

STRATFORD TIMES

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Property owners want better parking downtown

AMANDA NELSON
Times Reporter

Downtown property owners are calling for adjustments to Stratford's parking programs to better meet the needs of residents living in the core.

Earlier this week, Rebecca Cheney, property owner and landlord at 56-62 Wellington St., raised concerns in an email to city staff about recent changes to the Erie Street parking program. While she acknowledged progress, she said the current approach does not fully address the realities faced by downtown residents.

"I have been advocating for a workable downtown residential parking solution for years," Cheney wrote. "I was encouraged when the Erie Lot overnight permit program was introduced, and I want to acknowledge the work that has gone into getting it this far. However, the current program does not solve the problem that downtown residents are actually facing."

Council approved updates to the Erie Street parking program at its Jan. 26 meeting, including an increase in available monthly permits and the introduction of a new overnight parking pilot.

The number of monthly permits for the Erie Street lot increased from 24 to 35. The overnight pilot includes five monthly overnight permits for downtown residents and 10 daily overnight permits, available on a first-come, first-served basis.

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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Happy St. Paddy's Day! Meg Riley belts out a tune as Brady Lewis, the other half of acoustic band MeganBrady, accompanies during a performance at Gilly's Pubhouse on March 17. Downtown Stratford was painted green as droves of locals and plenty of music filled area restaurants and pubs.

A conversation with Colm Feore, voice of Oscar-winning short *The Girl Who Cried Pearls*

MEGAN SMITH-HARRIS
Guest Contributor

On March 15, *The Girl Who Cried Pearls*, a Canadian animated short film directed by Chris Lavis and Maciek Szczerbowski and available through the National Film Board (NFB), won the Best Animated Short Film award at the 98th Academy Awards. Stratford's Colm Feore narrated and voiced the film. He sat down with Stratford

Film Festival director Megan Smith-Harris for a Q-and-A about the project just a day before the Oscars. Below is an excerpt from the conversation, edited for clarity and brevity.

... I know that the filmmakers had you on their radar for many, many years ... How did they approach you about the role?

That never occurred to me. It never appeared that way

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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A conversation with Colm Feore, voice of Oscar-winning short *The Girl Who Cried Pearls*

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

to me, and it certainly didn't reflect itself in the fee, so I'm not sure what they're talking about, but I was delighted to be approached. I got a reach out at some point, I guess now it's a couple of years ago, to consider voicing this. And so they sent me the show in its rough way, put together in this rough way, representing years of work. And I just thought it was fantastic. I thought it was a fabulous piece. I thought it was beautifully done. It also was ... Montreal, where you and I both gone to school. It was all of that kind of snowy, horrible, beautiful Montreal weather and geography ... That's why I thought, "Oh, I know that. But I know what that sounds like; I know what that guy might sound like." And so consequently, I was very excited to participate.

How did you approach your preparation for this role?

... This show is no different than if I was doing *King Lear* or *Richard III* or anything else I would do, and the reason for that is, in fact it's even more important when you're talking about something from the NFB, which is going to live forever, right? ...

You have a responsibility to bring everything that you know how to do. I have never felt that just showing up and reading a cold thing would be of value or do justice to my talent and what the folks who were paying needed. And so we meet somewhere in the middle. I do an enormous amount of work so that we can sit and have a wonderful time – and we did. You know, unlike AI I have more nuance, more experience, and I'm hoping that that will allow me to keep working for another year or two, though I'm not so sure.

What was your takeaway from this film?

Well, first of all, I think what has to be recognized is how unspeakably difficult it is to make such a thing. I've always been a huge fan of things like ... animation, *Wallace and Gromit* and all those wonderful kinds of things. So this was an easy sell for me, but it's difficult to explain to an audience that I was the last two per cent of the 98 per cent of the work that went into this, that it took an enormous team of people years to get 17 minutes of something this extraordinary and beautiful. That's been recognized at the Oscars. (It's) enormously gratifying

for the boys and for me and everybody involved, I hope. But by golly, it's hard to do. Now, what do we get when we do all that hard work? If it's done properly, there's something that repays a second, a third and a fourth, viewing – stuff you never saw, stuff you never heard ... There was just so much to look into and to mine and to research and to offer that I think it repays, as I say, many, many, many viewings. And so it is my hope and why I invested so much in it, that it will have a real life, that it will be one of those touchstones of their work ...

(The filmmakers) will be at the Oscars tomorrow on the 15th of March. Are you going?

I have just come back from Los Angeles from the Screen Actors Guild Awards, where me and my colleagues were nominated as Best Ensemble for a show called *Landman*, Billy Bob Thornton and Sam Elliott, etc. Alas, we lost to *The Pitt*, which was – we were robbed, but we were there and it was a very starry affair. It was fun, but it was, it was very, like, hyper glamorous. I mean, everybody, there was somebody.

Do you have a stylist?

No, I had a friend help me. And I tied my

own bow tie and I did my own ... you know, I curled my eyelashes and away I went. Everybody else had an army of people. The truth of the matter is Paramount Plus flew us in because they had a huge interest in promoting the show and all that. The National Film Board of Canada is playing with your money – and here's to say, I must point out *The Girl Who Cried Pearls* is already yours. So you must please go see it, watch it again for free because you've already paid for it – but they don't have a lot of extra money kicking around. And so although they were prepared to offer me a ticket in the mezzanine and a ride to the venue, I live some considerable 3,500 kilometers from the venue ... You know what, I'm busy here trying to help my genius wife direct and choreograph two shows at the same time. So I have stuff to do and I will be closely watching on television.

*The full conversation with Feore, edited by Bill Harris with clips from the National Film Board (NFB), can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1DQuZD-7fCI/>. To watch *The Girl Who Cried Pearls* in its entirety, visit <https://www.nfb.ca/film/the-girl-who-cried-pearls/>.*

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Warriors investigating racially motivated incident at playoff game

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors are investigating an incident at a recent playoff game.

On March 16, racially motivated language was directed by an attendee in the stands at an opposing player during Game 3 against the London Nationals at the William Allman Arena. After the incident, security was called and the fan was removed from the premises.

"We want to be unequivocally clear: there is no place in our game, our arena or our community for racist or discriminatory language of any kind," a statement from the team reads. "This behaviour does not reflect the values of our organization, our players or the vast majority of our fans."

While Nick Aroutzidis, president of the organization, told the Times he was not aware of the incident when it happened, he was informed by Jason Clarke, director

of hockey operations, the next morning. He reiterated the Warriors' statement, calling it "unacceptable for our club," and confirmed that they have spoken with Nationals' ownership to express their regret.

In its own statement, the Nationals thanked the Warriors for its "prompt outreach and professional handling of the situation."

"Stratford is a longstanding and respected organization within our league, and we value the relationship between our teams, players and communities," the team's statement said. "It is important to recognize that the actions of one individual do not reflect an entire organization, its players or its fanbase."

Aroutzidis said that there isn't more information to be shared at this time, as the organization is conducting an investigation with arena staff and league officials to review the incident.

"We sincerely apologize to the player, their team, and their organization for what occurred," the Warriors' statement said. "... The Stratford Warriors are committed to fostering a respectful, inclusive and safe environment for everyone involved in our game."

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Downtown property owners seek improvements to residential parking options

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Under the program, overnight permit holders can park from 6 p.m. to 9 a.m., aligning with the start of paid parking hours.

Cheney and other downtown property owners say the program is a step forward but does not yet reflect how residents use parking on a daily basis.

“The overnight-only structure (6 p.m. to 9 a.m.) does not reflect the reality of how people live,” she wrote. “Downtown residents work day shifts, evening shifts and rotating hours. They want the ability to leave their car parked and walk to work, to errands or to enjoy the very downtown that the City of Stratford is working hard to keep vibrant. The current permit forces residents to either move their vehicle by 9 a.m. or pay for additional daytime parking – making it functionally useless for a

large portion of the people it was intended to serve.”

Cheney said parking challenges have had an impact on tenant retention, including former tenant Adam Wadud, who accumulated \$1,650 in parking tickets between December and March last year, during a period when winter conditions made parking in the Cooper Lot difficult.

“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 wrote in an email to the Times. “I feel bad for tenants with kids who have to make that commute.”

Wadud said the situation contributed to his decision to move out of the downtown core.

“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.”

Cheney is asking council to revisit the program and consider options similar to the York Street parking lot, which allows downtown residents to purchase a pass for 24-hour access.

“I understand that Stratford is a celebrated tourist destination and that the city has a legitimate interest in ensuring visitors have access to downtown parking during the day. That is a reasonable priority,” she

wrote. “But I would ask council to consider this: tourists visit Stratford. Residents live here, pay taxes here and sustain the downtown economy every single day of the year – not just during festival season.”

The Times reached out to city staff, who say a comprehensive downtown parking study is almost underway, led by external consultants, to better understand both short- and long-term parking needs in the core.

The study, the first since 2016, will examine changing demand, including the increase in residential development, and help inform future parking programs and planning decisions.

While no immediate changes to the Erie Street program are planned, staff say the findings are expected to guide improvements to parking management in the downtown core once complete.

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Police investigating B-and-E at Mobil Gas Bar

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Stratford Police Service is currently investigating a break and enter that occurred at the Mobil Gas Bar located at 865 Ontario St.

Shortly before 1 a.m., police received a report of multiple alarm hits at the gas bar. Officers arrived on scene to find that the main door to the gas bar had been smashed and items from inside had been stolen.

Police later obtained video surveillance from the store, which showed a black pickup truck with four occupants arriving at the store at 12:45 a.m.

One of the occupants was observed using a sledgehammer to smash the glass door while two others entered and cleared the shelves of a large number of products.

The suspects left the store and are believed to have driven east out of the parking lot on Ontario Street heading out of the city.

At this time the only description available is four individuals, believed to be male, dressed all in black wearing masks.

Police are asking for anyone with information regarding this matter to call 519-271-4141 ext. 2, or to contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or www.p3tips.com.



(TIMES FILE PHOTO)

The Stratford Police Service is asking anyone with information about a recent break and enter at the Mobil Gas Bar on Ontario Street to come forward.

Area unemployment remains lowest in province at 5.1%

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

In February, the unemployment rate in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula economic region increased by 0.2 percentage points to 5.1 per cent yet remained the lowest unemployment rate in the province. Meanwhile, the provincial unemployment rate also increased 0.2 percentage points this month to 7.3 per cent, both unadjusted for seasonality. Employment in the region decreased by 3,300 (-1.9 per cent) in February, with loss in both full-time employment (-1.5 per cent; -2,100) and part-time employment (-3.3 per cent; -1,300).

In February, the region's overall population aged 15 or over increased by 300 whereas the labour force size decreased by 3,200 people. The number of people not in the labour force in the region decreased by 3,400. This change reduced the region's participation rate by 1.2 per cent percentage points to 62.3 per cent. Employment in the region increased in the services-producing sector (+0.8 per cent; +900) and decreased in the goods-producing sector (-6.4 per cent; -4,200).

Overall employment in the services-producing sector saw an increase of 0.8 per cent (+900 people) in February. Transportation and warehousing experienced the largest percentage growth (+400, +12.1 per cent) in employment followed by finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing (+400, +7.3 per cent), wholesale

and retail trade (+1,600, +6.7 per cent) and health care and social assistance (+1,100, +4.1 per cent). On the other hand, professional, scientific and technical services experienced the biggest percentage decrease in employment (-1,300, -12.7 per cent), followed by other services, except public administration (-1,000, 9.4 per cent) and public administration (-200, -4.5 per cent).

The goods-producing sector saw a decrease in overall employment numbers in February (-6.4 per cent; -4,200). Gains were experienced in manufacturing (+1.8 per cent, +300) and utilities (+0.8 per cent, +100), whereas losses were seen in agriculture (-18 per cent, -2,000) and construction (-9.7 per cent, -2,400).

"We continue to experience a very low unemployment rate for our region but continue to see positive signs for our workforce," said Dana Soucie, executive director for the Four County Labour Market Planning Board, in its monthly update. "Gains in employment are being seen in sectors that have previously seen decreases, which is a positive sign of their recovery. The decreases in goods producing sector align with seasonal trends but may be a bit higher due to the current confidence levels in the market."

Current job postings for the Bruce, Grey, Huron, Perth region have increased overtime since the pandemic and can be found at www.connect2JOBS.ca. The current number of job postings currently exceeds 1,600.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Progress continues to be made on the new peopleCare long-term care home on Vivian Line on the north-east side of Stratford. With milder temperatures, much of the work is keeping pace with the date for move in of future long-term residents.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What plant is traditionally worn on St. Patrick's Day to represent Irish heritage?
2. What animal is known to eat magic mushrooms?
3. According to legend, what did St. Patrick drive out of Ireland?
4. Claude AI was created by what company?
5. What city dyes its river green every year for St. Patrick's Day?
6. What historic protest in Boston Harbor became a key symbol of colonial resistance to British taxation?
7. What Irish rock band released the famous album *The Joshua Tree*?
8. Who won best actor at the 2026 Oscars?
9. What Irish musical instrument is considered a national symbol?
10. What might you find at the end of a rainbow?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

Before it was the Festival City it was the Classic City – find out why in new e-book from Streets of Stratford creators

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

From the Festival City to the Railway City to the Classic City, Stratford's history goes back far – far beyond it was even a city at all.

Now, residents can learn more about its founders, settlers and builders in *Creators of the Classic City*, a free e-book by Paul Wilker and Gord Conroy that chronicles its city-builders.

Wilker and Conroy are known for their popular Streets of Stratford website. The website continues the work Stanford Dingman did in the early 1980s to tell the stories behind the names of city's streets. Through the assistance of the Stratford-Perth Archives and many other historically-minded residents, Wilker and Conroy have collected a database of streets and the stories behind their names.

This most recent publication was a direct result of the Streets of Stratford. As Wilker said, he had a plethora of material from updating the website since it started in 2021.

"Because I had all that material, it was fairly easy for me to write this book



A sketch of the Shakespeare Inn, Stratford's first permanent building, done by Bruce Stapleton for the 100th anniversary of the inn. Although it did not survive, the red-brick building on the corner of Ontario and Downie Streets (that's home to Pazzo Pizzeria and Café Bouffon) stands in its place.

about people who played a part in the growth of Stratford," Wilker shared. "And I tried to start it at the beginning,

where the surveyors came in, and then the settlers came in, and then furniture factories started to grow, and then the railway shops. And of course, following that was the Shakespeare festival. So over the time period, there were close to 170 people that I've identified as people who actually built something or contributed something to Stratford that caused it to grow to where it is today."

While today Stratford is known as the Festival City, its first nickname came from prominent merchant James Corcoran. Following its incorporation as a city in 1885, the local press of the day made a public call for a moniker and Corcoran's suggestion stuck.

"When they chose that nickname, there were a lot of theatres in Stratford," Wilker explained, "and there was a real focus on theatre and the arts and music, even at that time. So I think that's why they thought it should be called the Classic City."

"When the first city hall was built, it was well before the city was named Stratford, it had a music hall in it, and it was quite elaborate in the old city hall, which burned down. There's quite a number of bands and choirs that were in the city at the time. I don't know that's for sure, but I just assume that that's why they called it the Classic City."

While 1885 could be considered the start of Stratford, there are many other dates in contention. In 1827 the Canada Company sent surveyors to the area with the express purpose to establish townsites. They established a road that crossed two small streams, recognizing "waterpower potential." By 1832, the road was wide and strong enough for wagons and a dam and sawmill were

built on the "Little Thames," as the Avon River was known then. That road is now known as Huron Street today.

That same year, another year that could be considered the start to Stratford, William Beauchamp Sargent built the first permanent building in the settlement, the Shakespeare Hotel. While it was a typical two-storey pioneer building at the time, it burned down in 1849 and today the red-brick building on the corner of Ontario and Downie Streets (that's home to Pazzo Pizzeria and Café Bouffon) stands in its place.

Coincidentally, by 1854 that same building was operated by Corcoran, the same businessman who suggested the Classic City nickname.

