

St. Marys Independent

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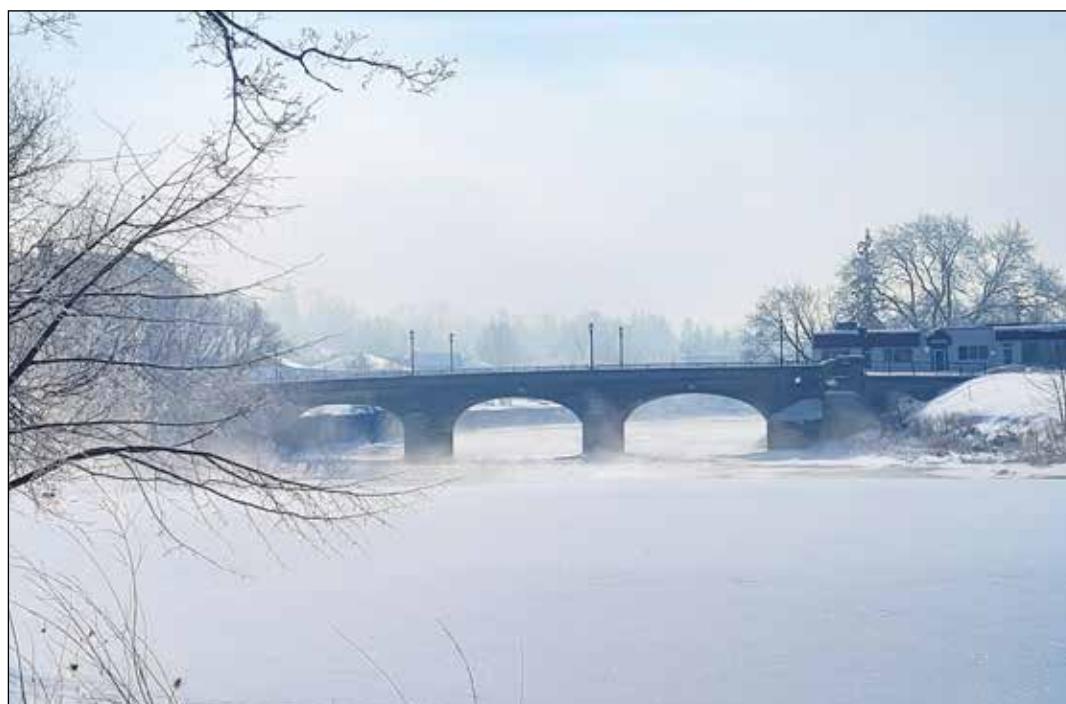
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A DEEP FREEZE Monday was not only groundhog day but was a beautiful winter morning in St. Marys. This view is looking South with mist rising up from the river. (WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Building permits issued in 2025 by Town of St. Marys down from previous years

Number of residential dwelling units built increases in 2025

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

Though the number of building permits issued by the Town of St. Marys dropped in 2025 compared to previous years, the town approved the construction of more residential dwelling units than it has since 2021.

At the Jan. 27 St. Marys council meeting, town staff presented year-end statistics and reports for each of their departments. Town director of building and development Grant Brouwer presented an overview of his department's building and planning work last year, telling council the town issued a total of 113 building permits. From those permits, 57 new residential dwelling units were built – seven single-family dwellings, nine townhouse units, seven accessory dwellings and 34 apartment units.

"When you take a look at what happened on the building side, things were a little soft; everybody saw that, everybody knows that right across the province," Brouwer said. "When you take a look at our housing numbers, our numbers were fairly consistent throughout the year, if not peaking above our five-year trend of 42 units a year."

While the 113 building permits issued by the town last year was the lowest number of permits issued in at least a decade, and the total

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

St. Marys Fire Department to receive nearly \$21,000 through provincial Fire Protection Grant

Funds used to purchase additional protective gear

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

The St. Marys Fire Department will receive \$20,900 this year through an Ontario Fire Protection Grant, which the department has allocated for the purchase of additional protective gear and equipment.

At the Jan. 27 St. Marys council meeting, St. Marys Fire Chief Phil West told councillors the town's fire department had been

approved for the provincial grant for the second year in a row. Last year, West said the department received roughly half the grant it will get this year, and that money was put toward equipment and gear aimed at protecting firefighters from exposures to cancer-causing chemicals.

"We focused on some touch items, so we got an extra pair of gloves, a balaclava which is very big contact for firefighters where they

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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Building permits issued in 2025 by Town of St. Marys down from previous years

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

construction value in town last year – just over \$24 million – was the lowest the town’s seen since 2019 (nearly \$16.8 million), the town saw more residential dwelling units built in 2025 than in 2024 (42), 2023 (28) and 2022 (55). In 2021, the town saw 72 residential units built.

“The majority of (the residential dwelling units built in 2025) were around high density – what we call St. Marys high density or, generally, medium density,” Brouwer said. “When you take a look at the building permits, building permits were down considerably. ... Twenty years ago, we were up over 200 and that’s tracked down for a number of reasons. The significance this time – why it’s tracked down – is because when we do a permit for a medium-density block, it’s one permit and it could be 12

units in there, where typically, if it’s 12 single-(family dwellings), you’d get one building permit for each.”

One of the highlights from last year’s building activity, Brouwer said, was the approval and construction of seven accessory dwelling units, up from six last year and the highest number built in recent memory. This type of alternative housing, Brouwer said, is proof St. Marys’ efforts to promote alternative housing, higher density and intensification through its Opening Doors Action Plan are paying off.

“Taking a look at the crystal ball for 2026, we’re starting to see that as well,” Brouwer said, pointing to a zoning by-law amendment approved by council at the Jan. 27 meeting that will permit the severance of 236 Queen St. W into two properties to allow for the construction

of a new single-detached dwelling on the severed lot.

“... We’re starting to see that ... gentle intensification ... where people are trying to take those lots they have today and now they can get some more density within that. So, some good news even though things are a bit low.”

On the planning side, Brouwer said 2025 was a year of transition for St. Marys. While provincial housing starts slowed significantly, the town continued to advance strategic initiatives aimed at modernizing planning policies and supporting intensification. Development activity showed a clear shift toward higher-density housing, consistent with broader affordability and sustainability goals.

Town planning staff reviewed eight pre-consultations, one official plan

amendment, five zoning bylaw amendments, four site plan applications, four consents, one minor variance and 17 community improvement plan (CIP) pre-consultations.

“That related to 12 different (CIP) grants; five of those 12 reached the maximum eligible amount of either \$10,000 or \$8,000 depending on what stream they are,” Brouwer said. “And then four of the 12 were located within the downtown core, again strengthening one of council’s strategic priorities. Five were for the creation of dwelling units and helping with dwelling units.”

Brouwer said the town has already fielded three inquiries for CIP grants this year, which he said is a good sign property owners are already considering how they can leverage funds provided by the town to make improvements.

St. Marys Fire Department to receive nearly \$21,000

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

can get chemical exposure on the face and the chin and the neck, and we got a (decontamination) machine basically to spray firefighters’ gear off before they return to the hall,” West said.

“This year, we focused on airway and some protection again, so we put an application in for an adaptor that fits on our current SCBA masks, and two filters can attach to it for overhaul. When we do air monitoring, it’s safe to do so but we want extra filtration for that.”

Additionally, West said the fire department will purchase 24 sets of interior helmet liners and six more oxygen bottles to allow firefighters to perform additional duties after a fire is extinguished.

While West said the grant funding will cover nearly the entire cost of these purchases, he told councillors the town will need to cover one per cent of the HST, equating to just \$323.

First announced in the Ontario government’s 2024 budget and included again in the 2025 budget, the Fire Protection

Grant program assists fire departments in acquiring critical equipment to enhance firefighter health and safety, and minor infrastructure at the local level. Specifically, these grants are aimed at supporting cancer prevention, enhanced broadband and internet connectivity, and lithium-ion incident response.

According to West’s report to council, recent statistics have shown firefighters

die of cancer at a rate up to four times higher than the general population. On average, 50 to 60 firefighters die of cancer each year in Canada, and up to half of those firefighters live in Ontario. Contaminated PPE may expose firefighters to hazardous biological and chemical contaminants and reduce the effectiveness of the protection it is intended to provide.

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EDITORIAL

The difference between corporate media and local independents, and why supporting local matters

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

In my nearly 13-year career in journalism, I've worked for both corporate giants and local independent newspapers.

While both employ excellent journalists and editors who work hard to report the news in ways readers can understand and engage with in their daily lives, in my experience, there are some key differences that aren't always entirely apparent when we're skimming through our community newspaper or scrolling through headlines online over a morning cup of coffee.

First and foremost – and probably the most obvious point I'll make here – the motivation behind the production of news differs between those who put out your independently owned community newspaper and the folks who pull the strings behind the scenes at national headquarters for your local corporately owned outlet.

The bottom line is a key motivator for any business regardless of who owns it, but in my experience, it plays a much heavier role in restricting what journalists can report on at corporately owned media outlets than at independent ones. At my previous job, there was a push to focus only on what generated the most clicks online – breaking news, larger features and topics of wider interest that could be shared across the company. Here at Grant Haven Media and other independent locals, we are free to report on everything and anything that could be of interest to our readers – pageviews be damned!

While that includes breaking news, larger features and stories of more regional interest, it also includes all those community stories about fundraisers, events, minor sports teams, service clubs and communities coming together to support one another. Those are the stories I love to tell because they reinforce that idea of community – that friends, neighbours and total strangers can come together to accomplish incredible things that wouldn't have been possible otherwise. And as newspapers, we play an important role in those accomplishments, helping organizers promote their fundraisers

and events, and celebrating their successes for the whole community to see and read about.

At Grant Haven Media, we value the work of our contributors. Whether stories come from a retired farmer, a high school student or a journalist fresh from college, we invest heavily in our news team with time, training and money to ensure we have the right people in the right places who know how to ask the right questions so we can have as fulsome coverage of daily and civic life in our communities as possible. Are we perfect? Of course not, but we do our best to capture every moment of joy, sadness, frustration, triumph and heartbreak that we can, both to inform the communities we live in and to create a record of history for future generations to learn from.

In my experience working for a corporate giant, the mantra was "do more with less." While the editorial teams worked hard to produce the quality of content the communities they serve deserve, the executives and their hedge-fund puppeteers had no qualms with eroding the bedrock on which newspapers are built – the people who report and edit the news.

In my time working in a corporate newsroom, we went from a staff of four full-time reporters down to just two, while other papers in the region lost their complement of editorial staff entirely. With fewer reporters to fill the paper, its pages were instead filled with regional content that, while interesting and well-produced, had little bearing on readers' daily lives and was instead heavily influenced by news and events in urban centres where the bulk of company resources were so often funnelled. As a result of that continued downsizing, the reporters left behind to "do more with less" on a shoestring salary felt underappreciated and overworked. Again, I write from experience.

I guess what I'm trying to say here is we need the support of our readers and our advertisers to continue reporting the news that matters most to our communities. We're not only journalists, editors, salespeople and publishers; we're your neighbours, friends and fellow community members, and we do this work because we care about the communities in which we live.

Bravo

We have 2 Bravos this week.

- 1) Bravo to the BIA for the lovely hanging lights. At a dreary part of the year, they brighten up the downtown.
- 2) Bravo to the young gentleman that was at the St. Marys Cemetery on Saturday walking his dog. He helped get my car unstuck out of the snow. I really appreciated your help.

Boo

We have 2 Boos this week.

- 1) Boo to whoever hit my truck on Huron Street near Maxwell Street on Friday evening, taking off the driver's mirror and failing to stop. It definitely damaged the other driver's mirror as there were broken parts down the street.
- 2) Boo to the few people that let their dog poop in someone's yard, then make a big show of getting the bag out, putting it on their hand and bending down - only to leave it there for the homeowner to find. You're not fooling anyone. Pick up after your dog or stay home!

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

Quote of the Week

"Being named to an Olympic team isn't about a singular performance, season, or moment. It takes years of commitment, sacrifice and resilience from athletes and those who support them every day. We're proud to stand behind each of them, committed to providing an optimized, distraction-free environment that allows them to reach their full potential. I look forward to seeing how this incredible group will leave its mark on Milano Cortina 2026."

- Eric Myles, chief sport officer, Canadian Olympic Committee supporting Canada's 207 athletes taking part in the winter olympics

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

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

St. Marys Independent

Publisher

Stewart Grant • stew@granthaven.com

Regional Editor

Galen Simmons • galen@granthaven.com

Graphic Design / Sales Inquiries

Tyler Carruthers • info@stmarys-independent.com

Business Development

Heather Dunbar • heather@granthaven.com

Billing Administrator

Cindy Boakes • boakescindy1576@gmail.com

Administrative Assistant

Wendy Lamond • wendylamond74@gmail.com

Contributors

June Grant, Nancy Bickell, Mary Smith, Nancy Abra, Lauren Eedy, Spencer Seymour, Sarah Cairns, Paul Knowles, Jake Grant, Julia Paul, Emily Stewart, McGinny Photography

36 Water St. St. Marys, ON, PO Box 2310 N4X 1A2

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The most wasted of days is one with no laughter.

