

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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2026 municipal race kicks off

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The 2026 municipal election day on Oct. 26 is near half a year away, but in many ways the race has officially kicked off.

On May 1, nominations for Stratford's next city council and board of trustees open. Those interested in running to be mayor, a city councillor or school board trustee can file a prescribed form at the city clerk's office at Stratford City Hall for a \$100 fee (\$200 for mayor) during regular business hours.

To run for a position on council, a candidate must be a Canadian citizen, 18 years old, a resident in the city or an owner or tenant of land in the city (or the spouse of an owner or tenant). For school board trustees, candidates must be a Canadian citizen, 18 years old and a resident in the desired board's jurisdiction.

The nomination period runs until Aug. 21, though on that last day nominations will only be filed until 2 p.m.

When filing, the candidate must provide photo ID which includes their name and qualifying address. If a nomination for a candidate is filed by an agent, a letter must be submitted at the time of filing which authorizes the agent to file on behalf of the candidate. The letter must be signed by the candidate and commissioned or notarized by a person authorized under the Commissioners for Taking Affidavits Act or Notaries Act. In addition to this letter, an agent must also provide a copy of the candidate's ID.

No person who proposes to be a candidate may solicit or accept contributions for election purposes or incur campaign expenses until a nomination paper has been filed.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Leif Wahlquist, Rory Auster, Quinn Kearsy and Nanako Ueno pose for the Stratford District Secondary School Eco-Club's booth at the fifth annual Earth Day Street Party on April 25. Hosted by Climate Momentum, the popular event packed Factory 163 on a drizzly Saturday.

A big bite-sized piece: Council commits \$15M for GTR community hub

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After city clerk Tatiana Dafeo read out a long motion pertaining to Stratford's keystone Grand Trunk renewal (GTR) project on April 27, Coun. Bonnie Henderson's hand shot up from the far end of the horseshoe.

"Coun. Henderson after 19 years would gladly second it," Henderson exasperated, as the room erupted in laughter and applause.

It was Henderson and Coun. Brad Beatty, who has been debating the GTR project as a councillor himself for 16 years, who ultimately put forward a mo-

tion which committed \$15 million towards a shared community hub between the city, the Stratford Public Library and the YMCA of Three Rivers.

The renewal project has been on and off for decades, with various councils of the day attempting to move forward with a development plan that would transform the 18-acre site and superstructure on the southern edge of downtown. None have gotten so far as the commitment made on April 27.

As many councillors pointed out, the decision made that evening was very specific. It allocated \$15 million toward the development, directed staff to formalize partnerships with the YMCA and the library through

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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A big bite-sized piece: Council commits \$15M for GTR community hub

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), to undertake the next phase of work on the hub (including design, governance, and funding models), to prepare a report on the parking at the site after the completion of a comprehensive downtown parking study being undertaken now and to begin a market sounding process to gauge private sector interest.

The passed motion did not commit to a location, scope or design for the shared community hub, nor did it close the door on other community groups becoming partners. Importantly, it did not decide the fate of the historic superstructure that once housed the Grand Trunk Railway's locomotive repair shops – that decision is still yet to come.

“This is a really large project,” Coun. Mark Hunter said. “There will be more pieces coming forward, some of them might be a decade or two away, but this isn't the entire project we're talking about. It's one segment. It's one segment that staff put work into, telling us that we can actually afford to do this. ... I like this because it's a, I mean it's a big bite, but it's a bite-sized piece of the whole thing. It lets us get our heads around what we're trying to do.”

“I don't recall us saying we wanted to tear the building down,” Hunter went on to say during a discussion of whether or not council has indicated a desire to demolish the superstructure. “In fact, I think the last discussions we had, everybody wanted to find a way to try and save it, if we can. We know it's likely going to be very expensive. The reports we got tonight talk about enclosing 100,000 square feet, put that number at \$50 million and what we've got in front of us tonight is for (\$15 million) and our (chief administrative officer) has said, as of now, that's kind of tapping us out. So it's going to be a bit of a struggle, but I think we'd all like to try and find a way to save it. That's what we've all been working on.”

The \$15 million would combine with \$10-\$15 million coming from the YMCA, \$4-\$5 million from the library, \$2-\$10 million coming from development



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

An overhead shot of the Grand Trunk site. While council has not decided on the fate of the superstructure, it has committed \$15 million to a shared facility between the Stratford Public Library and YMCA.

charges, \$1.2 million from a grant for child care and \$5-\$8 million through fundraising, according to an earlier report presented during the GTR workshops.

If located outside of the superstructure, which would be more cost-effective, the community hub could cost between \$47 and \$65 million, depending on the size and location – though city officials said those figures are high level Class D estimates and are subject to change as the project gets closer to a plan.

There would still be a funding gap, as noted earlier, but that gap could be filled through additional partners, a smaller scope or more assistance through upper levels of government.

The city's \$15 million portion will be funded through an annual capital investment of about \$1 million a year, which will go towards the community hub and the city's wider assets. As explained by chief administrative officer (CAO) André Morin, staff worked to find a reasonable investment which considers this project and the city's wider responsibilities – its roads, infrastructure and buildings. The investment is expected to impact the tax levy by one per cent a year and will be addressed during annual budget talks.

The decision was nearly unanimous. Only Coun. Cody Sebben opposed the motion. He attempted to include the Stratford Police Service as partners and to explicitly have the city's climate change programs manager comment on the environmental side of the project in back-to-back amendments that got little support around the horseshoe – without which he said he could not support the motion.

“I'll add my comments, with regards to how proud I am of the community, the CAO and staff with their work that brought us to this point tonight,” Mayor Martin Ritsma said after the vote and applause from the gallery. “We know that nothing moves forward without the preceding work, and nothing moves forward without direction, recommendations and financial commitments. So we have provided that to the CAO and staff. They will go away and continue their work that they have done so well in this last little while, and we will build on that work from staff and community, and we will move forward.”

For more information, read the over 300-page report at <https://tinyurl.com/5e4k8wju>.

2026 municipal race kicks off

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The city has prepared information packages for candidates, which includes important details about the nomination process, key dates, required forms and contains

resources to assist candidates.

Printed copies are available for pick-up in the clerk's office located on the ground floor of city hall during business hours.

Questions can be directed to the municipal elections team in the clerk's office. They can be reached by emailing elections@stratford.ca or by phoning 519-271-0250 ext. 5237.

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A Passion for People

Phase 2 of Huron Street reconstruction awarded for \$1.7M more than expected

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The City of Stratford is moving forward with the second phase of the Huron Street reconstruction project.

At the city council meeting on April 27, council awarded the tender to Birnam Excavating Limited for \$8,615,936.82 including HST, the lowest bid. The work will replace underground infrastructure, renew the roadway and sidewalks and upgrade the signalized intersection infrastructure

at Foreman Avenue, as well as reconstruct the stretch of road from John Street to Matilda Street.

The total project costs exceed the amount allotted in the 2025 budget, \$6.3 million. According to the staff report, several factors have contributed to the tender price exceeding the original estimate.

“First, initial project estimates are typically based on benchmark pricing observed over the past two years and do not always fully reflect the added complexity of reconstructing a provincial highway

while maintaining traffic,” the report reads. “In addition, recent increases in fuel and asphalt prices have raised operating and material input costs and have introduced further uncertainty into future cost projections.”

“Essentially, each year, we provide a 10-year capital plan for the upcoming works,” Taylor Crinklaw, director of infrastructure services, explained. “So essentially, what would happen is we have a certain amount that we’ve dedicated like what’s going to happen is something that we’re hoping to

happen next year, or part of it might be slightly reduced to account for the fund that’s available. So it does impact our consideration for the 2027 capital projects.”

As noted in the report, council had three options given the tender overage: proceed with the project and adjust the funding, postpone the project or reduce the scope and retender it – the latter two would have impacted funding from the provincial government through the Connecting Link Fund, which has contributed a combined \$3 million to the project to date.

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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner spoke to a packed gallery at the Stratford city council meeting April 27. Schreiner was in the Festival City to endorse his private member's bill, the Protect Our Food Act. Although many councillors had concerns on the bill's scope and where it might impede other pressing issues like housing, council ultimately supported it. Councillors voted unanimously to write a letter of endorsement.

STRATFORD *TIMES*

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Council reconsiders downtown parking permits after petition

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At the Stratford city council meeting on April 27, council unanimously voted to reconsider an earlier decision it made, approving a pilot program for overnight parking at the Erie Lot.

That decision was largely informed by the advocacy of Rebecca Cheney, property owner and landlord at 56-62 Wellington St. As she delegated that evening, the city's lack of overnight parking makes living downtown almost impossible, even as the city tries to intensify housing in the core.

"I purchased this property and made the decision to invest in a complete rebuild," Cheney said. "The building was tired and in some places dangerous, but it was beautiful. ... I helped breathe new life into a piece of Stratford's history and have revitalized a vital piece of this core. In 2023 we opened the doors to 14 apartments, welcoming over 20 new residents who were happy and excited to make downtown their new home. I'm here tonight to tell you what happened to some of those tenants and one barrier that made living in our downtown unnecessarily difficult and therefore unaffordable to many. Over the past year, I have lost many tenants, many of whom have cited parking as a primary reason for leaving."

Cheney brought up her past tenant Adam



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)
Rebecca Cheney, property owner and landlord at 56-62 Wellington St., petitions Stratford city council April 27. Cheney argued the city's lack of overnight parking makes living downtown almost impossible, even as the city tries to intensify housing in the core.

Wadud. In March, Wadud spoke with the Times, saying he accumulated \$1,650 in parking tickets between December and March 2025, unable to park at the city's free Cooper Lot.

"It's about a 10-minute walk to the apartment from the (Cooper) Lot, which in winter can be difficult, especially when

you have a vehicle full of groceries or other items," Wadud shared. "I feel bad for tenants with kids who have to make that commute. ... It's unfortunate because I really liked my apartment and living walking distance to work. I can't park near my apartment as the building doesn't have dedicated parking."

He added he was hesitant to continue using the Cooper Lot overnight after his vehicle was damaged.

"I left my vehicle at the Cooper Lot for a week last October, and somebody dented it on the side. Since then, I am not comfortable leaving the vehicle at the Cooper Lot overnight."

With Wadud's story, Cheney argued a more comprehensive parking system is paramount to fixing the local housing crisis. Council evidently agreed.

As part of the new pilot program, the number of monthly permits for the Erie Lot has increased from 24 to 35. Five monthly overnight parking permits and 10 daily overnight parking permits will be provided on a first-come-first-served basis at the city clerk's office at city hall.

"To me, this is about removing a small but real barrier to living in the downtown," said Coun. Lesley Biehn, who brought the motion to reconsider up that evening. "And this modest adjustment supports accessibility, livability ... making it easier for people to choose the downtown core as their home."

As noted, the parking in downtown Stratford is currently being investigated in a comprehensive study, the findings of which will be presented to council at a later date.

With files from Amanda Nelson, Times reporter.

School boards hosting tech and mental health seminars

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

In recognition of Children's Mental Health Week (May 4-10), the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB), in partnership with the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB), will host parent and caregiver learning sessions focused on supporting children's healthy development in an increasingly digital world. HPCDSB will welcome author and journalist Katherine Martinko (Childhood Unplugged, The Analog Family Substack) for two practical and engaging presentations taking place:

May 5, from 7-8:30 p.m. at St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School, Clinton.

May 25, from 7-8:30 p.m. at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, Stratford.

Both events will include a parent and caregiver presentation alongside same-day student presentations for HPCDSB secondary students, creating a shared learning opportunity for families. Martinko will examine the impacts of excessive screen use on children's well-being and provide clear, evidence-informed guidance to help parents/caregivers establish healthy technology and social media boundaries while promoting face-to-face connection and age-appropriate independence.

Parents and caregivers will learn practical strategies for setting manageable screen-time limits, supporting meaningful face-to-face interaction and using simple, supportive language to guide conversations about technology use at home. These sessions reflect the ongoing partnership between HPCDSB and AMDSB and a shared commitment to student mental well-being, digital awareness and healthy, balanced technology use.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the largest living species of lizard?
2. What fashion brand is known for the double "G" logo?
3. How many championships do the Toronto Raptors have?
4. What baby animal is called a puggle?
5. The gong belongs to which section of the orchestra?
6. Who wrote *The Jungle Book*?
7. Captain Kirk was the captain of what *Star Trek* starship?
8. The term Grand Prix was first used in a motor race in which country?
9. Who was the first Marvel villain to appear in Fortnite?
10. What is the name of Bluey's little sister?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27



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City launches new guide for ecological gardening

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Just in time for a much-anticipated spring, a group of local experts has launched a new and free publication to help all Stratforders be more environmentally conscious while gardening.