The 237-page book goes from the 19th century to the 20th and represents a concerted effort from Wilker, Conroy and those that assisted them. Wilker estimated that 80 per cent of the content was found in the Streets of Stratford project, but the other 20 per cent needed to be sourced from new research – often done by talking with relatives.

"I got excellent feedback," Wilker said. "People love to talk about their ancestors and what they've done, and that was very good material. And they also provided me with pictures."

"It sounds altruistic, but I really want people in Stratford to learn about the rich history of Stratford," Wilker continued. "That's my main intent. I don't need the money, and it's been a hobby, but my real intent is that the people will have access to the story of Stratford right from essentially the beginning all the way up to today, using the settlers, founders and builders as the basis of the stories."

To view the free digital book, visit <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ypken/pqiv/>.



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Creators of the Classic City

Settlers - Founders - Builders



"Industry and Arts"

By: Paul Wilker and Gord Conroy

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Creators of the Classic City by Paul Wilker and Gord Conroy chronicles Stratford's city-builders.

SDSS Students host Sustainable Bites seminar on reducing your 'foodprint'

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Local Community Food Centre, Climate Momentum and the Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Eco-Club invite residents to explore tasty ways to shrink their foodprint and help the planet at their upcoming Sustainable Bites: Soundbytes and Samples for Reducing Your "Foodprint" seminar.

The event will take place April 8 at 7 p.m. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. at the Local Community Food Centre, 612 Erie St., Stratford.

"We wanted to help people learn what they can do to make their lives and eating habits more sustainable," said Rory Auster, a Grade 10 student. "There are going to be speakers discussing how you can incorporate sustainable eating into your everyday life."

Attendees will hear from Andrew Mavor, hospitality and tourism teacher at SDSS, as he discusses shifting perspectives toward plant-based eating.

"Andrew Mavor will be discussing the vegetable-focused plate," said Quinn Kearsley, a Grade 12 student. "So instead of focusing on the main portion of the meal being meat, his presentation is going to be really interesting because it's going to

shift our perspective into 'What are we going to have with our vegetables?'"

Erin McIntosh of McIntosh Farms will speak about using the whole animal, with a main focus on chicken and beef products.

"The evening will very much focus on vegetarianism and veganism and how shifting our attention, food-wise, to plant-based foods can offer a more local perspective and a more sustainable perspective," said Kearsley.

"However, we are also going to be having a speaker from McIntosh Farms who will discuss using all parts of the animal. It will help us think about meat production and meat use in a more sustainable way."

Amanda Propper, lead chef at the Local Community Food Centre, will discuss and present different ways to cook and prepare vegan and vegetarian meals based around chickpeas and other easily accessible and affordable foods, with a focus on food availability.

"Food availability is a big thing because transportation – let's say food is coming from the California valley, where a lot of fruits and vegetables are grown – that's going to be a lot of extra emissions to get that produce here," said Leif Wahlquist, a Grade 10 student.

"It's sometimes hard to know how to



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Students at SDSS are partnering with the Local Community Food Centre and Climate Momentum to help people better understand how to reduce their 'foodprint.' From left: Leif Wahlquist, Rory Auster and Quinn Kearsley, SDSS Eco-Club members.

help, but making a few small changes to your diet can really benefit the climate, so we wanted to show people how to do that," Wahlquist continued.

Between speakers, guests will enjoy

thoughtfully prepared samples inspired by each presentation.

Tickets are available at Eventbrite. The event is free, but a \$10 donation to the Local is encouraged at the door.

Early electric car owner donates vehicle proceeds to the Local Community Food Centre

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Malak Sidky, an early adopter of the electric car – the 755th electric vehicle sold in Ontario – recently decided to sell it through Donate A Car Canada and have the proceeds donated to the Local Community Food Centre (CFC).

In 2012, electric cars were still a novelty and Sidky said that soon after she purchased the car, she was stopped many times by curious people who wanted to know the range, whether she liked driving the car and how powerful it was. She believes the car served its purpose as a means of transportation and may even have made people more interested in being environmentally friendly.

"I'd like to think that I influenced people to think green," she said.

But like any older car, Sidky said that after the brakes failed and the estimate to fix the car was \$4,000, she decided it was time to move on and sell it. However, the resale value was not what she expected.

"It's a 13-year-old car. It needs new brakes. I can't sell it without the brakes, so I decided to see what else we could do with it," said Sidky. "The car served me well over the years and required minimal



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Malak Sidky stands with the electric car she donated through Donate A Car Canada, with the proceeds going to the Local Community Food Centre in Stratford.

maintenance. We figure the money saved on gas and oil changes more than paid off the cost of the car."

Through online searches, Sidky found www.donatecar.ca, where anyone can donate the proceeds from their used cars to a charity of their choosing.

"I was delighted to find Donate-A-Car Canada. They took the time to listen to my desire to donate the car to the Local CFC in Stratford. They took care of all the arrangements," said Sidky.

The one thing Sidky was worried about

was transportation of the used vehicle. Donate A Car Canada took care of that as well.

"The lady on the phone took all the details and then said, depending on where you live, you can drop it off or have us come and pick it up," said Sidky. "So I said, here's the thing, it doesn't have any brakes, so she actually connected me to a local tow truck company to transport the car to London, which was great."

After the car was sold at an auction house in London, Sidky was advised of

the amount received. She was then given a tax receipt, and Margaret Smart, executive director of the Local Community Food Centre, received the proceeds soon after to help support the organization.

"Every act of generosity helps build the kind of community we all want to live in," said Smart. "Malak shows up every Monday to volunteer for our community meal prep, knowing that every carrot chopped and every hour given helps meet real needs through the Local CFC. Now, by donating the proceeds from her car auction, she's found yet another way to strengthen our ability to make good food accessible to everyone in our community. Thank you, Malak!"

Although it can sometimes be hard to know how to make a difference in the community, Sidky said donating her car was one way she knew she could help.

"It was emotional for me. I loved that car, but now I know it has a new home and the charity I chose and love has money to help out," said Sidky. "The Local does phenomenal work to help the community throughout the year. I love volunteering there, so it made sense to me to help out financially as well."

To learn more about Donate A Car Canada, visit www.donatecar.ca

Community foundation funding helps tackle food insecurity across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As rising grocery prices and increasing demand for food programs place growing pressure on local organizations, the Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation is highlighting how local philanthropy is helping ensure families across the region have access to nutritious food.

During Nutrition Month in March, the foundation is drawing attention to the impact of community generosity in supporting food security initiatives throughout Stratford, St. Marys and across Perth County. In 2025 alone, the foundation directed \$82,525 in grants toward food-security initiatives, supporting 30 programs delivered by 25 local organizations across the region.

Community foundation acting executive director Rachel Smith said the rising need for food supports is being felt in communities large and small.

“Food insecurity is a growing problem. It’s not just an urban poverty problem anymore,” Smith said. “Rising grocery costs, fixed incomes – it’s being felt in schools, in senior households and in families who never imagined they would need support.”

The community foundation helps address these needs through endowment funds established by local donors. These funds generate annual grants that can respond to emerging challenges in the community.

“We have endowment funds here at the foundation that generate annual grants that can respond to emerging community needs,” Smith said. “We connect donor intent with those emerging needs.”



(STRATFORD AND PERTH COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PHOTO)

Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation acting executive director Rachel Smith and fund holder and donor Courtney Teahen recently visited Romeo Public School in Stratford to see how the community foundation’s funds are used to feed students through the school’s breakfast program.

Three of the foundation’s funds were created specifically to address food-related needs – the Chris Kurz Fund, which supports student nutrition programs; the Teahen Family Nutrition and Wellbeing Fund, which supports student nutrition and wellbeing; and the Florence Kehl Fund, which supports the Stratford House of Blessing food bank.

However, Smith said the response to growing food insecurity has extended beyond those dedicated funds.

“When our grant applications started

coming in, we actually only have three funds that go specifically to nutrition and wellbeing,” she said. “But when the fundholders saw this emerging need, that’s what became really powerful – all of those fundholders came together to respond.”

The resulting funding has supported a wide range of programs across the region, from school nutrition initiatives to community food programs.

One of the largest recipients of funding was the Ontario Student Nutrition Program, which provides breakfast and snack

programs in schools throughout Perth County, including those operated by the Avon Maitland District School Board and the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board.

“They’re really boots on the ground doing that work in all of the schools across the county,” Smith said. “They do breakfast programs and respond to family needs in the schools.”

Community foundation funding has also supported programs at the St. Marys Friendship Centre, local library food pantries in Stratford, St. Marys, Tavistock and Mitchell, and youth programming at the new North Perth Access Centre.

In some cases, the foundation has supported practical needs such as appliances used to prepare food for youth programs.

To help donors better understand the impact of their contributions, the foundation has also brought fundholders into local schools to see the programs in action.

“We went and visited the classrooms and helped with the breakfast programs, really connecting everybody to that cause and seeing their work in action,” Smith said.

She said Nutrition Month offers an opportunity to highlight both the challenges many families face and the way communities are stepping up to help.

“Food is fundamental to wellbeing,” Smith said. “The good news story here is that local generosity is stepping up in meaningful ways.”

Residents interested in supporting these efforts can learn more about creating or contributing to community foundation funds by visiting the foundation’s website, www.spcfc.ca.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Ron Bailey receives a certificate from Pat McKinna — and a standing ovation from his fellow Kiwanians — at their meeting on March 16. Bailey received the Ontario Music Festivals Association (OMFA)’s 2025 Volunteer of the Year award for his work at the annual Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts. Bailey was instrumental in stewarding the program and ushering it into the digital age, according to McKinna, who said: “At all times, he has been a poised, dedicated and articulate spokesperson for the club and its signature event ... We are indebted to Ron for his wonderfully effective leadership and delighted that the OMFA joins us in recognizing his incredible contribution.”

Prepare for Pride this May

SYDNEY GOODWIN

Stratford-Perth Pride

June is the time when people from all around the world come together to celebrate Pride and honour those who are members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the ongoing battle for equality and rights. During the month of June, we acknowledge what has been done to help the members of the community and what changes still need to be made. In June, millions show their support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in various ways, such as parades and advocacy, helping to reinforce a message of love, acceptance and pride.

Stratford-Perth Pride is gearing up for the eighth annual Perth County Pride March, taking place Sunday, May 31. This year’s march kicks off at the end of May/ the beginning of June, making sure Pride Month 2026 starts with a bang. Everyone from all walks of life is welcome to come together and join in the march which begins at the Tom Patterson Theatre, then makes its way up to Upper Queen’s Park along Lakeside Drive.

At the end of the march, participants are

welcome to stay and enjoy the festivities put together at the Stratford-Perth Pride Festival. Ally Alley is where you will be able to find community resources and local vendors. Artist Alley is where local artisan vendors will be located, selling their Pride-full handmade goods that can be sported all year long. There will be a wide array of food trucks available, so you’ll be able to grab a tasty treat while enjoying all of the festivities. The bandshell pavilion lets festival goers enjoy an afternoon filled with live music performances, captivating the audience with a lineup of both local and guest artists.

Stratford-Perth Pride is committed to providing a welcoming and open space for members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and allies. If you would like to know more about this event or are interested in what else the Stratford-Perth Pride offers, you can visit their Facebook account at Stratford-Perth Pride, their Instagram under the name @stratfordperthpride or send them an email at stratfordperthpride@gmail.com.

Editor’s note: Sydney Goodwin is a program coordinator for the Stratford-Perth Pride.

Stratford's *The Ripple Effect* to screen at Rotary International Conference in Taiwan

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

What began as a small, community-driven documentary about the Rotary Club of Stratford's Dragon Boat Festival is now headed to the largest Rotary gathering in the world.

The Ripple Effect, produced by Ballinran Entertainment in partnership with the Rotary Club of Stratford, has been selected for screening at the 2026 Rotary International Conference in Taipei, Taiwan, running June 13-17. The conference draws roughly 40,000 delegates from more than 150 countries.

"From the beginning, as the executive producer, I saw *The Ripple Effect* as more than a documentary," said Robert Ritz on behalf of the Rotary Club of Stratford. "It was an opportunity to amplify a local story that deserved to be heard far beyond Stratford.

"To now see it selected for screening in Taipei, in front of a global Rotary audience, is incredibly rewarding. Craig Thompson and his talented team brought the creative vision and storytelling expertise to make that happen, and together we've created something that reflects both our community and Rotary's global mis-

sion."

Ballinran executive producer Craig Thompson said the opportunity to screen the film in Taiwan came as a complete surprise.

After the film's premiere screening at the Tom Patterson Theatre last November, Rotary International representative Valerie Wafer approached Thompson following a panel discussion after the film's initial screening last November and expressed interest in helping expand the film's reach.

"I said to her, 'How do we get this out to a wider audience?'" Thompson recalled. "She said, 'Let me reach out to some people.'"

Initial efforts to gain exposure through Rotary's magazine were unsuccessful, but Thompson and Rotary Club of Stratford president Dan Kane were later invited to record an episode of the Rotary Voices podcast, which has an estimated global reach of about 300,000 listeners. That connection eventually led to discussions with conference organizers in Taipei.

"At first, they said the program was already locked," Thompson said. "So, I asked them, 'Have you watched the film?' They hadn't. I sent the link, and after they

saw it, they were very impressed."

Three weeks ago, organizers confirmed they would host a screening June 14 at the Friendship Hall, followed by a talkback session.

While Thompson is realistic about attendance, he said the significance lies in the global exposure.

"We're not going to get 40,000 people watching it. We might get a few hundred," he said. "This is the largest Rotary conference in the world, and Stratford and the Rotary Club of Stratford will be on the map. We just did this as a small community project, thinking it was a nice little story. But the ripple effect has gone beyond local – it's global."

Featuring many voices recognizable to Stratford audiences, the 30-minute documentary explores how the Rotary Dragon Boat Festival has raised more than \$1 million over three decades for local initiatives including hospice care, mental-health services and youth programs, while also supporting international efforts such as AquaBox water-purification kits. The film also reflects on the importance of service clubs at a time when membership is declining.

Thompson said the film resonates inter-

nationally because its themes are universal.

"Dragon boating happens all around the world," he said, "and we're living at a time when there's a lot of negativity. People are asking, 'What can we do as individuals to make a difference in our communities?' Rotary clubs everywhere will see themselves in this story."

To attend the conference and represent Stratford, Thompson will need to raise roughly \$5,000 to cover travel, accommodations and registration. Plans are underway for a local fundraising screening this spring.

"I wouldn't be jumping on a plane to Taiwan otherwise," he said, "but this is a chance to show the film and talk about Stratford to people from 150 countries. It's about discoverability – giving the film a life beyond its premiere. This is a seed we're planting."

If all goes as planned, *The Ripple Effect* may soon be screened by Rotary clubs far beyond Stratford, proving the film's title prophetic in more ways than one.

Editor's note: The author of this article was employed by Ballinran Entertainment to conduct much of the research and interviews featured in The Ripple Effect.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A screen capture from *The Ripple Effect* shows a team of racers participating in the Rotary Club of Stratford's largest annual fundraiser, the Stratford Dragon Boat Festival.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Ballinran Entertainment executive producer Craig Thompson and Robert Ritz of the Rotary Club of Stratford speak to the audience before the premier screening of *The Ripple Effect* at the Tom Patterson Theatre in Stratford Nov. 13, 2025.

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Stratford-Perth Pride launches proud community project workshop

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Stratford-Perth Pride is proud to announce the launch of the Proud Community Project, a new educational workshop initiative aimed at fostering greater understanding and inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people in rural communities. The public launch event will take place on Thursday, March 26 at 7 p.m. at Grayson Mills in Stratford.

Developed over the past year, the Proud Community Project was made possible through funding from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), a federal government department dedicated to advancing gender equality and inclusion across the country.

The initiative was created in response to feedback gathered directly from community members across Perth and Huron Counties through a series of in-person and virtual conversations, as well as an online survey.

"We developed this workshop based on community feedback and lived experiences in Perth and Huron Counties and look forward to sharing the 2SLGBTQIA+

experience with everyone. Our workshop will help the community see what they can do to make our region more welcoming and inclusive for everyone," said A.J. Ashley, who led the project over the past year.