We either make ourselves miserable or strong. The amount of work is the same.

Each sunrise in February is a step closer to Spring.

The best view comes after the hardest climb.

Overheard

AT THE COFFEE SHOP

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Go team Canada. Let's hope the only ICE there, is on the hockey and skating rinks!

Of course I have a date for Valentine's Day. It is February 14th!

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

St. Marys Tim Hortons supports Special Olympics



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured, left to right, are St. Marys Special Olympics Athletes Sean Darling, Hannah Buckland, and Matthew Gratton, who are joined by Tim Hortons staff member Brooklyn DeVries and Store Manager Shari McHardy.

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

Tim Hortons' nationwide annual Special Olympics fundraising campaign wrapped up on Sunday, Feb. 1, with our local St. Marys location raising \$516 thanks to the sale of 258 donuts.

Community support worker Tammy Lynch described this year's Special Olympics donut as a chocolate base with white icing, pastel-coloured sprinkles, with a dollop of whipped cream in the centre. Or in short, "A tasty chocolate sweet treat of savoury deliciousness!"

Along with the three-day event itself raising awareness about Special Olym-

pics and its mission of inclusion, 100 per cent of the funds collected during the Jan. 30 to Feb. 1 donut campaign are donated to Special Olympic programs across the country. Locally, this support goes to Special Olympics Ontario - Stratford & Area.

Tim Hortons has been a proud partner of Special Olympics Canada since 2016. This includes sponsoring youth programs ActiveStart and FUNdamentals, sending gift cards to Special Olympics activities across the country, supporting National Games and, of course, creating a Special Olympics donut to raise funds and awareness for the movement.

St. Marys Health Care Foundation announces winner of January 50/50



(PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. MARYS HEALTH CARE FOUNDATION)

January's 50/50 winner is not pictured, but a big congratulations to Sandra N. of Grand Bend on winning January's jackpot of \$4,265. February's jackpot is now live with a total of seven early bird prizes! Get your tickets today for a chance to win big while supporting local health care. Visit Trellis.org/stmarys5050 for more information and to enter.

STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



ZONING BY-LAW REVIEW SURVEY

As the Zoning By-law Review progresses, the Town encourages residents to complete the Zoning By-law Review Survey. Please be advised that responses collected may inform and influence future updates to the Zoning By-law. This survey is an important opportunity to stay informed and provide meaningful feedback.

townofstmarys.com/zoningsurvey

UPCOMING SPONSORED SKATES

Grab your friends and hit the ice at one of our upcoming sponsored skates - thanks to St. Marys Buick GMC and the Optimist Club of Downie!

- February 16, 10:30 AM - 11:50 AM
- March 16, 1:30 PM - 2:50 PM
- March 17, 1:30 PM - 2:50 PM
- March 19, 1:30 PM - 2:50 PM
- March 20, 1:30 - 2:50 PM

Register: townofstmarys.com/activenet



SCRAPBOOKING DONATION CALL OUT

The St. Marys Friendship Centre is currently in search of donations for their spring Scrapbooking Garage Sale. All proceeds raised from the sale of donated items directly support St. Marys Senior Services. They will gladly accept cardmaking/scrapbooking items, notebooks, adult colouring books, markers, pencils and pens.

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Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Wayne Benny. Wayne was born at St. Joe's Hospital in London. He will be celebrating his 75th birthday near the beginning of February. He lived in West Nissouri Township on the fifth concession road now known as Purple Hill Road on a hobby farm. Wayne has three daughters. He loves fishing and still tries to get out in the nice weather to fish when he can. He loves watching baseball and hockey and is a sports fan. Wayne is a St. Marys Lincolns Fan and goes on Friday nights to watch the games. He enjoys gardening in the summer and helps water the plants in the vegetable garden at Kingsway Lodge where he currently resides.

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

Local entrepreneur helps small businesses grow online with practical and grounded support

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

Maggie Whitcroft is combining over a decade of experience in energy healing and business support to help local entrepreneurs grow their online presence with confidence and clarity.

Whitcroft specializes in helping entrepreneurs navigate marketing and social media concepts. She developed a deep understanding of people after prioritizing her self-healing and blending it with helping businesses grow their online presence.

"I don't want them to feel overwhelmed, and I want to help them feel confident when they're online," said Whitcroft. "I'm not trying to turn anyone into an influencer; I want to help people show up in a way that fits who they are."

With a decade of experience, Whitcroft has accumulated positive feedback from her clients. She enjoys seeing people grow with their business and become more confident in their own skills.

"A lot of the time, business owners get hung up on what they want to show, rather than what their target audience wants to see," said Whitcroft. "I help them look at things from the consumer's perspective."

Whitcroft said one of the main challenges that business owners struggle with is they don't know what content they want to create. She explained it can be easy for owners to feel overwhelmed with technology and its rapid evolution.

"There's a challenge in knowing what to post, when to post it and how to create content that works with the algorithm," said Whitcroft. "Many business owners also struggle with the fear of putting themselves out there."

"AI has been a big change over the past two years, and small businesses need guidance on how to use it



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

St. Marys entrepreneur Maggie Whitcroft.

ethically and authentically. The algorithm is always changing, so I have to stay on top of what kind of content works right now."

Whitcroft emphasized that she wants to approach her clients with intentional and grounded guidance. She hopes to help as many people as she can, whether through self-healing or business growth.

Anyone interested in Whitcroft's services can find more information at www.healingenergylight.com or by calling or texting 519-301-6771.

"I hope to keep growing this business and helping people succeed in reaching their goals; that's all I can ask for. I have no plans to take it to a grand scale. I'm happy focusing on helping people in St. Marys and the surrounding area."

WEEKEND QUIZ
By Jake Grant

1. What is the birthstone for February?
2. What is commonly known as the "love hormone?"
3. The Patriots and the Seahawks last met at what Superbowl?
4. Who is Lady Whistledown in Bridgerton?
5. What is the meal called that Muslims eat to break their fast at sunset?
6. How many dots are on a six-sided die?
7. What kind of wool do dogs make?
8. What does CBC stand for?
9. A group of caterpillars is called what?
10. Finish the quote "Shall I compare thee to a ___?"

This week's answers are found on pg. 31



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No shortage of choices at this Saturday's Chili Cookoff

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

With cold weather persisting, it's a great weekend for chili and there's no better place to be than the Royal Canadian Legion – Branch 236 this Saturday for the second-annual Chili Cookoff.

Legion member Colin Coburn reports that all 20 spots have been allotted for teams competing in the fundraising event this weekend.

"We are all hoping for a big turnout," he said.

The restaurants category will have six entries: Chris Campbell Catering, Gilly's Pubhouse, Joe's Diner, Sunset Diner, the Creamery and Perthstone Kitchen. Perthstone, operated by Jason Thorne and Jessica Kelly, is the name of the new restaurant opening downtown at 159 Queen St. E.

St. Marys service clubs are very well represented at this weekend's event, with this category including the Lions Club, Kinsmen Club, Masonic Lodge, Rotary Club and St. Marys Public Library.

Coburn also says nine individuals have registered to round out the field of 20 entrants.

"For the kids, I just booked Kooky Kate, who will be doing balloon creations and face painting."

Folks can purchase tasting tickets (just \$5 for three tickets or \$10 for eight tickets) and try one of the chilis and they can then vote on: Best Restaurant/Commercial Chili; Best Service Club Chili; Best Independent Chili; and Overall People's Choice.

The Chili Cookoff will be held at the St. Marys Legion, 66 Church St. S, on Saturday, Feb. 7, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.



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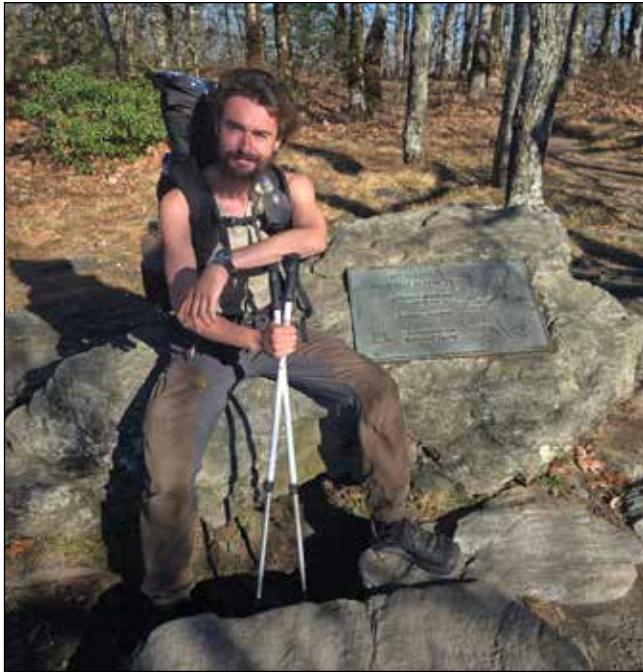


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Kevin Oliver hikes the Appalachian Trail – all 2,200 miles of it



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Kevin Oliver ends his hike at Springer Mountain, the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Oliver saw some amazing scenery along the way. This photo was taken from the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Looking for a challenge to tackle before starting law school, St. Marys native Kevin Oliver made the decision to undertake the 2,200-mile Appalachian Trail that stretches between Georgia and Maine passing through 14 states in the U.S.

Starting on June 14 and ending on Nov. 16, it took Oliver 155 days to walk from Maine to Georgia, though not every day was spent hiking as he would take some days off just to hang out in the woods or spend time in a nearby town.

The best part of the hike, according to Oliver, was the liberty and freedom found out on the trail. The worst part of the hike was its inevitable end. Oliver said it can be pretty tough to find satisfaction in other activities after completing something of this magnitude.

The cost of hiking the trail was approximately \$7,000 to \$8,000 over 155

days and Oliver managed an average distance of 20 miles per day after the first month.

Since he was only able to carry so much, every five to 10 days, he would hitchhike into town and stock up on supplies and food. Hiking the trail required 3,000-4,000 calories per day, but having to keep his cargo light, Oliver kept to items like ramen, Knorr Sidekicks, a lot of clarified butter and beer.

Many nights, Oliver slept on the ground under a polyester tarp. There are also basic, three-walled wooden shelters along the trail that range from condemned shacks to “veritable cathedrals of the woods.”

The most common direction that many hike the trail is northbound from Georgia to Maine, however, Oliver hiked it southbound due to a later start in June and his relative proximity to Maine.

Even though there are some physical demands on the trail, the hardest part was the mental aspect.

“You’re on your own and living outside for half a year. Tomorrow’s going to look like today and the finish line is still a long, long way away,” said Oliver on keeping in a good headspace throughout the trek.

As far as wildlife, while there is potential to encounter some dangerous wildlife, Oliver said the biggest concerns were ticks and rodents, but those can be mitigated or tolerated. He did, however, see eight moose in Maine. He also saw many bears, deer and eagles. Rodents like squirrels, rats and mice were ever present on the trail, as well.

Cell service was available sometimes, especially in the mid-Atlantic states, but it couldn’t be counted on most days.

“I’d love to join the Continental Divide Trail and the Great Divide Trail together and walk the span of the Rocky Mountains,” Oliver said when asked if he has any plans for another trek. “In reality, however, I would need a sponsor or benefactor to support this kind of en-

deavor. Had I resources, I don’t think I’d ever sit still again.”

According to Oliver, the Appalachian Trail is for anyone and everyone who loves nature. Along his journey, he met hikers as old as 92 and as young as five. He encourages anyone reading this to give it a shot.

“It’s nonsense to count on long-term plans in a world this turbulent, especially if you are young. There may not be a later, so get out there, take risks for new experiences. Everything else is just filling time,” Oliver said.

Oliver is the son of Mark and Janet Oliver of St. Marys.

“We were naturally concerned about his welfare, especially at times when the remote nature of where he was made it impossible for us to communicate with him,” Mark Oliver said of his son’s trek. “That said, we are very proud of him for completing such an epic challenge.”

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Local Salvation Army campaign raises more than \$440,000 for community support



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Salvation Army friends, staff and volunteers enjoy the annual drop-in luncheon to celebrate funds raised during the 2025 Christmas Kettle fundraisers throughout Stratford. St. Marys and Mitchell. Pictured from left are Pierre Chateauvert, Jim Hodgins, Lynda Hodgins, Christine Weadick and Ray Weadick.