Nature in the City: A Guide to Ecological Gardening in Stratford, Ontario is a new publication for residents, courtesy of the City of Stratford's energy and environment (E&E) advisory committee and a host of environmentally-minded citizen contributors. It was launched on April 23

at an event at the Local Community Food Centre.

As Autumn Loosemore, climate change program manager with the city, wrote in her forward, the book means to provide guidance on how to live and garden in an interconnected world.

"Every resident has a meaningful role in shaping a healthier, more resilient Stratford," Loosemore wrote. "By planting native trees, shrubs and wildflowers in our yards, gardens and shared spaces, we help strengthen the city's natural systems.

"In nature, everything is connected; native plants support biodiversity, provide

habitat for pollinators, conserve water and increase carbon sequestration. By adopting these nature-based solutions, we create multiple benefits that together enhance our community's capacity to adapt to a changing climate."

As espoused in the publication, by gardening with an ecological approach (being mindful of the interconnection between all things), citizens can play an important part in the protection of their local habitat: the air they breathe, the land they share and the water that sustains them. It lists local flora species suitable for supporting native butterfly populations, wildflowers,

threats to Perth County's soil (and tips to maintaining healthy soil), as well as methods for conserving water, among other tips.

Nature in the City was written by Julia Schneider and Anna Stratton, edited by Schneider. Local experts like Joe Salter, Vanni Azzano, Lucas Tingle, Don Farwell, Antony John and Barb Hacking provided their expertise to each of the sections: water, soil, wildlife and plants, birds and butterflies.

It is available for free at the city clerk's office in Stratford City Hall.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach introduces *Nature in the City* at the Local Community Food Centre on April 23. The free publication is a guide for gardening and living in an interconnected Festival City.



(CRAIG MERKLEY PHOTO)

Volunteers and E&E members at the T.J. Dolan Natural Area on April 22 weeding garlic mustard.

SPS and MTO lay 20 commercial vehicle charges during enforcement blitz

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

On April 20 and April 21, the Stratford Police Service conducted a mini commercial motor vehicle enforcement blitz in partnership with the Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO).

The initiative took place on Perth Road 113 and Perth Line 26 in the Township of Perth South, focusing on commercial motor vehicle compliance and road safety. Over the two days, the following charges were laid:

- Overweight Vehicle – Violate Permit: 1
- Overweight on Axle – Reduced Load Period: 12

- Insecure Load: 2
 - Expired Permit – CMV: 1
 - Fail to Display Annual Inspection: 1
 - Fail to Comply with Emission Regulations: 1
 - Speeding: 2
- Total Charges: 20

In addition to enforcement, numerous vehicles were inspected. As a result, three vehicles were placed out of service, and two sets of licence plates were removed, with the vehicle status transferred to unfit.

In a media release, Stratford police stated these enforcement initiatives are an important part of keeping the community's roads safe and ensuring compliance with provincial regulations.

Health unit looking for another dog involved in Stratford incident

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is looking for a dog involved in an incident in Stratford on Tuesday, April 21 at approximately 4:30 p.m. The incident took place at the Stratford Education Recreation Complex (SERC) on Forman Avenue, where the presumed owner was headed in the direction of the YMCA Child Care Centre building on Oakdale Avenue.

The dog involved in the incident is described as a bulldog with light brown fur. The individual with the dogs is described as a male, approximately 5'10", around 40 years of age with grey hair

and a long black beard. He was wearing sunglasses, a hat and a black graphic band shirt. He had two other leashed bulldogs with him at the time of the incident.

The health unit is investigating this incident to check if the rabies vaccination status of the dog is up to date.

HPPH reminds people to always obtain the contact information of the owner(s) of the animal that is involved in an incident.

Anyone who has information about this dog should contact the HPPH at 1-888-221-2133, Ext. 3670. After hours or over the weekend, call the main number and follow the prompts to reach our answering service.

Every Voice contest winners announced to end National Poetry Month

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Every Voice poetry contest team has announced the top prize winners in both its Youth and Adult categories,

Zipper

(performed as part of "Words Defeat Bullets" book launch, Toronto, April 25, 2026)

We zipper in zipper out
divide bisect rule in rule out
borders and stanchions
the moats and railings
of the human heart

Restrict forbid segment
we rope off even
the water the mare liberum
with its scars
of jurisdictional seas
and laneways
Einsatz verboten
we float
above the hash marks
seeking friendly skies
and a place to take us in

Bollards and hedgerows
blockades and barriers
we've mastered
the art of walls
blistered this
partitioned paradise
with the barbed wire
of defended edges
red lines and rhetoric
marked our territory
with the cat piss
of arrogance
and blinkered ambition
this is mine
and that is yours
a planet pixelated
into endless islands
of fortified ownership
we value more
than people's lives.

I say these things
to my neighbour
as we lean across
the garden fence
respectful of the
line between us

the land of the other

all these little lives
in all these little houses

all the whirring
inside these microscopic
weeping worlds that
zipper us together yet
keep us so far apart.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

in conjunction with the release of the contest's Roots Through Stone - Poems of Strength and Resilience anthology. The prize winners and all published poets were celebrated in a well-attended and rather joyous awards ceremony at Stratford's City Hall auditorium on the evening of April 23, National Poetry Month in Canada.

The Every Voice poetry competition is a joint project undertaken by Stratford poet laureate David Stones, along with Destination Stratford and the Stratford Public Library.

Open to all residents of Perth County, Stratford and St. Marys, the inaugural contest was announced in July 2025, with submissions related to the theme of resilience accepted to the end of October. In the final analysis, Roots Through Stone comprises 85 poems by 75 poets from throughout the community, with 17 poets taking home top prizes and Judges' Choice awards. An editorial panel comprising Stones, then Stratford youth poet laureate Quinn Mayer, multi-award-winning poet and Pathways to Poetry founder Heidi Sander and award-winning poet and Poetry Stratford coordinator Mark Hertzberger oversaw the submission guidelines and the adjudication process.

"This contest and the anthology are everything I hoped they could be," Stones said in a media release. "In addition to the crafting and performance of poetry in support of a range of local events and causes, the build out of a community-based poetry program is a key part of my mandate. The robust response to this contest and the honour of publishing so many poets from throughout the region is hugely gratifying. I congratulate our award recipients, but everyone who entered, in fact anyone who puts pen to paper in the act of self expression, is a winner in my books."

"Hearty kudos to all who entered and to the prize winners," said Destination Stratford executive director, Zac Gribble, and Stratford Public Library CEO, Krista Robinson, in a joint statement. "It's wonderful that so many of these poets are being published for the first time. Our organizations are so much about the stories that shape and sustain our remarkable community. We applaud all

initiatives that help surface these narratives and ensure more voices are heard. We see the Every Voice poetry contest has a primary and recurring feature of the Poet Laureate program in the years ahead."

First, second and third prize winners for both Youth and Adult categories received cash prizes of \$500, \$250 and \$100, respectively, while all 17 short-listed poets received a commemorative award certificate. Prize winners are as follows:

A. Youth Category (aged eight-18)

- First Prize: "How to Kill a Butterfly: A Tutorial" – Melantha Rusticus, St. Marys
- Second Prize: "The Artist, War" – Aspen Gloin, Stratford
- Third Prize: "When the Light Found Me" – Haylee Turcott, Listowel

Judges' Choice Awards

- "My Humanity" – Nguyen Thai Huyen Vo, Stratford
- "The Lost Sea" – Lily Paterson, Stratford
- "A Wall to Reprimand" – Anaya Campbell, Stratford
- "At the Talkers' Mercy" – Aspen Gloin, Stratford

B. Adult Category

- First Prize: "Cerebral Palsy" – Aleah Graff, Stratford
- Second Prize: "Schrodinger's Caterpillar" – Alex Oeming, Stratford
- Third Prize: "Tending the Past" – Judith Harway, Stratford

Judges' Choice Awards

- "Birth, Death and the Bit In Between" – Barbara McMahon, Stratford
- "About My Brother Ben" – Michael Smith, Stratford
- "A Line on the Library Floor" – Judith Harway, Stratford
- "Healing" – Faera Lane, Stratford
- "A Good Storm" – Shayda Campbell, Stratford
- "Emancipation" – HAU, Stratford
- "All Evidence Points to Your Missing" – Nicole Bulger, Stratford
- "Palm Reading" – M Daniela Mange, Stratford
- "See Me" – Victoria Powell, Stratford
- "Arboretum" – Faera Lane, Stratford



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford poet laureate David Stones speaks to a packed city hall auditorium on April 23 for the Every Voice poetry contest ceremony. Selected works will be available in the Roots Through Stone anthology.

Alastair Home & Design launches apparel line supporting the Local

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

A downtown business is marking a milestone by giving back to the community it serves.

Bruce Borgundvaag, co-owner of Alastair Home & Design at 151 Ontario St., has launched a new line of Stratford-branded apparel, with a portion of proceeds supporting the Local Community Food Centre.

The collection – which includes a t-shirt, sweatshirt and quarter-zip pullover – comes as the store approaches its second anniversary.

“Right from the beginning, when we were working on the idea of what we wanted to do here, there was always a focus on including a charitable component,” said Borgundvaag.

After considering several organizations, Borgundvaag said the Local was a natural fit.

“We have so many great options in Stratford, but we have a lot of customers who are big fans of the Local,” he said. “We’ve also contributed to their silent auctions in the past, so they seemed like a really logical choice for us.”

From each sale, \$5 from sweatshirts and quarter-zips and \$2 from t-shirts, will be donated directly to the organization.

Borgundvaag said the goal is not only to raise funds, but also awareness.

“We really want to help raise awareness of all the good work that the Local does in the community,” he said.

The apparel is made in Canada using high-quality materials. The garments are pigment-dyed and pre-washed for a vintage look and feel. Borgundvaag added the designs are intentionally versatile, appealing to local residents as much as visitors.

On April 22, Mayor Martin Ritsma and Julie Docker Johnson, community connector at the Local, visited the store to help promote the initiative.

“Any time we can celebrate a shop in the downtown core is a win for our city,” said Ritsma. “The strength



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Julie Docker Johnson, Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma and Bruce Borgundvaag show off new Stratford-branded apparel at Alastair Home & Design, with proceeds supporting the Local Community Food Centre.

of a city’s economy can largely be reflected through its downtown.”

Docker Johnson said partnerships like this play an important role in sustaining community services.

“The stronger the economy is in Stratford, the more support we see, because we’re all part of the same community,” said Docker Johnson. “When tourists come

downtown – to the theatre and local businesses – they’re helping support infrastructure that serves the people we care for every day.

“That’s why initiatives like this are so meaningful. They recognize that the people who live here matter too, and that support helps us keep our doors open and continue bringing people together over a meal as a community.”



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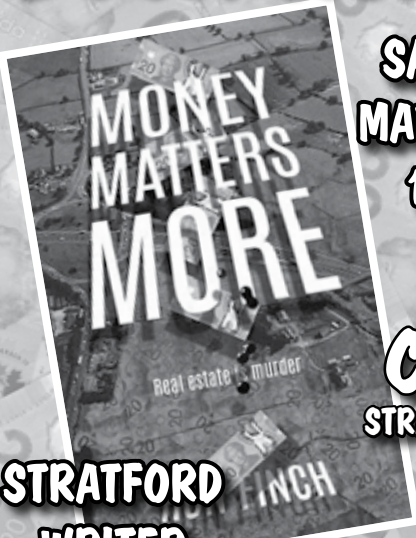


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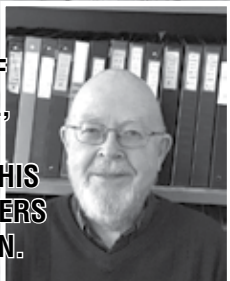


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A Dispatch from the Ghost of William Shakespeare to the Good People of Stratford

Good citizens,

I am delighted to see that my well-remembered play, *The Tempest*, will soon be taking to the stage at your beloved Stratford Festival, in a town that celebrates my life's work – a true honour, indeed. While I'm no longer with you in person, I feel a spiritual connection to your community and thus, am compelled to share a few words of wisdom.

In *The Tempest*, I set down the line: "What's past is prologue." By this I meant the past is not behind us. It is a guide to what comes next.

The storm I summoned in my play was not intended to destroy but to stir reflection among those cast upon uncertain shores. For after any storm comes an opportunity to rebuild and create anew. The aftermath of a storm initially leaves one bereft in the midst of ruin, leading to tests of judgement and debate over competing visions.

Now, in my metaphorical return to Stratford, I discover that your fair city is at a crossroads – a moment of decision with a consequential choice. What's remarkable, almost magical about Stratford, is that this is not the first time. You have been here before.

When the railway and industrial barons sought to occupy the banks of the Avon River, you chose the river. And that decision shaped the Stratford we know today.

When Stratford City Hall was threatened with demolition, you chose preservation. And that choice became the foundation of Ontario's heritage movement.

These were not decisions made for the moment. They were decisions made for generations.

