the Earth's poles reaches maximum tilt away from the sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, this occurs on December 21. Because there will be only roughly seven hours of daylight, take steps to make the fact that the sun will set at its earliest a little easier to swallow. Kids can run around outdoors with glow sticks, while adults can deck their homes in twinkle lights if they are not decorated for Christmas. Lanterns, campfires and candles can be lit, and everyone can gather outdoors to chat and socialize.

Winter begins on December 21, 2023, and there are plenty of ways to celebrate this fun, if sometimes frigid, season.

*May Your Holidays Be Merry & Bright!*



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As we celebrate this special time of year, I would like to extend heartfelt gratitude on behalf of Woodstock City Council to everyone who contributes to making our community such a vibrant and caring place.

Whether you gather for Christmas, observe another tradition, or simply take this time to rest and reconnect, we wish you moments of peace, good health, and happiness.

From our families to yours, warmest wishes for a safe, joyful, and hopeful holiday season—and a bright year ahead.




Jerry Acchione  
Mayor, City of Woodstock

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# Woodstock glows with Christmas lights

Homes throughout Woodstock are coming alive with colorful lights, meaningful symbols, and festive displays that celebrate both the beauty and the purpose of the holiday. Residents are embracing the tradition of outdoor Christmas decorating as a way to express personal creativity, honor faith, and foster a strong sense of community during the winter months.

Through their decorated homes, Woodstock residents are not only celebrating Christmas, but they are also building connections, preserving traditions, and sharing light during the darkest time of year. Each glowing display is a testament to community pride and the enduring power of the Christmas message.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



In the Drew Street area, this festive scene shines brightly, spreading Christmas cheer throughout the neighborhood.



A cheerful holiday display lights up the Vansittart Street area, creating a warm and welcoming Christmas atmosphere.



Seasonal lights and decorations transform this Devonshire Street home into a celebration of Christmas joy and togetherness.

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# Boxing Day traditions

The holiday season is filled with activities and steeped in tradition. The magic does not end when Thanksgiving, Christmas or Chanukah have come and gone. While people mark off the days until they can count down the hours on New Year's Eve, another event between Christmas Day and December 31 merits attention as well.

Boxing Day is celebrated in Great Britain, Canada and British Commonwealth nations like Australia and New Zealand. The holiday originated in the United Kingdom but other European nations have since embraced it. Boxing Day coincides with the Christian holiday Saint Stephen's Day, which is considered the second day of Christmas. St. Stephen was a deacon the Apostles ordained to take care of widows and the indigent.

Boxing Day dates back to 1871, according to Love to Know, and came about as a custom for tradesmen and women to collect "Christmas boxes" of money or presents on the first weekday after Christmas in exchange for good service throughout the year. Many workers, particularly household servants, had to work on Christmas Day, so Boxing Day provided an opportunity for them to visit with their own families. The workers took home boxes filled with foods and other gifts. In the U.K., Boxing Day is a government-mandated holiday. If it falls on a weekend, then the holiday will be observed on the following Monday. Schools and many organizations are closed on this day. Stores tend to be open, as Boxing Day

sales are very popular.

As with most events, Boxing Day features some notable customs.

- Workers, especially those in service positions, are honored. It's customary to give a financial gift to people who provide services throughout the year. This includes mail carriers, sanitation workers, hair stylists, and others.
- Contribute to the less fortunate. People often donate food to local food banks and support charities.
- Watch or attend sporting events. Boxing Day also is marked by sporting events like horse racing and football, with the U.K. often hosting a full day of Premier League games.
- Take a chilly swim. Some individuals enjoy participating in Polar Plunges to raise money for charities. One annual event features people jumping into the English Channel, and similar plunges are held elsewhere.
- Head to the stores. Boxing Day is similar to Black Friday in the United States. Boxing Day is filled with slashed prices and bargains for shoppers who are eager to spend holiday gift cards.
- Meet up with friends and families. On Boxing Day, friends frequently get together to socialize and go out for dinner or drinks.

Boxing Day is celebrated the day after Christmas and provides a chance to continue the merriment of the holiday season.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## INGERSOLL AND DISTRICT CURLING CLUB SUPPORTS THE SALVATION ARMY FOOD BANK

Members of the Ingersoll & District Curling Club generously donated to the Ingersoll Salvation Army Food Bank. Many families require help with grocery items, particularly at this time of year. Club members heeded the call and were delighted to provide their support for this third annual food drive at the club. Club members recognize that this is a tough year in Ingersoll for many people. As one member put it, "helping to look after families in need in our town is the right thing to do!" Shown above is club member Mike

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# Woodstock Ingersoll Echo **SPORTS**

## Red Devils girls' hockey fans could use some work on hat-trick 'celly'

JEFF TRIBE

*Echo Correspondent*

The Woodstock CI Red Devils girls' hockey fans on buyout knew when to cheer, were appropriately dressed in red-and-white and packing a witty assortment of supportive signage.

But they could have used a little work on their hat-trick 'celly' protocol.

"Yes, they do," smiled Red Devils' defender Alex McDonald Tuesday, Dec. 9 at Woodstock's Civic Centre Arena.

Clearly, the fans missed their cue, a variety of red-and-white and other headgear remaining firmly anchored on heads rather than being tossed onto the ice as per hockey tradition as Jillian Trepanier greeted the 42-second mark of the third period with her third goal of the contest.

The cost of a contemporary hat may have been a factor.

"Thirty bucks?" hazarded Trepanier, who personally favours a winter toque with a pom-pom. "Depends which one you get."

"We would have given them back," McDonald clarified. "We weren't going to keep them."

Missed opportunity aside, there was lots for the Red Devils to celebrate in an eventual 9-1 Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast victory over the Woodstock Huron Park Huskies. McDonald had opened scoring at the two-minute mark of the first period, assisted by Natalia Thompson and Paige Kilgour, kicking off a three-goal run including a pair of unassisted Trepanier efforts.

WCI's Whitney Fraser, Kilgour and Dakota Thompson added second-period goals with a single assist to Tayla

Graham. Trepanier from Kilgour, Eden Fraser, unassisted, and McDonald (from Fraser) rounded Red Devils scoring.

McDonald's second of the game came from the left point, a high, hard wrister inside the right post.

"I just took my chance and shot it," said McDonald. "They were all in front of the goalie and she couldn't see."

WCI finished last season as Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletics Association (WOSSAA) bronze medalists and are looking to pick back up from there.

"We have big goals," said coach Martha Trepanier. "Big goals this year."

The roster includes a lot of Grade 12 students the coach continued, as well as a solid cadre of Woodstock Wildcats U18 skaters.

"And then you add talent and depth from other associations."

"I feel we are used to each other because we played together last year," McDonald added. "We know how each other plays."

Expectations are high, in the short term, improving on last year's finish, with the potential to advance beyond WOSSAA as a result.

"It will take a lot of hard work," said Trepanier.

Huron Park's Nevie Baker had a reasonable idea how the Red Devils would play, given she is also a Wildcats U18 roster member, enjoying competing against her teammates, even if that meant a little good-natured 'chirping.'

"A little bit, not too much," smiled Baker, also enjoying potting her team's lone goal. Baker was rewarded as she drove to the net, burying the puck 'top shelf' at the 4:37 mark of the third period.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

**Woodstock CI's Natalia Thompson (right) bears down in the face-off circle against Huron Park's Ella Neil.**

"Just like a rebound," she summed up. "Screened the goalie."

"It was good we got at least one."

The Red Devils are a strong team credited Huskies coach Ray Robbins, quality talent and shooters, with few holes in the lineup.

"Our goal was to get a goal and hopefully help our goalie a little more."

Mission at least partially accomplished, he alluded to other team goals including having fun, staying positive and striving to improve.

"I think we just keep getting better as a team," Baker agreed.

**Tillsonburg Gemini Boys 9, Woodstock College Avenue 3**

A three-goal Tillsonburg third decided the issue, but not without two solid periods of play from the Knights.

"Best game all year," summed up College Avenue's Tyson Clough Tuesday, December 9 at Woodstock's Reeves Community Complex.

Teammate Jacob Skanes opened CASS scoring on an end-to-end second-period

rush, cutting into an earlier 3-0 deficit. Picking up the puck in his own high slot, Skanes headed up ice, gained the Gemini blueline and scored on a wrister, possibly using the Tillsonburg defender as a partial screen. The Knights' Nathan Beam made it a 3-2 game 1:59 later, driving to the net for a backhanded deke on a five-on-three power play. Tillsonburg's Lucas Thompson restored Tillsonburg's two-goal lead with 8:13 remaining in the period, a goal countered by Clough, cutting in off the left wing.

That would be as close as the Knights got, giving up a pair of late second-period goals and three unanswered in the third, en route to the 9-3 final.

"They came out hard in the first two periods," said CASS coach Brody Campbell. "And we were with them up 'till then (the third)."

The Knights scored twice in their first outing, three in their second and are looking for four in their next.