AMANDA NELSON
Independent Reporter

The Salvation Army in Stratford recently celebrated local volunteers at its volunteer appreciation luncheon, where kettle volunteers gathered to share lunch, stories and learn about the impact of the 2025 Christmas kettle campaign.

This year, The Salvation Army surpassed its goal of \$385,000, raising more than \$440,000 for local programs and services. Funds were directed toward the operating budget, including food purchases and programs such as the food bank and an income tax clinic.

“Surpassing our goal was not expected, but a pleasant surprise,” said Jennifer Morris, community and family services manager. “We had lots of community partners step up and make sure everyone had a Christmas, whether that was food, toys or hygiene items. We even had pet toys this year.”

Morris said the demographic of people needing support continues to shift. “We’re seeing more people who are in retirement accessing support,” she said. “The money they have through their pension isn’t covering everything anymore. We also see people who are working, but even their income isn’t enough to cover their needs.”



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Pictured is the Salvation Army staff that makes sure the Kettle Campaign runs smoothly including, from left, Raelyn Marshall, Elaine Honcharsky, Rick Honcharsky, Jennifer Morris, Nancy Argyle and Michael Tigani.

The Salvation Army raises its entire annual budget during the Christmas season. This year, across Stratford, St. Marys and Mitchell, the campaign raised a total of \$440,968.48.

St. Marys

In St. Marys, Foodland raised \$11,025, the Your Independent Grocer raised \$23,162, the LCBO raised \$699, Scotiabank raised \$16,149 and mail-in donations totalled \$89,252 for a grand total of \$142,141.

The St. Marys Salvation Army serves an average of 70 households per month and distributes more than 36,025 pounds of food annually. In 2025, volunteers contributed more than 858 hours.

Throughout the year, 694 food hampers were provided to community members in need, along with 84 bags of diapers, 121 Christmas hampers and nine backpacks filled with school supplies. Four children were sent to camp, eight feline-friend vouchers for spay and neuter services were issued, 49 income tax returns were completed and 22 emergency food hampers were distributed.

Stratford

In Stratford, Canadian Tire raised \$12,446, Food Basics raised \$19,903, the downtown LCBO raised \$16,839, the Stratford Mall raised \$10,748, No Frills raised \$10,600, Sobeys raised \$18,212, Walmart raised \$25,234, Zehrs raised \$28,378, and other donations — including mail-in and online contributions — totalled \$99,179. The Stratford campaign raised \$242,283.

An average of 123 households per month accessed Salvation Army services in Stratford, with more than 55,125 pounds of food distributed. Volunteer hours totalled 2,426.

In 2025, the Stratford Salvation Army provided 12 feline-friend vouchers for spay and neuter services, completed 313 income tax returns, distributed 65 bags of diapers, sent one child to camp, provided 17 backpacks filled with school supplies, distributed 184 Christmas hampers and 1,000 food hampers, and issued five emergency food hampers.

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Paws on Patrol Stratford brought their third annual Pet Pantry Drive to Klomps Home and Garden

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

The Winter Paws Holiday Market aimed to meet the growing demand for pet food and supplies over the weekend.

Last weekend, Tyler Jouwsma, owner and founder of Paws on Patrol Stratford, hosted the business' third annual Pet Pantry Drive at Klomps Home and Garden. The event raised food and supplies for pets in need while featuring local vendors selling their wares.

"It's a hybrid between a pet-friendly market and a fundraiser. All donations are shared between Stratford House of Blessing, local churches and the Pet Pantry Drive," said Jouwsma. "Market vendors keep all proceeds from their sales, making it a win-win-win for the community."

Jouwsma said that since starting his mobile pet nail and trimming business three years ago, he noticed a growing need for pet necessities, with the challenge worsening due to current financial pressures.

"We started this drive to raise dona-



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

The Paws on Patrol Stratford team, from left to right, includes Julia Rachuk, Drew Scherbarth, Paige Knechtel, Tyler Jouwsma and Andrew Scanlon.

tions for our pet pantry through my company, Paws on Patrol Stratford," said Jouwsma. "We saw that a lot of

families in the community were struggling to provide basic pet food and necessities. To help keep animals off the

street and out of shelters, this felt like the most sustainable, cost-effective and proactive way to support them."

Jouwsma hopes to expand on the success of the last drive, which raised more than 5,000 pounds of pet food and essentials.

"Every year, we focus on running this market with different local businesses and supporting the community," Jouwsma said. "The first two markets were Christmas-focused, but when Klomps reached out, they couldn't host it in December, so we moved it to January."

Paws on Patrol Stratford is a mobile pet service that works with animals experiencing anxiety, PTSD and fear-based reactivity. Jouwsma tries to reduce those symptoms by serving pets' needs in the comfort of their own homes.

"Pets are a therapy for us too, and it pains me to see animals suffering because they don't have a voice. I'd love to raise more awareness, so people show more compassion for animals. A lot of pets and people are struggling, and often we don't even know it."

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Quadro Communications doubles down on hospice care with February matching donor campaign

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A local telecommunications provider is turning the month of February into a powerful show of community support, pledging to match donations to Rotary Hospice of Stratford Perth dollar for dollar up to \$25,000.

St. Marys-based Quadro Communications Co-operative Inc. is partnering with Rotary Hospice on its February Monthly Giving Challenge, matching all new monthly donations and any increases to existing monthly gifts made between Feb. 1 and Feb. 28. The initiative encourages residents across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County to make a lasting impact by supporting compassionate end-of-life care while doubling the value of their contribution.

“At Quadro Communications, we believe strong communities are built on care, compassion and connection,” said Chris Ladouceur, general manager of Quadro Communications, in a press release announcing the campaign. “Rotary Hospice provides an essential service to individuals and families during incredibly challenging times, and we’re proud to support their work.”

For Quadro, the partnership is deeply rooted in community connection. Stephannie Metcalfe, marketing admin-



(PHOTO COURTESY OF ROTARY HOSPICE STRATFORD PERTH)

The Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth lit up with winter lights.

istration specialist with the cooperative, said the hospice’s impact is felt far beyond its walls.

“It’s just a very important thing for the community,” Metcalfe said. “We have lots of customers who have gone through the hospice, and there are so many beautiful stories that come out of it. It’s a really meaningful collaboration for us.”

Metcalfe said giving back has always

been central to Quadro’s identity as a business.

“The community has been so good to us and our business,” she said. “We want to make sure we’re sharing that success and giving back wherever we can.”

Rotary Hospice provides 24-hour palliative care, 365 days a year, in a home-like setting at no cost to residents or their families. While Ministry of Health funding covers roughly half of its oper-

ating costs, the hospice relies on community support to raise more than \$1 million annually to continue its services.

“Monthly donors are essential to the long-term sustainability of Rotary Hospice,” said executive director Louise Lepp. “With Quadro’s matching support, even small monthly gifts can make a lasting difference.”

Throughout February, Quadro will also help promote the campaign through its retail locations, sharing information and encouraging customers to consider becoming monthly donors.

“We’d love to see at least one new donation every day throughout February,” Metcalfe said. “It’s such a beautiful program, and this is a simple way for people to show their support.”

“We currently have 72 generous monthly donors and are hoping to get one new one for each day in February, rounding us out to 100 monthly donors,” added Rotary Hospice communications and marketing coordinator Pippa Elliott.

Community members interested in participating can start or increase a monthly donation at www.rotaryhospice.ca/monthly-giving. With Quadro’s match, every act of generosity this February goes twice as far, helping ensure hospice care remains available for those who need it most.



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The Art Olympics Exhibit opens at the Station Gallery



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Stella Timmins proudly stands in front of her ink art piece called "Urban Rat Study."



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

A group of St. Marys Station Gallery visitors stopped in at the opening of the exhibit and took time to vote for their favourite creative artwork.



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Joan Sandwith had more than one picture on display and was onsite to show her beautiful creations.

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

The hard work and talent of both children and adults who have participated in St. Marys Station Gallery's art education program over the last year is now on display as part of a new exhibit.

The Art Olympics exhibit opened Jan. 31 and runs until Feb. 28. The first-time "Art Olympics" exhibit, which coincides with the Winter Olympic Games in Milan, presents a diverse range of creative artwork that can be voted on in a variety of categories.

There was a good showing on opening day this past Saturday as the gallery welcomed the public in to view the pieces and opened judging.

The Art Olympics was a legitimate category within the Olympics from 1915-1952. Subjects like painting, sculpture, architecture, literature and music were recognized with gold, silver and bronze medals but the category was eventually ended because most of the artists were professionals and the International Olympic Committee believed it contradicted the amateur Olympic spirit of the games.

Voting will remain open throughout the exhibit's run, ending on Feb. 28. Anyone who comes to see the work on display can vote for their favourites in the following categories:

- Best drawing by a child
- Best drawing by an adult
- Best watercolour by an adult

- Best watercolour by a child
 - Best use of colour by an adult
 - Best use of colour by a child
 - Best depiction of a building
 - Best landscape
 - Best artwork of an animal
 - Best acrylic painting
 - Best still life
 - Best collage
 - Best work done in ink
 - Best composition
 - Favourite artwork by an adult
 - Favourite artwork by a child
- Curator Duncan MacDonald said choosing artwork to display was a nearly impossible feat.

"There have been hundreds of works created over the past year, mostly by people who are brand new to making

art," he said. "Choosing a couple dozen to present was extremely tough. ... What you see here is the culmination of lots of work by a group of talented individuals."

Adult artists exhibiting their work include Vivian Reid, Debbie Lemmons, Julie Robson, Kelley Coghlin, Monica MacInnis, Tammy Chapman, Tine Crossfield and Joan Sandwith. Children who are exhibiting work include Stella Timmins, Alex (the Great), Emily Andren, Valeri (the victorious), Anna and Sophie and Ella Mekis.

Gallery hours are Wednesdays to Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. St. Marys Station Gallery is located in the beautiful train station building at 5 James St. N.

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March break registration opens at the St. Marys Station Gallery

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

St. Marys Station Gallery curator/director Duncan MacDonald is encouraging residents to register sooner rather than later before spots fill up for the gallery's March Break programming.

Children and youth workshops will run from March 16-21. Programs for children aged seven to 11 will run from 9 a.m. to noon, while youth programming for ages 12 and up will run from 1 to 4 p.m.

"These programs are based on ones we ran last summer. I found that the drawing and watercolour classes were especially popular," said MacDonald. "Drawing and watercolour are really the foundation of other kinds of art making. There's an old saying, 'If you can't draw it, you can't paint it.'"

Children and youth workshops will teach watercolour from Monday to Wednesday and drawing from Thursday to Saturday.

Due to smaller group sizes, MacDonald said he's able to provide a more in-

dividualized teaching experience for his students. He added learning and practicing art is a great way to keep the brain active, providing a sense of fulfillment.

"I love to see where people start and end up on a creative level. Just go for it and have fun," said MacDonald. "It's an affordable thing for a kid to do for three days, while not taking up their whole March break."

MacDonald said kids are fearless when it comes to creating art because they're not holding themselves back once they start drawing.

"Adults tend to overthink it, but kids just jump in and do it. Not everything in art is about technical skill; it's also about being open-minded, thinking creatively and solving problems. Some of the pieces both the adults and kids have made are really interesting and very independent."

Parents can sign up their child for a workshop by emailing stmarysstation-gallery@gmail.com.

Fees are \$10 an hour per child with materials included.



Duncan MacDonald, curator and director at the St. Marys Station Gallery. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

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St. Marys Scouts selling River Valley tubing passes to fundraise for scouts programming

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

Whether locals are sliding down the River Valley Golf Course and Country Club's winter tube slide this winter or next, there are discounted passes available thanks to First St. Marys Scouting, including Cubs.

The First St. Marys Scouting group is selling passes for the River Valley Winter Tube Slide. Passes are \$28 each and

are for ages four and older to use any time during tubing season. All passes will support First St. Marys Scouts programming.

"It helps us with our camping supplies. It helps us to be able to take the kids camping. With the loss of our own campground, we now have a bigger expense when we rent other places and that can be a great deal of money added to families," said Michelle McKeen, contact scouter. "Everyone is struggling

right now so we don't want to add any extra and this fundraising actually goes a long way."

Along with camping, fundraising also allows the First St. Marys Scouts to take their members on outdoor adventures like snowshoeing at the Stratford-Perth Museum and exploring the Tree Top Adventure Park at London's Boler Mountain, which features high-ropes courses.

McKeen said winter tubing-pass sales are, so far, on par with previous fund-

raising years. She hopes more families will continue to purchase the passes into March Break, weather depending. Either way, the passes never expire.

"As long as River Valley is open, they are going to be valid and able to be used," McKeen said.