Now the future of the Grand Trunk Railway Shops stands before you. There is, I observe, a pressure toward the short-term – a pull toward economic expediency, anxiety over uncertainty and a desire to resolve and move forward.

But not all things of value can be measured in the short-term. Not all outcomes can be judged by immediate return. Some decisions must be weighted in decades, even centuries.

As I once wrote, "The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance." In this moment, virtue may lie in restraint, in patience and in the careful consideration of what may endure. For Stratford is not merely a place. It is the result of choices made with foresight and sustained by imagination.

As I reflected in *The Tempest*, "we are such stuff as dreams are made on..." and it is those dreams, honoured or discarded, that shape the future.

And so, I ask: What future will this decision create?

The stage is yours now, Stratford.

I take my leave and trust that you will choose wisely.

W. Shakespeare (in spirit)

William Shakespeare



Fresh Idea Collective hosts sold-out female entrepreneurship event

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Kerry Ramsay, founder of Fresh Idea Collective, hosted another sold-out event this week at the St. Marys Golf and Country Club. The Business LeadHERship Summit brought together leaders and business owners from across Ontario to learn, connect and discuss their business goals.

Keynote speaker Cheryl Himburg spoke about the importance of vision and the courage to imagine what's possible before the path is fully clear.

"Vision takes shape when you have the courage to imagine what's possible, even before all the steps are mapped out," she said. "When we stop believing that what we've done so far is the ceiling of what we can accomplish, this is how we start to claim our lives."

Himburg also shared that a recent stroke earlier this year will not stop her from pursuing her goals and



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Karis Mapp of CTV News speaks with Shaw's Ice Cream co-owners Kristine Hayes and Kelly Heleniak during the Business LeadHERship Summit in St. Marys.

continuing to grow.

"I'm a glass-ceiling breaker," she said. "When we take an idea that feels impossible and start to ask how we can break that ceiling, we begin to take action, and all of a sudden it becomes possible."

She emphasized the importance of aligning vision with personal values, noting that when the two are connected, actions and goals become clearer.

Second speaker Aileen Edwards of AME Consulting discussed executive presence, highlighting that confidence is something that must be practised consistently to build momentum.

She explained that hesitation and self-doubt can be perceived by others, while confidence and clarity can inspire trust.

"People benefit from your hesitation – don't let them," she said. "Lead clearly, lead with presence, lead believing you are ready, no matter what."

Edwards also spoke about her experiences as a Black woman in leadership and the importance of believing in oneself before feeling fully ready.

"As women, we need to know how to enter rooms with intention," she said. "If you don't trust yourself in the room, people can feel that. Confidence is not volume – it's a decision."

"Being seen is not ego, it's stewardship. You can't build a brand by being invisible."

The final segment featured CTV News reporter Karis Mapp, who interviewed Tillsonburg entrepreneurs Kristine Hayes and Kelly Heleniak, two of the three sisters behind Shaw's Ice Cream.

Originally from Tillsonburg, three of six sisters purchased the brand when it was close to shutting down. Having grown up working at their family's business, Dad's Ice Cream Shop, they decided while still in college to buy Shaw's and revive it.

Despite early challenges, the brand has since expanded and is now available in stores across Canada, known for its unique and seasonal flavours.

"We had to wear a lot of hats, but growing up balancing being moms, wives and our own lives, we learned the importance of having the right people in our corner," said Heleniak.

The pair also discussed adapting their leadership styles to support their team of more than 100 employees, emphasizing the importance of recognizing individual strengths and challenges.

Throughout the day, attendees had opportunities to connect with other entrepreneurs and take part in discussions on leadership, business challenges and work-life balance. Participants travelled from across Ontario, including as far as Ottawa.

The event highlighted the continued growth and impact of female-led businesses in local communities and beyond.

For more information on future events, visit freshideacollective.com.

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Market Update: Ontario rolls out major HST relief on newly built homes

MAKLANE DEWEVER

Home & Company Real Estate

On March 25, Ontario announced a temporary removal of the 13 per cent HST on newly built homes. This change is effective April 1, 2026, through March 31, 2027. The province will cover the 8 per cent provincial share, while Ottawa agreed to cover the remaining 5 per cent federal portion. For homes up to \$1 million, the full HST is rebated, to a maximum of \$130,000. That cap holds flat to \$1.5 million, then tapers down. Unlike the earlier first-time buyer rebate, this program is open to all buyers. This includes move-up purchasers and investors buying purpose-built rentals.

This is not entirely new. Buyers of new homes have always had access to a partial HST rebate, up to roughly \$24,000 on the provincial side and \$6,000 on the federal side. That was typically handled by the builder at closing.

What has changed is the scale. On a \$650,000 property, the old rebate covered roughly \$30,000. The new program covers the full \$84,500. The savings are real, but the headline "13 per cent off" slightly overstates it because part of that relief was already in place.

A buyer purchasing a \$650,000 property could save roughly \$84,500 in HST. That

is not a small number. It makes new construction directly competitive with resale for the first time in years, and for first-time buyers or people looking to upsize, it could be the difference between getting into the market and watching from the sidelines.

The rebate lands at a good time. New home sales and starts have weakened. Locally, the Perth-Huron Builders' Association (PHBA) says the rebate is already generating momentum. "The rebate is helping to rekindle buyer interest for projects and units that were marginally uneconomic or slow to move," says Melissa Schenk, executive officer of PHBA.

But there are a few things buyers should understand before they purchase a new build.

In our market, many local builders advertise their prices with HST included. That means the rebate is already baked into the sticker price. Not every builder province-wide is handling it the same way, either. Some are passing the full rebate through. Others are retaining part of it to offset rising construction costs. How much of the rebate ends up in the buyer's pocket will vary from project to project.

What matters most is how the rebate shows up in your contract, because it directly affects your financing.

Option one: the builder credits the rebate

at closing. The buyer then assigns the rebate back to the builder, and the purchase price on the statement of adjustments is reduced accordingly. Your lender underwrites based on that lower net price, which means less down payment and better qualifying math.

Option two: the builder writes the contract at the full gross price. The buyer closes at the higher number and applies to CRA for the rebate after the fact. Your lender qualifies you at the full purchase price because the rebate is treated as a post-closing tax benefit. That means more cash up front and your borrowing capacity has to cover the gross amount. You get the money back eventually, but you have to carry the full price through closing.

Ask the question early and loop in your mortgage broker to avoid surprises.

Eligibility is tied to your Agreement of Purchase and Sale (APS), not your closing date. Only agreements signed between April 1, 2026 and March 31, 2027 qualify. If you signed before April 1, you are not eligible, regardless of when you close. Industry groups, including the PHBA, advocated for retroactive treatment, but the government chose a forward-looking, one-year window.

There is also an uncomfortable reality for those already in the pipeline. A client

of mine, who was set to close on a pre-construction property and had hoped to make Stratford their home, was relocated for work. They are now concerned about what the HST cut means for their ability to recoup their purchase price when they sell. They paid full HST. A buyer walking into the same development today would not. That kind of overnight shift in the math is difficult to plan around, and there is no retroactive relief for buyers who signed before April 1.

This has had a real effect on values for recently completed construction. When a brand-new home next door suddenly drops \$75,000 on an all-in basis, the comparable value of every unit that has already closed in the same development shifts downward.

If you are shopping for a new build this spring, ask the builder or your realtor how the HST is being handled in the contract. Speak to your mortgage broker or bank to find out how it will affect your financing eligibility. And confirm your APS date before you assume you qualify.

The program will move the needle. But some kinks need to be ironed out before it becomes the affordability boon it was announced as.

Questions about the market: As always, you can reach me by calling or texting at 519-301-2214.

Hurts, hang-ups and habits: Celebrate Recovery available for whatever ails you

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Celebrate Recovery in Stratford has quietly become a place of transformation for area individuals who might be seeking hope, healing and lasting change in their life.

Celebrate Recovery is a worldwide organization, run by local area volunteers and are in every Canadian province. It has been part of the Stratford and area community since 2011 and meet every Monday evening from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Elgin Missionary Church in Stratford.

The organization encourages personal growth, and participants do not have to identify as christian or attend any denomination of churches to take part, nor do they need to be in crisis. Many attend because they might feel overwhelmed or just desire personal growth.

Two local program leaders, Jenny Van Den Hoven of South Easthope Township and Bill Kechnie of Stratford, said life can be tough sometimes for those who might be hurt by others, or even for those who placed hurt on others.

The Celebrate Recovery program can create leaders and is open to anyone 18



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Celebrate Recovery leaders Jenny Van Den Hoven and Bill Kechnie stand in front of the sign of Elgin Missionary Church in Stratford, the location of their volunteer-based program.

years of age and older, and the program's cornerstone is its commitment to anonymity and confidentiality.

According to Kechnie, attendees come for a variety of reasons, including coping with the loss of a loved one, navigating divorce or separation, dealing with job loss or just managing the pressures of caring for others. He said for many, they attend

simply because they feel overwhelmed or desire personal growth.

Over the years according to Van Den Hoven, some of the participants have said they never believed freedom from their addiction was possible, but through the

program, began to see that their behaviour was rooted in deeper unmet needs.

Another person said, "I wasn't sure this program was for me at first, but what convinced me to stay, was the unconditional acceptance that I experienced from the very beginning."

The program leaders say those who come to the program travel from Goderich, Clinton, Exeter, Brussels and Listowel, and many areas in between.

Representatives will be at the Stratford Farmer's Market on Saturday, June 6, and will be available to answer any questions that visitors might have.

For more information call 519-271-5407, ext. 5 or email celebraterecovery.stratford@gmail.com. Follow its page on Facebook: crstratford.

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Duke Ellington fans gathered to celebrate his birthday through personal stories

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

On a crisp Saturday afternoon jazz fans and musicians of all ilk came together to celebrate the birthday of Duke Ellington through speakers with personal stories of when Ellington came to Stratford and the music scene then, singing with Ellington, growing up with Ellington around the house and stories of his music from band leader Brian Barlow.

The event was hosted by jazz aficionado Tim Elliott as a prelude to the planned concert by the Brian Barlow Big Band this July 13 at 7:30 p.m., where they will be performing the rarely-heard suite *Such Sweet Thunder*, inspired by the works of Shakespeare as seen at the Stratford Festival in 1956 by Duke Ellington.

Ellington came to Stratford in 1956, 1957, 1965 and 1968. That first visit to this city enthralled and enchanted him. With an invitation from Louis Applebaum, he came to play at what was then the Stratford Music Festival in conjunction with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. But he was so struck that he stayed as long as he could and went to plays. A little-known fact was that Ellington and his partner Billy Strayhorn were both Shakespeare scholars and had the entire works at home.

Local resident Laura Pogson was on hand to share those early days as she remembered them from her childhood. She began by reminiscing of a young boy born in Stratford, who when in Grade 11 was inspired with a project by his English teacher Miss Rose McQueen.

"She assigned the class to come up with an economic project that would spare the city after its loss of the main industry, the railroad. As the young Tom (Patterson) sat in class, inspired by Miss McQueen, who had a passion for Shakespeare, he came to the river in front of my house to talk to my dad about an idea that he had. ... It inspired Tom to say, 'Why don't we have a theatre here like they do in England?' As a child I was most excited to think of a theatre in the park. As we all know, it became



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Band leader Brian Barlow speaks to an appreciative crowd about Ellington's connection to Shakespeare through the upcoming concert Stratford Swings Ellington with the Brian Barlow Big Band July 13 at the Festival Theatre.

reality in 1953," recalled Pogson.

The amazing composer, Louis Applebaum, was brought to town to lead the music of the plays. Most famously, he created the fanfare that still plays today. Applebaum would stay at Pogson's house where he would compose. In 1955 Applebaum created the Stratford Music Festival and had many famous musicians come through the years.

In 1956, once in Stratford, Ellington was commissioned to compose a piece for the festival and he conceived of the suite *Such Sweet Thunder* which was performed in 1957 for the first time.

Former resident Gordon Conroy was in the Merry Wives of Windsor as a boy soprano, he served as an usher and in 1968 sang in Ellington's Concert of Sacred Music as a member of St. John's United Church Choir under the direction of Gordon Scott and graciously shared his memories.

"Tickets to Ellington were awfully expensive. I know my mom got to hear a couple of concerts on the inside of that building but I never did. That hill (beside), that's where I heard him. They would open the windows of the building as it was awfully hot in there. I would drift by and be there for the beginning and make a decision. If they were really good, then I would stay and listen. Ellington was of course playing stuff like 'Sophisticated Lady' and 'Take

the A Train'. Those were things I listened to in the living room on '78s. What a joy to hear and to actually connect with Duke Ellington. That was the first time I got to meet him," shared Conroy.

Bill Harris, who some may know as director of the Stratford Film Festival and an American ex-pat, knew Ellington simply as Uncle Edward growing up as a child in New York. Ellington was a close family friend of his Aunt Marion and physician Uncle Arthur.