"Each game just get a little better," Campbell concluded.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

**College Avenue's Nathan Beam (right) keeps track of Tillsonburg Gemini Lucas Morse deep in the Knights' zone.**

# Red Devils girls' hockey fans could use some work on hat-trick 'celly'

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TVRA SOUTHEAST GIRLS HOCKEY	
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 15</b>	
WOODSTOCK CI	2
ST. THOMAS PARKSIDE	1
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 9</b>	
WCI	9
HURON PARK	1
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 8</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	2
PARKSIDE	0
<b>THURSDAY, DEC. 4</b>	
WCI	5
AYLMER EAST ELGIN	0
INGERSOLL DCI	1
LORD DORCHESTER	1
<b>WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3</b>	
PARKSIDE	4
HURON PARK	3
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 2</b>	
ST. THOMAS ST. JOE'S	7
HURON PARK	1
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 1</b>	
EAST ELGIN	6
WOODSTOCK ST. MARY'S	2
<b>THURSDAY, NOV. 27</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	10
HURON PARK	0

TVRA SOUTHEAST BOYS HOCKEY	
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 15</b>	
ST. MARY'S	2
PARKSIDE	1
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 9</b>	
LORD DORCHESTER	5
ST. MARY'S	3
TILLSONBURG	9
COLLEGE AVENUE	3
<b>THURSDAY, DEC. 4</b>	
ST. MARY'S	6
ST. JOE'S	2
INGERSOLL DCI	3
DORCHESTER	2
<b>WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3</b>	
HURON PARK	5
COLLEGE AVENUE	2
PARKSIDE	3
IDCI	2
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 2</b>	
ST. THOMAS ST. JOE'S	7
HURON PARK	1
<b>THURSDAY, NOV. 27</b>	
ST. MARY'S	6
CASS	1
<b>WEDNESDAY, NOV. 26</b>	
ST. JOE'S	5
HURON PARK	0

# Laird's halftime half-court bombs provide inspiration for Warriors' outside game

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

It wasn't clear if Woodstock St. Mary's scorekeeper Jada Laird offered inspiration.

Or just the right amount of competitive challenge.

Either way, her halftime halfcourt hoops provided an example her senior male basketball counterparts could follow en route to a hard-fought 53-45 Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast victory over the visiting Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers Tuesday, December 9 at St. Mary's.

"That's what we needed," laughed Warriors coach Duane Kumala-Harris. "Get the crowd going."

Partisan Warriors boosters bolstered by a buyout option were already 'going' through a competitive first half. The Warriors came out strongly in the opening quarter, knocking down a trio of three-pointers en route to a 16-6 advantage. The Bombers answered back in the second period however, Kolton Stewart punctuating a scoring reversal with a game-tying (22-22) corner three at the buzzer.

As both squads retreated to their respective dressing rooms, a pair of Warriors juniors - names withheld to make identification more difficult following ensuing 'schooling' courtesy of their scorekeeper - took to the vacated court to show off their long-range prowess. As they continued to struggle to find the net, Laird joined in, earning a loud cheer from the fans for knocking down a long-range bomb in the hoop to their left, completing a set with one to their right.

"Inspirational of course, of course," smiled St. Mary's senior Kymani Small, who emerged in time to see Laird knock down her second.

To be fair, it would be the combination of the Warriors' fullcourt pressure person-to-person defence and pushing the ball in transition which first broke the game in their favour. With the Bombers maximizing their height advantage and presence on the boards through a 3-2

zone, St. Mary's initially struggled from distance.

After a goaltending call on Ingersoll's Quorron Kelly, teammate Gavin Laidman gave IDCI a 25-24 lead 55 seconds into the third quarter on an old-school three-point play, adding a free throw to the back end of a two-point field goal. The Warriors regained the lead on a coast-to-coast Johnny Bertoia runner, going up by three on a Kingston McPherson fast-break lay-in.

"We pressed them hard, played good defence," said McPherson. "Our threes weren't hitting outside so we had to go inside for layups."

Michael Agosu found the Warriors' missing three-point stroke on a late-clock three from the top of the key, Small following with a lay-in off a fast break. A nine-point run was broken off by a Laidman offensive putback, but Destiny Omirige re-established it with a three-pointer 4:34 into the eight-minute third quarter, set up again off transition from defence.

"At times they'd be more aggressive than us," said Small. "When we started to fight back, that's when we'd take the lead."

The Bombers battled back from a ten-point deficit to within four on a Laidman drive to the basket, Kelly four-foot baseline jumper and pair of Stewart free throws. However, Jeremy Zamora hit the Warriors' third trey of the quarter, Small following up with a drive to the hoop for a nine-point (42-33) lead which essentially lived for the duration.

"Rough loss," summed up Laidman, strong on both the drive and boards resulting in a game-high 21 points in a losing cause. "Everyone gave it their all... it happens."

The defeat was Ingersoll's first on the young TVRA Southeast season, following earlier victories over St. Thomas Central Elgin and Lord Dorchester. Short three guards on the day, Stewart, who finished with 13 for the Bombers, looked forward to regrouping and getting back on the court at full strength.

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# Laird's halftime halfcourt bombs provide inspiration for Warriors' outside game

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

"We'll be ready to go," he concluded. "We've got lots of games left."

Kelly added four for IDCI, T. Strom and L. Cuthbert one field goal apiece. Emmanuel Fadeyi had a field goal for the Warriors, Zamora and Agosu seven points each, Bertoia nine, McPherson and Small ten apiece and Omirige a

team-high 11.

The win lifted the Warriors into a 2-1 record including a win over Woodstock College Avenue and a loss to Tillsonburg Glendale.

"We're learning, trying things and the kids are committed," Kumala-Thomas concluded. "That's the main thing."

TVRA SOUTHEAST SENIOR BOYS BASKETBALL	
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 15</b>	
WOODSTOCK CI	59
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	39
TILLSONBURG GLENDALE	52
INGERSOLL DCI	32
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 9</b>	
ST. MARY'S	53
IDCI	45
HURON PARK	77
CENTRAL ELGIN	57
WCI	66
COLLEGE AVENUE	38
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 8</b>	
TILLSONBURG	48
ST. MARY'S	45
<b>THURSDAY, DEC. 4</b>	
ST. THOMAS ST. JOE'S	54
COLLEGE AVENUE	34
HURON PARK	55
AYLMER EAST ELGIN	35
IDCI	61
LORD DORCHESTER	43
<b>WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3</b>	
WOODSTOCK CI	53
TILLSONBURG	43
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 2</b>	
HURON PARK	55
ST. THOMAS ARTHUR VOADEN	35
INGERSOLL	65
CENTRAL ELGIN	51
WCI	68
EAST ELGIN	48
ST. MARY'S	67
CASS	47

TVRA SOUTHEAST JUNIOR BOYS BASKETBALL	
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 15</b>	
WOODSTOCK CI	58
HURON PARK	38
GLENDALE	71
INGERSOLL DCI	53
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 9</b>	
ST. MARY'S	46
IDCI	26
COLLEGE AVENUE	69
WCI	66
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 8</b>	
ST. MARY'S	53
GLENDALE	39
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 4</b>	
IDCI	64
DORCHESTER	48
COLLEGE AVENUE	69
ST. JOE'S	57
EAST ELGIN	54
HURON PARK	47
<b>WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3</b>	
WCI	62
GLENDALE	51
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 2</b>	
COLLEGE AVENUE	59
ST. MARY'S	43
WCI	48
EAST ELGIN	28
CENTRAL ELGIN	65
IDCI	45

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(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO) IDCI Blue Bomber Gavin Laidman (right) drives to the hoop against St. Mary's Warrior Michael Agosu.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO) Ingersoll's Quorron Kelly (left) was called for goaltending on this shot from St. Mary's Warrior Johnny Bertoia (right).

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# Woodstock CI Red Devils rising to meet AA challenge

JEFF TRIBE

*Echo Correspondent*

The roadmap to Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) championships is a familiar one for the Woodstock CI Red Devils senior girls' volleyball team.

But this year's route will feature considerably more AA traffic than they were used to at their previous A level.

"The path will be a lot harder," said coach Pauline Schubert of her squad's 2025-2026 transition. "But we're certainly going to give it our best."

Schubert looks forward to having three experienced navigators on this year's squad, middle Kate Booker, power Kaiden Martin and power-turned-setter Ava Bick-

ell.

"She's very versatile," credited Schubert of the latter's conversion.

The three are among the returnees from last year's Red Devils squad which reached OFSAA A quarterfinals in Toronto, continuity in terms of experience and an expectation to compete, regardless of opponent and outcome.

"They are just very motivated," said Schubert, proud of her team's effort against an extremely strong London Christian squad the previous Friday. Although dropping a 25-18, 25-19 tournament semi-final decision, coach and players were pleased with their performance.

"It was like, 'We did so good,'" said Schubert. "When you've left it all out there, you can't be disappointed with the result."

The Red Devils also benefit from Ontario Volleyball Association players on the roster, a level of experience allowing Schubert to quickly move beyond rotation basics into broader strategy.

"We can start off right away with higher things."

An athletic season being as much or more about the journey than the destination, the Red Devils took a step forward on their Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast path with a 25-15, 25-15, 25-18 homecourt victory over the visiting Woodstock College Avenue Knights Tuesday, Dec. 9 at Woodstock CI.

The Knights have height and athleticism, on this day however, the Red Devils were more consistent, setting up their offence from the serving line and with a transition

from strong defence.

That win and a Monday, December 15 sweep of Woodstock Huron Park gave WCI a 5-0 record on the young season, a strong start, albeit one without facing 5-0 Ingersoll DCI or 4-0 St. Thomas Parkside and St. Thomas St. Joe's. What was expected to be a challenging back half to the TVRA Southeast campaign was scheduled to open Tuesday, December 16 with the Parkside Stampede's visiting the WCI Devildome.

"I think that will really show what level we can compete at for the year," said Schubert.

The Knights, falling to 1-2 with the loss, were scheduled to finish out their pre-Christmas schedule with a Tuesday, Dec. 16 home date against the St. Thomas Central Elgin Titans.