To inquire about purchasing a pass, either contact McKeen on Facebook, send an email to 1stmaryscubs@gmail.com or call or text 519-274-2673.

Ice time at Stone Willow



(NOEL GIESEN PHOTOS)

The consistently cold temperatures of late might not be for everyone, but they've been a hit with local youth who have enjoyed the outdoor skating rink on the grounds at the Stone Willow Inn. General manager Noel Giesen says that the rink has been up-and-running since last week and is free to enjoy for skaters of all ages between the hours of 4 p.m. and 8 p.m., Tuesdays through Sundays, weather permitting. "We wanted to do something for the community and give back, and knowing that St. Marys is such a great hockey town, the outdoor rink seemed like a great way to do it." Giesen added that the rink can also be rented during off-hours, and those interested can contact the hotel at 519-566-5819.

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St. Marys Fire Department responds to record-breaking number of calls for service last year

Fire chief says number of fires has doubled over previous two years

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The St. Marys Fire Department has once again broken a record for the number of emergency calls for service they responded to in a year.

At the Jan. 27 St. Marys council meeting, Fire Chief Phil West presented his department's 2025 statistics and reviewed the year as a whole with councillors. According to his report, local firefighters responded to 179 emergency calls for service, up from the department's previous record of 162 in 2024.

"The biggest category that grew was fires," West said. "We're working with the team to increase public awareness; we're doing more press releases, social media bursts and campaigns on fire safety."

According to department statistics, the highest volume of calls last year involved alarm-system malfunctions including out-of-date warnings at 38, motor-vehicle collisions at 27, fires at 26 and carbon-monoxide alarms at 18. On average, 16 firefighters attended each call.

Broken down month-to-month, firefighters were at their busiest in December last year, responding to 28 emergency calls for service, nine of which West said were for motor-vehicle collisions attributed to winter storms and poor driving conditions. August saw the second-highest volume of calls at 20 and February followed closely with 18.

"It seemed like we were getting call volumes under control and then December came along and we had 28 calls," West said. "We are working on a few

things to reduce call volume. Whether they're going to work right away, likely not, but we have modified a few things."

Chief fire prevention officer Chris St. Clair was also busy last year, completing 303 fire inspections – up from 243 in 2024. Of those inspections in 2025, 151 were routine, 105 were follow-ups, 22 were by request, 15 were for licensing, six were to address a safety concern and four were motivated by complaints.

"We're ... making sure we're highlighting places that haven't been inspected for quite some time," West said. "If you look at the trend in follow-ups, there's a huge jump in follow-ups (from 51 in 2024). That means that, in summary, we're writing up things that business owners have to do to be compliant and we're following up on those require-

ments. So, they could be 'blocks exit doors,' not having their private hydrants tested, their exit lights are burnt out, so we're doing a really good job on inspecting businesses thoroughly and making sure that deficiencies are brought up."

"It's really nice to hear you comment on the inspections that were done and the things that haven't been done for a while, and going in and all the follow-up," Coun. Fern Pridham said. "So just a good job throughout the year by the new inspector."

Looking ahead, West said the department is preparing to host an ice-rescue training course with the Ontario Fire College in February at the town's swimming quarry that firefighters from St. Marys, Stratford and Woodstock will participate in.

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St. Marys Independent **SPORTS**

U11 B Girls win gold at Orangeville tournament

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The St. Marys Landscaping U11 B Girls St. Marys Rock captured the gold medal at the 46th annual Sweetheart Tournament in Orangeville Jan. 23-25.

Head coach Mike Kittmer praised the team's work ethic throughout the tournament.

"The biggest thing this weekend was the girls' compete level on every shift," said Kittmer. "To start our year, we preached giving 110 per cent, and this weekend, no one took a shift off. The girls fed off one another all weekend as well. When they looked at their linemates and teammates and saw how hard they were pushing, it increased the expectations on themselves to push as well. I couldn't be happier with the way the girls showed up, competed and pressured teams all weekend. They represented St. Marys extremely well, and I hope this gives them confidence heading into WOGHL (Western Ontario Girls Hockey League) Playoffs and Provincial Playdowns."

Additionally, Kittmer said the Rock's puck movement was something they worked on before the tournament, and the team executed incredibly well.

"On the Thursday practice before we hit the road to Orangeville, we worked on carrying the puck while keeping their speed, and on getting puck possession back off rebounds. Our speed and hunger to get the puck were big factors this weekend. In chatting with one of our opponents, he agreed with our aggression, saying that they were unable to move the puck like they did in the rest of the tournament, and attributed it to our hard work every shift."

The Rock's record of two wins and one loss in the three-game round-robin was good for second place in their pool. Following round-robin play, the tournament hosted a skills competition. Adalyn Blake went two-for-three in the breakaway challenge, while goaltender Mya Grose stopped two of three attempts, earning four points apiece for the team.

In the relay race, Addison Poetker gave the Rock an early lead before Sianna Sicilia, Jacklyn Kittmer and Jillian Davies finished strong to win their pool. This set up a head-to-head relay final against the Georgina Golden Hawks. After a dropped handoff by Georgina, the Rock seized the advantage and captured their division's skills championship.

St. Marys then faced off against the Golden Hawks in a semi-final game with a berth in the championship contest on



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The St. Marys Landscaping U11 B Girls St. Marys Rock earned the top prize at the Sweetheart Tournament in Orangeville Jan. 23-25. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Harper Hillman, Adelyn Laidlaw, Addy Blake, Mya Grose, Jacklyn Kittmer, Ella Stacey and Addison Poetker. In the middle row, from left, are Monica Hinz, Scarlett Maddock, Jillian Davies, Sianna Sicilia and Kira Henderson. In the back row, from left, are coaches Mike Kittmer, Rob Davies, Gracie Hillman and Derek Laidlaw.

the line. Kira Henderson scored early in the first period, her third goal in four games, which held up as the eventual game-winner. Georgina mounted pressure in the third, but disciplined team defence and a key blocked shot by Davies kept play to the outside. Grose closed the door for her third straight shutout, sending the Rock to the gold-medal game.

The bench boss noted Henderson's goal was an example of the teamwide effort turned in by his team throughout the tournament.

"They wanted a medal this weekend, so we are all pumped that medal was gold," Mike Kittmer said. "We have relied a lot this year on the (Jacklyn) Kittmer-(Jillian) Davies-(Adelyn) Laidlaw line to drum off our offence, but the (Adalyn) Blake-(Scarlett) Maddock-(Kira) Henderson line got hot this weekend as well. Ella (Stacey) is our little pinball, and she rolled through the lines all weekend and brought an added bit of energy to each shift. Her energy led to a lot of puck possession for our team this weekend."

In the final, the Rock matched up against a strong Grand River Mustangs

squad. St. Marys controlled much of the first period but was denied by the Mustangs' goaltender. The second period was evenly played, with Grose making several timely saves. Stacey eventually broke through, picking up a loose puck in the St. Marys zone and converting on a breakaway with a five-hole goal.

That marker stood as the game-winner, with another blocked shot in the final minute by Davies. Adelyn Laidlaw was able to get the puck deep in the Mustangs' zone to finish off the game, with Grose earning her fourth consecutive shutout.

Mike Kittmer explained how their improved starts to the games contributed to their success.

"This group of girls had struggled to come out in the first period and push the other team," he said. "When we announce our starting lineups, we always remind the starters that they get the opportunity to set the game's tone. The girls did just that this weekend and came out flying each game. While we credit Mya (Grose) with the shutouts, we also did not trail for a single minute after game one. The girls are much more con-

fidant and aggressive when we have the lead, but we also continued to push and not drop off our aggression, and made the other teams play to our pace instead of us playing to theirs."

Mike Kittmer also credited the team's defenders for making significant contributions throughout the tournament.

"Our defence core of (Sianna) Sicilia, (Monica) Hinz, (Addison) Poetker and (Harper) Hillman had their heads up this weekend," he said. "They all made some great breakout passes and moved the puck up the boards as plays required and played some really strong defence."

That strong defensive performance was emphasized as critical to the Rock going as far as they did.

"We are a low-scoring team, so the group has to defend well first and take advantage of the offensive chances we get from it. The coaching staff has reminded the girls that the best defence is putting a lot of pressure on their players, and eliminating the time and space to make a decision. While we have had glimpses of it this year, this weekend, they were always pushing hard on the opponent's defence and got those turnovers we promised they would, and that led to offensive chances.

"On our defensive end, we have been working with the defence to push the approaching players to the outside, and keep the shots to the outside," Mike Kittmer continued. "The girls kept the middle-ice shots to a minimum and helped make the net that much smaller so Mya (Grose) could step out and play her angles."

During the banner ceremony, Grose was awarded the Monique Babineau Memorial Trophy, presented to a goaltender who demonstrates outstanding character on and off the ice. Grose received the majority of the tournament's 96 nominations amongst the 27 teams.

While her on-ice performance was exceptional, Mike Kittmer emphasized Grose's sportsmanship and kindness. Throughout the weekend, Grose formed friendships with opposing goalies, including a Georgina Golden Hawks netminder she went out of her way to comfort after a tough semi-final loss. Following Sunday's final, Grose went out of her way to congratulate her new friend after learning the Golden Hawks had captured the bronze medal.

"Mya may be small in stature, but she has a huge heart and is a very big part of our team," Mike Kittmer said. "From her acrobatic saves to her maturity and compassion, she's a special player and an even better person."

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MacQueen-Spence makes history as Lincs hit 16 straight wins

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

After a stretch of three games in four days, there is a new greatest modern era St. Marys Lincoln, with Chase MacQueen-Spence setting new team Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) records for most career goals, assists and points since the formation of the league in 2007.

MacQueen-Spence registered three assists in the Lincolns' 5-1 win over the Hamilton Kilty B's on Jan. 29, hitting new Lincolns' franchise GOHL records of 107 career assists and 184 career points. Then, in the Lincolns' 3-0 win against the Waterloo Siskins on Feb. 1, MacQueen-Spence potted his 78th career goal, breaking the GOHL career goals benchmark for the Lincolns.

Sean Consitt previously held the GOHL records for career goals, assists and points with the Lincolns, tallying 77 goals, 106 assists and 183 points in 178 games with the Lincolns between 2009 and 2013.

The Lincolns' captain admitted the record-setting goal against Waterloo lifted a heavy weight off his back.

"It feels amazing," said MacQueen-Spence. "It's a big relief coming off my shoulders. I've been holding onto it the past few games, just trying to get it. I wanted to do it at home, but I'll take it away. When I first came here, I wasn't expecting to be here for all four years. I had other goals in mind, but I am extremely happy that I did stick it out for the first couple of years, and to be here in my fourth year now, it's been awesome, and I have zero regrets."

MacQueen-Spence added the immediate feelings when he scored his 78th career goal, joking about the reaction by his teammates on the bench, who all remained seated when MacQueen-Spence skated by the bench after scoring.

"I felt just so much relief (when he scored against Waterloo). I didn't really know what to do. I went to the fly-by, and all the boys were just sitting down there. All the emotions came out. It was great. I'm going to take a wild guess that it was Owen (Voortman) and Ryan (Hodkinson) who were planning that one for a couple games. I've heard them whispering about it, so I didn't know what they were planning, but I knew it was something."

MacQueen-Spence's assists and points records came against the Kilty B's, who the Lincolns defeated on Jan. 29. Voortman scored a pair of goals as part of a three-point game, which brought him to 150 career points. Head coach Jeff Bradley credited the two overage forwards, not just for their milestones, but for getting back to the top of their game.

"Chase and Owen were outstanding. It was nice to see those guys get back to where they need to be. Owen has the ability to be a pretty overpowering pres-



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Chase MacQueen-Spence carries the puck up ice during the St. Marys Lincolns' 3-0 win over the Waterloo Siskins on Feb. 1. MacQueen-Spence scored his 78th career goal against the Siskins, just days after recording his 107th career assist and 184th career point, all of which are new Lincolns GOHL records.

ence for his opponents when he's skating and being physical, and I thought that's what he did Thursday night, and it got him engaged, and when he does that, he can be one of the premier players in the league.

"I called Chase after the game Thursday night and just told him how important what he did was," Bradley continued. "I know points aren't everything, and he's the first one to say it. What he wants to do is win. But when you're done junior hockey, 99.9 per cent of players are left with nothing except memories and friendships. But what Chase has done for this organization, his name will be remembered forever, and he should be incredibly proud of that."

One of the other brightest spots for the Lincolns against the Kilty B's was the returning Jacob Montesi, who played his first game since Dec. 12. Montesi showed no signs of rust, despite the lengthy lay-off, and, according to Bradley, reminded everyone how valuable he is.