"My uncle Arthur was a prominent doctor and a lifelong friend who treated Edward through various medical crises and performance issues, sometimes even backstage at important events. Arthur and Marion were a New York power couple very steeped in the civil rights movement, bringing money and political power. As a kid sitting there in the open floating mid-century stairs, listening to all the strategizing going on around the dining table, I was really unaware of the historical importance or even creative significance," Harris said.

The final speaker of the afternoon was none other than the band leader Barlow.

Much of Ellington's work was not transcribed initially, in fact, only three movements of the suite have been published. In order to perform this in concert, Barlow has had to painstakingly transcribe the orchestration himself, a task that brought him closer to the composer.

"Ellington was a prolific composer. The Smithsonian has all of his papers which include over 3,000 compositions. He is the most recorded jazz composer of all time, and by composer we usually mean a jazz musician who also created music for initially, other jazz musicians. He was also a terrific piano player which often gets overlooked. Then there's Billy Strayhorn, who Ellington referred to as his right and left hand. Strayhorn was a wonderful pianist, composer and orchestrator. Ellington was the idea man, the showman. He commanded the spotlight but Strayhorn made sure that the musicians always had something to play on the music stands," said Barlow.

He went on to talk about the upcoming concert of *Such Sweet Thunder*. The second half will see Heather Bambrick joining in for a selection of Ellington classics. Barlow will be joined by some of the finest musicians in Canada, 15 in total.

The afternoon concluded with Tim Elliott accompanying the crowd to a rousing rendition of Happy Birthday to both Duke Ellington, whose birthday is April 29 and William Shakespeare, also an April baby. Those in attendance left with a sense of anticipation for the July 13 concert at the Festival Theatre at 7:30 p.m.

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Meet Laurène Gaucher, Café Bouffon's new head chef

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

When Laurène Gaucher was asked how she felt about being the new head chef at Café Bouffon, she said "It's good. It's a new challenge."

Chef Gaucher came to Canada from Lyon, France and brings nine years of culinary experience. She was a private chef in Lyon and Monaco and worked in fine dining restaurants such as Chez Moss, Villa Blanche on Réunion Island and La Balançoire.

Café Bouffon, a French bistro in Stratford above Pazzo Pizzeria, and Gaucher match together well as both focus on classical French culinary techniques and highlighting seasonal ingredients.

"It's a very exciting chapter for Café Bouffon to welcome Laurene to the team," said Chloe Miller, chief administrative officer of Pazzo and Café Bouffon.

Chef Gaucher is learning more about the local ingredients grown in Perth County and got to visit a local farm to source produce. She prefers the farm-

to-table cheffing style and is eager to create French dishes with Canadian vegetables.

"We're so excited to have Laurène joining us because she has an extensive history and extensive training in French cuisine but also she brings a natural enthusiasm and curiosity; curiosity about Stratford, curiosity about Canada, curiosity about the bounty of ingredients that we have and watching her explore that and presenting that with her traditional French cuisine is something really special that we're excited about," Miller said.

For Gaucher, her favourite part of being a chef is seeing the joy when customers enjoy the food she made.

"I like to see the smiles on the faces of people when they eat," she said.

Stratford and area diners got to try a taste of Gaucher's creations during a pop-up five-course dinner on April 30. Winemaker Alex Baines of Beamsville winery Hidden Bench was also in attendance to pair wine with the meal.



(CHLOE MILLER PHOTO)

Chef Laurène Gaucher is excited to learn more about using Stratford and area ingredients to shape her dishes at Café Bouffon.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Tight-knit Warriors reflect on season and look ahead to future

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Less than 24 hours after their tough season-ending loss in Game 7 against the St. Marys Lincolns, players from the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors gathered at the William Allman Memorial Arena for their end-of-season interviews.

Most of the roster is expected to return next season, but for the four veterans—Haden Frayne, Jonas Schmidt, Rhyse Brown and Joseph Curtin—yesterday was their final appearance with the organization, as they are graduating from the team.

The four graduates looked back fondly on their time with the Warriors and valued their experience with the organization.

“I just feel so thankful and just to get to grow up here in Stratford and to play for my hometown, like growing up watching this team, and then just getting to live it. You know, it's really cool. It's honestly something I can't really explain, but I don't know, it's really special,” Frayne said.

“It was amazing. Stratford supports us as few other places do in this league, and even in other places I played, the support gets crazy good, pushes us every night, and it's what makes the organization run. Really, we need fans to come out and support us to make this all happen. So we thank everyone who comes out,” Schmidt said.

“Everything here is unbelievable. I love this rank, the fans, the community and the executives here. It's a tight-knit program, the guys, I mean, this team, it feels like a family no matter what year it is. I've been here for four years, and I could say (that about) every single guy that I play with,” Brown said.

“It's been incredible. I mean, you can see, especially in this last series, how much support you get from the fans in the community. I mean, such a tight-knit locker room, great coaching staff, and great management staff. I mean, so much support from everyone,” Curtin said.

Pleased with the Warriors' progress this season, Quinn Kipfer plans to rejoin the team next year to improve his skills and aims for a productive offseason.

“Obviously, it's tough, especially in the kind of position we were in there with 10 minutes to go up two goals. So it's definitely a tough one, a tough pill to swallow, but just proud of the group and how far we came and the run we kind of went on there in the playoffs. So, yeah, just trying to look at the positives and just be happy with how we did,” Kipfer said.

“The main thing for me is just kind of like focusing on getting faster. Obvious-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

After a friendly bet with St. Marys Mayor Al Strathdee, Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma begrudgingly donned a Lincs jersey for April 27's council meeting. The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors lost to their rivals in Game 7 of the finals.

ly, I want to progress my skills, but I just want to get faster and stronger. So whenever I am next year, I can kind of step in and be effective as soon as I start playing games.”

Colin Slattery made a commendable comeback to the team for the Western Conference Championship series, earning five points. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to play in his hometown of Stratford, complimenting the community, coaching staff and management. During the offseason, he plans to focus on carpentry, exercise and golf.

“I loved it again, my second year here as a hometown kid. Couldn't ask for anything more, you know, from the community, from this to the coaching staff, to the management, everything just top notch,” Slattery said.

“You know, I'm gonna go back to work, you know, I'm doing carpentry in the summer. A lot, a lot of work. Gonna hit the gym and go golfing. That's about it.”

Noah Bender and Gage Hurst formed a reliable goaltending duo for the Warriors throughout the season and playoffs. They finished the regular season with a combined record of 29-12-3, a goals-against average of 2.49 (ranking within the top five in the Western Conference), and a save percentage of 0.900.

Bender and Hurst expressed positive views about their first years with the Stratford Warriors, emphasizing the strong bond developed during the season.

“You know, I came down from Flint at the start of the year and wasn't sure where

I was going to play, but I couldn't have been happier that I ended up in Stratford. You know, it's been a great, great organization, all the way from the coaches to all the players. It's been great. So I'm really, really glad I ended up here this year,” Bender said.

“I think we've got a really tight group. The boys welcomed me, and all the other rookies, and definitely just a really tight group all around, a good group on the ice as well. I think I made some big steps this year, and I'm proud of my season,” Hurst said.

The first-year class of Lucas Minard, Evan Arnold, Coen Galbraith, Grady Murphy, Max Wildfong, McQuen Haylock, Will Coward and Mateo Craievich gave the Warriors a glimpse of their future potential. They shared with the Times what it was like to spend their first season with the team and their plans for the offseason.

“It was great. Growing up in Dallas ... Stratford, it's just way smaller, way more tight-knit a community. They just welcome you. So it's just so awesome. I love playing here,” Minard said.

“I'll go home and get my golf clubs back out. But no, I got a good program back home. A lot of NHL guys and division one guys, we all get together and skate, try to skate three times a week. I'll probably take about two or three weeks off, just kind of reset. Don't want to burn yourself out throughout the summer. So I'll take a good chunk of time, just, you know, be with my family and friends I ha-

ven't seen, and then you get right back on the ground, you know, working out, skating and get ready for next year.”

“It's been great. I love it here. It's a great community. Obviously, a lot of fans come out for the playoffs, and even in the regular season, they show out. It's awesome,” Arnold said. “As right now, just work out on skating and just figure out my plans for the future.”

“Just great. It's like they treat me like family. I have such a good billet family. It's just a great place,” Galbraith said. “Likely a couple summer skates, couple tournaments, maybe, and yeah, just keeping loose.”

“It was a great experience, like it's always been my dream to play here, and I was happy to play. I'm happy that we went that far, and not most people thought we were gonna get there, but we did, and kind of proud to show people that we were better than what they thought,” Murphy said. “I'm just gonna work and hopefully come back here next year.”

“We have such a tight group, and all the older guys just coming in, as a younger guy, they made me feel so welcome right away. I'm just happy I got the opportunity to play in Stratford,” Wildfong said. “Yeah, just keep my head down. It's not done yet, and I just keep working towards my goals, and hopefully have a good summer and have a good season next year.”

“It's been amazing from everything, from the team to my billets to the town, everything, all the fans. It's been so much fun on and off the ice, and I just love it here,” Haylock said. “Staying off the ice for a little bit and trying to build a little bit of muscle, get stronger and really just work on shooting the puck and taking a little bit of time just putting off my head a little bit.”

“It's been a really good experience. A lot of young guys, a lot of good boys, you know, come to the rink every day. Made it fun, the coaches were great, and it was just all-around fun,” Coward said. “Just stay on the ice, stay in the gym. You know, have some fun, hang out with my friends, keep it light.”

“I'd say the experience was amazing. I am very fond of my teammates, the organization, and everything that goes into it. Not much I can say, other than it's just been a fantastic experience, and very glad I took the opportunity,” Craievich said.

“Obviously, I'll be working out all summer, just training, maintaining shape and going on skates, just working out and preparing my body and mind for next season.”

Second-year forward Dominic Marshall and defenceman Drew Hodge enjoyed the

CONTINUED TO PAGE 15

Tight-knit Warriors reflect on season and look ahead to future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

opportunity to play for the Warriors, and both are eagerly anticipating the off-season.

"I think this is one of the most fun years I've ever had playing hockey. These boys are so awesome, and it's just a great time coming to the rink every day to play with them. So I'm absolutely honoured to play with these boys, and I think it's real good season overall," Marshall said. "Hard work and dedication. Do as much as I can and get better all off-season."

"I've been with Stratford for the last two years. Great experience every year. Coaching staff is great, mentoring is great and we just always find even like the best people to fill that room, and everyone's a best friend, and we're just such a tight-knit group, and it's just awesome," Hodge said.

"I definitely want to be prepared to come back and show them that we deserve to win and win the playoffs. But I think step away from hockey and just regroup, and just have a little fun, and just keep on working a little stuff."

Jaxon Broda returned to the Warriors in January, adding veteran depth to the

roster, and appeared in 19 regular-season and 19 playoff games. Arnold reflected on his half-season return to Stratford and shared his offseason plans.

"It was great to be back. The guys in the room were amazing when I came back. They were great. Guys made me feel like I was part of the team all year, and being in front of the fans is also nice to be back for," Broda said. "Just working, going to the gym a little bit and having some skates in the summer as well."

Acquired from the London Nationals at the trade deadline week, Cruz Ferguson joined the Warriors as a Sutherland Cup champion and a much-coveted offensive threat, headlined by a four-goal, five-point performance against the Sarnia Legionnaires on Jan. 22.

"You know, it's a huge honour. There's a long history and tradition of hockey here, and I was just glad to be a part of it. Was hoping to make some history with some of the guys here," Ferguson said.

"I'm gonna take some much-needed time off, and then, you know, get back into training once the summer rolls around, and hopefully come back stronger, smarter, faster."

Rebuilt Aces tuned up for another season

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On April 25, the Stratford Humphrey Fleet U16 AA Aces played a spring tune-up game at the Stratford Rotary Complex against the Guelph Jr. Gryphons.

During the game, Stratford struggled to overcome their penalty problems despite a strong performance from netminder Leicia Baldwin. Guelph scored the only goal of the game on the powerplay in the second period, handing the Aces a 1-0 defeat.

Head coach Sean Cameron conveyed confidence in the team's abilities and their past successes for the upcoming season.

"At try-out season, it's always kind of a funny time of year: new girls, new systems, a little bit of everything coming together, but we got really lucky, and the

girls that we had come in this year have a lot of skill. They've had a lot of success in the past, and we're looking forward to bringing this new group together and starting a new family, as we do every year at the start of the year," Cameron said.

"I'm super confident with this team. A lot of good things to talk about out there, a lot of speed, a lot of poise. And you know, we're gonna get pucks on net, and when we start working on our system, things will come together. But I'm really excited about this group. A lot of energy in the room, and pretty exciting. And our new goalie really stood on our head today. Was fun to watch."