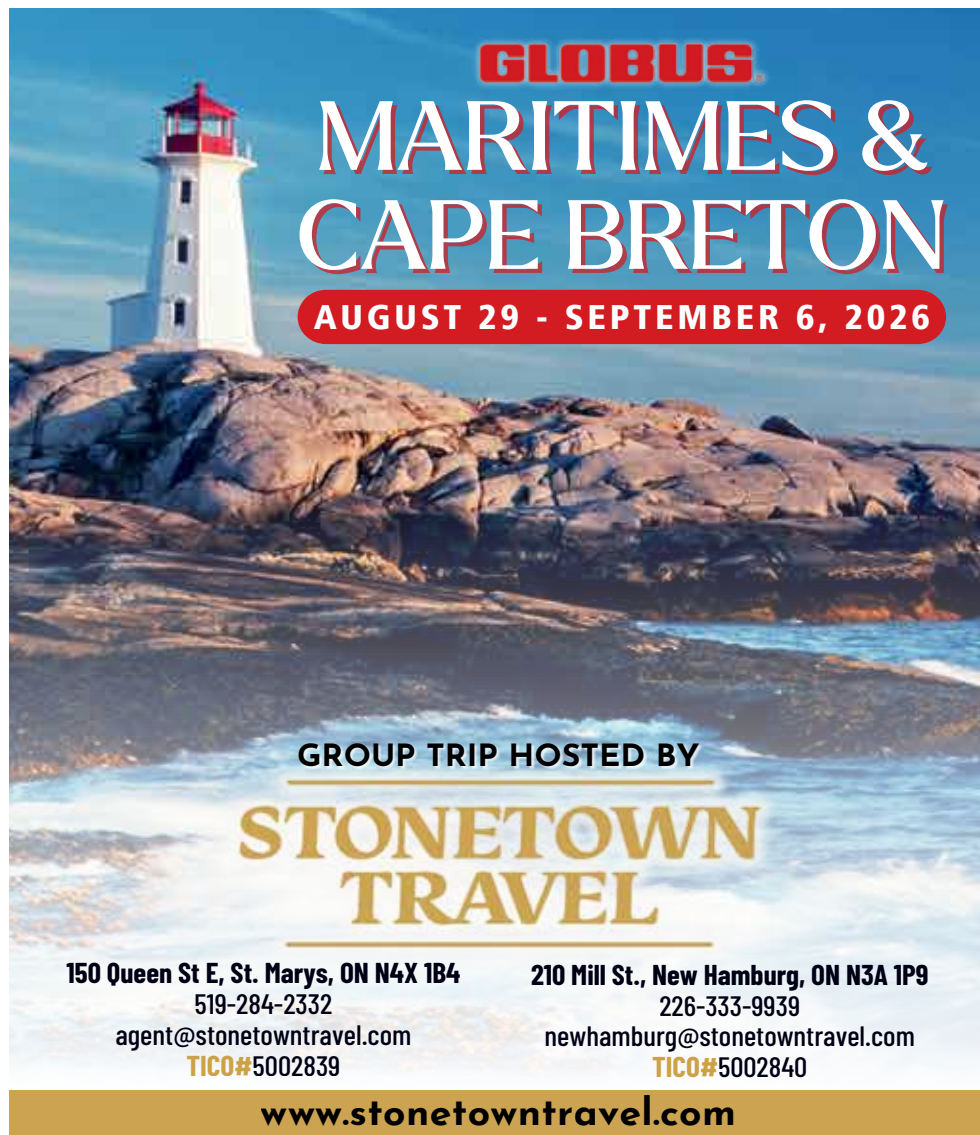
Using insights gathered from the community, Stratford-Perth Pride developed two interactive two-hour workshops designed to help participants better understand the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals in rural communities. The workshops also provide practical tools to help individuals, workplaces and organizations develop action plans to become more inclusive and supportive in their everyday practices.

The Proud Community Project Launch Event will offer attendees an opportunity to learn about the project, connect with community members and explore how local organizations can participate in upcoming workshops.

Community members, businesses and organizations are encouraged to attend.

For more information or to RSVP for the launch event, please contact:

proudcommunityprojectsp@gmail.com



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The Bird Men at the Stratford Farmer's Market

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Two young entrepreneurs have expanded their door-to-door bird seed delivery business to also include a spot at the weekly Stratford Farmers Market at the Rotary Complex.

Andy Van Schaik and Andrew Hoskin, owners of A&A Birdseed, enjoy serving customers at the far end of the indoor market every Saturday morning from 7 a.m. until noon.

The pair started at the market in the fall of 2021 and now carry 11 different kinds of birdseed, as well as suet cakes and suet logs, bird houses, bird feeders and more.

Van Schaik and Hoskin are both graduates of Lambton College's Community Integration through Co-Operative Education (CICI) program, which helped them to develop independence as well as foster a desire to seek new opportunities. They both have part-time jobs besides the birdseed business and live independently on their own. They have both demonstrated that determination and hard work do have their rewards.

The supplies for the birdseed stand are brought to the market every Saturday morning by Hoskin's dad, along with his wife, Donna, who own and operate a farm and feed store near London.

The birdseed arrives mostly in large bags, like what you would purchase from

a feed mill. A&A Birdseed sells the birdseed in seven- or eight-pound bags, so there is a lot of packaging that needs to be completed before it can be sold.

Hoskin works the early shift from 6:30-9:30 a.m. and Van Schaik works from 9:30 a.m. until noon when the market closes. Most of the mornings are very busy selling 25 to 40 bags of birdseed weekly, just the way customers like it.

With the enthusiasm of both sets of parents, John/Donna and Dave/Cathy, Van Schaik and Hoskin have come a long way in their business model.

In the beginning, Hoskin would weigh out the birdseed at his parents store, bring the bags to Stratford and Van Schaik would make the deliveries to their customers on his three-wheeled bicycle. The business has thrived considerably since, taking up residence at the Stratford Farmers Market.

Customers can now come directly to the market, choose the variety of birdseed they want, and take it right home with them for their feeders. They always have lots of stock on hand and can accommodate bulk sales as requested.

Hoskin and an Schaik, along with family friend and coach Ron Neeb, who himself likes to help the boys, welcomes everyone to stop in by the A&A Birdseed stand anytime they're at the Stratford Farmers Market, and browse the inventory, perhaps make a purchase, or just to stop and say hi.



Coach Ron Neeb and Andrew Hoskin were at the Stratford Farmer's Market on Saturday, doing lots of business for the A&A Birdseed stand.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Market Update: Is spring really the best time to sell your house in Stratford?

MAKLANE DEWEVER

Home and Company Real Estate

When is the best time to sell your house in Stratford? Conventional wisdom says spring is the best time to list: More listings attract more buyers, houses sell for more and they sell more quickly.

But when looking at data on seasonal performance, the truth is less clear:

Season	Price vs. yearly average	Average houses sold	Average days on market
Fall	-0.5%	109	49
Spring	0.6%	139	42
Summer	2.4%	134	44
Winter	-2.5%	75	59

For the past 26 years, houses sold for a little more on average in the summer months in Stratford; however, there were more sales in spring, indicating more to choose from, and things went a little quicker, meaning fewer showings and less disruption.

Most people don't sell their house every year, so you can't spread it out; it's a one-time event. So, this begs the question: how consistently is each season different than the others? The chart below shows, over the past 26 years, how many times each season

Season	Years with highest prices	Years with most sales	Years with fewest days on market
Fall	8	0	4
Spring	6	16	16
Summer	10	10	7
Winter	3	0	0

was the best.

Here, we see a different story: in some years, fall was the best season to sell your house. Some years spring was. Some summer. Consistently, winter underperforms, and this makes sense. Fewer people want to move in the winter.

So, is this spring of 2026 the best time to sell your house? The truthful answer is that we will only know in 2027 when we look back.

Selling your house is different from selling stocks, where you can pick up the phone or press a button and carry on with your day. It depends on life circumstances. Often, the best time to sell your house is when it is most convenient for you. Especially since it's not a sure thing which season will be better.

While seasons matter, broader economic factors like interest rates often play a bigger role in any single year than the season does.

Ontario investing nearly \$29 Million to expand and improve infrastructure in Perth and Wellington counties

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Ontario government is investing nearly \$29 million to expand and rehabilitate rural water infrastructure in Perth and Wellington counties. The funding is part of a \$875 million investment in the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program's Health and Safety Water Stream (MHIP-HSWS) and will help protect more than 5,500 homes, support new housing opportunities, keep workers on the job and drive economic growth in southwestern Ontario.

"Across Ontario, our government is investing in our \$223 billion plan to build so we can protect Ontario, keep workers on the job and connect families to the world-class services they rely on," said Premier Doug Ford in a media release. "Today's investment will protect homeowners and support the construction of new homes across Perth and Wellington counties. We will continue to work with our municipal partners to build for the future and keep the dream of homeownership alive in Ontario."

The following municipalities in Perth and Wellington counties are receiving MHIP-HSWS funding:

Township of Wellington North – \$26,097,500 to expand the Arthur Wastewater Treatment Plant and upgrade the associated forcemain, as well as replace and expand the Drayton Sewage Pumping Station in Mapleton, ensuring long-term service sustainability for 2,330 existing

homes

The Municipality of West Perth – \$2,053,125 for the Herbert Street Sewage Pumping Station, helping to sustain service for some 2,378 homes

The Township of Perth East – \$675,250 for the Milverton Well Replacement and Reservoir Rehabilitation, supporting 850 homes with improved water security.

"As we continue to navigate economic uncertainty and unwarranted U.S. tariffs, our government is protecting Ontario by investing in critical infrastructure that drives growth, creates jobs and strengthens communities," said Todd McCarthy, Acting Minister of Infrastructure. "Through our historic \$4 billion Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, we are giving municipalities and First Nations the tools they need to get shovels in the ground and build stronger communities. Our investments will deliver more homes, modernize aging water systems and lay the foundation for long-term prosperity across Ontario."

In January 2025, Ontario announced an initial investment of \$175 million to launch the MHIP-HSWS. With additional funding of \$700 million announced in January 2026, Ontario's investment in MHIP-HSWS now totals \$875 million.

"Our government is making significant, long-term investments in rural infrastructure, including right here in Perth-Wellington," said local MPP Matthew Rae. "This nearly \$29 million commitment will strengthen water systems, improve com-

munity assets and unlock new housing opportunities across Wellington and Perth Counties, which will support economic growth and ensure we are protecting our communities for the next generation."

Since 2024, the government has invest-

ed a total of almost \$150 million in Perth and Wellington counties through MHIP and the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF), representing one of the largest infrastructure commitments in the region's history.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford has many seniors' groups who are doing their part to help those in need. Just one example are the ladies of the new Tuer Apartment complex at the corner of McCarthy and Orr Streets in north-west Stratford. These women have been very busy since last November, knitting 11 blankets, with each blanket having 42 squares. They are donating them to victim services and have been assured they will stay in Stratford and area. Pictured are Jen (from victim services), Donelyn Reilly, Evelyn Beeby, Nancy Malloy, Liz Jeffery, Mag Bossence, Lori Pinder, Isabel Hamilton, Heather Schlotzhauer, Rita Philips, Linda Hayter, Ruth Spencer and Jen from victim services.

Feline Friends Network of Stratford reaches 20-year anniversary

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Feline Friends Network of Stratford is celebrating 20 years of growth and helping cats and kittens in need.

The organization announced the monumental milestone via Facebook, expressing gratitude to volunteers and the greater community for their support.

"It's pretty exciting. I think it is quite an accomplishment from what we started with and there's been lots of volunteers throughout the years. It's quite a thing, 20

years going and still going strong," said Marg Usprech, board president of Feline Friends Network.

The organization was founded in 2006 by Cheryl Simpson and began with a trap, neuter and release program for outdoor cats, barn cats and cats having multiple litters with no place to go. Either the strays were set up in colonies or had a caregiver until they were ready to be released back.

Over time, Feline Friends Network added a foster and adoption program that focuses on abandoned cats and kittens that were born outside. Each year, about 120

cats and kittens are adopted out through the Feline Friends Network.

Usprech said that there is a crisis of cat overpopulation. Most of the found stray cats are either one or two years old and not neutered or spayed. The organization offers a low-income vet program with vouchers that provide a discount for spay and neuter services at vet clinics partnering with Feline Friends to help with the issue.

"Our main goal is just to prevent unwanted litters and to make the lives of the cats better," she said. "Unneutered males, they travel around, they fight with other cats,

they spray all over, and it just prevents that from happening."

Feline Friends Network has many volunteers on board, with several volunteering for either 10 or 15 years. The organization partners with PetSmart to adopt out their cats and also runs bake sales, auctions and other fundraising initiatives.

Financial and food donations for the Feline Friends Network are welcome. The organization runs a 100 Feline Friends fundraiser where anyone can become a 100 Feline Friends member for a year with a donation of \$100.

Foster's Dinner Concert Series continues with an evening with Jory Nash

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Singer-songwriter Jory Nash returns to Stratford for the second in a series of dinner concerts at Foster's Inn on Thursday, March 26. Enjoy a three-course prix fixe meal, then sit back and relax as the dining room transforms into a listening room with enticing music and witty story telling from the charming Jory Nash.

"I'm looking forward to coming back. I certainly have played Foster's before and it's a beautiful little venue and the food was lovely. It's almost like in the '60s, dinner and a show," said Nash.

Coming back is appropriate to say, as Nash left music behind in 2019 after 15 years of full-time creating and nine albums. The music business had changed and what had worked for him no longer gave the same response. Streaming had taken over and he became disillusioned with it all.

"As the business changed, downloads took over and now streaming. I wasn't able to adapt. I kept clinging to this idea that the CD would sell and it didn't. Everything that had worked for 10-plus years



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Thursday March 28 dinner concert at Foster's Inn features folk singer-songwriter Jory Nash for what promises to be an evening of uplifting music and hilarious stage stories.

wasn't working anymore and I wasn't able to figure out the new paradigm and so my choice was to step away," shared Nash.

He did what he could to make money, dabbled in the stock market, worked in the trucking industry, anything and everything he could to make a buck. Life

threw challenges at both him and his wife to overcome and now that they have, Nash has returned with newfound passion and determination.

In 2024 he started doing some shows and followed up with a new album, his 10th, in October 2025. The album, *The Light Still Shines on the Main* is probably the most personal to him, covering those absent years and all that he and his wife faced.

"My wife is an artist, and she married an artist and of all, she was most disappointed when I stepped away. So, it didn't take any convincing from her when I said I might like to try this again. She did say, don't **** this up because you can only come back once. Do it well. Put everything you've got into it, and I took that to heart and I worked on the songs for a year," said Nash.

He wrote about his wife, and her journey to cancer remission. While writing, his older sister was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer and passed away. He found himself on a sort of song cycle about loss and recovery, death and family and new beginnings.

"It became part of a whole cycle. I don't

tend to write that way, I tend to write songs and then you find the ones that work best together and you patch it together to make a record. This is the only collection of songs that really do have a cycle within the context of the album. It's a classic album in the sense that it's a really concise piece of art," Nash said.

Time away has given him new perspective on what it means to be successful as an artist. He no longer measures success in the same parameters he used to make previous recordings.

"I'm really proud of it and people seem to connect in a way that has meaning for them, and that has meaning for me," he said.

An album as personal as this one brings self-discovery, that he still had the ability to write songs. He learned that he could write in the first-person narrative without hiding elements of himself. It is probably his most raw, where he stepped away from his safe style of writing with success.

The Foster's show will be a blend of new and old music, songs by writers he admires and a lot of anecdotal funny stage stories. His setlists tend to be quite fluid; he reads the room and plays what seems to fit the audience mood. Covers could include songs by Gordon Lightfoot, John Prine or even Smoky Robinson.