TVRA SOUTHEAST SENIOR GIRLS VOLLEYBALL	
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 15</b>	
WOODSTOCK CI	25, 25, 25
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	15, 12, 15
INGERSOLL DCI	25, 20, 26, 25, 15
TILLSONBURG GLENDALE	15, 25, 24, 12, 3
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 9</b>	
WCI	25, 25, 25
COLLEGE AVENUE	15, 15, 18
HURON PARK	25, 25, 25
ST. THOMAS CENTRAL ELGIN	15, 23, 22
INGERSOLL DCI	27, 25, 25
WOODSTOCK ST. MARY'S	25, 14, 19
<b>THURSDAY, DEC. 4</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	23, 23, 26, 25, 17
LORD DORCHESTER	25, 25, 24, 19, 15
ST. JOE'S	25, 25, 25
COLLEGE AVENUE	12, 19, 15
<b>WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3</b>	
WCI	25, 25, 25
GLENDALE	15, 13, 16
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 2</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	25, 25, 25
CENTRAL ELGIN	11, 11, 15
COLLEGE AVENUE	25, 25, 25
ST. MARY'S	23, 17, 22

TVRA SOUTHEAST SENIOR GIRLS VOLLEYBALL	
<b>MONDAY, DEC. 15</b>	
ST. MARY'S	25, 25, 25, 18, 25, 15
LORD DORCHESTER	21, 20, 25, 6, 12
INGERSOLL DCI	25, 25, 15, 25
GLENDALE	17, 19, 25, 9
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 9</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	22, 25, 20, 25, 15
ST. MARY'S	25, 15, 25, 18, 9
HURON PARK	19, 25, 25, 25
CENTRAL ELGIN	25, 8, 9, 7
WOODSTOCK	25, 25, 25
COLLEGE AVENUE	10, 11, 9
<b>THURSDAY, DEC. 4</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	25, 25, 25
DORCHESTER	12, 15, 19
ST. JOE'S	25, 25, 25
COLLEGE AVENUE	21, 10, 10
AYLMER EAST ELGIN	22, 15, 25, 25
HURON PARK	25, 25, 14, 23, 12
<b>WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3</b>	
WOODSTOCK CI	25, 25, 25
GLENDALE	16, 20, 8
<b>TUESDAY, DEC. 2</b>	
INGERSOLL DCI	25, 25, 25
CENTRAL ELGIN	5, 11, 13
WOODSTOCK CI	25, 25, 25
EAST ELGIN	23, 11, 7
ST. MARY'S	25, 25, 25
COLLEGE AVENUE	22, 19, 17



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The Woodstock CI Red Devils (right) took a three-set victory over the College Avenue Knights (left) Tuesday, December 9 in the Devildome.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

College Avenue's Emily Pye (right) gets a hit past the block of WCI Red Devils Ivy Caska-nette (left) and Natalie Parsons.

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# Woodstock Wildcats U15 A team brings home gold from Tennessee

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Tennessee may seem like a long way to go just to play some hockey, but the team made it more than worth its while to cross the border and bring home a championship.

The Wildcats U15 team won the Smashville Girls Hockey Showcase in Nashville recently, something head coach and well-known hockey icon Chad Paton said was an incredible trip.

“This the last year that a majority of these girls will likely play together as U18 becomes a three-year age group and we wanted them to have something special and memorable. It was important that when they look back on their hockey experiences growing up, they have positive and happy memories.”

He added the coaching staff checked with parents before planning the trip as it is a time and financial commitment.

“Everyone was in favour so we went for it. The tournament organizers were also helpful and it was a well-run event. Nashville is a really fun city and we wanted the girls to have the full experience, play some good hockey, explore a great city, listen to some good music and overall have fun.”

Paton said he wasn't sure what in terms of the competition stateside as their rankings can be slightly different than here and some top ranked teams may not be as strong or vice versa.

“We did play another strong Canadian team (Brampton) and saw some good competition with some of the US teams as well. The team we played in the finals was a strong AA team that had some great players. We led most of the games that we played until the final game and were down 4-1 going into the third period. This group of girls never ceases to amaze us



(WOODSTOCK WILDCATS PHOTO)

The U15 team won all five games they played, capped off by a 5-4 win over a team from Massachusetts in the title game.

as they came back and started catching up, eventually tying the game, then came out ahead. The best part is they never got down, they never gave up, they never turned on each other, they just keep playing their hearts out and I think that's a big piece of how they are so successful.”

The team has enjoyed coming up with third jersey ideas and two years ago added surprise Hawaiian jerseys made for them. For the tournament, it was a mix of Canadian and county.

“We knew we wanted to do something fun for them for the tournament. Our coaches designed the plaid theme, then one of our parents was inspired and added the cowboy hat, so it was really a collaborative effort and the girls loved them and it's something special for them as well.”

Most of the team have played together for five years and Paton said it has been a special group since the first year they came together.

“It was after covid when a number of them came together to play and we had no idea how good they were going to be. We started out in one division pre season and quickly realized we had a group of talented athletes on our hands and were able to move up and play in a stronger

division.”

He added players that have come and gone over the years, and every other year it's a minor/major factor that changes things.”

“This group this year is one of the best we've seen, the 'newer' girls on the team have been accepted with open arms from their teammates and fit right in. It is never and has never been about who's new and not, they have always played as a team and truly care about each other.”

Even though the Wildcats won gold in Nashville, Paton said the one of the biggest takeaways is how parents from opposing teams saw them.

“We were playing a game and we were stronger than the other team by a decent margin, their parents approached some of our parents and stated how it was so nice to watch a good playing team like ours. It was refreshing and how great our girls were, they knew they were in over their heads entering the tournament but our players were good sports on and off the ice, their players had previously seen our girls off the ice before a previous game and they stated how kind our girls were to their girls.”

He added the same team commented on the Wildcats social

media account with similar praise.

“At the end of the day that's what matters, these girls are great athletes but in that they are also great people.”

Paton said he and his staff agree coaching the group of girls is an absolute pleasure and they know the importance of a team first attitude.

“When we built our team, we had a really good idea of the kind of player we wanted. Attitude, effort and team first are right there at the top of our list of attributes we wanted our players to have. We have a goal early in the season to really make the girls understand that we will build a culture where every player wants to win for the player beside them in the room and be happy to share in each others personal success but also to be there when teammates need you.”

He said this is one of those years that he doesn't want to see end, but in the end, he knows everyone has built lifelong relationships that the girls will never forget.

As for the guitar trophy, Paton said the team in the process of trying to find a clear guitar display case and then the hope is to hang it from the rafters at Woodstock's Civic Arena.



(WOODSTOCK WILDCATS PHOTO)

The Wildcats brought home a 'trophy' in the shape of a guitar, something fitting for taking the title in a Nashville tournament.

# Oxford County Library and Woodstock Public Library partner in new reciprocal borrowing program

**STAFF**

*Woodstock Ingersoll Echo*

County residents will be able to borrow materials from both library systems in Oxford starting Jan. 1, 2026

Oxford County Library and Woodstock Public Library are pleased to announce the launch of a new reciprocal borrowing program on January 1, 2026. The program allows patrons of either library to register for cards and borrow materials from both systems at no cost, meaning Oxford County Library cardholders can borrow from Woodstock

Public Library, and Woodstock Public Library cardholders can borrow from any Oxford County Library branch.

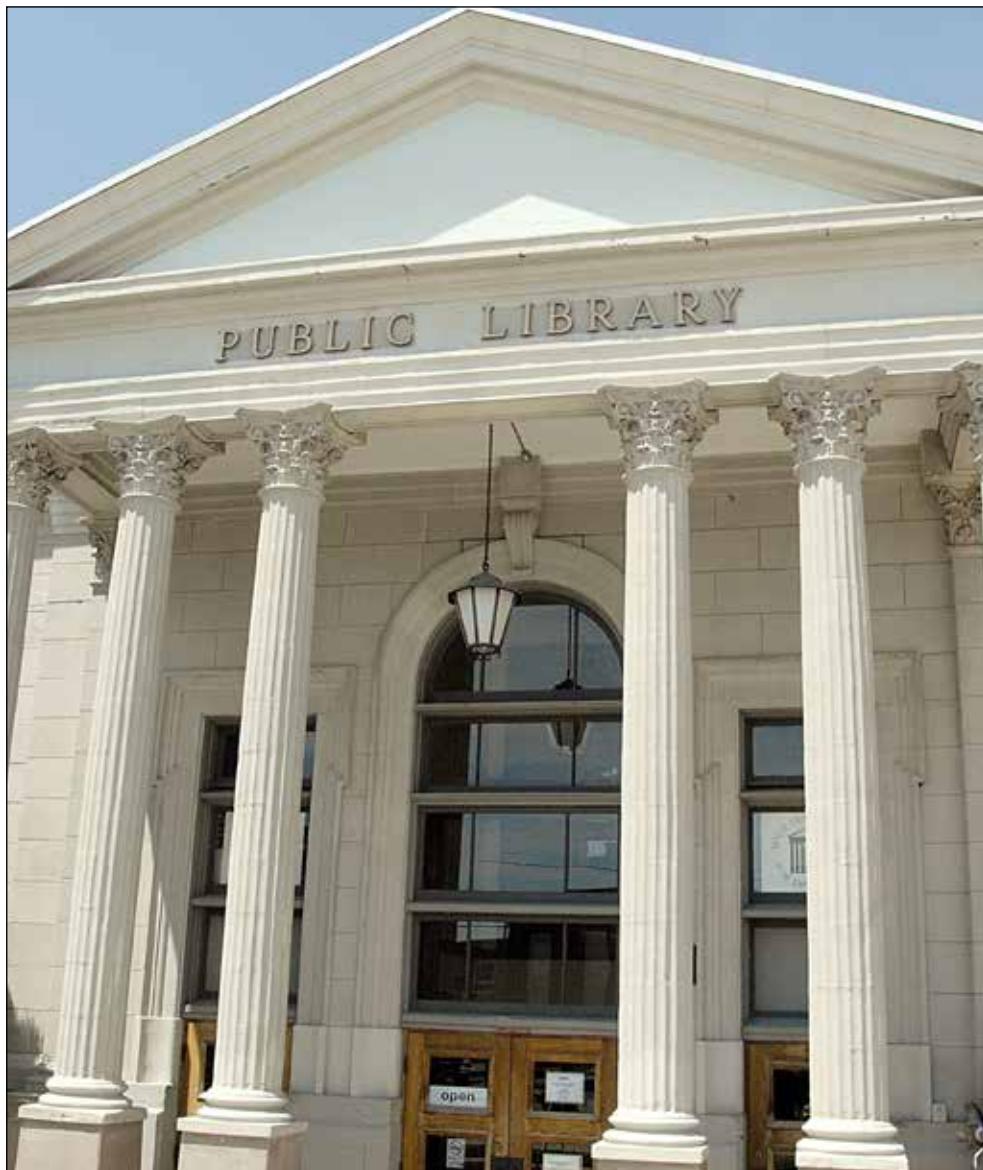
This agreement expands access to books, media, and other resources across both systems, offering greater convenience and choice for residents. Patrons can register for a new library card at the partner library using their existing library card and identification. A valid Oxford County Library or Woodstock Public Library card is required. Library cards are free and information on how to register for a card is available online at [www.ocl.net](http://www.ocl.net) or [www.mywpl.ca](http://www.mywpl.ca).