According to Cameron, training camp takes place in mid-August, with their next exhibition game against the Stoney Creek Sabres on Labour Day weekend, before the regular season starts in early October.

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Sunday, May 24	Spring Tea, open to all, 2-4 p.m., adults \$20, Children 12 and under \$10 For tickets call Anne 519-301-0914, Linda 519-276-7969 or the Legion 519-271-4540
Sunday, June 7	Don McKone Memorial Cribbage Tournament, \$20 per team of 2, men, ladies or mixed Registration 12:00 p.m., play starts at 1:00 p.m.; sign-up by May 24th. Sports Officer Dave Mewhinney 519-276-1317 mewhinney.55@gmail.com Legion 519-271-4540 stratfordlegion008@gmail.com
Wednesday, June 10	Ladies Auxiliary Cold Salad Plate Luncheon, \$16 per plate. Delivery available for an additional \$2. Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservations.
Sunday, June 14	Annual Rib 'n Kraut Dinner, baked potatoes, vegetables and dessert. \$25 per person. Take-out 4:30 p.m., Dine-in 5:00 p.m. Call Frank 519-271-9669 or Pearl 519-305-2757 for reservations.

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OnStage Dance Studio takes home top studio of the competition for second time

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Competition season has come to an end with the final two events in Toronto and London. In North York, the En Pointe and Just Dance competition was held the weekend of April 10-12. It is a special event because ballet is separated and adjudicated separately from the other categories.

"The Meridian Arts Centre in Toronto is a beautiful venue with a professional stage and seating area for the parents, it was just gorgeous. We had a great showing, it's been one of our best seasons so far," said Meghan Seamen, owner and artistic director of OnStage Dance Studio.

There were many overall top scores including highest score for senior solo awarded to Nathan Hodgson and highest score for senior small group and senior large group. In the junior solo category, ages 11 and under, dancers took home top scores placing first, second and third in the category. Two groups were awarded adjudicator's choice for style. One was in the tap category for Rock and Rolling choreographed by Michelle Good. The other was in modern dance for Contents May Shift choreographed by Danielle Mascolo.

"What was interesting about this was there was a whole separate division for ballet dancers so all the ballet routines, whether a solo or duet or a trio, are competing in a separate division which is kind of nice. Ballet is a very specific detail-oriented style of dance and at a general competition sometimes you can find judges that don't have the same depth of exper-



(MEGHAN SEAMEN PHOTO)

It was with great pride that the OnStage Dance studio was awarded Top Studio of the Competition in London at the Dream to Dance competition.

tise that the judges of this competition have. At OnStage we have a very robust program and our ballet dancers take it seriously. It's really nice for them to have that chance to be in front of ballet specific judges and compete against some stronger ballet students as well. It attracts more of the serious ballet studios," said Seamen.

April 17 to 19 was the final competition of the season at Centennial Hall in London for Dream to Dance where the studio as a whole was again very successful taking home the award for Top Studio for the second time this season. Additionally, for a perfect run where in every compe-

tion this season, Shaina Wood has been recognized, this event was awarded top choreography of the competition for In Pergatory. Scholarships were awarded to Leah Monteith, Nathan Hodgson, Kayla Winter and Emma DeVries. Awards for most potential for their age divisions went to Avalynn Duff, Alena Trotter and Madison H. Finally, Yeva Goad was awarded top novice mark.

"If you look at our routines from our showcase back in February compared to how the routines were performed at our final competition you can see a big difference. Everybody is feeling not just more comfortable with their routines and per-

forming, but they have really dialed into the details and fixed everything we can," said Seamen. "It's exciting for the kids to know that overall as a studio, our routines scored highest."

Now that the season is over there will be a year end recital to look forward to. The dancers will again perform their award-winning routines as well as a new dance number featuring 120 kids at one time, a feat worth watching. The recital is scheduled for May 9 at Stratford District Secondary School.

For more information about OnStage Dance Studio or for registration information, visit www.onstagedance.com.

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Celebrate Asian Heritage Month with screening of *Shining Light*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A special screening is planned for May 8 of the powerful documentary, *Shining Light*, in honour of Asian Heritage Month. This true story tells the harrowing tale of a mother, nine months pregnant, and her two-year-old son escaping Vietnam after the fall of Saigon.

Through interviews with mother and daughter, archival footage and photos, their story of escape and ultimately finding a home in Canada is told. Directed by Robbie Hart and produced by Peter Raymont and Gary J. Smith, *Shining Light* follows the journey of Mui and her daughter, Chieu Anh, whose name means “*Shining Light*,” from those harrowing beginnings to a new life in Canada.

It was late April in 1975, and the North Vietnamese had entered Saigon. Tens of thousands of innocent people were desperate to leave. Mui Nguyen Bui, heavily pregnant, held her two-year-old son as they waited on the steps of the U.S. Embassy hoping to be airlifted out on one of the last few helicopters. Gunfire forced the helicopter to abandon the lifesaving effort.

“The historical context is very interesting to me. It’s the fall of Saigon, 1975, thousands of families were desperately trying to escape. So, there’s a sense of urgency and this universal sense of humanity. We can all relate to what it must



Witness the journey of one young mother desperate to save her family in this true story documentary, *Shining Light*.

be like to be under attack, to be trying to protect your family. It’s also Mother’s Day weekend, so I thought this story of a mother and newborn daughter and their bond was worthwhile,” said Megan Smith-Harris, artistic director of the Stratford Film Festival.

Fifty years later, mother and daughter reunite with the helicopter crew that airlifted them from the Danish ship that rescued them after the ship they escaped

on sank. They also visit with the immigration officer that chose them to enter Canada, putting together what Anh calls “all the pieces of my survival story.”

“There’s a lot of drama in this and a sense of urgency, plus the history, which for me was kind of an unknown history. I think that may be for some others too, but for those that remember, it will be interesting because of the archival footage and the behind-the-scenes access,” said

Smith-Harris.

There will be a panel discussion following the film with producers Peter Raymont and Gary J. Smith and Elizabeth Heatherington, who was involved with Operation Baby Lift. Additionally, there will be a Zoom interview with daughter Anh.

The evening will open with the short film *Desync*, by Filipina-Canadian filmmaker Minerva Marie Navasca. The film explores a complex mother-daughter relationship, offering a contemporary and personal counterpoint to *Shining Light*. The film follows Ana, a young Filipina filmmaker as she stages a reenactment of a painful argument with her mother, rewriting each phrase in search of perfection and in the process revealing the deep cultural pressures that shape their relationship.

“What’s so compelling about *Desync* is how honestly it captures the tension between love and expectation,” said Smith-Harris.

Be on the lookout for the Stratford connection via Jennifer Villaverde who plays the mother, Celine.

The evening is generously sponsored by the City of Stratford and former Canadian High Commissioner Michael Welsh. The screening is May 8 at 7 p.m. in the Stratford City Hall auditorium. Tickets are pay-what-you-wish, with a suggestion of \$20, and can be purchased online at stratfordfilmfestival.com.

Stratford Film Festival monthly screening features the documentary *The Librarians*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Film Festival (SFF) continues to program thought-provoking feature films and documentaries with this May 9 screening of the important and timely documentary *The Librarians* that asks the question, “Who gets to decide what we read?”

Beloved books like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 1984, or even *To Kill a Mockingbird* are quietly disappearing from library shelves and librarians are fighting back. Once considered essential reading, these books have been challenged or removed from schools and libraries across the U.S. in recent years. Part of a broader and more visible wave of book censorship, one that, at times, plays out in ways that are both startling and disturbing, and is increasingly viewed as a sign that free expression and democratic values are under threat.



(AMY BENCH PHOTO)

The documentary *The Librarians* tells the tale of those who are risking so much to protect the rights and freedom of expression in the face of present-day censorship.

“*The Librarians* was very big on the festival circuit. I have all these Google alerts for different film festivals, so I know what’s popping, what’s winning, what’s popular and what’s controversial. I know the work of Kim Snyder and she’s an excellent filmmaker so anything

she makes I want to see. When I heard that the film was about censorship and libraries, censoring librarians, threatening their life’s work, I became intrigued,” said SFF artistic director Megan Smith-Harris.

This practice of pulling books off shelves is not history. It is

happening right now in states like Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Arkansas, Utah, Virginia and even here in Canada to an extent, in Alberta schools.

“It raises questions about access to ideas and freedom of speech, questions of democracy and taking away these rights and freedoms eroding the democratic process. I think these are red flags and it’s like an early warning system,” said Smith-Harris.

The librarians featured in this film are the front-line defenders of democracy. They provide education, information, arts and culture to the masses and in this film, they are being pilloried and threatened with their livelihoods because they are trying to preserve these rights that are being taken for granted.

Targeted books are about race, LGBTQ+ identity, history or rewriting history and mental health. In a panel discussion following the film, adult services librarian Melanie Kindra-

chuck from the Stratford Public Library will discuss these topics and others relevant to the film. David Stones, Stratford’s poet laureate, will be performing an original poem, “Redaction” at the beginning of each screening.

“The joy of exploring new ideas, cultures and concepts with my young son, is one of my most special memories. The idea of targeting librarians and trying to force them to remove these books is horrifying. They’re facing pressure, threats, job risk, online trolls, it’s terrifying. It’s about who gets to decide what we are allowed to read,” said Smith-Harris.

The event is generously sponsored by Stones and Jean Anne McLeod, with programming support from the Stratford Public Library. There will be two screenings on Saturday, May 9 at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tickets are \$20 in advance at stratfordfilmfestival.com.

Production soon to begin on local director's film

Europe in Ontario

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Southwestern Ontario has a story about settlers to tell and will be explored in the new documentary *Europe in Ontario*. Local director Robert Crowley Smith and producer Keven Huhn are partners of MARKD productions, which is producing the film. They are both excited and a little bit nervous as this is their first feature film together.

This area of the province is home to a number of towns and cities of European heritage like Stratford, London, Kitchener (formerly Berlin), Waterloo, Cambridge and Paris. By exploring local voices and cultural traditions the film hopes to answer the central question, "What is the root of *Europe in Ontario*?"

As someone who doesn't fly but enjoys travel, Crowley Smith feels that experiencing it here at home is special and getting to connect it with somewhere else is equally special and important. Huhn, who travelled across the country with his family in an RV was inspired by the experiences and sights they witnessed.

"Once you've travelled across Canada, you start going 'We have a pretty cool country going on here,' and the fact that Rob was from Stratford, we thought ok, we can't get closer to home than London to Cambridge and everything in between," said Huhn.

The film will be about the journey of going from town to town, exploring why these towns are named after European cities.

"We'll be exploring history, culture, food, anything that is their connection to these other places," said Crowley Smith.

This will be a year-long journey capturing the highlights. There will be different types of events in every town throughout the year that will culturally identify each spot where people will be inspired to attend. Connection, reaction, action is the goal of the film.

The host and narrator for the film will



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Meet local director Robert Crowley Smith and producer Kevin Huhn, who will soon be seen on the streets of southwestern Ontario filming for their new documentary, *Europe in Ontario*.

be Cat Callaghan, widely known as one of the text-to-speech voices on TikTok, and with national reach brings accessibility and continuity to the project. They will talk to mayors, merchants, people of the town and endeavour to uncover the celebrities of the town. For Stratford, think Colm Feore, Chef D from Kitchener who is the new president of K/W Oktoberfest, or Victor Garber from London.

"Each of the towns have somebody that's been profiled so we want to get their perspective, what was it like growing up, what was it like living there?" questioned Huhn.

"We don't really have any expected outcome, we just hope to reveal a good story along the way because the good story is what really drives people to want to watch or want to go there," adds Crowley Smith.

It's not just a historical piece, it's also about what's going on so people can get to experience it in film, then hopefully in

person. The approach will be a mix of interactive and traditional storytelling with a combination of interviews about the history and culture as well as revealing the present through exploration with Callaghan.

"At the end of the day, the overarching purpose of the movie is not just to give somebody something to watch, but get them out of their seat and say, 'I want to go experience that, I want to go meet someone at that shop, I want to go into that merchant, I want to go to the Stratford Festival, whatever we've captured in the movie,'" said Huhn.

With funding, filming will begin this year with editing 2027 and hopefully a re-release in 2028. They are most excited about getting to each city and town to learn a little bit more about them than what's written on paper or a website. Getting the local look and feel of the area will be so much better than pictures and videos.

"It's going to be a collaborative effort to create this project. We've got the structure and view of the bones, but all the muscle and skin of it, you get to input," said Huhn.

"We want this to be a film about communities made by communities. One of the things we've been told from the mayor of Cambridge is we're doing a service to Canada for capturing the history and the culture on these areas for preservation of future generations," said Crowley Smith.

The filmmakers will document their journey on social media for those interested in following along. Instagram is @markdproductions and Facebook, web is markdproductions.com.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A Lange Bros. worker contends with a tree just north of Shakespeare Public School in Stratford last week. The Tavistock-based company has been in the tree trimming business since 1951.