"The folk community used to have a lot more Barry (James) Paynes in it. People, local presenters who are artists themselves; people who put the energy and time to spreading the gospel of music in our community. So, when someone like Barry says, 'Would you like to come play?' It's not just a no brainer for me, it's an honour to be a part of something with someone who is just so artistic and community centric," said Nash, of local promoter and musician Barry James Payne who is assisting in the dinner series.

Tickets are available for dinner and the concert, or the concert only and can be purchased online at www.fostersinn.com and select the menu option "Buy Concert Series Tickets."

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Paddling Puppeteers return to Stratford with new show *Plugging Into Nature*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Plugging Into Nature is the fun and fanciful puppet show by the Paddling Puppeteers and Glen Caradus, who since 1998 has been bringing eco-friendly programming to children and adults alike. This highly demanded entertainer will be appearing at the Stratford Perth Museum for one day only, March 28 at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. It has been 10 years since the last appearance.

“It is behind the main building where the Players Backstage is outside so dress warmly. This lovely gentleman plays at museums, parks all across, libraries, wherever he can as an educational artist. We brought him here probably 10 years ago and he was talking about the Thames River and watershed, but he does it with these delightful little puppets,” said Eileen Smith, artistic director of SpringWorks~PuppetWorks.

Plugging Into Nature is about a young child, Edward, who is always inside and on his phone. One day he goes outside and discovers the natural world. He



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Paddling Puppeteers bring ‘Plugging into Nature’ to the Stratford Perth Museum March 28th for two shows only. This high in demand eco-friendly event will delight the audience with music and performance.

meets a chickadee, butterfly and frog who guide Edward on a path of outdoor fun and wellness. At the end of the show Edward helps to “plant up” the “neighbourhood.”

“It’s just sweet, and he plays banjo and sings songs. It’s a mixture of hand puppets and rod puppets and a delightful educational and fun way of learning that you can enjoy your phone and you can go outside. He’s just a fun and gentle, very kind, lovely performer,” said Smith.

This is a family friendly event intended for an audience aged two and older. Attendees are encouraged to explore the pathways on the museum grounds and try out the free snowshoes if there is snow on the ground. As well, the museum is open for its regular Saturday hours.

Learning about stewardship of the environment in a fun and magical way will be an event to be remembered by children and their own eco-journey.

Tickets are \$15 plus HST with a 10 per cent discount for four or more children. Tickets are available online at www.springworksfestival.ca.

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Stratford Poet Profiles: Scott Tillson shares his story of recovery through poetry

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Scott Tillson's poetry is well known in Stratford. His poem "Acknowledge" has been read across the city in recognition of Truth and Reconciliation acknowledgements.

But Tillson said becoming a poet was never something he imagined for himself – especially during the years when his life was consumed by addiction.

Tillson said he reached his lowest point nearly four years ago when he attempted to take his own life. After connecting the exhaust from his truck in an attempt to end his life, the vehicle would not start.

Taking this as a sign from God, Tillson went to the local hospital to seek help. While waiting there, he said he sat beside someone he now refers to as an angel – a woman who appeared to be facing her own struggles. The two began sharing their stories and she held his hand as they talked.

After quitting drugs and alcohol, Tillson said he still struggled with the effects of his upbringing. It wasn't until years later, when he began participating in rehabilitation programs and seeking support, that he realized his life could have a greater purpose.

That realization is what led him to poetry.

Tillson said his first poem, "Acknowledge," flowed out of him almost without thought.

"I knew I was meant for greater things and to tell my story to help others," he said.

After sharing the poem with his sponsor, Tillson said poetry quickly became an outlet that helped him connect more deeply with himself and with others. Through writing, he said he learned that vulnerability is not a weakness but a strength that allows him to share his experiences with others who may be struggling.

Since writing his first poem, Tillson said moments from his life often inspire new work. One poem, he said, was written about his ex-wife, who later passed away. At the time of her death, Tillson said he was grateful to be able



to sit at her bedside and read the poem he had written for her.

More recently, after receiving photos and a video of a newborn baby from an Indigenous friend, Tillson said another poem flowed from him. The poem blended the joy of new life with reflections on the Indigenous experience and was written as a gift for the new mother.

As an Indigenous man, Tillson said reconnecting with his culture has also become an important part of his journey.

"For much of my life, I wasn't connected to who I was," he said. "As I've gotten older and connected more through poetry, I've been learning more about Indigenous culture and who I am. It's still a journey."

Today, Tillson said his goal is to help others through

his words.

"If just one person connects with my poems, or one person decides not to pick up a drink because of my story, then I know my life has purpose," he said.

Heidi Sander's Canada Is Our Poem contest is an initiative designed to recognize Canadian writers and their poetry. In addition to a \$1,000 prize for the winner, 200 poems were selected for publication in the Canada Is Our Poem anthology, including many poets from Stratford.

Three of Tillson's poems will be recognized within the upcoming anthology. Alongside his poem, "Acknowledge," "East Hastings" and "Spirit Drum" were chosen.

Stratford Poet Profiles is an ongoing series highlighting local poets who submitted to Heidi Sander's Canada Is Our Poem contest. An anthology featuring selected poems from the contest will be released this spring.

ACKNOWLEDGE

by Scott Tillson

"Grandfather"

"Yes Child"

"What does Dish with One Spoon mean?"

Grandfather answers "The dish is all that Mother Earth supplies us with and the spoon means we share it with everyone in peace"

Acknowledge and give thanks to the original stewards of this land. The Haudenosaunee: (Hode-en-o-show-nee) and The Anishinaabe:

(A-nish-in-ah-bay) people

Where the footprints of their ancestors are grounded in Mother Nature. Where they would hunt and fish as a source of survival

Where they would connect to the Great Spirit through the four directions, the four seasons and the four medicines

Balancing themselves with the Medicine Wheel, emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually

Open the eyes of your heart Cante ista (Chahn tday ish ta) and acknowledge with empathy the historical abominations

Way of life colonized, man's pride stripped of dignity, women raped and murdered and the children, yes acknowledge the children

The unspeakable has to be spoken for the wounds to heal.

Truth, Reconciliation, Respect, Perspective and most importantly Love must be reciprocated

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Provocation Ideas Festival invites Stratford to imagine its future

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Provocation Ideas Festival is returning to Stratford this year with an expanded season of events built around a familiar but evolving idea – Stratford as a city of dreamers.

Now entering its fourth year in Stratford, the festival continues its multi-year “City of Dreamers” theme, using food, performance, design, comedy and public conversation to explore where the city has been, where it is now and what it might become next. Festival founding director Mark Rosenfeld said that future-focused approach has been at the heart of the festival since it first arrived in Stratford.

“It’s premised on both the overarching theme, City of Dreamers, but it’s also premised on looking to the future,” Rosenfeld said. “People get an opportunity to say, ‘Okay, where have we been in the past, where are we now and what should we be doing in the future?’”

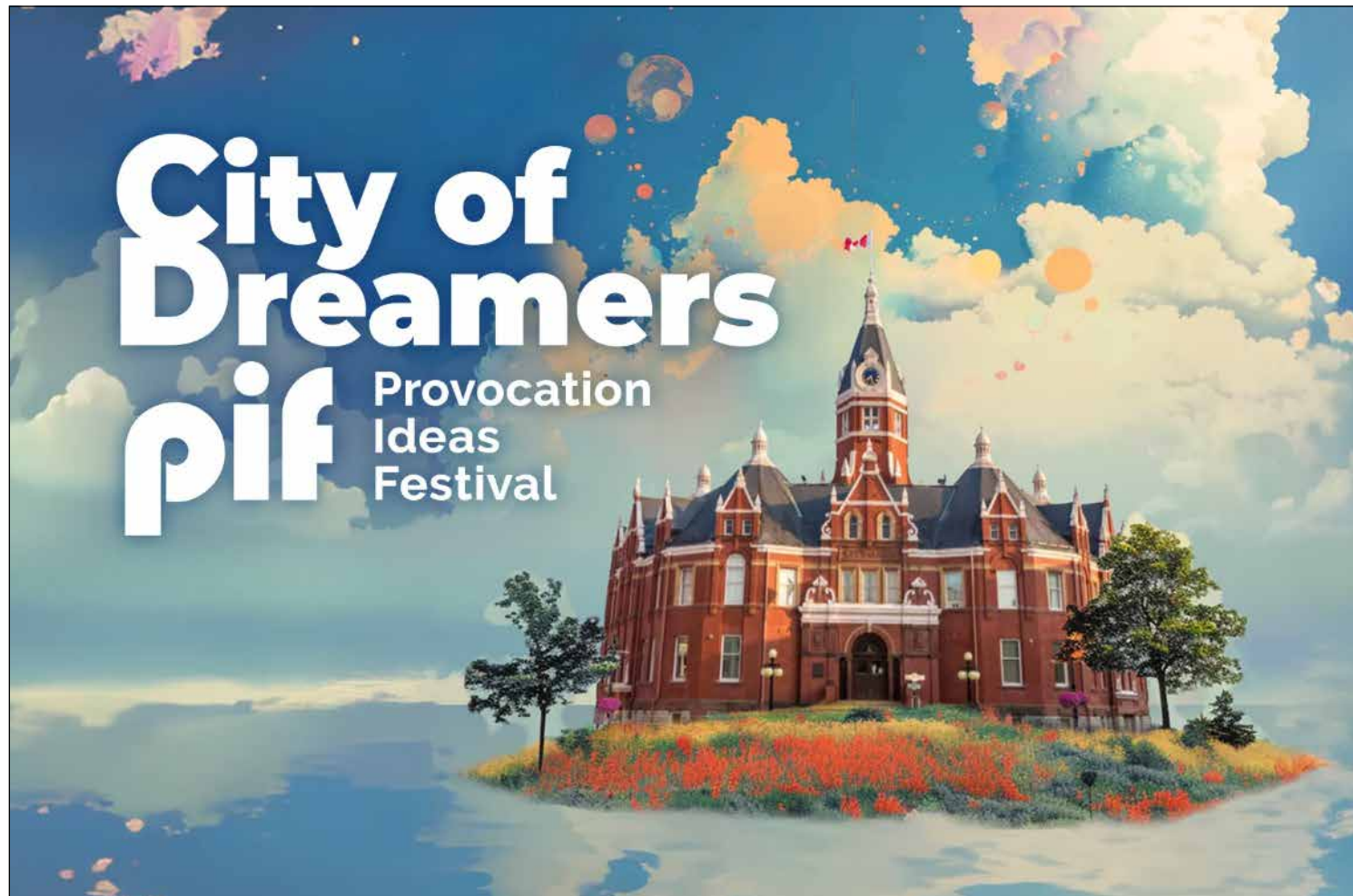
The festival began in Toronto in 2022 and expanded to Stratford the following year. Since then, Rosenfeld says the festival has grown not only in scope, but also in the sense of community ownership around it.

“As people experience the event and the variety of the events, there’s greater recognition of it, as well as a greater sense of ownership in terms of co-creating events,” he said. “People are starting to approach me saying, ‘Okay, is there something we can do together?’”

That collaborative spirit is reflected in this year’s program, which includes the Flavours of Home culinary storytelling series, a new Flowing Futures design challenge centred on the Avon River, a benefit gala called Illuminating Passion, the return of True Tapestries Redux and, pending funding, a large-scale outdoor performance called Ethereal Horizons.

The season begins on a personal scale with Flavours of Home, a dinner series pairing Stratford’s newest residents with local restaurants to share food and stories from their countries of origin. The first event, featuring Congolese stories and cuisine, will take place March 19 at Foster’s Inn.

Rosenfeld said that series fits perfectly with the broader City of Dreamers theme because it reminds people Stratford’s fu-



(PROVOCATION IDEAS FESTIVAL PHOTO)

A tentative lineup for the 2026 Provocation Ideas Festival has been announced for Stratford.

ture is being shaped not just by long-time residents, but also by newcomers building lives here.

Later in the year, the festival will turn its attention to the Avon River through Flowing Futures, a citywide design challenge inviting residents, artists, students and community groups to reimagine the river’s environmental, cultural and public potential.

“What we want is a broad cross-section of people in the town and in the region contributing their ideas,” Rosenfeld said. “How can we reimagine the Avon River in a way that makes it much more environmentally safe and environmentally healthy? How can we make it much more culturally vibrant? How can we respect Indigenous history and Indigenous heritage on the river itself? How can we make it more accessible?”

Participants will be able to submit ideas

in a wide variety of forms, from digital concepts and written pieces to performance-based work. Exhibits are planned for multiple locations, including a potential outdoor display along the river in October.

Also on deck this year is Northern Wit on May 1, a comedy and satire event tied to questions of Canadian identity, as well as a live recording of the popular CBC Ideas. Illuminating Passion, scheduled for June 22, will see well-known Stratford arts figures reveal hidden talents in a benefit-gala setting.

One of the most ambitious proposed events is Ethereal Horizons, an outdoor performance Rosenfeld hopes to stage near the former Grand Trunk locomotive repair shop and site of the future Grand Trunk community hub during Ontario Culture Days in October. If funding comes together, the performance would combine

choreography, spoken word, music and AI-generated visual imagery, while also involving community volunteers as dancers.

“We want to recruit volunteers, community dancers that are interested in dancing, that aren’t professional,” Rosenfeld said. “So, it’d be both a large community event, but also very much an artistic event focused on dreaming.”

For Rosenfeld, all of this year’s programming is meant to do more than entertain. He hopes festivalgoers walk away feeling more connected to one another and more invested in Stratford’s next chapter.

“I hope they can connect more, imagine what a future might be and see themselves as contributing to that future,” he said. “Dreaming and inspiring.”

More information about this year’s Provocation Ideas Festival events is expected to be released throughout the spring.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Warriors open series with the Nationals

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Following a demanding 50-game regular season, the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors start their pursuit of the Sutherland Cup by facing the London Nationals in the best-of-seven GOHL Western Conference Quarterfinals.

As the postseason approaches, Drew Hodge, Jonas Schmidt, Rhyse Brown, Quinn Kipfer and Joseph Curtin reflected on their experiences returning to the playoffs and discussed the essential factors for winning the series.

"It's definitely an honour. This is what we strive for all year. This was our end goal the whole season," Hodge said. "I think our focus is just playing Warrior hockey, working our tail off and just everyone bringing in 110 per cent effort every night."

"It's great. Obviously, this is what we spend the year preparing for. So we're all really looking forward to getting started," Schmidt said.

"We just want to play the way we have been all year and progress on that. Obviously, the little things matter a whole lot more now. So we really just need to amplify our attention, attention to detail."

"I'm looking forward to it. This is where everything cracks down. Everything's harder. Games are tougher, and this is where the real hockey starts. Obviously, it's way rougher and way more intense. I'm looking forward to it," Brown said.

"I think we should play our game. We've

had battles with these guys (London) in the season, obviously, and it should be a good series. Yeah, we're going to work hard and play our game and fast get pucks to the net and four more goals."

"It's good, obviously an exciting time of the year. You work hard every day to kind of put yourself in the best position possible, coming into the playoffs. We were happy to get home-ice advantage, and now we're hoping to make the most of it. We know how much the Allman means to us and playing here. So yeah, everyone's really excited," Kipfer said.

"We know our identity. We play fast, so just kind of sticking to that and making sure we get it to them right from the start. Don't take any time to kind of settle into the series. We want to be the first ones to kind of take it to them and set them on their heels."

"It's awesome. This is what we've worked for all year. I mean, glad we're back, and it's going to be a battle of the first series already," Curtin said.

"I think we competed very well with them (London) all year. The season series went to them, but I think it could have gone either way, and all those games. So I think it's honestly just keep doing what we're doing and play full 60 minutes every night, and I think the games will go our way."

Head coach Dave Williams stated that he and the team are pleased to be returning to the playoffs and that their confidence is very high going into the first round.

"It seems so long ago that we kind of got rolling in August. The guys have put in a lot of time and effort to get to this point. We're chatting with them after the game at Chatham, and it's almost like the 50 regular-season games are 50 exhibition games to try and get ready for this point. If you've learned anything so far through 50 games, just the parity in the league, that's just how good you have to be every night consistently if you want to win hockey games," Williams said.