"I thought Jacob came back and gave a reminder of how good and how important he is to our team. I turned to Mike (Herman) midway through the first period and just said, 'Man, I forgot how good this kid is.' So, it was really nice to have him back. I think the experience he has and understanding what to expect helps in being able to step back in and not miss a beat."

Ryan Hodkinson, Blake Elzinga and Callum McAuley also scored for St. Marys, while Vaughn Barr made 35 saves in his winning effort in goal.

Bradley noted the Lincs weathered a rough-and-tumble opening period before taking control in the final 40 minutes.

"I thought they took it to us physically a little bit in the first, but it was still a good road period for us, and then I thought

in the second and third, we dominated quite a bit. We circled a couple of things we wanted to work on Thursday and a couple of things we wanted to work on Friday. Against Hamilton, specifically, there were two things, one being our faceoff execution. We're not winning a ton of faceoffs right now, but we have a plan to get pucks back when we lose draws, and we haven't been executing it. And then our puck management felt a little bit sloppy as of late. Some of that has to do with the opponents we're playing, but we can control it a little bit and we did a better job of that against Hamilton."

Lincs dominate Nationals in Booth-Housego's return to the PRC

Just 24 hours later, Colby Booth-Housego made 22 stops in the Lincolns crease, his first home game since being reacquired by the Lincolns at the trade deadline, as Voortman scored two goals for the second straight game on Jan. 30 in the Lincs' 4-1 win over the London Nationals.

The Lincolns outshot London 43-23, in large part thanks to a second period that was wholly one sided as St. Marys

outshot the Nationals 20-4 in the middle frame.

According to Bradley, the team's physicality, breakouts and forechecking were the pillars of the Lincolns' strong showing.

"I thought we handled them physically," Bradley said. "I thought the guys executed the game plan. In every aspect of the game, I thought we deserved to win, so I was really happy with that effort. I thought we got in on the forecheck a lot easier. Our F-1 and F-2 were getting up and putting pressure on their defenders and not giving them any options but to go up the wall, and then that leads to our defencemen getting down the wall and forcing the puck to stay in."

Along with Voortman, Ethan Weir and Lincoln Moore found the back of the net, with Moore's goal giving the Garden River native 100 career GOHL points, rounding out a trio of milestones along with Voortman's 150 career points and MacQueen-Spence's records. Bradley was thrilled to see the three 20-year-old forwards celebrated for their career benchmarks.

"It's great to see. They all deserve the recognition they're getting. They really do. The loyalty they have to this program is inspiring. Chase (MacQueen-Spence) is driving past multiple teams to play here. Owen (Voortman) is from Thunder Bay, and he's choosing to come play here. And Lincoln (Moore), same thing. He's a guy who could be playing on any junior hockey team in Canada, and he's choosing to play here. I think we're very honoured that those three guys choose to play here."

Bradley also detailed the focus the team had on improving the consistency with which they displayed their physicality.

"We wanted to continue what we talked about Thursday night, but then the main thing that we wanted to add to that was being physically dominant. That's something that we feel that it's taken us a period or so to get back into that form. We're capable of doing it to a team in the first period and putting them on their heels right away, and we feel that's

CONTINUED TO PAGE 20

St. Marys Lincolns Player Stats (as of Feb. 3, 2026)					
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Ryan Hodkinson	F	36	14	42	56
Chase MacQueen-Spence	F	37	16	27	43
Lincoln Moore	F	35	19	23	42
Owen Voortman	F	38	16	26	42
Blake Elzinga	F	38	11	18	29
Ethan Weir	F	36	15	13	28
Owen Kalp	D	38	6	19	25
Declan Ready	F	38	10	14	24
Jack Clarke	F	29	9	10	19
Callum McAuley	F	13	8	8	16
Devun Colebrook	F	37	11	4	15
Oliver Lacko	F	17	6	9	15
Chase McDougall	F	34	3	9	12
James MacGregor	D	33	3	7	10
Jacob Montesi	D	27	1	7	8
Luke McMillan	D	32	1	7	8
Jakob Drobný	D	28	0	7	7
Cam Kean	D	19	2	2	4
Pearse Huey	D	6	1	0	1

GOHL Western Conference Standings (as of Feb. 3, 2026)							
Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
St. Marys Lincolns - X	30	6	2	0	62	158	79
Chatham Maroons - X	28	8	2	3	61	195	125
Elmira Sugar Kings - X	29	6	2	0	60	174	94
London Nationals	26	12	1	0	53	172	123
Stratford Warriors	24	9	2	2	52	145	101
St. Thomas Stars	19	16	2	1	41	149	141
Waterloo Siskins	17	16	4	2	40	120	116
LaSalle Vipers	18	19	3	0	39	138	152
Strathroy Rockets	18	18	2	0	38	143	146
Listowel Cyclones	16	20	1	1	34	109	122
Komoka Kings	13	24	2	1	29	132	169
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	39	0	0	0	62	264

Goals			
Player	Record	GAA	SV-%
Brogan Colquhoun	15-4-1-0	1.97	0.936
Vaughn Barr	11-2-1-0	2.08	0.927
Colby Booth-Housego	4-0-0-0	2.00	0.925

X - Indicates team has clinched playoff spot

Moore, Voortman hit career milestones as Lincs' continue win streak

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

a massive advantage for us leading into periods two and three, and I thought we did that as well.”

After a few games of some inconsistent play heading into their three games in four days against Hamilton, London and Waterloo, the Lincolns juggled many of their line combinations. These changes included Devun Colebrook centring a line with Voortman and MacQueen-Spence on his wins, as well as Jack Clarke moving from the wing back to the middle of the ice, both of whom the bench boss was pleased with in the games against Hamilton and London.

“Everybody wants to play with Devun,” said Bradley. “He’s physical, he competes, he works hard. Owen (Voortman) and Chase (MacQueen-Spence) are the fortunate ones right now, but literally everybody on our team wants to play with Devun. And Jack (Clarke) seems like he’s getting stronger. He’s very physical and I think he looked good in the middle, so we might try to keep him there a little bit.”

Lincs stay on roll in convincing shutout of Siskins

Unfortunately for the Lincolns, though they went on to continue their winning streak, their trip to Waterloo on Feb. 1 wasn’t all good news as Colebrook left the game less than a minute in with a leg injury after a knee-on-knee collision with Siskins’ forward Sutton Maltby.

With Oliver Lacko already not in the lineup due to an injury, this meant the Lincs were down to 10 forwards for the rest of the game. That level of depletion amongst the forwards, coupled with the



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Jacob Montesi steps onto the ice on Jan. 29 against the Hamilton Kilty B’s for his first game back in the lineup for the St. Marys Lincolns since Dec. 12 after missing over a month and a half due to injury.

busy four-day schedule, made the stellar performance more impressive to the bench boss.

“I thought, given the circumstances, it was an A-plus,” Bradley said. “It’s our third game in four days. We ended up playing the whole game minus one shift with 10 forwards. We were battling through a little bit of dirty play. I think our guys deserve a lot of credit. That’s the second time that we’ve shut Waterloo out this season, and I think that’s something to be incredibly proud of. I think the guys should be really proud of

the effort last night.”

While the entire team delivered a strong performance against the Siskins, Bradley praised Clarke for filling in for some of the elements that was lost with Colebrook’s exit.

“I think Devun (Colebrook) is a guy on his own in terms of what he brings, but I think a guy like Jack (Clarke), he brings a lot of similar elements, so it’s all the more important that he does that stuff when we’re missing someone like Devun. Jack had a really good weekend for us, and he had some time off, so I

think it was just a matter of him getting his footing underneath him.”

Declan Ready opened the scoring for the Lincolns with the only goal of the first period. In the second, MacQueen-Spence made history with his 78th career goal, followed almost exactly 11 minutes later by a goal by Voortman to make it three straight games with a goal for the Thunder Bay native.

The Lincolns did much better on Feb. 1, generating more offensive opportunities in the Siskins’ zone than in their first trip to Waterloo earlier this season – a 2-0 win for Waterloo. Bradley attributed the team’s play low in the offensive zone to the Lincolns’ improved offensive zone time.

“We talked after the first period about how it was clear that Waterloo didn’t really have an answer for us when we operated below the goal line,” said Bradley. “So, we were trying to work them down low, and then they would collapse even more, and the points would be wide open, and I think the big ice helps with that.”

Booth-Housego put up his first shutout of the season with the Lincolns, making 27 saves in the St. Marys crease.

“Colby (Booth-Housego) had a really good game,” Bradley said. “He’s been trying to get used to being back here, and I think (Feb. 1) was really a perfect game for him. Especially in his hometown, to be able to do something like that, it’s great for him and great for us. Anytime a goaltender can get a shutout, it’s a nice little confidence booster, so we’re happy for him.”

St. Marys bowlers compete at Masters Spring Challenge



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Two teams of St. Marys Bowling Lanes YBC and Masters bowlers competed at the Masters Spring Challenge on Feb. 1 at Fairmont Lanes in London. Pictured on the left, from left to right, are James Van de Gevel, Scott Rinn, and Asher Gregory, who bowled 256 points over average to win the gold medal. Gregory bowled a turkey, while Van de Gevel rolled a 200 game and accumulated the most points over average among all bantam players with 171. Pictured on the right, from left to right, are Nate Sims, Derek King, and Felix Louwagie, who finished 13th out of 20 teams in the tournament.

MINOR SPORTS **SCRAPBOOK**



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Angus Palmer blasts a shot from the point during the Finnbilt Construction U9 MD Boys St. Marys Rock game last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Matthew Parkinson launches the puck on net during last Saturday's St. Marys Ford U9 LL Boys Blue St. Marys Rock game.



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Tom Dundas rockets a shot on goal during the Stonetown Electric U9 LL Boys Red St. Marys Rock game last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Kylie Blake fires a shot on target during last Saturday's Cascades U13 BB Girls St. Marys Rock game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Bryson Nairn unleashes a wrist shot during last Saturday's Tremblett's Independent Grocer U11 LL Boys Red St. Marys Rock game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Leo Furtney releases a shot off the rush during the St. Marys Building Centre U12 A Boys St. Marys Rock game this past Monday.

COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER: Reframing the ordinary – why I stopped watching the news and started watching the light

ALONA VASYLIEVA

Independent Columnist

In Ukraine, “life goes on” isn’t a cliché, it’s a high-stakes logistics operation. Take, for instance, the time a friend ordered dinner from a local chain. Ten minutes later, the manager called, not to cancel, but to offer a deeply sincere apology.

“I am terribly sorry,” he said, sounding genuinely stressed. “Your delivery will be about 15 minutes late. You see, the Russians just bombarded this specific branch ... so we’re currently firing up the ovens at our location across town to remake your order from scratch. It’ll be with you shortly!”

That is the Ukrainian spirit in a nutshell. We don’t just “keep calm and carry on,” we finish the order. In a world where a minor inconvenience can ruin someone’s day, I am beyond proud to have friends and family who stay in a country where a direct missile strike is categorized as a “minor logistical delay” rather than a reason to quit.

I have a theory as to why this gritty reality feels so much more authentic than anything you see on a screen, and it actually started back at university. My diploma thesis was on news framing – essentially the study of how media outlets use “theatrical props” to keep your eyes glued to the screen.

I spent months analyzing how TV channels use music, tone and dramatic body language to keep you glued to the screen. I’ll spare you the academic lecture, but I’ll tell you the result: I stopped watching the news entirely.

I realized that TV news is often designed to entertain rather than educate. It’s like being trapped in a movie where someone else has already decided how you should feel. That’s why I switched to newspapers. Reading a newspaper is like reading the



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Note to the reader: No dramatic music or lighting was used in the making of this article. Just ink, paper and a bit of critical thinking.

book the movie was based on; it requires your imagination, your critical thinking and a bit of quiet reflection.

Most of you don’t know what I look like, and honestly, that’s the beauty of it. I’m just glad you’re still reading.

Living between two worlds gives you a strange set of observations. In Canada, “hydro” is a bill we grumble about while checking the mail. In Ukraine right now, “hydro” is a prayer.

Because of the strikes on energy infrastructure, my family treats electricity like a

rare, elusive guest who only visits for two hours at a time. This winter, “staying cozy” means heating bricks on a gas stove, sleeping in coats and gloves, and melting snow for water.

Now, when I’m in Canada and I flip a switch, the light comes on. Every. Single. Time. It feels like a magic trick. Next time you adjust your thermostat, give the wall a little hug. It’s a miracle in a plastic box.

We also have different views on nature. In Ukraine, we used to think winter was “manageable.” Here in Canada, the snow isn’t just weather, it’s a lifestyle. This year, the snow hasn’t been very polite; it has been a bit of a monster. But hey, at least our cars have seat heaters! That’s basically a spa on wheels, right?