“Oxford County Library’s 2024-2028 Strategic Plan identified 'Universal Access' as one of the library’s key values. Partnering with the Woodstock Public Library on this new program offers residents greater access to library materials, ensuring that no matter where you are in the county, information is easily accessible,” said Oxford County Library CEO Lisa Marie Williams.

“Community connection and partnerships are a key priority in the Woodstock Public Library’s 2025-2028 Strategic Plan, and Oxford County Library has been a valued partner for many years,”

added Woodstock Public Library CEO Lindsay Harris. “We look forward to widening access to library resources across the County and growing our relationship with Oxford County Library.”

An Oxford County Library card provides access to all 14 Oxford County library branches located in Brownsville, Burgessville, Embro, Harrington, Ingersoll, Innerkip, Mount Elgin, Norwich, Otterville, Plattsville, Princeton, Tavistock, Thamesford and Tillsonburg. A Woodstock Public Library card provides access to the Woodstock Public Library.



Woodstock Public Library.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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# Sikh history celebrated in the Friendly City



The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, upheld as the eternal spiritual leader, was respectfully placed at the center of the ceremony.

The local Sikh community hosted a well-attended ceremony at College Ave School on Saturday, Nov. 29, in Woodstock, bringing together over 200 people to reflect on history and teachings.

Organized by Panthak Sewa Dal Org. Woodstock, the event marked the 350th Shaheedi anniversary of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib Ji and paid tribute to the victims of the 1984 Sikh Genocide. Guests took part in traditional Kirtan, Katha, and Langar, while speakers from the World Sikh Organization, including Bhai Balpreet Singh, shared messages

on justice, equality, and human rights.

The event featured a touching kirtan performance by children who are students of the classes offered through the Panthak Sewa Dal Organization. The young performers shared devotional singing of Gurbani accompanied by traditional instruments, offering an inspiring display of dedication and learning. Their kirtan, an important element of Sikh worship, added a heartfelt and spiritual atmosphere to the gathering and was warmly received by all in attendance.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Granthi Singh served as the scripture reader and spiritual guide, leading the congregation in daily prayers and the recitation of Gurbani.

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## Register Now For Winter Programs!

Tuesday to Saturday | 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
466 Dundas St., Woodstock  
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woodstockmuseum.ca



### Cozy Crafts PA Day

Jan. 16 | 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Cost: \$55 (Members \$49.50)

Ages 5 – 12



### Winter Games PA Day

Jan. 30 | 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Cost: \$55 (Members \$49.50)

Ages 5 – 12



### March Break: Awesome Animals!

March 16 – 20 | 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.  
Cost: \$200 (Members \$180)

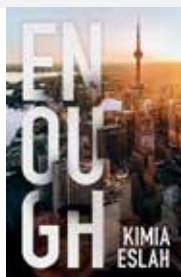
Ages 5 – 12

### Museum Book Club

March 24 | 6:30 – 8 p.m.  
FREE

Our book selection, *Enough* by Kimia Eslah, is inspired by the Museum's upcoming exhibit *Eve of Change: Breaking into the Old Boys Club!* Register now and pick up the book in January.

Ages 16+



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# Every artifact tells a story, but only the right ones make it to the Woodstock Museum



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Museum staff provide professional expertise and care when preserving community artifacts.

ALEX HUNT

Echo Contributor

Nearly half of all donation offers to the Woodstock Museum National Historic Site are declined, as the museum focuses on preserving items that reflect the community's history.

Curator of Collections Adam Pollard said the museum declines about 50 per cent of artifacts offered by area residents, either because the items are not directly connected to Woodstock or due to limited storage space.

Most of the collection held at the Woodstock Museum is from the 1850s and up, with a few items that date back to the late 1700s.

"People can bring their artifacts to us, and we'll take them in on a temporary receipt," said Pollard. "From there, we prepare a report and send it to our committee, which decides whether the donation will be accepted. It's always best to call ahead and check if the

artifact is something we're likely to take."

Education Officer Kerrie Gill said the museum is on the hunt for political artifacts. She explained that there are a lot of political figures who could be better represented in the collection.

"If people want to donate an item, then they need to sell me on it. Why should it be in the collection?" said Pollard. "The more history you give us then the more that the committee is going to be interested because then the artifact tells a story, and then we can put it on display and tell that story."

Pollard said the museum works to ensure artifacts are properly preserved using temperature and climate-control technology. He added that newspapers are not accepted, as they will deteriorate regardless of the preservation methods used.

"Every artifact we receive is a bridge between the past and the present. When someone donates, they're helping keep Woodstock's story alive for generations to come."



Important changes are taking place to curbside waste collection in Woodstock and South-West Oxford



**Green bin organic collection**

Oxford County's new green bin organics program begins in January 2026 for Woodstock and South-West Oxford residents. If a green bin has not been delivered to your home, please contact Oxford County at [info@wasteline.ca](mailto:info@wasteline.ca) or 1-800-755-0394, ext. 3159.



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**Recycling**

Beginning January 2026, residential blue box recycling will be the responsibility of a new provincial agency, Circular Materials. Learn more at [www.circularmaterials.ca/oxfordcounty](http://www.circularmaterials.ca/oxfordcounty)

For more information visit [www.oxfordcounty.ca/new-waste-collection](http://www.oxfordcounty.ca/new-waste-collection)

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# Route to the Past – Read the History of Your Country and Understand

SCOTT GILLIES

Contributor

I have often written and spoken about Major Edward C. Norsworthy, a heroic soldier from Ingersoll. However, his three other brothers deserve respect as well. What follows is the story of Alfred James – Fred to his family and friends.

The third son of James Counter “J.C.” Norsworthy, Fred was killed by an explosion in the days leading up to the attack on Vimy Ridge. “The Ingersoll Chronicle and Canadian Dairyman” newspaper reported his death in the April 5, 1917, edition.

Two years earlier, Fred had been working as a Canadian banker in Costa Rica when he received word that his eldest brother had been killed in action during the opening hours of the Second Battle of Ypres. He wrote to his father expressing his sorrow and admiration for his dear brother who had lived a full life: “What a glorious ending to a life that was lived as a man could hope to live. He lived a life that made all his friends justly proud of his acquaintance and died the death of a soldier fighting for his country and for the right. He was a son and a brother we can well be proud of. There never was such another.” These words show Fred’s character

and reflect the respect and love they shared with one another.

Fred returned to Canada as soon as possible and enlisted with the 73rd Battalion Royal Highlanders of Canada and was appointed a Lieutenant. Shortly after arriving in France, he was promoted to Assistant Adjutant of the regiment. Suffering the vagaries of the war equally with his comrades, Fred was killed by an explosion in the days leading up to the attack on Vimy Ridge. His elder brother, Captain Stanley Norsworthy of the 42nd Battalion, who had also given up a banking career to enlist with the Canadian Expeditionary Force following Edward’s demise, was able to attend Fred’s burial.

Three years to the day after Edward’s death, in 1918, a life-like, life-size bronze bust and plaque were unveiled in the Ingersoll Rural Cemetery. A year later history was repeated when a plaque to honour Fred was unveiled on the same monument, and on the same day a third plaque was also unveiled to two cousins of the Norsworthy boys – Robert and Harold Hunter.

For the ceremony of unveiling and dedication, Stanley and several decorated war heroes and notable businessmen were in attendance to honour a brother and comrades in arms.

The event was coordinated by the Ontario Historical Society under the direction of Embro native and Society President, the Honourable Reverend Dr. Henry Cody, Minister of Education for the Province of Ontario.

One of the many noteworthy attendees was family friend and Victoria Cross recipient Lieutenant-Colonel William Clark-Kennedy DSO, CMG, VC. He had been serving on the front lines on April 22, 1915, when Edward was killed. J.C. Norsworthy and Fred both thought that he had fallen that same night. However, he had survived the horrendous hours of the Second Battle of Ypres and went on to become the commanding officer of the 24th Battalion. In August of 1918, he was awarded the highest decoration for military valour.

Clark-Kennedy also happened to be a fellow Masonic brother of Edward. They had both belonged to St. Paul’s Lodge in Montreal. In an ironic twist of fate, he who was thought to have been dead was actually able to attend the Ingersoll event in memory of men who had died in battle.

Another notable guest of honour was international banker Sir William Stavert. He had worked in banking for years and during the Great War was the Financial Controller in the British Ministry of Information. As a fellow Canadian banker, he would have crossed paths with the four Norsworthy brothers. Stavert had recently been dubbed a Knight of the British Empire before attending the event in Ingersoll.

Major-General Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonnell KCB, CMG, DSO the former commanding officer of the 1st Canadian Division and the soon-to-be Commandant of the Royal Military College in Kingston, along with Clark-Kennedy drew the flags off the two tablets while Pipe Major Tom Johnston and fellow Ingersoll piper John J.C. Little played the lament “Lochaber



Alfred James. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

No More”. Reverend R.J.M. Perkins of St. James Anglican Church delivered a prayer of dedication, followed by “The Last Post” performed by bugler Private Joe Wade.