"Really good. I think guys are excited. I think credit to our guys to be down to Chatham a little short-staffed. Both teams were playing for something on Sunday, and I thought our guys battled really hard, so I'm really happy that we're able to find that tying goal and get home ice, right? So I think in the playoffs, everybody wants to start at home, and I think our guys are excited for the opportunity to play."

Five-hundred-eighty-one fans braved the elements and travelled to the Allman Arena for the first game on March 13.

Early in the tightly-contested first period, the Warriors successfully killed a four-minute power play. Moments later, they earned a power play of their own after Max Wildfong was taken down on a breakaway.

Early in the Stratford power play, the Nationals took the lead when Alexandre Campeau outskated two Warriors de-

fenders in the Stratford zone and scored by shooting the puck just past netminder Noah Bender with 7:04 remaining in the first period. Later in the same power play, with nine seconds left, Stratford equalized as Dominic Marshall scored on a rebound shot past the Nationals' netminder Dante Bertolin.

Late in the second period, Bender and the Warriors' defence faltered as London capitalized on their mistakes as Joshua Lipinski netted two quick goals within 26 seconds, putting the visitors ahead 3-1. Just 44 seconds before the period's end, Coen Galbraith, assisted by Dax Vader and Jaxon Broda, closed the gap by scoring from close range past Bertolin.

The Warriors sought to equalize early in the third period, but a familiar face extended the Nationals' two-goal advantage. Former Warrior Jack McGurn scored the crucial goal, slipping the puck past Bender's left side at 6:50 of the final period. Nathaniel Adams sealed the series-opening victory at 9:09.

Bender made 32 saves in the Game 1 loss.

After the game, Williams was straightforward about the team's performance in the loss.

"We need to be a lot better than we were here tonight. I didn't really like the start to the game for us, five-on-five. I mean, given that we're at home and it's the first game of the playoffs, we get to play in this great rink. You would think that there would be no lack of motivation to go out there and get right after the game. But we struggled to get to our game there, but we found a little momentum through the powerplay, even though we gave up that shorthanded goal. I actually thought we found a little momentum there," Williams said.

"The margin of error is so small, we've talked about it the entire year, and it shouldn't be something that surprises us, with the parity in the league that you've got to be almost perfect every night to win. We just made too many mistakes, and I thought we lost too many battles collectively."

With an assist in Game 1, Ferguson says he and the team need to put in more effort to bounce back in Game 2.

"I just think we've got to come up better. It's another slow start. We've had trouble with that lately, and I think we'll do better tomorrow. The pregame skate should've gotten our legs going, and I think special teams were good tonight. But we need to get better," Ferguson said.

Undermanned, the Warriors aimed to bounce back in game two as they travelled to the Western Fair Sports Centre on March 13.

In a strange case of déjà vu for the Warriors, London started the scoring in a similar way. Just like in Game 1, during the Stratford powerplay, the Nationals took advantage of a mistake in the neutral zone. At 6:54, Nicholas Kiss converted on the breakaway from the turnover and beat

Bender stick side, putting the Nationals ahead.

In the second period, the Warriors responded with a breakaway goal. Grady Murphy received a pass from Curtin in the neutral zone and scored against London goalie Bertolin at the glove side, tying the game. On the power play at 9:44, Luke Minard's quick one-timer put the Warriors ahead 2-1. Less than two minutes later, Broda scored his first goal of the series, extending Stratford's lead to 3-1.

Throughout the third period, London pushed for the comeback, but Bender and the Warriors' defence held firm and secured the win late with an empty-net goal from the veteran Brown, who scored with 1:04 remaining. Bender made 25 saves on 26 shots for the victory.

After the game, Williams was very happy with the Game Two win but highlighted the need for better on-ice discipline, as the Warriors took eight penalties.

"It feels really good. I thought the guys did, you know, a really good job tonight. We had a good skate this morning, a good video session. I thought the guys' details were better tonight than they were yesterday. We got to clean up a little bit, get ourselves into some penalty trouble, which made it a little bit tougher on us for the night," Williams said.

"I thought the second period, we were really finding our stride there. So I think that's what we have to focus on, is just playing five-on-five and minimizing their power play opportunities."

With the series tied at one each, Game 3 took place at the Allman Arena on March 16. This game was notable for marking Schmidt's return, as he played his first game since Feb. 20 against the St. Thomas Stars.

For the first time in this series, the Warriors took the lead. During a powerplay at 4:41 in the first period, Broda fired the puck past Bertolin for his second playoff goal, assisted by Schmidt and Galbraith.

London equalized early in the second period when Cooper McAslan's shot slipped past Bender's left pad for a game-tying goal at 4:09. Stratford then took the lead permanently on a fortunate bounce in front of London's crease, and Marshall seized the opportunity to score on the open net.

In the closing seconds of the middle period, the Warriors took advantage of a power play when Kipfer deflected Will Coward's shot in front of the net, getting past Bertolin and putting them ahead 3-1 going into the third period.

Bender was outstanding in the third period, saving all 13 shots he faced. The Warriors secured their victory with two late goals – Murphy on the powerplay and Green on the empty net – finishing with a 5-1 win and taking a 2-1 series lead. Bender made 28 saves out of 29 shots, and Brown led the Warriors with three points in the decisive third game.

Stratford Warriors Player Stats (Playoffs)

(as of March 16, 2026)

Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Rhyse Brown	F	3	1	4	5
Jaxon Broda	D	3	2	1	3
Dominic Marshall	F	3	2	1	3
Aaron Green	D	3	1	2	3
Grady Murphy	F	3	2	0	2
Coen Galbraith	F	3	1	1	2
Quinn Kipfer	F	3	1	1	2
Lucas Minard	F	3	1	1	2
Jonas Schmidt	F	1	0	1	1
Will Coward	F	2	0	1	1
Joseph Curtin	D	3	0	1	1
Cruz Ferguson	F	3	0	1	1
Haden Frayne	D	3	0	1	1
Dax Vader	F	3	0	1	1
Mateo Craievich	D	2	0	0	0
McQuen Haylock	F	3	0	0	0
Drew Hodge	D	3	0	0	0
Max Wildfong	F	3	0	0	0
Colten Brenzil	F	1	0	0	0
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	2-1	2.33	0.924		

Warriors open series with the Nationals

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Williams liked the team's resilience in the Game 3 win.

"I thought it was a good, hard-fought game, exactly what we expected here for Game 3 after each team, you know, won a game in the first two. So it's nice to see the powerplay, you know, come alive a little bit there, and get us three goals. Yeah. I mean, that's what these games are about. It's a good team on the other side pushing all the time, and we're trying to push to gain momentum as well," Williams said.

"I thought they actually gained a little bit of momentum in the third. I think what you want to guard against when you've got the lead, you always like to play with the lead rather than chase. I still think we're at our best when we're kind of on our toes, putting pucks in behind ... I think the third was a little harder than we might have liked, but credit to our guys. They continue to battle and get through a couple penalty kills, finding a way."

Frayne expresses satisfaction with the win and the series lead but acknowledges that he and the team haven't yet played their best hockey from start to finish.

"The energy's high. We had a really good game past two games. Really bought into our systems, and we're just really hounding them. It's been good," Frayne said.

"We're not really stepping up for the full 60, and that's obviously something we need to change. I think we did a good

job of containing them, though. We didn't give them too many high-chance opportunities. So it's something we got to change, though, play a full 60."

Marshall shared his thoughts on the team taking the series lead and detailed the play that led to the game-winning goal.

"That's exactly what we're looking for there. You know, it's a team effort. That's what it takes to win, win games, and especially playoff games. So as long as we've got everybody going, I think we'll be more than okay," Marshall said.

"Yeah, so end of my shift, I'll be honest, I wanted to get off, but I saw Brownie (Brown) at the puck, and I just kind of went to the net with my stick on the ice like, everybody says I do, and I got rewarded. So that's basically all that happened there."

In the last two games, Bender has achieved a 2-0 record with a 1.00 goals-against-average and a .964 save percentage. Bender discussed the key differences that helped the Warriors take the series lead after losing Game 1.

"Yeah, I think just staying together as a team, banding together. I think we're playing together a lot more, a lot better communication," Bender said.

The Warriors have a chance to take control of the series as they head to London for Game Four on March 18, after press time, and potentially secure the series on home ice at the Allman on March 20.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Stratford Warriors forward Dominic Marshall buried the loose puck past the sprawling London Nationals netminder Dante Bertolin for the game-winning goal in Game 3 at the Allman Arena on March 16.

GOHL Western Conference Quarterfinals (#4 Stratford Warriors Vs. #5 London Nationals

- Game 1 – London 5 Stratford 2
- Game 2 – Stratford 4 London 1
- Game 3 – London 1 Stratford 5
- Game 4 – Stratford vs. London (Western Fair Sports Centre) March 18, 7 p.m.
- Game 5 – London vs. Stratford (William

Allman Memorial Arena) March 20, 7:30 p.m.

Game 6 – Stratford vs. London (Western Fair Sports Centre) March 22, 7:30 p.m., if needed

Game 7 - London vs. Stratford (William Allman Memorial Arena) March 25, 7:30 p.m., if needed

Stratford leads series 2-1

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SATURDAY MARCH 21 • 2:00-4:00 PM



199 LIEBLER STREET, TAVISTOCK
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Dare to dream to own this lovely custom built 2 + 1 bedroom brick bungalow built in 2015, backing onto farmland. This stunning home is move in ready and offers an open concept main floor with cathedral ceiling in the living room, a spacious eat in kitchen with pantry and sliders to a 3 season sunroom- gazebo, and deck and the lovely view of the farmland. The fully finished basement offers a spacious family room with a gas fireplace great for those relaxing evening, a 3rd bedroom with a cheater ensuite and walk in closet, upgraded Kineticco water softener. For the hobbyist or the car person this home offers 2- 9 foot garage doors, lots of space to store that special car or work shop area. One added bonus to this lovely home is an extra monthly income from the solar panels. This is one home you do not want to miss viewing, be sure to call to view today and own this great home today or view through the open house, you will not be disappointed.

SUNDAY, MARCH 22 • 10:30-12:00 NOON Hosted by Lucie Stephens Sales Representative



48 WELLINGTON STREET, TAVISTOCK
MLS#X12547948 • NEW PRICE -\$624,900

Are you tired of mowing that big yard and cleaning all those flower beds? If so, this is one home you do not want to miss viewing. Located in a quiet neighbourhood on a low maintenance yard and is with in a few minute walk to the local public school, park and arena and shopping. This lovely well kept 3 bedroom two storey home offers a nice size living room with sliders to a side yard deck, a spacious eat in kitchen, and a 2 piece bath on the main floor. The 2nd level offers 3 good size bedrooms, and a 4 pc bath, and for additional living space the basement offers a finished family room, 2 pc bath, laundry room and a large cold-room. Also a great feature to this home is the double Exposed Aggregate double driveway. Get out of the city and enjoy small town living, this home is within commuting distance to the Kitchener Waterloo area, Stratford, Woodstock and London. Whether you are a first time home buyer or a family looking for a 3 bedroom home, this is one home you do not want to miss viewing, call today or view at the open house.

SUNDAY MARCH 22 • 1:00-3:00 PM



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Aces draw with Hornets

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Humphrey Fleet U18 AA Aces opened their OWA Southern League Tier-II Championship Semifinals against the Oakville Hornets at the Joshua Creek Arena in Oakville on March 12.

Stratford led 2-0, but Oakville responded with three unanswered goals in the second period to take the lead 3-2 into the third period. The Aces tied the game in the third period and settled for a 3-3 draw, picking up a point to open Game 1 of the series. Charlotte Hines led the Aces with two goals, and Macey Fischer added one.

Aces head coach Sean Cameron commented on the game.

"Yeah, you know, great performance from our girls. We had to travel to Oakville during the week. Girls took some time off from school to get there on time. And you know, Oakville, Oakville is a very classy organization. They're a very skilled hockey team. We came out of the gate flying. We went up 1-0 in the first. We scored another one in the second, and then Oakville came back with a real purpose," Cameron said.

"They scored three goals in the second period, and we got the equalizer in the third. Charlotte Hines was absolutely on fire, scored two beautiful goals in the top corner, and Macey Fischer scored a really nice one in the second period, there on the power play. So you know, an overall really, really good team. It's going to be a good battle, to say the least."

Despite lacking ice time for practice, Cameron announced the team will carry on this week to prepare for two games against the Hornets. The first game is scheduled for March 23 at the Stratford Rotary Complex, with the series concluding in Game 3 in Oakville on March 24.

The series winner will compete against the Markham-Stouffville Stars in the OWA-Southern Tier II Consolation Championship on March 28 at Westwood Arena in Etobicoke.

"Now, we're definitely always preparing. We're going to do a lot of off-ice stuff to get ourselves ready. Ice is really hard to come by, but we're getting prepared for Oakville to come to Stratford on Monday (March 24)," Cameron said.

"We already know who's waiting for us. We know Markham-Stouffville is moving on, so we're just putting in the work to get ready, to prepare for that, and we're looking forward to a great series with a great team."

Stratford Aces vs. Oakville Hornets (OWA-Southern Tier II Consolation Championship Semifinals)

Game 1 Aces 3 Hornets 3

Game 2 Oakville vs. Stratford (Stratford Rotary Complex - Rink A) March 23, 7 p.m.

Game 3 Stratford vs. Oakville (Oakville Joshua Creek Arena) March 24, 7 p.m.

Send in your sports reports

Coaches and/or parents are invited to send in your sports reports and pictures to the Stratford Times to let Stratford and area know how your teams are doing throughout the new 2025-26 season (and to create some great scrapbook material to be reflected upon in future years).

Game reports should be kept to a maximum of 100 words. Please include a brief description of what happened during your games, including the names of those who scored and any special efforts made by your players.

Please have all reports and pictures in by the end of the month by emailing stratfordtimes@gmail.com.

Lakers end ALLIANCE season in disappointing loss

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The ALLIANCE Championship hopes ended when the second-seeded Huron-Perth U16 AAA Lakers were knocked out by the third-seeded Brantford 99ers in Game 5 on March 15 at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

Entering Game 3 with the series tied at 1-1, the Lakers remained optimistic, believing the series was still achievable but needed to play with more consistency.

Team captain Sullivan Kipfer, defenceman Colten Van Geffen and head coach Jason Brooks shared their thoughts on the team's chances.

"I think, to a man in that dressing room, we can all agree that we haven't played our best throughout both games. I just believe that we need to be better, and if we want to come out on top in the series, we all as a team need to improve," Kipfer said.

"I thought we could play a lot better. I don't think it's our best hockey, but I think we'll get them later in the series," Van Geffen said.

"This team has been a very good team all season. Seems like in the playoffs, we've maybe, I don't want to say taking a step back, that's not the right word, but we just haven't played to our capabilities. Our goal is to play our best," Brooks said.

"If we lose playing our best as coaches, we'll sit back and tip our hats to Brantford and say, you know, good job by them, but it's hard. It's hard to watch. I mean, we're fortunate the series ended in a tie. We're at home with home ice, but you still have to win, and you've got to come ready Thursday for a war rampant. Come ready for war in the first two games, and we've got to be ready to read from the opening face-off."

Game 3 took place at the Stratford Rotary Complex on March 13. Aiden Silos gave Brantford the lead on the powerplay in the second period with 5:38 left. Blake

Moore, with help from Callum Brooks and Mathieu Lapan, scored for the Lakers at 5:50 into the third. The game remained tied through five minutes of overtime, ending in a 1-1 draw.

After the game, coach Brooks was impressed with how the team fought back after a tough second period.

"To our credit, I thought we had a really good start to the game. Brantford started to take it to us. Unfortunate break for us on the penalty kill. But to the boys' credit, they battled back. We had chances in the third, we just came up a bit short to get the win over," Brooks said.

"Time was back and forth, lots of opportunities for both teams. It's a heck of a series. It's really, really what it comes down to, the two teams that are battling and competing, and that's why you got a tight series."

The series resumed in Brantford for Game 4 on March 14. If there was a key moment in the series, it was this game, when the 99ers delivered a strong statement, beating the Lakers 10-3 to lead the series 2-1-1.