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Author event at the Local aims to raise funds, awareness for community food centre

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

An upcoming author talk at the Local Community Food Centre is bringing together literature, community conversation and fundraising efforts in support of the food centre.

Anglican priest and author Maggie Helwig will be in Stratford on May 5 from 6-8 p.m. to discuss her award-winning book *Encampment*, which explores homelessness, advocacy and community through her firsthand experiences in Toronto.

The event, hosted in partnership with Stratford Arts and Lectures, will serve as a fundraiser for the Local, with proceeds supporting its programs and ser-

vices.

“This is our first event with a fundraising component, and we’re really excited to partner with the Local,” said Rina Barone, owner of Stratford Arts and Lectures. “We’re hoping for a full house.”

Barone said Helwig’s work is especially relevant in communities like Stratford, where issues surrounding housing and poverty continue to surface.

“Stratford’s not immune to any of these issues,” she said. “These are important conversations about what a community can do in terms of infrastructure, programs and support.”

The event will include a discussion, Q-and-A, meet-and-greet and book signing, while also

offering attendees a chance to connect with the Local in a more informal setting over coffee, tea and light refreshments.

Organizers say hosting the event at the Local is intentional – not only as a venue, but as a way to introduce more residents to the space and its role in the community.

“To host something like this at the Local is huge,” said Julie Docker Johnson, community connector at the centre. “It brings people through our doors, and that’s so important.”

Docker Johnson said fundraising events like this go beyond financial support, helping to build awareness and strengthen community connections.

“All of these small fundraising

efforts – whether it’s a bake sale or a lemonade stand – help raise awareness,” she said. “Every person who stops and asks what it’s for learns about the Local, and that spreads. It turns people into advocates for something that serves everyone in the community.”

“But it’s not just about money. It’s about showing up – whether that’s coming to the market, sitting down for a community meal or having a conversation with someone who needs a job. Those connections are priceless.”

Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased online through the Stratford Arts and Lectures website. Organizers say the event is designed to be accessible and welcoming to all members of the

community.

For more information, visit www.stratfordartsandlectures.com.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Author Maggie Helwig will be in Stratford on May 5 from 6-8 p.m. to discuss her award-winning book *Encampment*.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



Editorial

Grant Haven Media, Stratford Times have huge showing at OCNA

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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Grant Haven Media publications, including the Stratford Times, had a great showing at the Ontario Community Newspaper Association (OCNA)'s Better Newspapers Competition.

Held in Collingwood on April 24, the awards are an annual competition that pits community newspapers against each other in a wide variety of categories.

Connor Luczka, editor of the Stratford Times, was second for Best Editorial, circulation 8,000 and under for his Sept. 12, 2025 column "Winner and waster, forever." Times reporter Amanda Nelson was second in the Most Creative Grip and Grin Photo category for the front-page photo of the May 30, 2025 edition. The Times received an honourable mention in Best Guest/Freelance Column category for a piece written by local musician Loreena McKennitt.

Tillsonburg Post editor Jeff Helsdon was the winner of the prestigious Reporter of the Year Stephen Shaw Award. Helsdon also placed third for Best Business Feature for the story on Shaw's Ice Cream. Post contributor Jeff Tribe won that category with a story in the Simcoe Advocate profiling Norfolk's wineries and micro-breweries. In addition, Tribe placed second in the Best Guest/Freelance Column category.

Tillsonburg Post designer Stacie Eden received an honourable mention for Best Use of Colour. Long-time Tillsonburg resident, newspaper editor and former OCNA president, the late Bill Pratt was inducted into the OCNA Hall of Fame during the evening.

Simcoe Advocate Editor Chris Abbott captured first in the Best Sports Pages division.

Michelle Malvaso of the Paris Independent took the other big award of the evening, Photographer of the Year. The Independent took a pair of thirds, with Ed-



(KAREN HELSDON PHOTO)

Grant Haven Media publications were the winners of several awards at the recent Ontario Community Newspaper Association convention. On hand for the awards ceremony were, left to right: regional editor Galen Simmons, publisher Stewart Grant, director of business development Heather Dunbar, Tillsonburg Post editor Jeff Helsdon, Times reporter Amanda Nelson, reporter Jeff Tribe and Simcoe Advocate editor Chris Abbott.

ward Lander in the Arts and Entertainment category and Chris Whelan for Best Editorial Column.

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo's farm edition for 2025 was the second-place winner for Best Special Section.

Designer Erin Parsons took first in Local Retail Outlet for an ad in the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette. Gazette Editor Galen Simmons was third in the Health and Wellness story category.

Also on the advertising front, Grant Haven publications were awarded honourable mentions for Best Cre-

ative Ad. Recognized were: Erin Parsons for a St. Marys Independent ad, Michelle Foster for the Simcoe Advocate and Sarah Cairns for the Stratford Times.

"Given that we were a small one-newspaper operation just a few years ago, it was pretty surreal to attend the gala with so many talented team members, and I was thrilled to see them recognized by their peers," said Grant Haven Media publisher Stewart Grant, who was installed this weekend as the new president of the OCNA.

Quote of the Week

"This is a really large project. There will be more pieces coming forward, some of them might be a decade or two away, but this isn't the entire project we're talking about. It's one segment. It's one segment that staff put work into, telling us that we can actually afford to do this."

— Coun. Mark Hunter on city council's decision to commit \$15 million towards a shared community hub.

STRATFORD TIMES

Guiding Principles

1. Everyone has a story
2. The news should be free for all to enjoy
3. Good news beats bad news
4. A Newspaper should be a community effort (contribute to your local paper!)
5. Newspapers document history
6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

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at a time!

STRATFORD TIMES

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Opinions

As I See It From America: How grateful and blessed I am

PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

Two words describe this past Saturday. As promised, my wife and I packed six other people into autos and set out for our first trip to Stratford in 2026. I have lamented prior that we were not able to take our winter trip this year because of the horrible weather, so this was a real treat. Our morning was full of excitement as we had two people with us that had never been to Stratford before. The discussions on what to expect were incredible and both of our new guests have wonderful theater backgrounds, so they had a lot of questions. The stage was set for Stratford to impress.

Many times, we take advantage of business and friends we know so that we are not disappointed with the outcome. From the wonderful people to the food, to the experiences walking around town, this again was the case on Saturday. There is this fantastic waitress by the name of Deb at the Arden Park who is not only

proficient in serving you some fantastic food but also in making you feel like a million bucks with her wonderful smile and service. We have known Deb for over 30 years, and she is one of the many Stratford people that we make sure we visit each time we are there. It would not be complete without a hug and a hello. She is truly special.

We are fortunate to have many friends in Stratford, both in the community and at the theatre. We were embraced with the wonderful pop-up 20-minute Acting Master Class at lunch by the incomparable Josue Laboucane, who headlined last year's *The Art of War*, and the inclusion of theatre stories and the start of the brand-new season. We also were delighted to hear Stratford stories about winter and the start of spring as well as the hellos and salutations from the wonderful people we see year after year including a very dear friend at lunch. A short welcoming conversation with Dr. Thomas Gray and his wonderful wife Linda MacDonald at the Festival The-

atre let us know that yes, we were back in the place that we love the best. It was joyous.

Of course, we did have a lot of questions on what it was like here politically and I even had a couple of questions about my column two weeks ago. I was correct to assume that our friends in Canada really do care what is happening in America, not only for the political happenings, but how it is affecting our daily lives. It is a comfort to know that there is a feeling of compassion for what is happening to us here in the United States. I could not be more grateful for the questions and concerns that we were asked during this quick Saturday stay. It told me that you all care.

On the theatre front we saw an amazing preview production of *Guys and Dolls* and we were treated to some fantastic performances. This is not a deep-thinking musical, filled with thoughtful themes and dramatic lessons for life. This is a musical where a dance hall entertainer sings of psychosomatic symptoms of a cold (or flu) as a result of being

unlucky and unfulfilled in love and a mission worker who falls for the biggest sinner of them all, a gambler. It is overflowing with amazing Donna Feore dances, tremendous vocals and beautiful sets and costumes. Performances, too numerous to mention, were top notch and incredible. Our group that came with us was totally enthralled by the experience. Stratford's *Guys and Dolls* production delivered high-quality and high-octane entertainment, not to mention the magnificent choreography and dancing. A quick shout out to Devon Michael Brown, an entertainer and dancer like no other ... are you even human?

As our Stratford Saturday drew to a close, I knew that we had to go and purchase our indulgent quantity of our favourite coffee and special treats that we can not get down here in the states. We really have no favourite grocery store in Stratford, in fact my wife and I differ on this, she prefers the big aisles and lots of choices of Zehr's and I prefer the mom-and-pop quality of the smaller

market on Downie Street, the Foodland. No matter where we shop, the service is always great and smiles and kindness abound. The canisters of coffee and the multiple treats for family members were tossed into the car and off we went towards home, knowing we would be returning next month.

On the drive home I realized just how important Stratford and the surrounding area were to my family. Now, we are introducing more friends to the area as well. The conversation was full of positive comments and discussions about the show. I am impressed by the fact that most friends that we have introduced feel the same way that we do. Stratford does not disappoint. The festival, your people, the beauty and the atmosphere are all exquisite. You are a grand treasure to our west. The two words to describe this past Saturday? How grateful and blessed I am.

Please let me know how you feel about this article. Contact me at burk.patrick1956@gmail.com.

WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH DAFFODILS AND CUCUMBERS

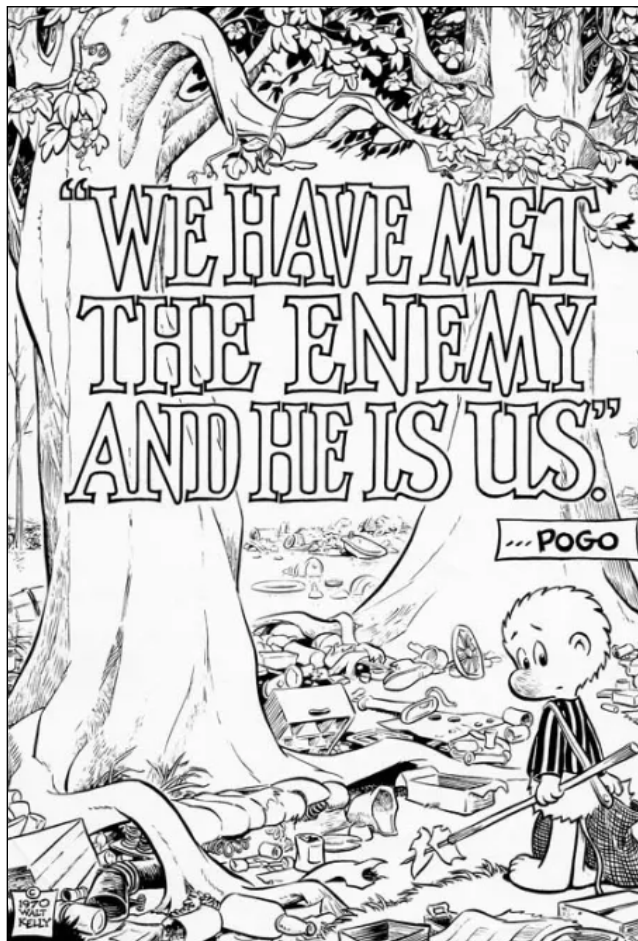
SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

Do you know the poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth? I love the line "And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils." In so many places in Stratford this spring, I see lovely gatherings of daffodils! The daffodils are here, the rosy house finches with the cheerful song have returned, and Earth Day has come and gone. This weekend the Climate Momentum Earth Day Street Party was held at Factory 163. There were many excellent exhibits, with opportunities to learn about so many steps we could take to mitigate climate change, and to adapt to the effects that will most certainly happen. The CFUW display shared a multitude of shopping tips to preserve the planet.

I thought of that as I read a news article tonight about the cost of vegetables, with a photo of an English cucumber, wrapped in plastic. I'm so naïve. When I lived on a farm for 26 years before I came to Stratford, we mostly ate what was in season. We froze much of our garden harvest. I remember mountains of green beans! Admittedly, we used plastic bags back in the day. I would try to find another solution now. We ate cabbages, potatoes, tomatoes, squash and onions, kept in the cold store under newspaper or sand for as long as they lasted. We purchased early kale from gardeners who grew it between rows of straw bales. We didn't expect cucumbers until summer – and then we delighted to have them!

Pogo says we have met the enemy, and he is us. Maybe our expectations need trimming. Instead of expecting a wide variety of vegetables from very far away, we might eat locally and seasonally as much as pos-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The classic Earth Day Pogo poster by Walt Kelly, with thanks to the Kelly estate for sharing it with the Stratford Times.

sible. That would help avoid preservative chemicals, fossil fuel to ship distant foods to us and endless plastic wrapping, from fossil fuels, which will become microplastics. We know they harm the environment and us.