The Honourable Dr. Cody, Minister of Education of Ontario began his address to the crowd with the following words:

*“We are met today in unique circumstances. The Ontario Historical Society is joining with the family and military friends to pay respect to men who gladly gave their all in the great cause, members of that great army which stood between us and a desperate enemy at a time when the world was in danger of domination by the Huns” and went on to state that these young men “were splendid examples of real Canadian manhood...and it is hoped that those who have died, in the great cause will not be in vain. Canadians must remember that a heavy responsibility has been left upon us...and we must make good use of our opportunities derived of these sacrifices. If we take these gifts softly we will have been unworthy.”*

The plaque urges everyone to “Read the History of Your Country and Understand”.

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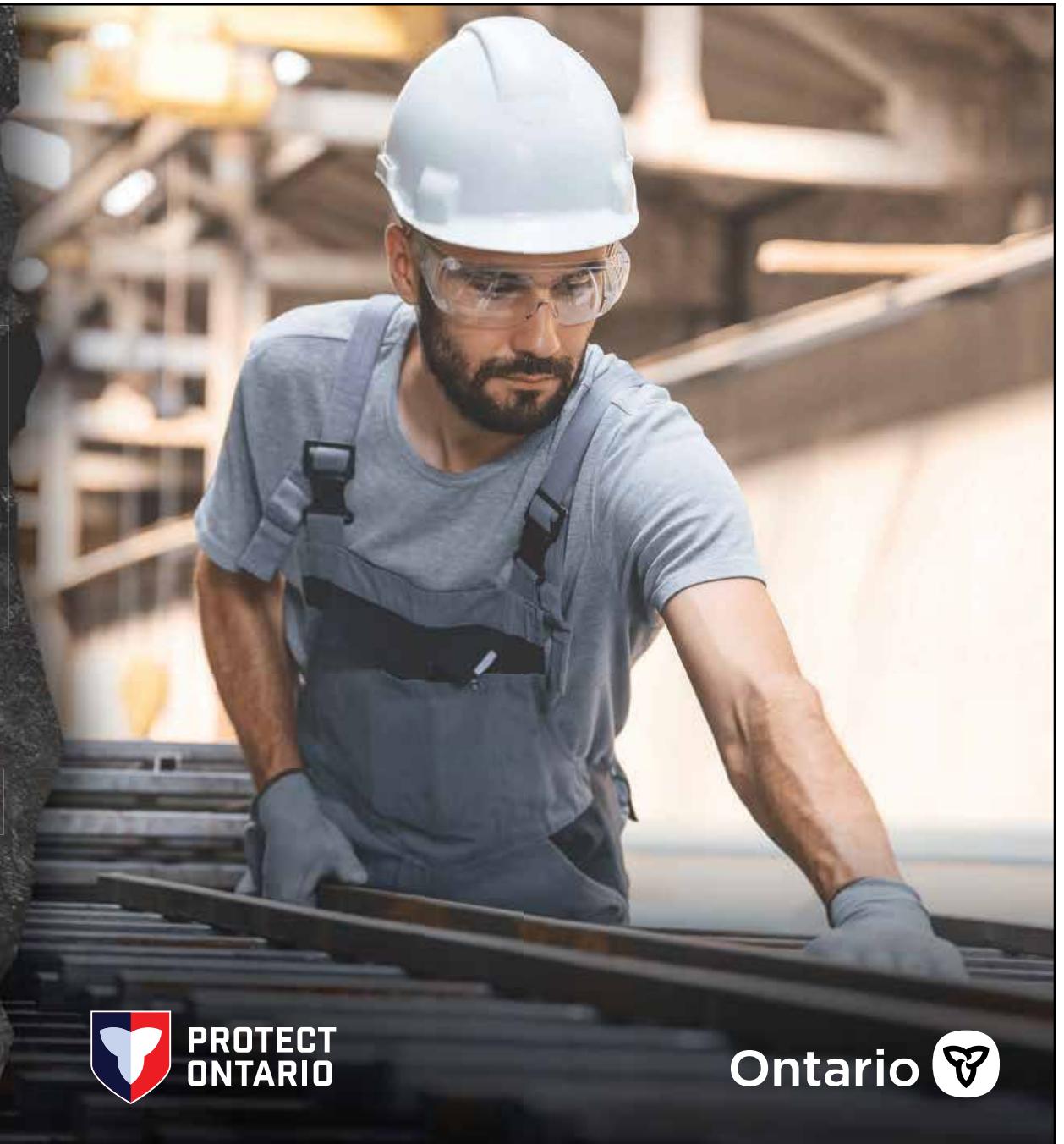
**TIME AFTER TIME**

(JEFF TRIBE PHOTOS)

The Woodstock CI RedPlayers Theatre presented the 2025 musical, Time After Time Wednesday, Dec. 10 through Sunday, Dec. 14. A deep theatrical cast supported by a behind-the-scenes technical team and show volunteers presented 24 different musical theatre numbers paying homage to recognizable and popular performances from the past decades.

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# OFA Viewpoint: Farmers step up to help as food bank demand surges across Ontario

TRACEY ARTS

Director, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

The holiday season is often called the season of giving — a time when we think a little more about neighbours, community and those who may be struggling. This year, that spirit feels even more important. Cost-of-living pressures continue to make it harder for families to put nutritious food on the table, and demand for food banks is rising at levels Ontario has never seen before.

According to the latest Hunger Hurts report from Feed Ontario, more than 1 million Ontarians made a record-breaking 8.7 million food bank visits in that last year.

Feed Ontario depends on a network of community partners to help more than 1,200 food banks and hunger-relief organizations and farmers are some of their strongest supporters.

Across every sector of agriculture and every corner of the province, farmers, farm organizations, processors, transporters and industry partners step up to help ensure Ontario families have access to good, healthy food.

I'm a director on the board of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and my family and I farm in Oxford County. We've participated in a food bank milk donation program ourselves over the years, so I was proud to see this year's Paul Mistele Memorial Award, presented by Feed Ontario, go to the Ontario Dairy Council.

They're a partner in the Ontario Milk Program with Dairy Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Milk Transportation Association, which donated 1.4 million litres of milk — that's more than six million servings — in 2024 alone.

In addition, local dairy producer commit-

tees across Ontario have donated an additional \$400,000 this year to support community activities like breakfast programs, food banks, local fairs and sports activities. Gay Lea, a large dairy co-operative, has partnered with food rescue organization Second Harvest to invest \$1.2 million over three years.

And dairy is just one part of agriculture's broader commitment to fighting hunger. So many sectors across the farm community have their own way of giving — and their generosity is making a difference.

Ontario's greenhouse vegetable growers have so far this year donated almost 6.2 million pounds of fresh peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers, surpassing last year's total of 5.6 million pounds.

The Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers' Association is also supporting Second Harvest, donating \$25,000 a year for the past five years, which has helped the organization provide more than 125,000 meals to communities experiencing food insecurity. Many more fruit and vegetable growers make donations directly from their farms to food bank programs.

Ontario Pork's Friends of the Food Bank program, which grew from the original Donate-A-Hog initiative launched in 1998 by hog farmer and former OFA Vice President Paul Mistele, has now supplied nearly two million servings of fresh Ontario pork.

Ontario's beef farmers have donated \$360,000 since 2014 to supply more than 127,000 pounds of beef — almost 770,000 servings — to families in need, and turkey farmers have supported more than 460,000 servings of turkey since 2013.

Through the CFO Cares program, Ontario



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

chicken farmers help provide more than one million meals through food banks each year, and fish farmers across Ontario donate thousands of servings of fresh rainbow trout to local food banks annually.

And our province's egg farmers donate the equivalent of \$350,000 in eggs annually to Feed Ontario and another \$85,000 to Student Nutrition Ontario. Since 2015, farmers have donated over 15.9 million eggs, including more than 100,000 dozen every year.

Agriculture's generosity also shines each year through FCC's Drive Away Hunger campaign, which has become one of Canada's largest food drives powered by farmers, agribusinesses and rural communities — donating 514 million meals nationwide in 2024.

Sarnia-Lambton MPP Bob Bailey championed

the Local Food Act more than a decade ago, which created a tax credit program for farmers who donate agricultural products to Ontario food banks and community food programs, and helped ensure even more fresh, local food reaches Ontarians who need it most.

And there is support coming in other ways too, like farmers in my area coming together to support local food banks by helping to buy refrigeration equipment so those organizations are better able to manage and distribute fresh food donations.

This is a difficult year for many families. But it's also a year filled with countless examples of generosity from people across agriculture who believe strongly in giving back — and as the holidays approach, the OFA is proud to shine a light on their efforts.

## Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oxford County receives nearly \$41K from Smile Cookie campaign

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oxford County (BBBS Oxford) are grateful for the Oxford County community stepping up and making a difference by buying cookies.

Tim Hortons in Innerkip, Ingersoll, and Woodstock sold the cookies and brought in over \$81,000 split between BBBS Oxford and Tim Hortons camp programs. BBBS Oxford received just over \$40,850 from the Tim Horton's Holiday Smile Cookie campaign in Oxford County.

Liz Wismer-Van Meer, communications manager, is thrilled with the fundraiser results and said it was the best year yet in the three years of being part of the campaign.

"They work so hard to sell so many cookies and it's a lot of work for them and we just are absolutely thrilled to be able to receive this funding at a time when we're really needing it," she said. "Our requests for support are increasing substantially and funding, of course, is always difficult to come by when we are not a government funded or core-funded agency. This is a huge help for us and helping us even get-

ting more young people matched."

The funding will support all programming run by BBBS Oxford, including one-on-one and group mentorship programs, as well as activities for mentors and mentees.

BBBS Oxford is running the Holiday Spark campaign and is hoping to raise \$40,000 to support youth. The organization is encouraging mentors and mentees to share their experience and seeking financial donations and volunteer applications.

As of Dec. 11, there were 135 youth on the organization's waitlist looking to be matched with a mentor. Programming is free to mentees and their caregivers and anyone looking to mentor can also join for free.

"That's why these funds are so crucial so we can continue to not offer the programs we have been offering but continuing to build off of those and offering more programs as the demands continue to grow in Oxford County," Wismer-Van-Meer added.