Brantford took an early 2-0 lead in the first period, but Huron-Perth fought back to tie the game with two powerplay goals by Wyatt Finch and Evan Miller. The 99ers regained the lead with a late goal in the first, and their momentum continued in the second, scoring four goals to extend their advantage.

Lakers' netminder Rylan Da Costa, who kept the team competitive throughout the series, struggled and was replaced by Tyler Wilkinson with over four minutes left in the second period. However, Wilkinson couldn't halt the 99ers' offensive surge. Luke McLean scored just before the end of the second period, narrowing the gap to five, but the 99ers added two more goals late in the third.

Brooks commended Brantford on their performance and emphasized the team's lack of response, which cost them the

game early.

"I will give Brantford full credit for the way they're playing. They're making it very hard. They're just battling and competing extremely well. They finished on their chances today. They're a great hockey team, and it showed against us today," Brooks said.

"We had zero response to them, other than the fact we got down to nothing, thought back to make it to two, which was great, but we couldn't sustain anything."

With the ALLIANCE season on the line the following day, Brooks remained optimistic as the team looked to extend the series on home ice.

"The beauty thing of playoffs is whether you lose 10-3, like we did, or you lose 2-1 in overtime, the loss is a loss. Tomorrow's a new day. Yeah, we're in an elimination game, so the stakes are a little bit higher," Brooks said.

"There's not as much room for air. We're going to have to do our jobs. We're going to have to play with heart and passion, compete, and we'll see what kind of character we have."

In Game 5 on March 15 at the Rotary Complex, the Lakers aimed to rebound and keep their season alive.

In a recurring theme throughout the series, Brantford scored first as Carson Vukelich opened the scoring with 8:57 remaining in the first period. The score remained 1-0 until the 4:03 mark of the second period, when Callum Brooks capitalized on the rebound to notch his seventh goal of the postseason from Ethan Bridges and Declan McCotter.

After a tough penalty call on McCotter in the final minute of the second period, the 99ers capitalized early in the third with a powerplay goal from Roman Vanacker just 43 seconds into the frame. Gavin Martin then added an insurance goal for the 99ers at 4:33, but Finch's shot from the point brought the Lakers within one goal with 1:55 remaining. Huron-Perth

pressured hard for the late equalizer but fell short, ending their 2025-2026 ALLIANCE campaign with a 3-2 loss.

Following the game, Brooks felt proud of the team's effort despite the result.

"The way we battled today, the way we competed today was obviously much better than yesterday, and we gave ourselves a chance because of it. Unfortunately, come up a little bit short, but get credit again to Brantford and their effort throughout the series. But today we played, we competed, and it just wasn't our day," Brooks said.

With the ALLIANCE League season concluded, Brooks said the team plans to rest and refocus for its upcoming OHL Cup run.

"I think probably take some time here this week to decompress a bit and just reevaluate where we're at. We'll have a week of preparation the following week for the OHL Cup. It's a great opportunity for the boys to finish the year at the premier event, and they earn the right to be there," Brooks said.

"So we'll take our time preparing, and use some of this week to just reinvigorate ourselves and mentally and physically, kind of get back in a good spot, be ready for that event."

The OHL Cup is set to occur at the Scotiabank Pond near Downsview Park in Toronto from March 30 to April 3, with the championship final held at Maple Leaf Gardens on April 4.

The schedule for the tournament will be announced closer to the date.

U16 AAA ALLIANCE Semifinal Schedule (Huron-Perth Lakers vs. Brantford 99ers)

Game 1 – Brantford 1 Huron-Perth 4
 Game 2 – Huron-Perth 1 Brantford 4
 Game 3 – Brantford 1 Huron-Perth 1
 Game 4 – Huron-Perth 3 Brantford 10
 Game 5 – Brantford 3 Huron-Perth 2
Brantford wins series 3-1-1

Mathieson reflects on the U18 Warriors season

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Just days after the heartbreaking end to their season, the Stratford U18 AA Warriors held their final practice of the year at the Stratford Rotary Complex on March 11. The session was more about having fun and relaxing after their defeat, as they took part in a scrimmage.

In an interview with the Times, head coach Riley Mathieson reflected on the loss in Game 5, noting that the team exhibited pride and competitiveness in the season-ending match.

"Yeah, there was some disappointment on the weekend, for sure, but there was also some pride as well. We could have rolled over after that game Thursday night, when we didn't perform well

at home. It had to go down to London the next night, win there, then come back to win at home to end out the season. And we played well, one of our, probably our best game of the year down there on Friday night. ... And, you know, it's Game 5 winner-take-all, similar to Game 7. ... It was a high-tension game, and a lot of emotion from both teams. At the end of the day, we battled hard right through the third period," Mathieson said.

"We came out down three, and we put two up within the first ten minutes, and we battled hard to get that tying goal right to the end. Unfortunately, we fell short. But I told the guys before the game, and before the third period was to go out there, and regardless of how the score turns out, be sure that when you come back in, you know you have

the satisfaction of knowing that you did everything that you could. I have all the faith there that every, every single player, knows that they left it all out on the ice there on Sunday. It just didn't go our way."

The Warriors finished the regular season in eighth place in the ALLIANCE U18 AA-A League with a 6-17-4 record. The season's biggest highlight was winning the Ajax Winterlude Tournament in December.

Despite challenges, Mathieson was very satisfied with the team's growth and looks forward to developing the program further next season.

"It could have been a bit of a different outcome had it not been for a couple of bounces there. But at the end of the day, we played well. There's a lot to be

proud of, a lot that we can look back on. Having seen how things went, we can definitely look at how we could have improved things in the moment. But I mean, that's just life in general. So yeah, I'm proud of how things went and of how the guys battled right to the end," Mathieson said.

"Would it have been nice to come out on top and get to the final series and maybe make a run at another OHF or another Alliance championship? Yeah, absolutely. But we knew the road all year long was going to have to go through, through London, and I think in the last week and a half, we played our best hockey against them, as we did compared to the rest of the year. So there's a lot to be proud of, and a lot to learn from and build on as well."

Stratford bowlers compete at YBC High-Low Doubles House Round

NICHELE BUTCHER-BONTRUP

Times Contributor

Young Stratford bowlers from the local Youth Bowling Council (YBC) program recently competed in the YBC High-Low Doubles House Round, showcasing teamwork, skill and sportsmanship across four competitive divisions.

The unique high-low doubles format pairs bowlers together and combines their scores against their averages, making every pin count and creating excit-

ing finishes throughout the event.

In the peewee division, the team of Lincoln Brown and Adrian Klomp captured first place with an impressive plus-118 score.

Finishing in second place was Jace Sebben and Lincoln Butcher-Cassidy, who posted a strong plus-71 performance.

The bantam division saw a close game with Roland Rains and Spencer Koyle claiming the division title with a plus-165 total, very closely followed by Syd-

ney Shillolo and Austin Janmaat, who finished just three pins behind with plus-162 to secure second place.

In the junior division, the duo of Charlee Koyle and Myla Douglas delivered the tournament's highest over-average performance, finishing first with an outstanding plus-256. McKenna Morris and Brent Louwagie also bowled exceptionally well, earning second place with a score of plus-237.

The senior division title went to Dominic Boyles Keating and Issac Kroes-

bergen, who finished first with plus-103. Alex Ward and Yulia Mooers placed second.

The house round highlighted the strength and development of the local YBC program, with bowlers supporting one another and delivering impressive scores throughout the competition.

Winners from each division will now look ahead to regionals, the next stage of competition as they continue representing their club in the YBC tournament season.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



SDSS wins third straight WOSSAA Curling Gold

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On March 9, at the Listowel Curling Club, the Stratford District Golden Bears girls curling team won the WOSSAA Girls Curling Championship and secured their spot at the OFSAA Curling Championships for the third year in a row.

The team, based at Stratford Country Club and supported by Tavistock and Milverton Curling Clubs, is led by skip Addison Hyatt, with vice-skip Brooklyn Hyatt, second Deanna Halls and lead Hailey Peters. Coached by Brian Anderson and Paul Hyatt, they entered the 2025-2026 WOSSAA tournament with an unbeaten record.

The Bears advanced to the WOSSAA finals after defeating the London Catholic Central Crusaders 13-0 in the semifinals. In the gold medal game against London's Saunders Sabres, they secured the championship with a thrilling 7-6 victory, completing their WOSSAA season with a perfect 13-0 record.

Anderson says he's very proud of the team's gold medal win.

"The girls are a very dedicated group of young ladies who have worked very hard all year, and it was really satisfying to see them accomplish their goal of making it

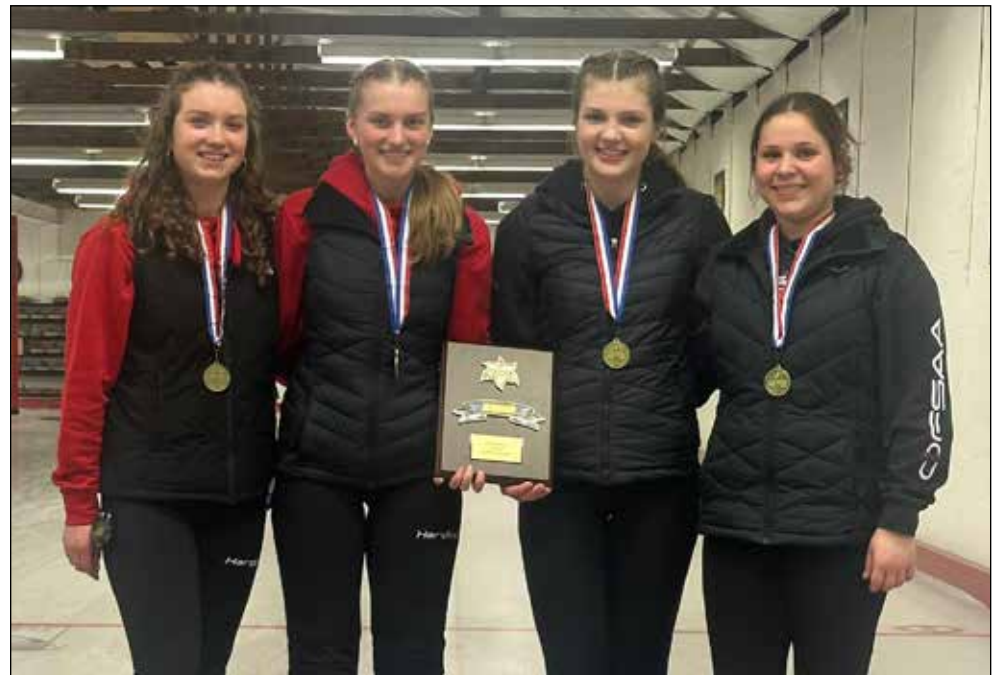
to the Ontario juniors or Ontario School competition. They work very hard all year, have learned a lot, and done very well, and I'm very proud of them," Anderson said.

Anderson told the Times how the team was formed and expressed gratitude for support from all three country/curling clubs in the region.

"We were very fortunate to have gotten these girls together. They started as a 4-H project in Tavistock, and the 4-H Club was a curling club. The four girls were all going to the same high school, and thought it'd be kind of cool to curl together. Then they have been curling now for the last three years, and this is the third consecutive time they've made it to the Ontario championships," Anderson said.

"It's awesome, the support we've gotten and the financial support, as well as the moral support from all three places. It's just a tremendous community, and the girls are working very hard to represent that group – and the community has really stepped up and helped them financially and by encouraging them."

At last year's provincial tournament in Sarnia, Stratford finished the round robin with a 2-2 record, losing to the eventual gold medal winners, Thunder Bay's St.



(STRATFORD DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL PHOTO)

WOSSAA Girls Curling Gold Medalists (from left) Addison Hyatt, Brooklyn Hyatt, Hailey Peters, and Deanna Halls.

Ignatius Falcons, and to the fourth-place team, Kingston's Frontenac Falcons.

The Bears will start their pursuit of the OFSAA gold medal from March 25 to 28 in Thunder Bay. They plan to

live-stream the games on their YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@TeamHyatt>. To encourage the team, please send messages of support to teamhyattcurling@gmail.com.

Bowling League High Scores

Men's

Rob Price 838
Matthew Wilker 805
Dan Clark 835

Ladies'

Brooke Louwagie 722
Monday Senior's
Steve Van Klooster 212, 227, 209-648

V-Ettes

Bernice Dale 222

Wednesday Ladies

Mollie Petryna 196
Bonita Baranyi 243,232
Debra Harvey 206
Sandra Cousins 217
Theresa Martell 247-605

Tuesday Morning Ladies

Dianne Currah 212

United League

Sydney Smith 221

Steven Walker 215

Paul Boyd 210

Stratford Pin Pals

Thomas Holland 132,118
Gregory Jones 106

YBC

Bowlasaurus

Dominic Rowe 127
Evangeline Butcher-Bontrup 108
Owen Farthing 103

Pee-Wee

Tiernan Eckert 106-236
Stella Hurley St. Pierre 119, 155-367 series
Lincoln Butcher-Cassidy 152-250 double
Coen Everitt 105-237 series
Rowan Eckert 259 double

Bantam

Scarlett II Iman 108, 100, 111-319 series
Grey Davidson 108-269 series
Addi Kollman 103-293 series

Noah Saunders 186 (100 POA)

Roland Rains 177

Joey Robinson 153

Talia Klomp 176

Kayleigh Heegsma 189-451 series

Junior

Mckenna Morris 173, 178-498 series

Ruby Parker 165

Anna Ward 160, 192, 225-577 triple

Brianne Bauer 164, 189, 227-580 triple

Charlee Koyle 206

Lauren Furtney 189, 197, 227-613 triple

Hayden Martin 157

Ryan Scheerer 154, 161, 173-488 triple

Arik Scheuermann 163

Abby Smith 150, 170, 216-536 triple

Tyler Koch 210

Myla Douglas 159, 160

Hugo Black 162-453 triple

Sydney Shillolo 168-466 triple

Senior

Austin Bauer 227, 241-621 triple

Peyton Boyles Keating 155,188

Jake Sippel 178,182

Zachary Clarke 218, 232, 230-450 triple

Alex Ward 183, 198, 213-594 triple

Sydney Smith 173, 199, 196-568 triple

Wiatt Robinson 175, 195, 272-642 triple

Austin Martin 205, 311-657 triple

Owen Martin 218, 245-645 triple

Jocelyn Gethke 199, 214-560 triple

Claire Turner 187, 234, 244

Dominic Boyles Keating 204-552 triple

Mayla Laukka 185, 196, 233-614 triple

Payton Petrie 206, 217-584 triple

Payton Kainz 254-574 triple

Special Olympics

Russell Hubbard 154

Phoebe Bootsma 184

Tyler Guibao 156, 155

Derek Wray 220

Franny Hitchcock 159

Rob Vannatter 161

Dan Noon 173

Jacob Kaufman 168, 202

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Send in your sports reports

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maximum of 100 words. Please include a brief description of what happened during your games, including the names of those who scored and any special efforts made by your players.

Please have all reports and pictures in by the end of the month by emailing stratfordtimes@gmail.com.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

There was a large crowd from seven area Optimist Clubs who came last week to compete for supremacy in the Downie Optimist Club's Mini Olympics. The clubs involved included Kirkton-Woodham, Ellice, Mournington, Tavistock, Mitchell, Shakespeare and host club Downie. Downie President Manny Puetz, along with club members, came up with competing games that included tractor pulls on a string, the plunger plop, rolling cup drop, dart toss, Downie optiputt and the frog game, among others. The night was full of getting to know each other from all areas, including an exchange of ideas on how the clubs are helping youth in their areas in an abundance of different ways.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Downie Optimist Club president Manny Puetz presents longtime Mitchell Optimist Sharon Flanagan with the President's Inspiration Award, for her many years of volunteering in the Mitchell Optimist Club.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The medal winners at the closing ceremonies of the mini Olympics included silver for the Kirkton-Woodham club, accepted by Barry Miller, gold for the Shakespeare club, accepted by Buck Mathieson, and bronze for Downie club, proudly displayed by president Manny Puetz.