Then there’s the water. In most of Canada, you can turn on a tap and drink deep without a second thought. For much of the world, that’s a luxury that requires filters, boiling, or a trip to the store.

One thing Ukrainians truly take for granted is the soil. Ukraine sits on a massive portion of the world’s chernozem (fertile black soil). We grow organic produce on every spare centimetre of land. It’s only when Ukrainians leave that they are shocked by the “plastic” taste of supermarket vegetables in other countries. We were spoiled by farm-to-table quality before it was a trendy buzzword!

The war has reframed other things, too. A clear night sky or the sound of a plane used to be mundane. Now, for those back home, true silence is the ultimate luxury.

Even the air here is a gift. I remember in Kyiv, we often had to check the “smog forecast” before we dared open a window. Here, despite the occasional forest-fire smoke in the summer, the air is crisp and sweet.

We are lucky to have space; 90 per cent of Canada is Crown Land, millions of kilometres of “empty” space that isn’t locked behind a “No Trespassing” sign. But perhaps the best local luxury is sitting right in your hands or on your porch.

To me, the local newspaper sitting on my porch isn’t just paper and ink; it’s a symbol of a stable, thriving community. Having a record of our town’s life delivered directly to my door, absolutely free, is a privilege I refuse to overlook. It is a testament to a society where the biggest headlines aren’t about survival, but about community, growth and shared stories. It represents a world where we are allowed to be informed, rather than just alerted.

This Thursday, I invite you to see your morning through my eyes. As you pour your coffee and hear the familiar rustle of those pages, take a breath and realize this quiet predictability is exactly what millions of people are dreaming of at this very moment. It’s pure bliss.

Straight from the Shelves

LAURA MCASH

St. Marys Public Library

Library hours don’t always align with the busyness of life. That’s why our online catalogue, BiblioCommons, is available 24/7, allowing you to browse the collection, place holds, and renew items at your leisure. We also have two droboxes, one at each entrance, for those times when you’re on the go, but still need to get those books back.

While we wish our droboxes were bottomless, sometimes they can get quite full, especially over weekends and holidays. In the interest of saving space for Library items, we ask patrons to bring any book sale or pantry donations directly to the circulation desk. We also remind patrons that Library+ items (all passes, YOTO Players, snowshoes, etc.) must be brought to the front desk as well. These

items are either small enough to get lost, large enough to fill the box, or fragile enough to be damaged.

Thank you for using your Library!

Up This Week

Fri., Feb. 6: Adult Learning – Creating a Resume Workshop* (11 a.m. to 1 p.m.)

Sat., Feb. 7: Dungeons & Dragons (10 a.m.)

Mon., Feb. 9: Learn to Play Bridge (1:30-3 p.m.), After Life Care Planning with Andrew Hodges*~ (6-8 p.m.)

Tues., Feb. 10: Capital Campaign Committee Meeting (6:30 p.m.), Write of Way (6:30-7:30 p.m.)

Wed., Feb. 11: EarlyON Play & Read (9:30-10:30 a.m.), Mahjong (1-4 p.m.)

Thurs., Feb. 12: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

*Registration Required

~Friendship Centre Multipurpose Room (317 James St. S, St. Marys)

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HISTORIC ST. MARYS: Mortgaging the homestead, part two

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

In the early 1980s, one of the pictures on display in the St. Marys Museum was getting considerable attention. A few years earlier, it had been identified as a preliminary sketch for the famous painting, *Mortgaging the Homestead*, by Canadian artist, George Agnew Reid (1860-1947) and had been on loan in Ottawa as part of an exhibition marking the 100th anniversary of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art. The chair of the Museum Board at that time was Ted Rowcliffe, who worked with the newspaper owner, R. Lorne Eedy, as publisher of the St. Marys Journal Argus. Ted was a keen researcher and found out as much as he could about Reid in those pre-internet days.

Learning that Reid grew up near Wingham on a Huron County farm provided good background to share with visitors interested in his painting. Museum Board members and staff also learned that while the picture in St. Marys showed an unhappy scene – the family watching while the father signed the mortgage document – Reid told an even darker story in a subsequent painting: *Foreclosure of the Mortgage*. There was no happy ending for the family. The second painting shows the family listening, despondent, while a bailiff reads out the terms of foreclosure. George Reid won awards for this painting, admired as another fine example of his genre painting. But some Canadian art critics felt the subject was just too depressing for lasting appeal. At the Museum, as the sequel to the story told in *Mortgaging the Homestead*, it was another detail to add to the painting's story.

The St. Marys Museum had undergone a transition in 1979-1980. The Women's Institute turned over the control of the Museum to the Town of St. Marys. The WI members had thoroughly enjoyed building the collection, bringing hidden treasures out into the open for visitors to enjoy. But they had begun this work in the 1950s. Three decades later, they were getting older and their numbers were dwindling. Edna Fulcher, a long-time Institute member who served as the curator, kept the accounts, maintained the collection records, and was the heart of the Museum's operations, had tragically died as the result of a traffic accident in 1979. The town appointed an advisory board and hired a curator to keep the community museum functioning.

In 1983, the Museum Board received an official letter from the Government of Ontario. Officials had found out that George Agnew Reid's preliminary sketch for *Mortgaging the Homestead* was in the St. Marys Museum. But it was part of the government's "lost" art collection and they wanted it back! This was a very upsetting demand. The sketch was one of the Museum's treasures. Who knew that the Government of Ontario even had an art collection? And how had it come to be lost? What was the proof that the *Mortgaging the Homestead* sketch was part of that collection in the first place?

The answers to all these questions were available and convincing. The government's art collection had been started by Egerton Ryerson as far back as the pre-Confederation 1850s. However controversial and discredited Ryerson is today, he remains the architect of our publicly funded education system. He was also responsible for establishing the Government of Ontario's art collection and for encouraging art education in its schools. He believed that for a complete education, students should be exposed to great works of European art. Since most Ontario school children were unlikely ever to visit Europe, Ryerson decided to bring these masterpieces to them. He travelled to Europe and bought 236 copies of Old Master paintings and over 1000 plaster casts of antique statuary. By 1857, these



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ST. MARYS MUSEUM)

Curator Emily Taylor (left) and Intern Abby Parsons examine the label on a piece of art from the St. Marys Museum's collection. Framed pieces not currently on display are protected with acid-free wrapping and stored on special shelving in the archives vault.

treasures had been placed in Ryerson's Educational Museum of Upper Canada in the Toronto Normal School. They became part of the education for teachers in training who would share what they learned with their students.

Following Confederation, in a new spirit of nationalism, attention turned way from Europe toward work by a new generation of Canadian artists. Starting in the 1870s, the Ontario Society of Artists lobbied to have their own original work recognized. From that time until 1914, the government consistently bought pieces of art at the OSA annual exhibitions and added them to the official Ontario art collection. Eventually, several hundred pieces of work by Canadian artists, including J.E.H. MacDonald and Arthur Lismer, hung beside the European prints, acquired by Ryerson in the 1850s. In 1912, the art galleries in the Educational Museum closed but the art was distributed to other government buildings and to the six new Normal Schools established in the early 1900s to increase accessibility of teacher training across the province.

Because of austerity measures during the years of World War I, the government stopped its art buying program and acquired almost no new art for the next 60 years. An exception was a series of drawings by the artist, C.W. Jefferys, commissioned in 1921 to illustrate Ontario elementary school history books. Jefferys (1869-1951) was a student, then a friend and colleague of George A. Reid. Reid himself was very involved in art education. From the mid-1880s, while working as an artist, he also taught private lessons. From 1890 to 1912, he was an instructor at the Central Ontario School of Art and Industrial Design. In 1912, its name was changed to the Ontario College of Art and Reid was OCA's founding principal. (Today, it is OCAD University.)

In 1944, Reid, in his 84th year, donated 459 pieces of his art to the Government of Ontario, on the condition that most of them be circulated to secondary schools in the province. Sometime in the 1940s, the sketch, *Mortgaging the Homestead*, arrived at the old St. Marys Collegiate Institute on the north ward hill. When that school closed and students transferred to the new high school in

the town's south ward, some of the pictures that had hung there were considered too old-fashioned for the brand-new premises. They were taken to Tracy House at 177 Church Street South where the Women's Institute was establishing a museum.

In the 1970s, the Ontario Government realized that it had lost track of its collection. Few records existed of the pieces that had been dispersed through the years to official buildings and schools across the province. An experienced curator and art historian, Fern Bayer, was hired to update the collection's ancient inventory and to track down the pieces that had been sent to other locations. It was a challenging project. Many of the pictures had been lost or destroyed. After several years of searching, Bayer had found only a handful of Ryerson's European prints and only 39 of the hundreds of pieces of art from the OSA exhibitions. She did manage to find almost 200 of George A. Reid's generous 1944 donation. One of the pieces was the St. Marys Museum's sketch, *Mortgaging the Homestead*, identified when it was listed in 1980 in the Royal Canadian Academy of Art's centennial exhibition catalogue.

The Board tried to make a case to keep the picture in St. Marys. Unlike some of Bayer's other discoveries that had been found in terrible shape in closets and basements, *Mortgaging the Homestead* had been cleaned and re-framed in Ottawa and was in excellent condition. It was valued and well cared for. Nevertheless, a government employee came from Toronto, packaged the picture up, and took it away. It probably was the right thing to do. In the early 1980s, the St. Marys Museum had not yet reached acceptable standards for care of its collection, including exhibiting and storing works of art in climate-controlled conditions. Today, conditions are vastly improved at the Museum. The 2006 addition included an archival storage vault and upgrades to the building's HVAC system.

The Government of Ontario's art collection is the responsibility of the Archives of Ontario where works not on display are stored according to archival standards. And the sketch, *Mortgaging the Homestead*, has not been forgotten in a remote archival vault. Recently, Sarah McGoldrick, a journalist for the publication, *Farmtario*, saw it hanging in the halls of the Legislature. She was impressed that this 136-year-old painting was still relevant to the struggles faced by many Ontario farm families today.



NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND OTHERS IN THE ESTATE OF MATTHEW ARBOGAST MACKEY

All persons having claims against the **Estate of Matthew Arbogast Mackey**, late of Stratford, Ontario, deceased, who died on October 18, 2025, are hereby notified to send into the undersigned Personal Representative of the said deceased, on or before the **17th day of March, 2026**, full particulars of their claims. After the said date, the Personal Representative will distribute the assets of the said deceased, having regard only to the claims of which he shall then have notice.
DATED at Stratford, Ontario, this 2nd day of February, 2026.

A. Paul Parlee
Personal Representative
by his Solicitors,
KDB Law Professional Corporation
Barristers & Solicitors
14 Erie Street, Box 902, N5A 6S8
Stratford, Ontario
N5A 2M4

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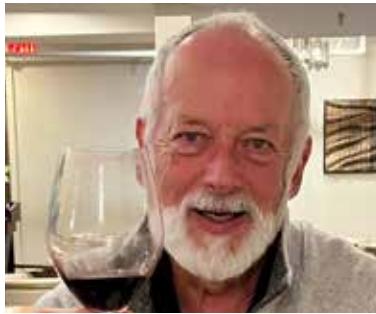
St. Marys Independent

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: In the midst of history



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

One of the many things I love about travel is that sometimes, out of the blue, you find yourself in the middle of an historic moment.

Perhaps my oddest moment came in 2004 when I was staying at a National Trust moated manor house in England. The owners were passionate fans of fox hunting, which was about to become illegal in the United Kingdom. There was one hunt left – would I like to come along?

I did. I was cheering for the fox, especially when I learned that the hunters, mounted on horses and following hounds, were using cell phones to report the fox's location. That seemed rather unfair. The good news for me and the fox, if not the hunters and hounds, was the fox escaped and I added an odd but genuine historic experience to my travel-writing resumé.

I've been in the U.K. for more significant events. Way back in 1995, we happened to be staying in the village of Stadhampton, just outside Oxford. We were there on May 8, the 50th anniversary of VE Day – the end of World War II in Europe.

We were invited by our B&B hosts to join a community event on the village common. I remember music, lamb stew, a world-class bonfire (a tribute repeated across the U.K.) and the apparently unscheduled appearance of a dark-suited man with a cigar, a doppelganger for Winston Churchill. It was a remarkable evening of nostalgic joy and sad reflection.

Two years later, I led a group of good friends on the "Grand Tour" of the U.K. We were there in the first week of September 1997 – the week following the death of Princess Diana on Aug. 31.

Throughout our two-plus weeks in the U.K., the tragedy was top of mind. We saw the forest of floral arrangements in front of Buckingham Palace. We purchased Elton John's "Candle in the Wind" CD in Harrod's. We adjusted our itinerary to account for the closure of everything on Sept. 6, the day of her funeral.