In 2024, nearly 700 children and youth were matched in the mentoring programs by BBBS Oxford County.

More information about how to get in-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A cheque presentation was held at the Tim Hortons Norwich Avenue location in Woodstock. In the photo are (left to right): Paul Tyndall, Erin Tyndall, Karen Lefebvre, Leslie Farrell, Kristen Ralph, Erica Hughes and Nicole Killaire.

involved with the Holiday Spark campaign can be found online by visiting <https://oxford.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca/what-we-do/the-spark-campaign>.

# Southwestern Public Health warns of very high Influenza risk locally

**STAFF**

*Woodstock Ingersoll Echo*

New data from the health unit's respiratory dashboard indicates sharp rise in local the local Influenza risk continues to worsen and they are advising residents to take precautions.

Local data shows that Influenza activity is now very high and trending upward for all three indicators of risk - high levels of respiratory outbreaks in congregate care facilities, high hospitalization rates, and high community transmission rates as evidenced through test positivity data. This indicates the risk of Influenza is currently very high locally, especially for those who are more vulnerable to the illness, such as older adults, young children, and individuals with chronic health conditions.

"We are now seeing the significant spike in Influenza cases locally that was reflected in provincial modelling earlier this month," said Joanne Andrews, Manager of Infectious Diseases. "When it comes to infectious disease control, simple, everyday actions can make a big difference in reducing the spread of respiratory illnesses."

In addition to getting a flu shot to protect

against severe illness and hospitalization, Southwestern Public Health recommends the following infection prevention and control practices:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, especially after coughing, sneezing, or being in public spaces.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow to prevent droplets from spreading.
- Stay home when you feel unwell to protect others and reduce transmission.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces regularly, such as doorknobs, light switches, and mobile devices.
- Consider wearing a mask in crowded or enclosed spaces, particularly if you are feeling sick or are around people at higher risk of severe illness.

"Every action counts. By practicing these simple steps, we can protect our neighbours, friends, and family from serious illness," added Andrews.

To help residents stay informed, visit the Respiratory Illness Activity Dashboard for up-to-date information on respiratory illness trends in the region.



**Contribute to your local community newspaper! Send articles, sports or event recaps, and photos to [info@theecho.ca](mailto:info@theecho.ca)**

## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Where does Santa live?  | 6. Who catches the Grinch stealing?                                  |
| 2. How many reindeer does Santa have?  | 7. Buddy the Elf sticks to the four main food groups, what are they? |
| 3. In the classic song, "Frosty the Snowman," what made Frosty come to life?         | 8. What is the color of the berries on mistletoe?                    |
| 4. Which fairy tale were the first gingerbread houses inspired by?                   | 9. Where was Jesus laid after he was born?                           |
| 5. Which popular phrase was made popular by Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol"? | 10. What is the day after Christmas called?                          |

This week's answers are found on pg. 39

## Attention: NAME CHANGES

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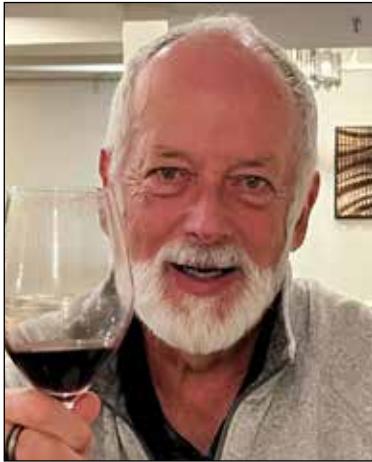
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# Oh, the places we'll go! Can't wait to see old friends on stage in 2026



**PAUL KNOWLES**

*Echo Contributor*

About 20 years ago, I discovered that CBC Radio was promoting community-based readings of Charles Dickens' wonderful story, "A Christmas Carol". The idea was initiated by CBC radio news anchor Judy Maddren. CBC would provide scripts, posters, and a volunteer reader for such an event, if local organizers did the rest.

I liked the idea, and so did some others in the community of New Hamburg. So we contacted CBC Radio, got the supplies, and started to recruit the other four readers we would need, as well as some musicians.

The way it worked was, the story was read in five "staves" by five separate readers, with musical interludes between each staff. Charles Dickens himself had converted and abridged his novel for live presentation, and had been the first one to do such a reading, in 1853.

I exceeded our first one a centu-

ry and a half later. Although we didn't present such an event every year, we did do at least 10, in New Hamburg, Fullarton, and London, and I got to emcee each one, sharing the stage with fabulous readers.

And what, you are by now asking, has this to do with travel?

Okay, maybe it's a bit of a nostalgic stretch, but stay with me. To digress for a moment (it will all come together, I promise), I am a big fan of the Stratford Festival, and I think it is important to write about Stratford – both the Festival itself and the rest of the community, a day-trip destination we are very lucky to be close to.

So, I was interested to receive the full menu of plays being mounted at the Festival in 2026, including a list of all of the actors appearing on Stratford stages, next season.

The playbill looks great, by the way. Check it out on the Festival website ([stratfordfestival.ca](http://stratfordfestival.ca)). I can't wait to see *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Guys and Dolls*, the return of *Something Rotten*, *The Importance of Being Ernest*, and much more. It will be a superb season.

And the reason I link 2026 Stratford with my fond memories of Dickens' readings? Well, that first year, as we stumbled our way through a process we had never done before, we realized that our proximity to Stratford might mean we could do something special. So we naively reached out to some wonderful actors who were appearing on the Stratford stage at that time. First to say "yes" was the amazing Bri-

an Tree, showing amazing trust in us. Brian not only came to read the fifth and final stage (which he did for us several more times over the years), he also brought with him Thom Marriot, a terrific actor, hugely impressive as the *Ghost of Christmas Present*. And we were off and running.

Subsequent Dickens events saw the returns of both Brian and Thom, and a revolving cast of Stratford greats. The readings were so well performed that in 2010, when Judy Maddren herself came to read, she told me it was the finest she had ever attended. After CBC Radio stopped sponsoring the readings, we continued, with five first-rate, volunteer actors every time.

And so, as I read the details about the 2026 Festival Season, I was thrilled that half a dozen of "our" actors will be on stage in Stratford next year. These are folks who volunteered their time and talent for our readings, and never, ever took it for granted. They brought their full passion and commitment, every time.

Sara Topham (in our Dickens in 2008, 2011, 2017) will be busy this year: she is Titania in one of my favourite Shakespeare comedies, "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*"; she plays Cath in "*The King James Bible Play*"; and Sara is also "Movement Director" in "*The Hobbit*".

Steve Ross (2017) – who knocked it out of the park in previous seasons in *La Cage aux Folles*, and "*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*" – will play Shylock in the much-anticipated return of "*Something Rotten*" and



(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

**Sara Topham as Hermoine (front-right) and André Sills as Polixenes (front-left) with members of the company in *The Winter's Tale*. Stratford Festival 2025.**

Nicely-Nicely Johnson in "*Guys and Dolls*", where he gets to bring down the house with "*Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat*."

Rod Beattie (2014) – famed for his *Wingfield Farm* one-actor plays, but also well known for his work in classical theatre – is back on the Stratford stage playing Antonio in "*Saturday, Sunday Monday*."

Stratford icon Lucy Peacock (2006) plays Miss Prism in "*The Importance of Being Ernest*", and Linda Loman in "*Death of a Salesman*" where she will share the stage with another of "our" alumni – Tom McCamus (2009). Tom is the tragic protagonist, Willy Loman, and will also appear as Estragon in "*Waiting for*

*Godot*." And finally, Tom McCamus' wife, Chick Reid, who joined us for a Dickens' reading (2009), appears in "*Death of a Salesman*", and as Brabantia in "*Othello*".

So, forgive me for wallowing in nostalgia, but I, for one, can't wait to see these generous and talented people on stage, once again, in the best theatre in Canada, in a city which I think is the number one day-trip destination in southern Ontario.

*Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and Past-President of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email [pknowles@golden.net](mailto:pknowles@golden.net).*



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

**Steve Ross as Shylock in *Something Rotten!* Stratford Festival 2024.**



(DARIANE SANCHE PHOTO)

**From left: Lucy Peacock as Linda Loman and Tom McCamus as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Stratford Festival 2026.**

# Arkain Hobbies and Games celebrate two years in Ingersoll

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

A local hub for gamers and hobbyists marked a milestone this month as Arkain Hobbies and Games located at 11 King St W, downtown Ingersoll, celebrated its second anniversary on Dec. 1.

Owned by Ingersoll native Kyron Slazar, Arkain has quickly become a gathering place for board game enthusiasts. Reflecting on the shop's journey, Slazar noted how much both the business and the town of Ingersoll have grown over the past couple years.

"There was a time where we just had a lot of empty lots," Slazar recalls. "Around the time I was opening, there was like a resurgence, where all these empty buildings just finally started filling up. It's great."

The shop carries a wide variety of board games, playing cards, and tabletop essentials, offering something for casual players and seasoned gamers alike.

"We're the only board game store in Oxford County," Slazar also shared, highlighting Arkain's unique role in the region.

What truly sets Arkain apart, however, is its welcoming play space. Tables are

set up throughout the shop, allowing customers to sit down and enjoy games with friends right in-store. That atmosphere has drawn visitors from well beyond town limits. "We have people come in from Waterford, St. Thomas, London and the Toronto area," said Slater.

Arkain regularly hosts game nights and special events, helping to foster a strong sense of community. Slazar recalled last year's New Year's Eve celebration as a standout moment. "We had probably about 50 to 60 people in and out throughout the night," he said. "I thought we were going to have to turn people away." The popular event is set to return again this year.

With its growing popularity, Slazar admits the shop has "definitely outgrown the space." Plans are already underway to move Arkain Hobbies and Games to a larger location in the coming year, allowing even more room for events, games, and the expanding community that has formed around the store.