But today my heart with pleasure-filled, as I watched the young folk work on Earth Day murals and write their wishes for the planet. They care so much. They care for the Earth they know, the nature where they play and watch, and the animals and flowers that fill their imaginations and spirits. Maybe we should care too – to the point of action. Voting with our food budget for local foods (and seasonal foods), and for items packaged in cardboard and glass, not plastic, would help. We don't really need cucumbers all year long ... do we?

UPDATES:

1.) Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of April 25, 2026: 431.43 ppm.

2.) The Xerces Society, promoting invertebrates (insects), has come up with a list of New Year's resolutions. The following will be the last I share from the list.

Reduce your carbon footprint by five per cent. Climate change is a threat to the environment and all the creatures that live on earth. Calculate your carbon footprint and make adjustments to lessen it by the end of the year. You can choose to adjust your thermostat, find alternative transportation, change your purchasing or eating habits, recycle and more.

Stop using pesticides altogether. Pesticides include insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and more. They are often harmful to wildlife. Embrace the natural world.

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

Opinions

Stratford is an experiment and every generation gets one decision that defines it – this is yours

JARED RITZ

Guest Columnist

Full disclosure before I say anything else: Robert Ritz is my dad.

A few weeks ago he came to visit me for a week at my home near Portland, Ore. The first thing he asked for was a small desk set up in my living room so he could work. I watched him for days – blueprints spread out, AutoCAD open, sketches on the side, phone calls with PCL, the whole thing. I watched a 40-plus-year architect, almost in his 70s, hunched over a project he is not being paid for, on vacation, in his son's living room, problem-solving the Grand Trunk site like the fate of his hometown depended on it.

Honestly? I hadn't really looked at the GTR website or the plan until a few days ago. When I finally sat down with it, my reaction was: oh my. This is real. This is serious. This is something that deserves more than a polite hearing and a procedural shrug.

And of course he's obsessed. Anyone who has ever built anything great was obsessed. That's the cost of admission. Before every big decision he leans on a test he stole straight from Rotary – the Four-Way Test:

Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

I'd argue this project, more than any other in front of council right now, has been built around exactly those four questions.

So here is what I want to say to council, to the mayor, to the committees, to the consultants and to the citizens of Stratford watching this play out:

Stratford is an experiment. It always has been. The minute you stop treating it like one, you lose the only thing that makes it special.

When councillors push back and say "We're a town of 35,000 people" as if that settles the matter, I want to gently point something out. Nothing about Stratford makes sense if you compare it to other towns of 35,000 people. If Stratford were just another small Ontario city, you wouldn't have one of the most renowned theatres in the world. You wouldn't have a parks system that visitors fly across continents to walk through. You wouldn't have just opened a \$100 million Tom Patterson Theatre in 2022 – funded largely by private donors who believe in this place. You wouldn't have a downtown that punches at 10 times its weight class.

Stratford is an outlier. Malcolm Gladwell wrote a whole book about places and people like this – Outliers – making the case that extraordinary things don't come from average circumstances, they come from unusual ones. Stratford should have written the foreword. Because almost everything we love about this city was built by people who refused to accept the small-town math.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Grand Trunk renewal project is a keystone development for the city — and guest columnist Jared Ritz urges council to have reverence for the site and Stratford's placemaking history.

And here is the part most people skip: none of it would exist without the building council is now debating tearing down.

The Grand Trunk shops came to Stratford in 1870 because a railway director named T.H. Roberts came to scout locations and fell in love with the mayor's daughter, Sarah Daly. He married her. The shops followed. A love affair built this town. By the 1940s those shops employed roughly 40 per cent of the entire local workforce. Then in 1951, CNR announced the shops were being phased out. Stratford was facing economic collapse.

That is the moment Tom Patterson – a local journalist, no theatre experience whatsoever – pitched a Shakespeare festival to save the town. The festival was incorporated Oct. 31, 1952. On July 13, 1953, Alec Guinness stepped onto a thrust stage under a canvas tent and spoke the line: "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York."

Read that sequence again. The building begat the crisis. The crisis begat the festival. The festival begat modern Stratford. Every theatre, every restaurant, every B-and-B, every walking path along the Avon, every dollar of tourism revenue traces back to a chain of events that began inside the walls of the very superstructure some councillors are now describing as too costly to keep.

Tear it down and you are not just losing a building. You are erasing the artifact at the centre of your own origin story.

Now, I am not asking council to write a blank cheque. I am not even asking council to vote tonight. I am asking for something much simpler.

Get obsessed. Even 10 per cent as obsessed as my dad has been on this. Your taxpayers, your constituents, your kids and grandkids deserve it. They deserve

more than a 10-minute presentation slot. They deserve real town halls, real debate, real time to look at the numbers when they come back, real space for other voices – not just Robert's – to be heard. They deserve to have those four Rotary questions asked of every option on the table, not just his.

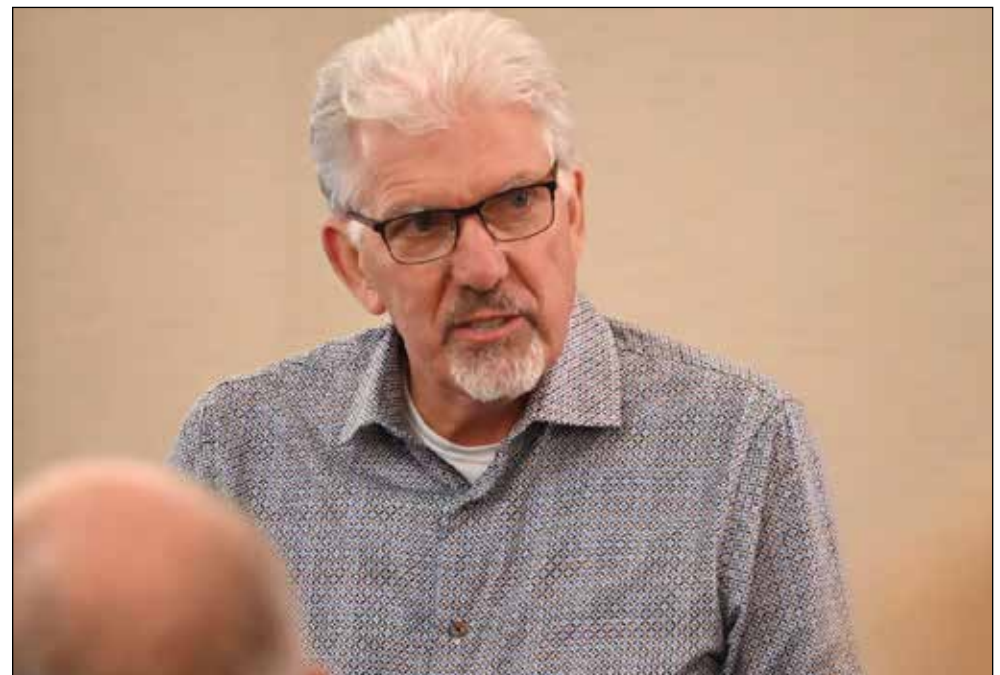
There are five months left in this council term. Five months. A decision this large, this irreversible, with this much heritage and money and identity on the line, should not be rushed through in the back half of a term by anyone – no matter how well-intentioned. The democratic process exists for exactly this kind of moment. Let the next council, with full citizen engagement around an active election, weigh in. Once the building is gone, it is gone. There is no

version two.

Stratford was not built by consultants. The parks system was not built by consultants. The Festival Theatre was not built by consultants. The shops themselves were not built by consultants. They were built by local citizens with knowledge, conviction, and the willingness to do something nobody else their size would dare try.

Dare greatly. Continue the experiment. Set ego aside. This project deserves a Stratford plan for Stratford – born here, debated here, decided here, by the people who actually have to live with it.

The best is genuinely yet to come. But only if we keep choosing to be the place that bets on big ideas instead of the place that paves them over.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Jared Ritz's father, Robert Ritz, presented his plan to Stratford city council on April 20. Robert's plan has received a tremendous amount of support from the public, though councillors were concerned over scale and cost.

COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathawy Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford
Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games.
Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

CROKINOLE

Every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1-4 p.m. Ladies and gentlemen, fingers or sticks. For more information call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford

Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

We are night sky enthusiasts. Everyone is welcome to attend. See our website at <https://stratfordastronomy.com/> or call 519-275-4472 for more information

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from 2-4pm at Infinity Dance 451 Erie St. Next meeting May 24. Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/person, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamangement.com

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday May 4, 2026, 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.
Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford
Featured Presentation: “Weeds and Wings: Adversaries and Allies in your Garden”, Amy Turnbull, London Middlesex Master Gardener
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, May 5, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.
93 Morgan St., Stratford
Speaker – Kathy and Bonnie from Wellspring, Stratford
Learn about the support and services for Cancer patients and loved ones. Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

ANNUAL PLANT SALE

Stratford District Secondary School
428 Forman Ave Parking near the water tower.
Saturday, May 9; 9 a.m. -12 p.m.
Cash/cheque only. Come and support your local student growers!

ELECTRIC VEHICLE WORKSHOP

Tuesday May 12; 7-9 p.m.
Stratford Agriplex 353 McCarthy Rd

Hosted by the Energy & Environment Committee of the City of Stratford

Bring your questions about EVs. There will be a panel discussion about rebates, costs, charging, range and environmental impacts. Make your next car electric and join the future.
Everyone welcome.

SPRING TEA & BAKE SALE

Sunday, May 24; 2 – 4 pm.
Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford
Enjoy dainties, finger sandwiches, tea and great conversation. There are door prizes, surprise prizes and our spring silent auction concludes that day. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for kids 12 and under. Call Anne 519-301-0914, Linda 519-276-7959 or the Legion Branch 519-271-4540 to reserve yours today.

HAVE AN UPCOMING EVENT?
Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com or call 519-655-2341

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.
Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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- The Community Calendar is for non-profit organizations to promote their free admission events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as a phone number, email address or website.
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
 - Coming Events Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
 - Coming Events Boxed Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
 - Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

STRATFORD TIMES

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Strickland's Toyota
Fix Auto
Stratford KIA
Expressway Ford
McDonald's - Erie St
Tim Hortons - Erie St
Stratford Mazda
7-Eleven - Erie St
Joe's Diner
The Urban Barber
Erie Convenience
Mr. Sub
Balzacs Coffee
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario
New Orleans Pizza

Zehrs
Food Basics
Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier
Festival Marketplace
Stratford Nissan
Stratford Subaru
Stratford Honda
Quality Festival Inn
McDonald's - Ontario St.
Papa Johns
Fore Everyone Golf
WalMart
Stratford Motor Products
A&W
Toner & Ink Shop
Rutherford Funeral Home

Athens Greek Restaurant
Stratford Legion
Gino's Pizza
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Pick Up Locations

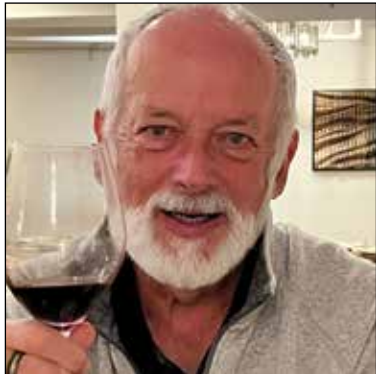
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Thoughtful walking in Ottawa



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

There are thousands of destinations we can visit that offer lovely places to stroll. Beaches, boardwalks, elegant main streets, the works. But there is something unique and special about walking in our nation's capital because in Ottawa, while there is certainly lots to be seen, there is even more to be thought about.

On our recent visit to Ottawa, we walked the route from the National War Museum to the National Gallery of Canada (that's mostly along Wellington Street) and found many reasons to pause and ponder.

I wrote, a few months ago, about the war museum, so I won't go there again this time, but just across the street from the war museum is a thoughtful and sobering monument – the National Holocaust Monument, which is entitled “Landscape of Loss, Memory and Survival.”

The monument is relatively new, designed by a team led by architect Daniel Libeskind and inaugurated in 2017 to mark one of the most horrific chapters in human history, the mass extermination of six million Jews and many, many others. When we visited, we were the only people in the place, which seems a shame and, yet, felt like an honour.



Ottawa's memorial to the Holocaust.

It's a powerful place that tells its somber story in art, word and images. The experience of visiting the space reminded me of my visits to Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, where everyone leaves in contemplative silence.

As you walk from there up Wellington, toward the Parliament buildings, you pass the Supreme Court of Canada. Frankly, that might have not meant a lot to me in past years, but in these days, when we hear far too much about the blatant politicization and manipulation of the U.S. Supreme Court, it was worth a moment or two to stand and think about our much more objectively fair and just system, and to feel thankful for the sane and equitable way our country is run.