Nuhn Industries: an ever-expanding local company

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

A most progressive manufacturing company is again building on the western edge of Sebringville in Perth East.

Nuhn Industries is a company whose namesake and red and gold machinery is not only one of the most popular in Ontario, Canada and North America but also around the world.

It is in the process of building a new warehouse and assembly plant (148,000 square feet), across the road to the east of the main plant, that will again give them more room for inside expansion of their many product lines in manure handling equipment.

It will eventually employ a large workforce of 250 workers, but at the same time, also contribute greatly to Perth County's thriving economy.

Nuhn Industries started in business in a small blacksmith shop, in the small community of Wartburg, just a few miles north of their present Highway 8 location. The year was 1902 when Simon Nuhn first opened his blacksmith shop and the history of Nuhn Industries began.

Today, it continues to be a leading manufacturer of liquid manure tanks and spreaders, agitators, manure pumps and slurry tankers. It built its new Sebringville Manufacturing Plant and moved from Wartburg in 1984.

Speaking with the Times, Nuhn vice president Ian Nuhn shared the company is now manufacturing 200-300 manure tanks a year, depending on demand, along with hundreds of manure pumps, lagoon crawlers and alley manure vacuums.

It was the first company to design and manufacture the hugely popular manure



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Nuhn Industries in Sebringville is one of the fastest growing farm machinery manufacturers in Ontario. Their iconic red and gold machinery can be spotted from far away.

crawlers for mixing and stirring large manure lagoons, with now over 800 in use around the world.

Its new self-propelled manure vacuums is its latest invention for large free-stall barns, where manure is sucked up and unloaded into the manure storage area of dairy and beef barns.

Ian said this machine has become very popular and Nuhn is manufacturing and selling one every week to their customers worldwide.

Farm and dairy shows that are happening now are also an important part of Nuhn's schedule and, according to Ian, they can then stay in close personal touch with the farming public, as they show their long line of equipment to the customers.

Nuhn Industries will surely be at the Canadian Dairy Expo Show coming up April 1 and 2 in Stratford.

When asked about what countries they sold the most to, the vice president said 60 per cent of their equipment is U.S.

bound, 30 per cent stays in Canada and 10 per cent to the rest of the world. Of the types of farms they continue to sell to, 60 per cent are dairy farms, 40 per cent are hog farms and 10 per cent are beef farms.

The Nuhn family includes Ian and his father Dennis (who has been inducted onto the Perth County Agricultural Wall of Fame), along with Ian's mother Marilyn, who manages the company's human resources department, and wife Linda and their two young girls.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A look at Nuhn Industries' new assembly and warehouse facility, presently being built west of Sebringville and just north of Highway 8.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Pictured here is just part of Nuhn Industries' large inventory of manure handling equipment.

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Editorial

Now that we're ready to travel, where in the world should we go?



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Though the world seems to be crumbling around us, Julia and I are finally in a position where we can afford to go on a trip somewhere beyond our relatively safe borders.

While there are plenty of good reasons to stay closer to home, we've both talked about traveling together for almost as long as we've been a couple. Sure,

we've taken weekend getaways to places like Algonquin Park and the Blue Mountains, but we've never travelled internationally together – other things like buying a house and redoing our kitchen always got in the way.

Personally, I haven't crossed the Canadian border for more than a decade and the last real trip I went on was back in high school when I had the opportunity to take two historical tours through parts of Europe. While I enjoyed those trips, Julia and I are both looking for something that will give us the freedom to explore new cultures, foods, histories and experiences on our own schedule with plenty of time to relax in between.

Every week, I edit the pieces submitted by our travel columnist, Paul Knowles. From European river cruises to golf and

fishing getaways – always with a unique tidbit of local history thrown in – Paul's columns tend to get me daydreaming about where in the world we could go to find the travel experience we're looking for.

But I'm an anxious person and there is just so much to be anxious about in the world these days. Mexico – a country with food, culture and history I can't get enough of – is off the list of potential destinations at the moment, at least until the violence between the drug cartels and the government subsides. Similarly, a visit to Cuba is a no-go as that country and its people struggle to survive amid the oil shortage that resulted from the American overthrow of the Venezuelan government and the subsequent blockade.

Speaking of oil shortages, the United States' current war with

Iran could throw all sorts of complications into the mix as roughly 20 per cent of world's oil supply continues to be held up at the Strait of Hormuz. The cost of literally everything travel related (and non-travel related) could soon skyrocket beyond anything we might afford.

I'm not super comfortable visiting Eastern Europe as Russia continues its full-scale war with Ukraine. While I'm sure there are plenty of destinations in the region safe enough to visit, there are simply too many unknowns I'm not willing to gamble on.

And while there are plenty of destinations in the U.S. I'd love to visit and explore, neither Julia or I feel comfortable visiting a country that is actively engaged in persecuting immigrants and foreigners, both for our safety and because supporting such a regime is something we can't

bring ourselves to do.

So, what's left? Maybe somewhere in western Europe or Africa or South America?

Luckily, my boss and the publisher of this newspaper, Stewart Grant, also owns a travel agency, Stonetown Travel, and he's offered to sit down with Julia and I, listen to our hopes and dreams – and my fears – and help us find somewhere we can enjoy with a relatively low risk of finding ourselves in the middle of another global conflict.

I recognize complaining about not having anywhere safe to travel is a first-world problem – something so many people around the globe and here at home don't have the luxury of worrying about – but these opportunities come around so rarely for Julia and I, we'd have regrets if we didn't take this chance.

Letter to the editor: Parking, an internet café and a library annex

After learning more about the Rob Ritz two level parking in the GTR, I had seen a definite advantage for the downtown. It would add more parking spaces to the downtown and keep the current spaces that are already

on the site.

The difference would be that the indoor parking would be leased. The cost of the leases would be less than a cup of coffee a day.

Each parking spot would have a charger for electric vehicles. Because the parking spaces are inside, they are out of the weather.

The current federal program that has just been announced covers the cost of each charger installation. The power used for the chargers would come from the solar panels.

This would have an elevator and escalator to service the second parking level.

The solar panels would cover the roof over the parking area.

When the Lakeside seniors are moved to the GTR, as mentioned in the Rob Ritz plan, an internet café plus a

library annex could be added to the Lakeside Seniors Centre, with trees and other greenery, along with tables and chairs, where people could meet and socialize over a coffee.

THE COST OF THIS WOULD BE COVERED BY LAKESIDE SENIORS \$4.9 MILLION that was designated from the sale of the Kiwanis Centre.

As Rob Ritz pointed out that the entire steel structure could be painted white, which would brighten up the entire interior and show how the architectural beauty of how it would look.

The cost of this would be covered from the building maintenance budget.

Other factories left open ceilings in their construction and have found improved air flow.

Lorne Bolton,
Stratford

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STRATFORDTIMES

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STRATFORDTIMES

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6. Newspapers strengthen communities
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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Opinions

As I See It From America: A godsend and my silver lining



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

Last night I joined over 1 billion people who were watching the Academy Awards in Los Angeles. I must admit, I have only seen one movie at a theatre this past year. However, I usually use the Oscars as a means to decide what to watch during the coming year. There are three or four of the nominated movies that I am definitely interested in, and I will see if they are streaming during this summer. It is in the summer that I look for things that I can stream and watch at my leisure.

I am very much looking forward to seeing the beautiful production

of *Frankenstein* as well as the surprisingly wonderful – or at least so I hear – *Sinners*. One movie is about monsters and another about vampires. I am intrigued with *One Battle After Another* and *Hamnet*. You would think as a lover of Shakespeare, I would have already seen the latter, but our performance schedule down here limits our ability to go to the theatre. Unless it is Christmas Day – my whole family goes on that day after all the festivities, we usually chose a festive choice. This past year it was part two of the *Wicked* movies.

Movies, television and theatre have always been a way for many, including myself, to escape from reality, the negative and the nasty. Entertainment has been a sure-fire way to get through some of our messier times. Right after 9-11 I was entrenched in watching comedies, our reality at the time was so horrible. I felt bad sometimes that I was escaping but I also thought of all the people that had lost so much. Being a frequent person that travelled to New York City and even went to the World Trade Center area, I wondered how many

people I met or talked to were now lost in a senseless attack. People who I was acquainted with lost their lives and I was on the phone frantically searching for people I knew, classmates from school and friends I had served with as the president of the New York State Junior Chamber of Commerce. It was all encompassing. It was tragic. It broke my heart.

Entertainment also got me through COVID. We would watch show after show, do a theatre thing if we could, watch more shows, do a craft project and watch and watch even more shows. I became familiar with *Brit Box* and English television dramas along with many movies. I admit that I was very reclusive and sometimes thought I was more comfortable with *Father Brown* than my own neighbours and found the many *Misses Marples* all had their quirks and idiosyncrasies. I loved them all. I even learned about the *Shetland Islands* and now have them on my bucket list for a visit.

Now I am dependent on entertainment once again. I am very much aware that I am avoiding long immersions into the televised

news. I am appalled that this quasi-fascist regime is starting to take over different television stations and today I read that news and factions of news reporting are being controlled even more than they have been in the past. So much for freedom of the press. Our current White House – now adorned with gold filigree everywhere and under major construction for the “ego” ballroom – is telling the chair of the Federal Communications Commission to revoke licences of any organization that reports noncompliant news about the current Iran conflict. They are following what many are saying in reports and online and making daily threats, arresting reporters and belittling many by calling them “piggy” or “ugly,” misogynists saved for the female reporters that cover the White House. It’s enough to make me squirm, cover my head with a blanket and watch what happens in *Midsomer*.

I am keeping in contact with our Stratford friends, and I had a couple of emails and messages from them this past week. I do find talking to them and staying in contact with the Stratford Festival

has been very helpful. I am very much looking forward to our first of five excursions to Stratford in April. We are bringing up some wonderful friends from our Main St. 56 Theater to have a great time with *Guys and Dolls*. I can chalk up this one-day excursion to the entertainment field taking my mind off the situation here in the United States. There is no better place than Stratford to accomplish that. Excellent shows, wonderful community people and a fantastic sense of beauty and caring all lead to a sense of peace and pleasure.

Only time will tell how long we will have to sit through this mess. In the sense that everything has two sides and you must look for the silver lining, I am grateful for movies, the television and of course theatre. Being the executive and artistic director of the Main St. 56 Theater and a very active member of the Stratford Festival is a privilege. Having friends in Stratford is a godsend. I am grateful, happy and sure that the city of Stratford is my silver lining.

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

Summer jobs – looking back: the lowdown, the results and what they taught me

JULIA SCHNEIDER

Times Columnist

Looking back on summer jobs I had while a student I am struck how they motivated me in ways much beyond the immediate and added to my life experience in ways I never predicted – or perhaps wanted.

Just after I graduated university I took an overnight job at Jack’s Snacks, a potato chip company with a factory near my parents’ then-home in Kitchener. The job was a basic one: I stood over a vat of raw potatoes, grabbed any that were substandard – tubers that were rotten, blemished or had green spots – and removed them before an ever-moving conveyor belt had a chance to take them with other jostling tubers into the deep recesses of the machine that prepared them for their junk food future.

It was cold work. Even though it was summer outside it wasn’t in the plant; even the water holding the potatoes was freezing. Though I felt I was doing an important job – those bad spots could result in sickness or birth defects – it wasn’t fun. During breaks I would sip coffee and read J.D. Salinger short stories before heading back to work at the vat.

At 6 a.m. the next morning I set off with my fellow workers to the nearest bus stop to catch the first bus of the day home. A summer of this convinced me to apply for grad

school, which I started that fall.

Decades later, having graduated to partial retirement, I recently volunteered to be a citizen member of Stratford’s energy and environment (E&E) advisory committee. With a few other committee members, I am currently working on a guide to green gardening in Stratford, which is all about ways to bring nature to the city.

One of my sections is on creatures and their important role in the whole scheme of life.

Due to another summer job I had for a short time decades ago, even before Jack’s Snacks, I especially wanted to pay notice to that industrious but oft-overlooked denizen of the deep, the worm. Aristotle called worms the intestines of the earth, while Darwin wrote: “It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly organized creatures.” And yet its work underground seemed not to be noticed. So much toil, I thought, for good – or not?

To my great dismay, one of my fellow E&E members, critiquing what I wrote about worms, had a problem with my unquestioning regard for them. Not only were worms not good, she said, but they were actually invasive in North America, and were doing great damage in boreal Ontario forests where they did not belong. This hit my belief system like a seismic shock. Worms? Bad?

It took me back again to memories of Kitchener and another summer job I had there, at Rockway Golf Course. Perhaps not everyone knows that, after the golfers go home from many courses after sunset, the worms, and their pickers, come out for the night.

A recent Grade 13 graduate, I was one of those pickers. There you might find me, a miner’s head-lamp strapped to my head and a can for the worms to my leg. It was an otherworldly experience but reminded me of the things people did for money if they had to – even though the pay was very little indeed.

After the job ended that August I went off to university and put away my fascination with the poor worms, which is how I had come to view them. I had sacrificed so many of them for so little, and my guilt lasted.

But now, in 2026, here was someone vilifying the object of my pity; it distressed me. I checked, did a bit of research and found my critic was right, at least in part.

There are three different kinds of worms and they live in different environments. The endogenic worm lives deep underground and is seldom seen; the anecic worm, which travels widely and is the earthworm we see in gardens and robins devour; and the epigenic worm, which is ideal for creating high-value compost because its territory is small spaces and it is happy to live in a worm bin as long as there is lots of discarded produce for it to eat and digest.

The worms that cause damage in the forests are the second kind. They are the ones fishermen take on their trips north, and they are the ones they discard there if they aren’t used, the ones that go on to ravage the roots of trees. It is humans who are creating a problem where none existed before, by not taking what they don’t use back with them after they finish fishing.

I cannot look at fishermen judgmentally, however, because I was part of their crime. I gave them worms that they could leave behind. It was years ago but who knew when the problem started; what we know is that it exists now. I was part of the propagation of an invasive species, but there is nothing I can do about it now.

A few months ago I almost had to cancel a trip after I ate some half-cooked potatoes. Given my experience with tubers, I should have known better. When it comes to the worms, however, no one told me what they might do.

I did not know. Did anyone know?

And so, my two summer jobs: neither a win for the environment or the health of the planet. Potato chips, worms and me. My education continues.

(Tonight I heard on the CBC’s *As It Happens* that “pet” goldfish released into the wild in B.C. are invasive and threatening native fish. The moral: take care what you release on the world!)

Opinions

WEB-CRAWLING THE CONNECTIONS



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

Today the web-crawling spider will take her eight eyes and look around the web. In the last column we looked at the options of removing guardrails that hinder development (and innovation, some say).

None of us lives on an independent island. All forms of life have some pretty basic needs. We can call them habitat: water, food, shelter and space to live, find a mate, reproduce and migrate if that's part of their life. This runs from top carnivores right down to soil micro-organisms. All those life forms create the web of life.

All those life forms are connected. That's actually called the first law of ecology: formalized by Barry Commoner in 1971. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was ahead of the game: "Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else."

The simplest example is a food web. Leaves fall in the forest. They decay and are absorbed by micro-organisms into fertilizer for the plants that grow there. The plants provide pollen for pollinators, vegetation for rabbits and seeds for birds and mice. Following the mice, they are food for foxes and owls. Those foxes and owls are food

for larger creatures that are their predators, such as coyotes and wolves. That food web is much more complicated, including thousands of insects, all with roles to play in nature.

The trees that drop the leaves? As we breathe, we are utilizing oxygen that came from those trees, as they absorb carbon and emit oxygen. The trees also influence weather patterns, providing cooling and contributing to the water cycle to produce rain. Humans are there too, as beneficiaries of oxygen, rain, plants, pollinators and the complex web that supports life at all levels.