As Arkain enters its third year, Slazar remains grateful for the support from Ingersoll and beyond; support that has helped turn a local passion into a thriving community space.



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Arkain Games & Hobbies Owner Kyron Slazar Celebrates the shop's 2 Year Anniversary.

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# COMING EVENTS

## FREEZER MEALS PROVIDED BY ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

We know life is busy for many families today, and it can be so nice to have things in the freezer to allow us to eat well, and quickly. This fall, St. Paul's has been busy making different items you can simply pull out of the freezer! We have frozen ham & pea soup, cabbage rolls and cabbage roll casseroles, as well as individual turkey pies. If you would like help with your Christmas dinner, we also have some lovely frozen apple and blueberry fruit pies ready for your oven! We'd love to make life easier for you this winter. For more details on what we have, and the prices, please call our church office at 519-485-3390 or by email: [stpauls@execulink.com](mailto:stpauls@execulink.com).

**START A NEW NEW YEAR'S EVE TRADITION!  
TOAST THE NEW YEAR  
BREAKFAST BUFFET  
Wednesday, December 31: 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.**  
South Gate Centre,  
191 Old Wellington St. S. Woodstock  
\$20/adult \$10 kids 12 and under  
Purchase tickets in advance. Some tickets at the door.

**SACRED HEART PARISH EUCHRE**  
We invite everyone to join us for a Euchre afternoon. It will be held in Henderson Hall 133 John Street Ingersoll.  
Tuesday January 6 and 20 start at 1:00 pm. Refreshments provided.

**OXFORD COUNTY FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE ANNUAL MEETING**  
Thursday, January 22: 6 p.m.  
Craigowan Golf Club, Woodstock  
Oxford OFA members and the community are invited to attend. This year's highlights include a keynote address by 'Wheat Pete' Peter Johnson, as well as the presentation of two prestigious awards: the Agricultural Hall of Fame Award to George Gilvesy and the Family Farm Award to Doanlea Farms, the Doan Family. These honours recognize outstanding contributions to agriculture and the dedication of local farming families. Tickets (on sale until Jan 14) and additional event details are available on our website at [www.oxfordag.ca](http://www.oxfordag.ca).

**CURLING DAY IN CANADA - OPEN HOUSE**  
Saturday, January 31, Club opens at 12:30 p.m.  
Ingersoll District Curling Club  
36 Chisholm Drive, Ingersoll  
Jitney play starts at 1 p.m. & 3:45 p.m., Canada's Big Shootout starts at 2:30 p.m., Bar open at 1 p.m., Kitchen open at 2 p.m., Silent auction tables open at 5:30 p.m., Live auction at 7 p.m., and Scotties 1 vs 2 Page Playoff Game on TV at 6:30 p.m.  
[ingersollcurlingclub.com](http://ingersollcurlingclub.com)

**IN 2026 IT'S YOUR FIX!  
INGERSOLL COUNTRY MUSIC JAMBOREE**  
Meeting every other Friday 1-4 p.m. at Masonic Hall, 190 Thames St. S. Ingersoll.  
Join us, walk ins welcome. Qualifications - love 50-70's country music. Perform, listen, dance & enjoy! January 16 & 30, February 13 & 27, March 6 & 20, April 10 & 17, May 1, 15 & 29, June 5 & 19.

**MONTHLY VON BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC**  
Last Tuesday of every Month:  
10 a.m. to Noon  
Ingersoll Pharmasave

19 King St. E., Ingersoll

**TILLSONBURG DUPLICATE BRIDGE CLUB**  
Interested in Bridge? Join us every Friday at the Tillsonburg Duplicate Bridge Club at 1 p.m. at The Senior Centre. Don't have a partner? Come anyway and we will match you up with someone. For more information, visit their Facebook page: TburgBridge.

**THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF OXFORD COUNTY**  
The Optimists bring out the best in Youth, Community, and Themselves. If anyone is interested in coming out to meet us and learn more about us please email [brenda7621@outlook.com](mailto:brenda7621@outlook.com)

**REPAIR CAFÉ - TOSS IT? NO WAY!**  
1st Saturday of each month: 9 a.m. to Noon  
St. John's Church 685860 Oxford Highway 2, Eastwood, ON N4S 7V9  
St. John's, Eastwood, now affiliated with Repair Café International (look for us at [repaircafe.org](http://repaircafe.org)). Meets the first Saturday of every month 9am to noon at St. John's Church 685860 Oxford Highway 2, Eastwood, ON N4S 7V9. Repairs made to clothing, linens, household items, toys, musical instruments etc. Save money, learn how to make your own repairs. Volunteers welcome. Payment by donation.

**THE CARING HEARTS SUPPORT NETWORK WILL BE HOSTING A "CAREGIVER CORNER" ON ZOOM**  
The first Wednesday of each month, beginning on Wednesday, January 7: 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.  
To Register: call or text 519-536-3370 or email [info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com](mailto:info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com)

**GRIEF SUPPORT FOR MAID RELATED LOSS**  
This monthly in-person grief support group for loss related to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) offers a compassionate, safe space to explore this unique loss. The group will meet the 4th Wednesday of the month from 1 - 2:30 p.m. at the Thamesford Library, 165 Dundas St., Thamesford. The group is free of charge and pre-registration is requested. To register or inquire about an evening group, contact 519-866-3016 or email [faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca](mailto:faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca).

**PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS**  
Third Wednesday of each month: 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.  
21 Wellington St., Woodstock (Virtual options available)  
PCMH is a peer support program providing support to parents and caregivers across Ontario with lived experience raising children and youth with mental health challenges. For more information, please visit [family.cmho.org](http://family.cmho.org) or [oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca](mailto:oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca). We are also on Facebook: Parents for Children's Mental Health ~ Oxford County

**VON OXFORD GRIEF CARE: FREE MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP**  
Register at: [oxford.griefsupport@von.ca](mailto:oxford.griefsupport@von.ca) or 519-539-1231 Ext 6299 or 6296

**TILLSONBURG**  
WHEN: 2nd Tuesday of every month  
WHERE: VON Oxford Office 24 Brock St. W., Tillsonburg  
TIME: 6:30PM-8:00PM

**INGERSOLL**  
WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month  
WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll  
TIME: 10:30AM - 12:00 Noon  
**WOODSTOCK**  
WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month  
WHERE: Sakura House Hospice 715180 Oxford Rd.4, Woodstock  
TIME: 10:30AM-12:00 Noon

**THE LIONS CLUB OF WOODSTOCK**  
The Lions Club of Woodstock has been serving the community and Oxford County with kindness and generosity since 1931. The Lions always place the needs of neighbours and communities first. Through the dedication and hard work of our volunteer members, we are serving those in need together. If you are interested in becoming a member or simply wish to learn more by attending one of our monthly meetings, please email Steve Iorio at [steveiorio4@gmail.com](mailto:steveiorio4@gmail.com) for more information.

**COLOURING THROUGH GRIEF Caring Hearts Support Network: St. David's United Church, 190 Springbank Ave., Woodstock ON**  
Third Wednesday monthly. One time fee of \$15. Registration is required. Call 519-536-3370. Check out website [www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com](http://www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com)

**OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY**  
Meetings: 2nd Tuesday (2 to 4 p.m.) and 4th Tuesday (7 to 9 p.m.)  
September to May  
Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street, Woodstock Ontario N4S 1C7  
If you have never belonged to a stamp club, now's the time. Meet new friends, grow your knowledge and collection. Contact: Don Eaton [dhfe@silomail.com](mailto:dhfe@silomail.com)  
Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

**OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS**  
Are you looking to start a summer pastime? Are you interested in your family history? Oxford Branch has an extensive collection of family history and genealogical resources that can help you. Come visit our Resource Centre at 82 Light Street, Courthouse Square, Woodstock. We are open Tuesdays to Thursdays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm where volunteers are ready to help you get started or help you research for missing information. You can also connect with us on the web at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting genealogical research in Oxford County. Hope to see you through the summer!

**BEACHVILLE LEGION EVENTS:**  
434852 ZorraLine, Beachville

**EUCHRE**  
Thursday nights 7 p.m.

**DARTS**  
Friday nights 8 p.m.

**ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BREAK DART TOURNAMENT**  
Saturday December 27  
Registration at 9 a.m. Play begins at 10. Doubles(bring your own partner ) followed by Singles. \$10 per person per event. All entry fees returned in prize money. Lunch available for purchase.

**NEW YEARS DAY LEEVE**  
Thursday Jan 1 1 pm

**ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 55 EVENTS:**  
642 Dundas St, Woodstock, ON

**SHUFFLEBOARD**  
Every Thursday at 1:30pm

**CADETS**  
Monday Nights

**DART LEAGUE**  
Every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday nights

**EVENING ENTERTAINMENT**  
December 20: 7-11 p.m. - Loose change  
December 27: 7-11 p.m. - 2 For the Road  
New Year's Eve December 31: Canteen opens at 5 p.m., music starts at 8 p.m. - 1 a.m. - Blue Sky (with ticket only)  
January 3: 7-11 p.m. - Jeff Dawdy  
January 17: 7-11 p.m. - 50-60 Bros  
January 24: 7-11 p.m. - DJ Kelly  
January 31: 7-11 p.m. - Flashback

**LEEVE DAY**  
January 1: Open at 11 a.m., Music featuring Blue Sky - 1 p.m.- ?  
Office closed.

**WE ARE CLOSED CHRISTMAS EVE, CHRISTMAS DAY, BOXING DAY, JANUARY 1, & JANUARY 2**

**MEAT DRAW**  
January 3: 3 p.m.

**SOUP N SANDWICH**  
January 8: 11:30-12:45 p.m.  
Beef barley and Special is Hamburger and Fries

**EXECUTIVE MEETING**  
January 6: 7 p.m.

**PRIVATE FUNCTION JANUARY 10:**  
The canteen will be open in the afternoon but closed to the public for a private function.