There is a plaque mounted near the street that points out “The Supreme Court is independent and impartial ... and makes sure laws are applied clearly and fairly across

the country. Also, it is the only supreme court in the world that is both bilingual ... and bijural (hears and decides on cases from two legal traditions, common law and civil law).” As you read that plaque, you are standing in Ontario, with a primarily English and common law tradition, but just behind the Supreme Court building, across the Ottawa River, is Québec, with its primarily French and civil law tradition. The twin foundations of our nation.

The other thing you will notice on the plaque is that among the nine Supreme Court judges are five women, a proportion you are unlikely to find in most countries in the world. And one of them, the Honourable Michelle O'Bonsawin, is also co-president of the World Assembly of Indigenous Judges. All of this should leave thoughtful Canadians feeling proud.

From the Supreme Court, let's

take a two-minute detour onto Sparks Street to honour a true Canadian hero. In a rather unlikely retail-oriented spot, considering all of the statuary that dots the Parliament Hill region, is a fine sculpture of Terry Fox honouring the heroism and sacrifice of that great Canadian.

And speaking of statues and Parliament Hill, visitors can spend hours contemplating all of the history commemorated in the statues around our still-shrouded, under-continual-renovations Parliament buildings. There are many inspiring sculptures here – I particularly like the statue of Sir Wilfrid Laurier gazing at the iconic hotel that bears his name!

But a more recent addition caught our attention – the War of 1812 Monument entitled “Triumph Through Diversity.” Designed by Adrienne Alison, it was created and installed in 2014, marking the 200th anniversary of the end of the

War of 1812-1814. That war took place because the United States launched an expansionist effort to take over what is now Canada, but the American effort was rebuffed. Just this morning, I read that Prime Minister Mark Carney has a small figure of War of 1812 hero Sir Isaac Brock on his desk as a constant reminder that Canada can and must stand strong in the face of threats from south of the border.

The War of 1812 Monument bears these words on a bronze plaque: “Fought on land and water, the War of 1812 helped shape the future of Canada. To defeat the American invasion, people from various walks of life came together – men and women; military personnel and civilians; English, French and Aboriginal peoples.” The impressive monument reflects that Canadian diversity.

That's just a few of the thoughtful pauses available on an Ottawa stroll. There is much more – the eternal flame on the grounds of Parliament and the temporary home of the Canadian Senate that was once an opulent railway station (and the Famous Five “Women Are Persons” monument that is now located there). There's also the historic Rideau Canal, with its system of locks, and at the far end of this walk, the National Gallery of Canada, our finest repository of great art.

My online map says the walk from the war museum to the National Gallery takes 40 minutes. Actually, it can take you through centuries, and into multiple worlds of contemplation and gratitude.

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



The home of Canada's Supreme Court.



The Terry Fox statue on Sparks Street.

Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

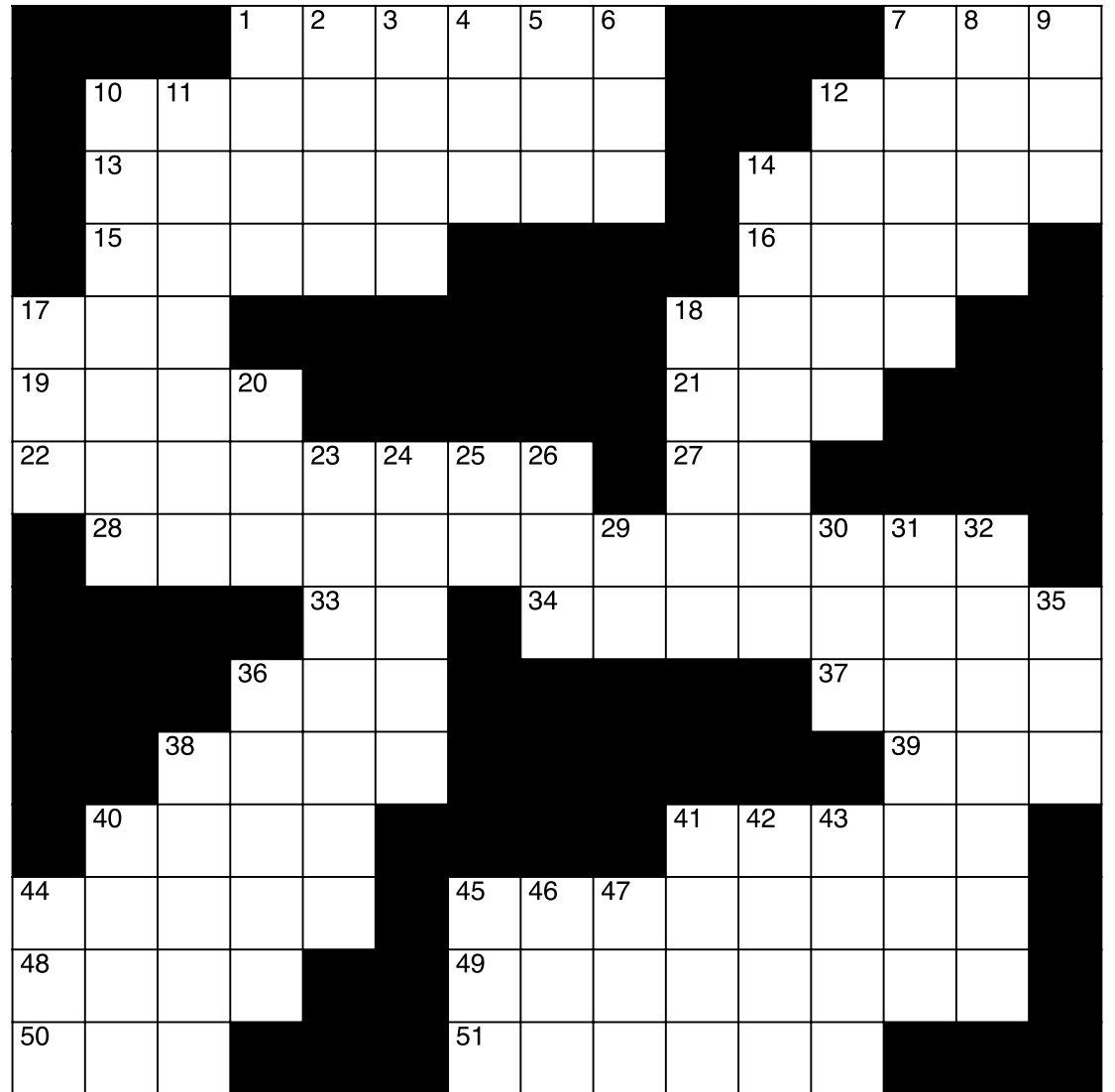
- 1. Large dung beetle
- 7. Gambling game __-lo
- 10. Further along
- 12. Type of tobacco
- 13. Looked for
- 14. Silk fabric
- 15. Computer method to solve equations
- 16. As fast as can be done (abbr.)
- 17. Tear
- 18. Brews
- 19. "Famous" cookie baker
- 21. Women's Army Corps
- 22. Front parts of an animal
- 27. It's causing quite a stir
- 28. Beloved March holiday
- 33. 12th letter of the Greek alphabet
- 34. More impudent
- 36. Indicates center
- 37. Young woman (French)
- 38. A cause of distress
- 39. Santa's helper
- 40. Hillside
- 41. Many wombs
- 44. Is afraid of
- 45. Popular baked goods ingredient
- 48. Popular computers
- 49. Conceiving of
- 50. Google certification (abbr.)
- 51. Sturdy

- 4. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!
- 5. Consumed
- 6. A place to sleep
- 7. Small seeds
- 8. Legendary law man Wyatt
- 9. Female sheep
- 10. Indigenous peoples of eastern Siberia
- 11. A place ships dock
- 12. Reciprocal of sine
- 14. Discomfort
- 17. British Air Aces
- 18. Exit sleep
- 20. Solar energetic particle
- 23. Plagues characterized by starvation
- 24. Short musical composition
- 25. Trauma center
- 26. Habitual twitching
- 29. A place where checks are exchanged (abbr.)
- 30. Decameter
- 31. Hinged surface in a wing
- 32. Shouting
- 35. Sports official
- 36. Volcanic craters
- 38. Supportive device
- 40. It's part of a rosary
- 41. Two-toed sloth
- 42. Body art
- 43. Let out
- 44. Foreign medical graduate
- 45. Nonprofit journalism organization (abbr.)

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Peruse quickly
- 2. Automobiles
- 3. Razorbill genus

- 46. Couples say it
- 47. Bird's beak



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Pet of the week



MABLE

Mable is a sweet-but-shy little calico cat looking for her fur-ever home. With your patience and your kindness, Mable's affectionate, gentle heart is ready for love and companionship. She enjoys soft pets and peaceful environments, where she can slowly blossom and show you her personality at her own pace. Mable is looking for a family with a quiet home that will be understanding of her worries, and support her with the space and time she needs to fully settle in to her new home.

If you think Mable could be your perfect cat companion, apply to adopt her today at kwsphumane.ca



Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

OBITUARY

**KERRY ANN MCMANUS**

Kerry Ann McManus passed away peacefully surrounded by love on April 14, 2026, in her 57th year, after a courageous battle with cancer.

Kerry was an extraordinary woman whose life was shaped by compassion, curiosity, and an unwavering commitment to learning and service. Born and raised in Stratford, she spent most of her life deeply rooted in the community she loved.

A lifelong learner and dedicated educator, Kerry lived her career teaching in Stratford, where she inspired students not only through knowledge, but through empathy, curiosity and care. She began her teaching career working with young offenders in Montreal, (an experience she remembered with great affection), before returning to Stratford where she taught French, Mathematics and Civics, as well as carrying out the role of teacher-librarian. Kerry had a gift for creating spaces where students felt welcome and valued, helping to make the school library a warm and inclusive place where young people could feel at home. Her students and colleagues will miss her deeply, and her impact as a teacher will continue to be felt in the lives she helped shape.

Kerry's passion for learning was reflected in her own educational journey. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Guelph and later completed her Master of Education degree at York University. Learning was not only her profession, but a guiding principle of her life.

Community involvement was central to Kerry's life. She was actively engaged with Care Stratford and devoted herself to environmental initiatives, homeless advocacy, and efforts to improve indoor air quality for vulnerable and at-risk populations. Kerry had a gift for seeing both the human story and broader systems, and she worked tirelessly to improve both.

Her commitment to public service extended naturally into politics. Kerry brought that same dedication forward when she ran as a New Democratic Party candidate in a federal election, motivated by a belief that civic engagement and collective action could lead to meaningful change. Later Kerry served two terms on Stratford City Council, where she was known for her thoughtful leadership, principled voice, and deep care for community well-being.

Outside of her professional and public life, Kerry embraced life with creativity and warmth. She loved music and played the piano, enjoyed sports and time outdoors, and cherished gatherings with family and friends. She was known for her kindness, her welcoming smile, and her remarkable ability to bring people together.

Throughout her cancer journey, Kerry was surrounded by a remarkable outpouring of love that reflected the life she had lived. Friends, family, colleagues, students and community members walked alongside her and her husband John; offering prayers, messages, visits, meals and an unwavering presence. In her final weeks at Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth, that love together with the compassionate care and support of the hospice staff filled the room and provided comfort beyond words. The family is deeply grateful for the dignity, kindness, and care shown to Kerry during this time.

Kerry is lovingly remembered by her husband and the love of her life, John Hishon; her father, Barry McManus; and her brothers, Brad McManus (Yvonne) and Kirk McManus (Linda). She was predeceased by her mother, Barbara McManus. Kerry will also be deeply missed by her many nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts, uncles, extended family, and a wide circle of friends, colleagues and community members whose lives she touched in profound and lasting ways.

While John mourns the loss of his beloved wife, this is a shared loss. Kerry's love was expansive and generous, and her absence is felt across the many communities she cared for and served. Kerry's life and contributions have been remembered with deep appreciation by the Stratford community she served.

Kerry McManus will be remembered for her kindness, intellect, creativity and integrity, and the quiet, powerful way she made the world better simply by being herself. Her legacy lives on in the people she taught, the causes she championed, the family and friends who have benefitted from her warmth, compassion and care, and the love she shared so freely.

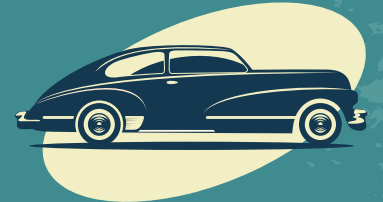
Visitation will be held Friday May 1st from 1-4PM at Avondale United Church, a celebration of Kerry's life will be held in the same location on Saturday, May 2nd, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Rotary Hospice Stratford (www.rotaryhospice.ca), The Local Community Food Centre (www.thelocalcfc.org), or Doctors without Borders (www.doctorswithoutborders.ca), directly, or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services (www.jarfh.com)

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