And during our tour of Canterbury Cathedral, I noted that the personal speakers they then used for tours had a different program from my most recent visit. The tour was avoiding the beautiful Chapter House. "Come with me," I said, and led my friends to the Chapter House. The doors were open and, inside, there were tall candles burning and a number of "Books of Remembrance" open on tables, ready to be signed. And, in all sincerity, keenly aware of the mourning of a nation, we each sat and signed the books that were eventually to be given to Diana's family.

These kinds of moments, when as a traveller I was dropped straight into history, have happened in other parts of the world as well. A few years ago, I had the amazing fortune to be part of a small group of travel journalists invited to witness – and dive – at the installation of a huge number of statues at Grenada's Underwater Sculpture Garden. Joining us was the sculptor, Jason deCaires Taylor, an artist who is making vital and dramatic artistic statements about our environment all over the world.

There have been other such moments such as a free, pop-up concert by Jimmy Buffett in Key West; or the celebration of the Hungry Ghost Festival in Hong Kong. But what actually sparked today's feature were two events in the United States, a country I currently am not visiting, though I deeply regret the need for such a decision. And these two moments, to which I was a silent witness, capture for me the entire recent history of our neighbour to the south.

The first happened on Jan. 20, 2009. I was with a buddy in a waterfront bar on the Intracoastal Waterway in Pompano Beach. We couldn't help but notice that all service had completely ceased. Everyone – bartenders, wait staff, cooks, hostesses – had abandoned their posts and were glued to the TVs mounted behind the bar.

This was a moment no one had dared to hope for – the inauguration of Barak Obama, the first Black President of



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

The Chapter House in Canterbury Cathedral where, in 1997, the author and friends signed books of condolence following the death of Princess Diana.

the United States. There were cheers and tears, and no one minded that it took an extra hour to get a drink or dinner. It was a time of enormous hope.

In contrast, I was back in the state of Florida, this time in my beloved Key West, on the morning of Nov. 9, 2016. I came down to breakfast at the B&B to find the gay couple who owned the place sitting in shock while their Latino cook sobbed in the kitchen. The reality was sinking in; Donald Trump had won the election and all three of these folks were terrified that their lives had changed for the worse and forever.

So today, as I have considered the question, "Should I travel to and write about the United States," those two moments are front and centre in my thoughts. And for now, I stand with my Key West friends against what is happening in the U.S. while hoping the spirit of 2009 may again become the dominant reality, and soon.

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



Canterbury Cathedral.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)



Sculptures added to Grenada's Underwater Sculpture Garden.

(ERIK R. TRINIDAD PHOTO)

FROM THE GARDEN: Forcing spring



NANCY ABRA

Independent Columnist

The official first day of spring is on Friday, March 20. For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, it is marked by the spring equinox which is also known as 'First Point of Aries'. No matter what Warton Willie, the Farmers' Almanac or meteorologists predict, the first day of spring is in six weeks.

These past few weeks we have been experiencing an old fashioned winter with lots of snow and bitter, cold temperatures. Like many of us, I am craving Spring. There are whispers of the seasonal transition. The sun climbs higher in the sky, its rays gradually warming and

daylight subtly lengthening by minutes every day.

But I still want more. I crave colour to interject our white frozen landscape and bring life to the garden. It is too early in the year for Mother Nature to grant my wish. However, we can help speed up the process by bringing certain branches in from our garden and force them into Spring to enjoy indoors.

Many ornamental trees and shrubs set their flower buds during the previous year's growing season. They need a dormant stage, a period of six weeks of cold temperatures, 4C or lower. If not, the branches will not come into flower. With the recent barren cold snap we have just gone through, timing is perfect.

Depending on the species, forcing branches can take anywhere between 2 to 5 weeks. Early bloomers such as forsythia, star magnolia and witch hazel are usually the fastest to come into flower, about 2 weeks. If you have access to pussy willows, they don't require water and they last for

ages. By mid-February, try eastern red bud, or cherry. By late February consider lilacs, honeysuckle, apple and dogwood tree branches. In general, trees take longer than shrubs to force into bloom.

To get started, select healthy branches of approx. 30cm (12") long with lots of plump flower buds. These are rounder and larger than leaf buds. Using clean pruners, cut branches on a diagonal. An angle cut creates a larger surface area for water.

Steps to force blooms:

- Remove any twigs or buds from the bottom 15cm (6") of the stem. This will protect the branches from rotting while in water.

- Cut slits in the end of the branch to promote water uptake.

- Set the branches in a tall vase or container, ¾ full of water overnight at room temperature. Make sure the vase won't tip with heavy branches.

- Keep the vase with the branches in a bright room, away from heaters and direct sunlight. The brighter the room,



the better the quality of bloom.

- Re-cut the ends of the branches on a slant the next day.

- Change the water every couple of days so branches don't rot from a build-up of bacteria forming. Misting branches helps to prevent the buds from drying out before they bloom.

- Once the buds begin to show colour, arrange your branches in a vase and place them in

a bright spot away from direct sunlight and away from a heat source. Enjoy!

It is seldom that we can fool Mother Nature, but forcing spring branches into bloom does brighten up those winter days, as the calendar checks off the days to spring.

Source: <https://www.almanac.com/forcing-branches-bloom-indoors>

Busting out boundaries

JACLYN TURPIN

Independent Columnist

The truth is that most of us are terrible at setting them. You don't want to do something, so you make up an excuse, apologize and over-explain your way out of it. It's just what us Canadian's do! We hate to say no so we either say yes to something we don't want to do, or we take the long way around to saying no.

It takes time to get comfortable with boundaries. If you have been someone who has always said yes, has been a people pleaser and has enjoyed helping others (or maybe all three), then setting a boundary can be especially difficult. But the truth is when your needs become less of a priority as the needs of others take over, your stress increases. What follows is weakened immunity, burnout and tenuous relationships.

Boundaries are individual. We each have to decide where we draw the line, what we agree to and how much of ourselves we are willing to give. That makes it sound easy, but you might agree it can be a challenge. It takes practice and consistency. Often, people ask things of us because they already have a pretty good idea of how we will respond. So, if we are in a position of wanting tighter boundaries or to be more considerate of our own needs and resources, it will take time, practice and consistency to make a shift in what others might expect of us. But that does not mean we can't start strong with our "ground rules." Over time, it will become easier for us to relay the message and for others to receive it.

Here's a good place to start.

Keep it simple and don't over explain. "I won't be able to make it on Saturday. Thanks for the invite." Don't leave your response open for interpretation. Have you ever tried to say no and added so much "fluff" that it was misinterpreted as a "yes" or a "maybe" and you now have to go back and resay "no?" I have! It's un-

comfortable; I don't recommend it. Instead, make your decision and communicate it clearly. In the moment, it can feel uncomfortable but I bet you will feel relief once your message is clearly heard.

No is a complete sentence. I had a manager who always used to tell me this. She was right. If the answer is going to be no, let's not sugarcoat it. And heck, let's get it over with quickly because as uncomfortable as it is to hear no, it can be just as uncomfortable to say it. There is nothing worse than knowing you are going to say no but losing sleep over how you will say it. Say no and then take a big exhale; it's not so bad after all.

If you want to give context, then be honest. "I am going to come for the first half but I want to be in bed before 9 p.m." When did it become rude to be honest? Actually, now that I read that back, I need to note that we should not be honest about everything. Not that we should lie, but rather some thoughts just shouldn't leave our head.

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Admission by donation with proceeds in support of
St. Marys and South Huron Hospitals

Riddles

What is the richest nut?
A cash-ew!

Why did the fruit salad skip its own wedding?
It had a lot of can't-elope!

What kind of beer won't get you tipsy?
Root beer!

What kind of poultry is always going to the bathroom?
Chick peas!

Why did the citrus tree go to the hospital?
Lemon-aid!

You cut me, slice me, dice me, and all the while, you cry. What am I?
An onion!

What kind of apples do computers prefer?
Macintosh!

What has many ears but cannot hear?
Corn!

I'm a bird, a person, and a fruit. What am I?
A Kiwi!

I'm the father of fruits. What am I?
A papa-ya!

What vegetable always loses in every competition yet is a terrific rapper?
Beets!

What vegetable can you use to tie your shoelace?
A string bean!

- Word Search -



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JANUARY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

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Q C D O M C A R N E Y W E F S P E E C H

- Stranger Things
- Venezuela
- Maduro captured
- ICE in Minnesota
- Renee Good
- Iran uprising
- Greenland
- Spain train crash
- Canada China deal
- Carney WEF speech
- US leaves WHO
- Alex Pretti
- Snowstorms
- Seattle Seahawks
- New England Patriots



The **Riddle Kid**
OF THE WEEK



Nash Near (7)

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

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

PET OF THE WEEK



FEBRUARY IS DENTAL AWARENESS MONTH!

Did you know that dental disease affects most pets by the age of three? February is the perfect time to protect your pet's smile and overall health. Schedule a dental check-up with us! We offer cleanings, exams, and tips for maintaining healthy teeth and gums. A healthy mouth means a happier, healthier pet!



FINNIGAN

Our Pet of the Week is Finnigan, a three-year-old lab mix. He is a high energy, goofy but smart, playful pup. He loves the beach, and all the beach activities... including stand up paddle boarding. He also loves playing in the snow and enjoys his walks around St. Marys with his sturdy winter boots on. His parents, Dillon and Faith Bendig, love bringing him along for an adventure wherever that may be.



Thorndale News

A section within the
St. Marys Independent

I Love Thorndale Winter Carnival to offer plenty of family fun

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

Family Day, created by the Ontario provincial government as a statutory holiday between New Years Day and Good Friday, was first observed on Feb. 18, 2008, to promote work-life balance and allow time for families to connect during the long winter stretch.

And what better way to celebrate Family Day than a winter carnival?

The I Love Thorndale (ILT) directors are please to announce the return of the Thorndale Winter Carnival on Family Day, Monday Feb. 16. Along with leadership from ILT, this event is also supported by a coalition of Thorndale community service clubs, other organizations and a local church.

The Mt. Olivett Masons, Thorndale Lions, Thorndale Agricultural Society and Thorndale United Church have family-fun winter outdoor activities planned. For anyone who is a railroad enthusiast, the Thames Valley Railroad Club will have their doors open for everyone to check out their model railroad setup. It is amazing.

As for indoor events, there will be lots of activities for families with kids of all ages. ILT will have fun carnival games sponsored by the Thorndale Repair Shop in rooms 1 and 2. Tables of board games are available in meeting room 3 for families to play. The gym will feature crafts for children and other entertainment. Thorndale Country Mills and TRS Components Ltd. are sponsoring facepainting and a magic show by Dotty the Clown.

There will be karate demonstrations by Stonetown Karate Centre and musical entertainment by Nova Music Academy planned that will also take place in the gym. Regarding refreshments, the Thorndale Optimists are providing and serving up hot dogs, while the Thames Centre Community Choir is overseeing the hot-chocolate bar.

The ILT 2026 Thorndale Winter Carnival is a fantastic opportunity to connect with friends and neighbours in our growing community. Running from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre, this free event promises plenty of family-friendly fun.



Horse-drawn sleigh rides at the 2016 I Love Thorndale Winter Carnival. (NANCY ABRA PHOTO)

What's on at the Thorndale Library

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

The library offers services that probably aren't well known.

For instance, recently posted on the Middlesex County Library Facebook page, staff wrote, "If you're an older adult or homebound and can't make it to one of our branches, Middlesex County Library brings the library to you! Our Books-by-Mail service mails carefully selected books to patrons via Canada Post. Choose your own titles or let our staff pick based on your interests and accessibility needs. Postage (including return postage) is fully paid."

For more information on this service, visit <https://library.middlesex.ca/out-reach-services>.

As for what's on at the Thorndale Library, EarlyON Play and Learn is on Fridays from 9-11 a.m. It is a free, drop-in program designed for families with children up to age six. Thorndale Storytime, featuring stories, songs and rhymes, is on Tuesdays from 10:30-11 a.m. No registration for these programs is required.

Afterschool Hangout for ages seven to 11 years is on Wednesdays weekly un-

til March 24 from 4:30-5:30 p.m. There will be interesting crafts, games to play and fun time with friends.

Beginning on Thursday, Feb. 5, the Middlesex County Library is offering a free, five-week tech training program called Seniors Connect -Tech Training at the Thorndale Library on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. This program is a series of digital literacy sessions focused on learning for older adults, to help participants develop skills and build confidence using their electronic devices. Currently, this program is full but there is a waiting list.

For information on the programs offered at Thorndale Library, call 519-461-1150 during open hours or email thorndale_staff@middlesex.ca.