**NO GENERAL MEETING THIS MONTH**

**FAMILY ROAST BEEF DINNER**  
January 25: 5-6 p.m.  
Prices have changed per person it's plus desert Pre-order and pay by January 20th no later. So please contact Office or Canteen for more information.

**WING NIGHT**  
January 31: 4:30-6 p.m.  
One price for wings plus w/Fries a different price Pre-Order and pay by January 23rd no later. So please contact Office or Canteen for more information.

**OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINTER 2026 SPEAKER SERIES**

**THE AGRICULTURAL ART OF ROSS BUTLER - PRESERVING OXFORD COUNTY'S HISTORICAL AND AGRICULTURAL ROOTS**  
Wednesday, January 28: 6:30 p.m.  
Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock  
Special Guest Speaker David Butler - Join David as he takes us through the history of his father's "Journey to Perfection" through art and agriculture, his roots in Oxford County and his special connection to the Oxford Historical and Museum Society (now the Oxford Historical Society). Free Admission, Donations Welcome!

# COMING EVENTS

**HOW DO I LOVE THEE – VALENTINES THROUGH TIME**  
**Wednesday, February 25: 6:30 p.m.**  
 Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock  
 Special Guest Speaker – Scott Gillies, Chair OxHS – Bring your sweetheart and come curl up in the big comfy chairs at Chartwell Oxford Gardens and listen to the history of Valentines Day. Free Admission, Donations Welcome!

**LITTLE ENGINES CAN DO BIG THINGS**  
**Wednesday, March 25: 6:30 p.m.**  
 Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock  
 Special Guest Speaker - Colin Currie, Director OxHS – join Colin as he takes us through Oxford County’s rich railroad history and historical infrastructure that helped shape and connect cities like Woodstock and Ingersoll (CN/CP) and towns like Tillsonburg, Hickson and Beachville (CASO/ GWR), now featuring numerous surviving heritage

train stations and active train-watching spots. Free Admission, Donations Welcome!

For more information, please email us at [info@oxhs.ca](mailto:info@oxhs.ca)

**HURON PARK BAPTIST CHURCH EVENTS:**  
 199 Berwick St., Woodstock, ON

**CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE**  
 Wednesday, December 24: 6:30 p.m.

**FREE MOVIE NIGHT – SIGHT AND SOUND PRODUCTION OF JONAH**  
 Wednesday December 31: 6:00 p.m.

**YOUNG AT HEART (SENIORS) LUNCHEON**  
**Thursday, January 22, 202: Noon**  
 Music by Louanne Schultz  
 Please call the church for more details  
 519 -421-4722

## Ceremony remembers mass shooting at École Polytechnique

A moving vigil was held on Monday, Dec. 8, at Theatre Woodstock to mark the anniversary of the 1989 École Polytechnique mass shooting.

The event, organized by DASO, Ingamo Homes, and OSAS, brought residents, advocates, and allies together to reflect on the ongoing issue of gender-based violence and to honour the victims of past tragedies. The program opened with thoughtful readings deliv-

ered by community advocates, each acknowledging the pain endured by survivors and families, while also recognizing the systemic issues that allow gender-based violence to persist.

The École Polytechnique tragedy, during which fourteen women were murdered in a targeted attack, was referenced as a defining moment in Canada’s collective memory, underscoring why continued awareness and prevention efforts remain

vital.

Candles were raised in honour of lives lost, as well as in recognition of the courage shown by survivors. The theatre fell silent as attendees observed a minute of silence, creating a powerful shared moment of grief and commitment. After the ceremony, community organizations hosted booths throughout the venue, offering informational resources and opportunities for involvement.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Roses filled the vase in remembrance, with each bloom representing the name and Ontario community of a victim of femicide.



Each portrait, paired with a brief biography, reminded those in attendance of the lives taken at the tragedy where fourteen women’s lives and aspirations were remembered with deep respect.



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# Riddles

I'm hung by the chimney and filled with surprise. What am I?  
*Stocking*

I'm green and pointy and wear lights like jewelry. What am I?  
*Christmas tree*

I'm wrapped up tight with paper and bow; shake me gently to guess what's below. What am I?  
*Present*

I'm a sweet striped stick, red and white; I show up most in wintertime. What am I?  
*Candy cane*

I'm made of snow but I'm not a cloud; I wear a carrot nose and stand out proud. What am I?  
*Snowman*

I fly at night on Christmas Eve, with a red nose you can't unsee. What am I?  
*Rudolph*

I'm warm and cozy, you drink me with cheer; I'm often topped with marshmallows here. What am I?  
*Hot chocolate*

I'm kissed at midnight, green above your head; I bring you luck (or so it's said). What am I?  
*Mistletoe*

I drop from the sky at midnight, but I'm not rain. What am I?  
*Confetti*

I sparkle and pop and light up the night when the year turns new. What am I?  
*Fireworks*

I'm a promise you make when the year begins, but many forget me before it ends. What am I?  
*New Year's resolution*

# Sudoku

by PeterS 2025

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

Solutions on page 39

Basic

## Featured Pet



### MOLLY

Molly is 3 years old. She likes playing fetch and enjoys rides, but really hates walks.

Nominate your pet to be a Featured Pet by emailing [info@theecho.ca](mailto:info@theecho.ca)

# Word Search

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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

- CHRISTMAS
- NEWYEAR
- COUNTDOWN
- CELEBRATION
- MIDNIGHT
- RESOLUTIONS
- FIREWORKS
- CHEER
- FESTIVE
- HOLIDAY
- GATHERING
- TOAST
- CALENDAR
- EVE
- JANUARY

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# CLASSIFIEDS

## CHRISTMAS LOTTERY

South Gate's 12 Days of Christmas Lottery. 12 Cash prizes from \$100 - 10,000. Get your \$25 tickets at the Centre or [www.bit.ly/4p12BII](http://www.bit.ly/4p12BII). The perfect holiday gift.

## FOR RENT

Newly renovated 1 bedroom apartment, upstairs unit. Located in Tavistock. If interested call 519-801-5454.

## TREES

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## WANTED

In search of vintage stereo equipment pre 80s. Receivers, amps, speakers, records etc. Preston - 519 770 7366 - [prestonsoutar@gmail.com](mailto:prestonsoutar@gmail.com)

## QUIZ ANSWERS

1. The North Pole
2. Nine
3. An old silk hat
4. Hansel and Gretel
5. Bah! Humbug!
6. Cindy Lou Who
7. Candy, candy canes, candy corns, & syrup
8. Milky white
9. In a manger
10. Boxing Day

## SUDOKU

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

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o o o o  
o o o o

## OBITUARY

# DONNA ELIZABETH HUNTER (NEE PHILLIPS)



HUNTER, Donna Elizabeth (nee Phillips) – Passed away on Tuesday December 2, 2025 at Victoria Hospital, London ON, after a courageous battle with multiple myeloma and amyloidosis.

She was predeceased by her loving husband Bob (2022). Until the end, Donna maintained her kindness and grace, her resiliency, her love for family and friends, and her gratitude for life.

Born December 28, 1941, in Chatham ON to Harry and Elizabeth (Jane) Phillips, Donna was raised in Ridgetown along with her younger sister Judie. There she graduated high school and set her sails to work in the big city of London. It was while working in an office at Drug Trading Co., that she met and married her soul mate Bob in 1963. Three years later, she dedicated herself to her proudest career as a stay-at-home Mum, where she excelled in creating a beautiful and gracious home for Bob and their two daughters Anne and Kelly, in Ingersoll.

Donna was known throughout town as a gracious, kind, and steady lady with a brilliant warm smile. She gave freely of her time, talents and treasures wherever and whenever needed, especially within her beloved parish family at St. James Anglican Church. Many friendships blossomed there and over the years Donna fulfilled many roles as a lifetime member of the Altar Guild, ACW and Quilting Group, while also contributing to many different church projects and committees.

Her faith in God radiated throughout her life and she felt most fulfilled leading the life of a faithful servant. Donna led by quiet example and could regularly be found delivering flowers to the sick, delivering meals-on-wheels, driving folks to appointments, manning the Salvation Army Christmas Kettle, and volunteering her skills at nursing homes, to name a few. Later in her life, Donna's time was encompassed by the unflinching care of her husband Bob, which she did with boundless love and grace.

The crowning glory for Donna was the arrival of her 6 grandchildren over 6 consecutive years, Noah, Cail (Liv), Maddie (Connor), Jonah (Meg), Zoey and Max. Later she welcomed Leo into her heart in true fashion. She made it a point to be as engaged as possible in their lives and they will all miss her deeply. When asked what they will most remember about their Gran, they mention first her laugh and sense of fun, followed by her composure and quiet kindness, her way of listening and making them feel special, her dedication to her church and her sacrifice to others.

Her legacy lives on in her proud family. Daughters Anne (Dave) and Kelly (Nick) have lost their guiding star and a piece of their hearts. Judie will miss her big sister dearly. Donna will also be missed by her nieces Kim, Melissa, and Julie, along with many extended family members, neighbours and friends, especially Dave, Ruth, Katie, Gary, Ronnie, Pat, Don, Randy and Margaret who was such an advocate and comfort to mum in her final weeks.

Our love is eternal and Donna now resides in her everlasting home, reunited with Bob in peace and joy. Amen

Cremation has taken place. A memorial service will be held at St. James Anglican Church on Saturday December 20, 2025, 130 Thames St. South, at 1:00 PM in Ingersoll, with Rev Marty Keating presiding.

Internment for Donna and Bob will take place on their 63rd wedding anniversary, September 7, 2026 at Forest Lawn Memorial Gardens, 2001 Dundas St. East at 1:00 PM.

If desired, friends may make memorial contributions to the Canadian Kidney Foundation, the Canadian Amyloidosis Society or St. James Anglican Church in Ingersoll. Finally, in memory of Donna's beautiful smile, please gift one of your own to a passerby today. Personal condolences may be shared at [www.mcbeathdynes.ca](http://www.mcbeathdynes.ca)

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