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A Comedy By Pat Cook

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27 & 28 - TICKETS: \$50.00

SHOW ONLY: FEB 25 - TICKETS: \$25.00

For more details go to: thorndalefair.com

For info call - Jackie at 519 461-0218

OBITUARY

Frehner



Heidi Martha Frehner
May 19, 1933 - January 28, 2026
Heidi Martha Frehner (92) of Vernon, British Columbia died peacefully from ovarian cancer at Hospice House on January 28, 2026.

Heidi grew up on a farm in Switzerland. At 16, she met Max, the love of her life, when she brought a can of milk to the cheese factory every day using a dog cart. Not long after that, Max immigrated to Canada.

At 19, Heidi got on a boat and sailed to Canada and married Max. Southern Ontario was where they raised five children and managed cheese factories in Thamesford and Wellburn before moving to St. Marys. In Ontario, she was active with the United Church Women, Sunday school teaching, the Women's Institute, as well as a leader in 4H and the Order of the Eastern Star. She loved to quilt with her friends at the Friendship Center.

In 1993, Heidi and Max made the big move to Vernon. They adjusted well to retirement and soon joined Knox Presbyterian Church and the Vernon Outdoors Club embracing hiking, biking and cross-country skiing. Heidi continued her civic commitment as treasurer for both Knox and the Outdoors Club.

Heidi and Max were married for 71 years and will always love and care for each other. Max passed away in 2024. Heidi is survived by children: Harry (Norma), Sylvia (Claude), Esther (Fred), Ron (Deb) and Peter; grandchildren: Rudy, Pascale, Matt, Heidi, Lee (deceased), Alex, Sarah, Katie, Ben and Emily; step-grandchildren: Eric, Laura and Katie; and great-grandchildren: Hadrian, Hannah, Mia, Max, Owen, Milo, Auggie, Lucie, Zoe and Emmett and one more on the way. Heidi will always be remembered as a kind and generous person who enjoyed the beauty of nature, held a deep faith in God and cherished her family and friends.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the North Okanagan Hospice Society in Vernon.

OBITUARY

Bettridge



John Edward Bettridge of Bayfield and formerly of Stratford, passed away peacefully on January 28, 2026 at Alexandra Marine and General Hospital, in Goderich, at the age of 89. He is survived by his wife Margaret Murray-Nicholson, daughters Julie Hagan of Dallas, Texas and

Lynne Bettridge of Toronto.

John was a loving grandfather to Kristen Hagan and Bryce Hagan and great-grandfather to Hendrix Hagan and Halen Hagan. Also remembered by extended family members. Predeceased in death by his parents Harold and Jennie, his brother Raymond Bettridge and his first wife Joan Elaine Bettridge (nee Bishop).

John was well known and respected in the communities where he lived. He owned Bettridge Floor Coverings in Stratford for many years, followed by retirement to Bayfield where he ran a brokerage for Ford Mustang car parts and was involved in various activities in the community.

Cremation has taken place. Family and friends are invited to Holy Name Of Mary Parish, Northeast corner of Peel St. N. and Widder St. E., St. Marys on Feb. 6, 2026 for visiting from 10 am until the time of the Funeral Mass at 11 am with Fr. Don Pumputis. Private family interment in St. Marys Cemetery. Reception following in the Holy Name of Mary Parish Hall.

Memorial donations may be made to the Alexandra Marine and General Hospital Foundation or the Heart & Stroke Foundation.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

IN MEMORIAM

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Marjorie Ann Shaw



A beautiful, caring, and devoted mother and grandmother, as well as a beloved wife to John (d. 2025), who left us on February 6, 2021.

Five years have passed since we said goodbye, yet not a day goes by that you are not with us. Your love, strength, and kindness continue to guide our hearts and shape who we are. We miss your voice, your warmth, and the comfort of your presence more than words can express. Though time has moved forward, our love for you remains unchanged. You are forever remembered, forever cherished and forever missed.

Love Barb, Sandy, Lauren, Brayden and Dani.

THANK YOU



Junior Doupe

We would like to thank our friends, neighbours, and extended family for their supportive condolences, memorial donations, food, cards and flowers.

Thanks to the staff at Kingsway Lodge and Dr. Berta for their care of our dad. Also to the Lockhart Funeral Home for their guidance and support with dad's final arrangements. It is all very much appreciated.

**The family of Junior Doupe
Kevin, Kim, Vivian, Vern and Sharon**



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THANK YOU



Jean Ross

Jean Ross, of St. Marys and formerly Fullarton Twp., who passed away on November

29, 2025, at the age of 94. Jean's family wish to sincerely thank the staff at Kingsway Lodge for their compassionate care. Visitation will be held at the Andrew L. Hodges Funeral home, 47 Wellington St. S. St. Marys, on Feb. 19, 2026 from 2 - 4 & 6- 8 pm. The Memorial Service will be conducted at the St. Marys United Church, 85 Church St. S. St. Marys, on Feb. 20 at 11am. Reception in the church hall following. Spring burial in Woodland Cemetery, Mitchell. In her memory donations may be made to a charity of choice.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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Free tax clinics help Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County residents unlock benefits

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For residents of Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County, filing income taxes can be stressful, confusing and, for some, financially out of reach.

Stratford Social Services is working to remove those barriers through its annual free income tax clinics, a long-running program that offers low-income residents an opportunity to have their tax returns completed accurately and on time by professionals. Organized by Stratford Social Services, which coordinates the provision of social services for Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County, the clinics have been operating for many years and continue to be an essential service for people who may otherwise delay or avoid filing their taxes altogether.

“The primary purpose is to connect individuals with a service where they know their taxes are done properly and at the right time,” said Alex Burgess, manager of Ontario Works with Stratford Social Services. “When taxes are filed accurately, it gives people access to a lot of benefits they may not even realize they qualify for.”

Burgess said cost, access to computers and the complexity of the tax system can dissuade people from filing, especially when documentation piles up or deadlines are missed. By running the clinics early in tax season and partnering with local accounting firms, Stratford Social Service can help residents avoid those pitfalls.

“Having professionals do it means they can make sure documents are complete and credits are maximized,” Burgess said. “It takes the worry out of it.”

The benefits go far beyond a potential tax refund. Burgess said filing taxes is the precursor to many federal and provincial supports including HST credits,

the Ontario Trillium Benefit and the Canada Child Benefit.

“If you don’t file your taxes, your Canada Child Benefit could be delayed or stopped altogether,” he said. “HST credits, one-time government payments; all of those are tied to tax filings. Filing sets people up for the entire year.”

While some people assume those receiving social assistance don’t pay taxes, Burgess said that’s a misconception.

“Everybody pays taxes every day through purchases,” he said. “And once accountants look at things like rent receipts, medical expenses or disability tax credits, people are often surprised by what they’re entitled to.”

The free clinics are available for current-year returns to low-income individuals and couples living in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County. Those receiving Ontario Works or ODSP are eligible with a T5007 slip. Income thresholds apply for others, including seniors.

There is no cost to participants, with services provided by Famme & Co. Professional Corporation and McCutchen & Pearce Professional Corporation.

Burgess said the value of having an expert prepare returns can’t be overstated.

“Instead of hoping you got everything right online, you can go to professionals who will do it correctly and at no cost,” he said. “That’s huge.”

Residents must register in advance by Wednesday, March 18, by calling Stratford Social Services at 519-271-3773 ext. 6208. Appointment times for document drop-off will be scheduled between March 19 and 27.

“The earlier people call, the better,” Burgess said. “Once you get through it once, it’s much less daunting the next time. That first step is often the hardest.”

For many residents, that first step could make all the difference.

Looking Back



AMY CUBBERLEY

Independent Columnist

Wrap it up

25 years ago (2001)

In response to a delegation from a concerned Stratford parent and a London-area lawyer, staff of the Avon Maitland District School Board will report to trustees about the provision to students of information about birth control. A parent of a grade 10 student expressed her concerns to trustees at a regular board meeting on Tuesday. She characterized a demonstration of proper condom application as “not only offensive to them as students, but also harmful to our children”. The parent, who said she’s a promoter of abstinence among unmarried people, said the instruction about birth control gives the impression that premarital sex is a matter of choice, rather than right or wrong.

Abby Mossey won the bike in the Jr. B. Lincoln Kids Night promotion last Friday night. The bike was sponsored by Sam’s Home Hardware. An estimated 550 fans attended the game.

50 years ago (1976)

McLean-Foster Construction of St. Marys was the successful bidder recently on a \$1.6 million contract to replace the York Street bridge in London.

Building permits issued in St. Marys during January, probably reflecting the severity of the weather, were limited to a permit for one new home on Sparling Crescent with a value of \$30,000. In January 1975, a \$350,000 permit for Domtar began that building year in a big way.

75 years ago (1951)

Attempts are being made by Dr. Fred Follick and others to revive the St. Marys amateur boxing club here.

Members of the local detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police are thinking about securing a few gas masks to use while entering and leaving the police office in the Town Hall basement. The stench from a faulty sewer almost takes one’s breath away in that area at present.

100 years ago (1926)

On Tuesday evening, members of the Cheer Club met at the home of Miss W. Westman and showered one of the members of the club, Miss K. Andrew, with a kitchen shower of Bonny Blue Granite Ware, the bride-to-be having to hunt in different places for her gifts. The evening was spent with games and was brought to a close by a dainty lunch which was served by Mrs. and Miss Westman.

An English firm has perfected a metal diving suit equipped with which a diver is enabled to work 600 feet below the sea surface.

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Solutions on pg. 31

Andrew L. Hodges
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If you are interested in the work of our local Museum and Archives and have a desire to become involved with community outreach activities, please contact Amy at acubberley@town.stmarys.on.ca by Friday, February 20 to learn more.



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PRC & Friendship Centre events – See the Stonetown Crier on Page 5
St. Marys Public Library events – See Page 22
Thorndale Library events – See Page 27

FRIDAY, FEB 6

- Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon
- A.N.A.F. meat draw – 6 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs LaSalle Vipers at the PRC – 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, FEB 7

- Royal Canadian Legion chili cook-off – 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Mabel Ballantyne 100th birthday celebration at the PRC – 2-4 p.m.
- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw – 5 p.m.

SUNDAY, FEB 8

- St. Marys Lincolns vs Stratford Warriors at William Allman Memorial Arena – 4:30 p.m.

MONDAY, FEB 9

- Community dinner at St. Marys United Church – 5 p.m., Sponsored by St. James Lodge

TUESDAY, FEB 10

- Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee – 10 a.m. to Noon
- St. Marys Legion cribbage – Starts 7 p.m. sharp

WEDNESDAY, FEB 11

- Friends of the Library social at the library – 6:30-8 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs London Nationals at Western Fair Sports Centre – 7 p.m.

THURSDAY, FEB 12

- A.N.A.F. sausage on a bun – 12-1:30 p.m.

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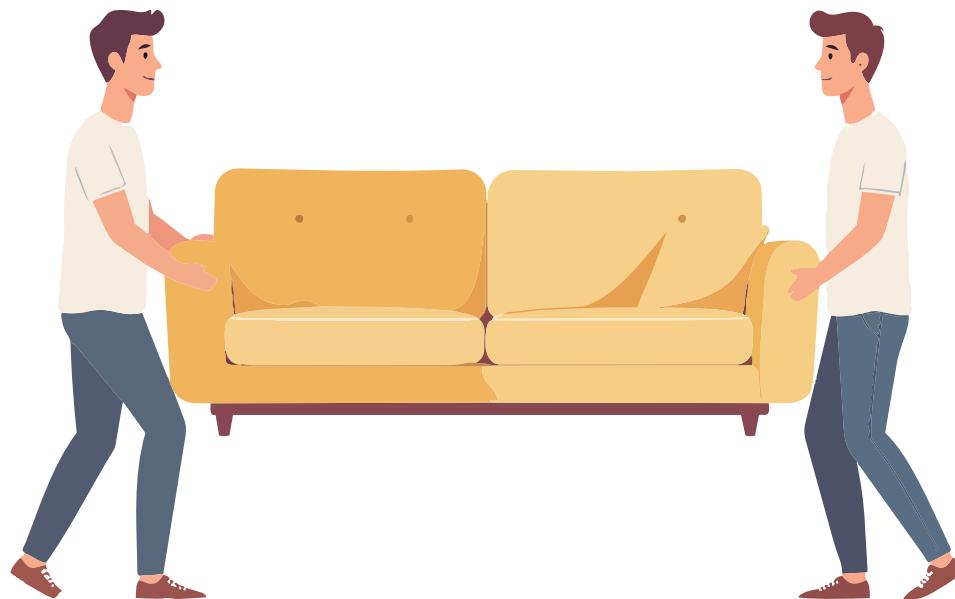
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