Every time a part of that web of life disappears, either naturally or by human interference, it doesn't just go quietly into the night. Everything connected to that point on the web collapses. Wetlands, for example, are being removed at an astonishing rate by development. The wetlands bog in the Ring of Fire is the second largest wetland in the world. Wetlands are vital habitat for migrating birds, and for millions of organisms sheltering in the water, the soil and the plants that make up wetlands. The wetlands bog in the Ring of Fire is also a huge peat bog. When peat bogs are disturbed, they release large amounts of carbon and methane, potent greenhouse gases.

The web of life faces many challenges when wetlands are destroyed or disturbed. Life forms that are part of complex ecosystems and food chains disappear. So too, do those other life forms that depend on them. We too suffer from imbalance in our atmosphere. Wetlands are carbon sinks, so between less ability to absorb carbon, and the increased presence of greenhouse gas emissions, the heat



(TIMES FILE PHOTO PHOTO)

Two geese lead a brood of goslings to Lake Victoria in Stratford during Spring. An interconnected environment is always on display in Stratford's park system, which stems from one corner of the city to the other.

blanket that surrounds the earth continues to affect us. We all breathe the same air, whether the increased carbon dioxide comes from lack of trees and wetlands or the war in Iran – everything is connected.

Create something wonderful and beautiful to support the web of life. Create habitat for those native creatures that walk, fly and burrow among us. They all support the web of life. Make a resolution to turn part of your world into habitat, with native plants, shrubs and trees. Oak trees, for example, are host to over 2,000 species of native life forms. Native shrubs are wonderful, offering shelter for birds and flowers for pollinators. Plant as many different native flowers as you can; different plants attract different pollinators.

Native? These are the flowers, shrubs and trees that have been in this area for thousands of years. There are wonderful lists and sources for our area.

Check the CFUW website (cfuwstratford.ca/advocacy-climate-action/) and the Tri-County Master Gardeners (<https://tricitycountymastergardeners.ca/>) for help. All forms of life would be grateful, including the spider.

There are other forms of support too. It can be in the form of speaking for that web of life, when it's threatened. It can be lessening the use of fossil fuel and plastic, it can be protecting wetlands and it can be speaking to government representatives. The web of life is under assault on many levels. Theresa McClenaghan, executive director and counsel of the Canadian Environmental Law Association noted: "We need to 'look before we leap' and once we leap into new projects for economic development, we need to make sure that we are protecting the health of our environment and communities even as we pursue the economic activities that give us our prosperity, with fair rules that apply to all."

It is important to acknowledge the wisdom of the guardrails in law and community. Environmental laws serve an important function in protection of the web

of life. Opportunity for community to review new projects is critical, along with our responsibility to the Indigenous community. Jane Goodall reminded us, "You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."

UPDATES:

Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of March 13, 2026: 429.23 ppm.

The Xerces Society, promoting invertebrates (insects) has come up with a list of New Year's resolutions. I'll be sharing them in UPDATES in 2026.

Plant or expand a native milkweed plot.

Turn off lights each night. Reduce light pollution at night to help creatures like fireflies that need darkness to thrive. Commit to a nightly routine for turning off lights inside and out.

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.

STRATFORD TIMES

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Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com or
call 519-655-2341

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathaway 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

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

March 21; 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

St. Mary's Catholic High School, 431 Juliana Drive, Woodstock, ON, N4V 1E8

Free admission and parking. Framed and Judged exhibits, Stamp dealers, youth gift bags, Sales Circuit, draw prizes.

Contact: dhfe@silomail.com

Web: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from, 2-4pm
Infinity Dance 451 Erie St.

Next meeting March 22. 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

LENTON LUNCH

Wed., Mar. 25; 12:00 Noon

Immaculate Conception RC Church

\$15.00 Speaker: Charlie Swartwood (Bethel Pentecostal Church)

SHANE COOK & THE WOODCHIPPERS

Friday March 27; 7 p.m.

Avondale Church, 194 Avondale Ave

A joyous musical journey through fresh, original fiddle tunes and songs., with all proceeds supporting the next generation of performers at Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts 2026.

Tickets \$35/adult, \$10/children 12 & under
www.kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/events

EUCHRE NIGHT

Friday, March 27; 6 p.m.

Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

Enter your 2-person team for \$20 by calling Anne at 519-301-0914, Dave at 519-703-6544, or the Legion at 519-271-4540. Prizes for 1st to 3rd place.

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, April 7, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

93 Morgan St., Stratford

Speaker – Denise Strasser from Action Health Care. She will update us on assistive devices, mobility aids, other home health products, and the Assistive Devices Program, (ADP) Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday April 13, 2026, 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "How to Grow and Care For Hydrangeas", Stephanie Fletcher, Grey County Master Gardener

Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

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

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11:00 a.m. – Fellowship and
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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
Rosso's
Buzz Stop
Union Barber
Mornington Variety
Split Rail
Stratford Rotary Complex
Agriplex
No Frills
Cozyn's
Sebringville Esso
Dave's Diner - Sebringville
Stratford-Perth Museum
Sobey's

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron
Circle K - Huron
West End Pharmacy
Tim Hortons - Huron
Stratford Hospital
Video 99 - Erie St
Jenny Trout
Stratford Medical Pharmacy
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A.N.A.F.
Stratford Hyundai
Daisy Mart
Foodland
Stratford Variety
Brch & Wyn
Stratford Place

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AJ's Hair
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Stratford Tourism
Coffee Culture
Stratford Public Library
The Parlour Restaurant & Inn
Dick's Barber Shop
The Livery Yard
Town Crier Marketing
North End Pharmacy
Annie's Seafood Restaurant
Avon Pharmacy

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: A bridge to nowhere and a palace bereft of Popes



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

Anyone who got anywhere near a French class in school remembers the song, “Sur le pont d’Avignon l’on y danse, l’on y danse.” (“On the bridge of Avignon, they are dancing”). We probably learned it right after “Frère Jacques.”

Turns out, we were badly misled, as we learned during a fascinating tour of the southern French city of Avignon.

Oh, there is a bridge all right. Or part of one. While it once spanned the Rhône River, most of it is gone. It was built in the 1100s with 22 spans connecting the west and east banks, but most of it was destroyed by floods in the 17th century, and today, only four spans remain.

But that’s not the problem with the song. The problem is, they didn’t dance on (“sur”) the bridge – they danced “sous” (under) and the prepositions got switched in the centuries since the song was first sung. So, if you go to Avignon and want to be historically accurate, dance under the remaining bits of the bridge, not on top.

Although, frankly, the broken bridge is not close to being the most interesting thing about Avignon. This ancient city can date its founding to the Neolithic period (the



Only a small section of the Avignon bridge remains, but it’s enough to dance on – or more properly, under.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

“New Stone Age”, from 10,000 to 2,000 B.C.). Artifacts from those dates have been found in Avignon, and there are a lot of archaeological ruins from the Greek and Roman periods of the city.

But two features stand out above all others: the 14th century city walls, which still completely enclose the old city, and the Pope’s Palace.

These two outstanding examples of architectural heritage are related since the walls were built by order of Pope Innocent VI.

The walls run for 4.3 kilometres. They enclose 151 hectares – the entire old city, including the Pope’s Palace. And therein lies a story.

Though we think of Rome – or more properly, the independent city state of the Vatican – as the historic seat of the papacy, this was not always the case. In 1309, Rome was a hotbed of political intrigue and Pope

Clement V moved the Papal Court to Avignon in France where it remained until 1376. By then, the Avignon Papal Palace had housed seven popes. The last of those, Gregory XI, returned to Rome in 1376.

But it didn’t end there. Even while popes reigned in Rome, several other papal wannabes were elected pope in France; they’re now referred to as “antipopes.” Two of them were also based in Avignon. The second of these, Benedict XII, was eventually kicked out of Avignon.

And by the way, in 1409, an effort was made to solve the dispute when a third pope was elected at a council in Pisa, intended to replace the two other claimants. This didn’t work, so now there were three “popes.”

It wasn’t until 1417 that the schism ended and only one pope was again recognized by the entire Roman church. And you thought church

history was boring.

All of this comes to life when you visit the sprawling, soaring Pope’s Palace in the heights of historic Avignon. We toured the site as part of our terrific Viking River Cruise on the Rhône River.

The Palais des Papes is one of the largest and most important medieval gothic buildings in Europe. Much of it is open for tours – including the rooftop, which provides amazing views of the city of Avignon.

Construction of the palace began in 1252, half a century before it became the sole residence of a pope. But when the Papal Court was moved to Avignon, successive popes devised increasingly grand additions and alterations, including several extra towers, a grand chapel and adjoining buildings. Eventually, the size grew to encompass 16,500 square metres. The medieval popes

were determined to build monuments, perhaps to God, but more likely to their own memories.

After the pope moved back to Rome, and the messy business of competing popes was resolved, the palace remained as property of the church but was largely ignored for about 350 years. Things got worse during the French Revolution when it was seized by revolutionary forces. In 1790, it was the site of a massacre of counterrevolutionaries and then became a prison.

Finally, in 1906, it was named a national museum. Our tour guide pointed out “there is no link with the church anymore.” Restoration work started on building, and that has continued ever since. Tour leaders guide you carefully around scaffolding and across temporary bridges.

Most of the rooms continue to be unfurnished, so the architecture is the star of the show, though during our visit, several of the rooms were adorned with incongruously modern art installations by sculptor Jean-Michel Othoniel.

We saw a few rooms where the walls still carry original murals from the 13th and 14th centuries, an intriguing juxtaposition the with ultra-modern art in neighbouring halls.

Perhaps the most impressive sight on the tour comes as you stand on the rooftop and peer through the castlements; at that moment, you are looking at 12,000 or so years of human history. And later, if you wish, you can dance under (or on) a bridge.

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 walls of the ancient French city of Avignon still surround the entire old city.



The Pope's Palace.

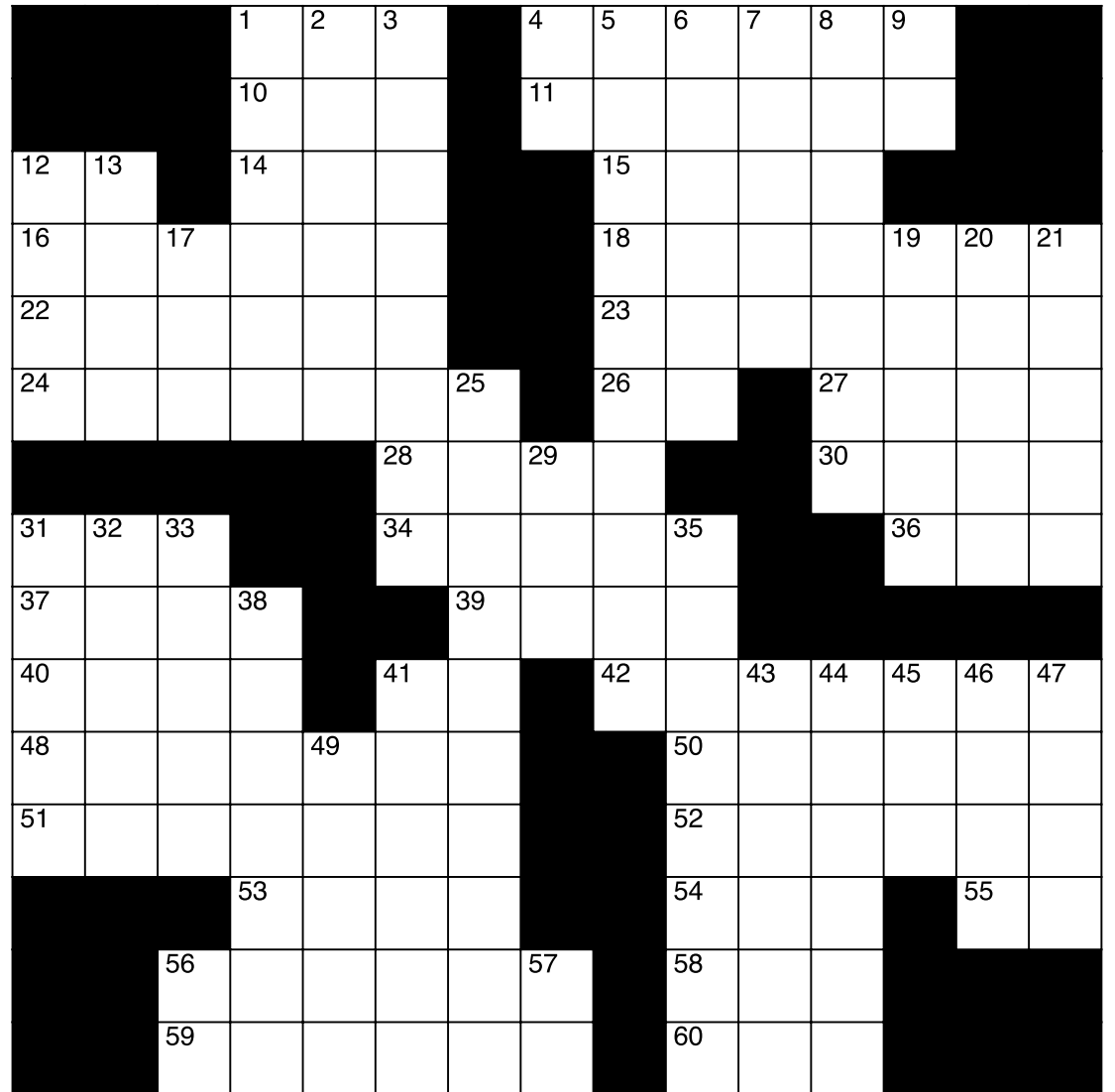
Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Inclined to do
- 4. Sketches
- 10. Book of Chronicles (abbr.)
- 11. Atomic #58
- 12. Dorm official
- 14. Small Eurasian deer
- 15. Southern constellation
- 16. Workers' groups
- 18. Former
- 22. Excellent
- 23. Romance language related to Spanish
- 24. Reference
- 26. Equally
- 27. Dirty towels
- 28. A cargo (abbr.)
- 30. Ammunition
- 31. You get one in summer
- 34. Slang for trucks with trailers
- 36. Swiss river
- 37. Exchange rate
- 39. British School
- 40. College teacher
- 41. Foreign Service
- 42. Horse gear
- 48. Cost to fly
- 50. A salt or ester of boric acid
- 51. Mocking
- 52. One who bird-watches
- 53. Concluding passage
- 54. A major division of geological time
- 55. Sodium
- 56. A way to produce
- 58. Soak
- 59. Laughed loudly and harshly
- 60. Affirmative

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Moth species phalonia ___
- 2. Quantum of energy
- 3. Break the law
- 4. Location of White House
- 5. Official cancellation of a decision
- 6. Where rockers work
- 7. Cut of beef: ___ mignon
- 8. Nocturnal burrowing reptile
- 9. Atomic #62
- 12. Genus of evergreen subshrubs
- 13. Flowering plant of the legume family
- 17. Inches per minute (abbr.)
- 19. Tropical fruit
- 20. Hot fluid beneath the earth's crust
- 21. James ___, painter
- 25. Popular dessert
- 29. Payment (abbr.)
- 31. Cuisine style
- 32. Genus of true flies
- 33. City in western France
- 35. Arrogance
- 38. One holding a position of command
- 41. Weekday
- 43. An evening party
- 44. Print errors
- 45. Not good
- 46. Egyptian Sun god
- 47. East German town
- 49. Olfactory property
- 56. Atomic #37
- 57. "Pollock" actor Harris



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Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

OBITUARY



LINDA ROSE DALE

Linda Rose Dale, age 77, of Stratford passed away peacefully at West Perth Village, Mitchell on March 10, 2026. Born in Stratford, February 24, 1949, daughter of the late Jack and Gertrude (Orth) Jones.

Beloved wife of Larry Dale. Loving mother of Tracy Dale (Brad Elliott) and Tricia Dale. Sister of Bob Jones (Deb) and sister-in-law to Deb Beintema (Jake). Also survived by nephews Mike Jones, Chad Fralick and niece Teri Fralick and their families.

Predeceased by her father-in-law and mother-in-law Bruce and Betty Dale.

Linda worked at the Board of Education and later was secretary at Romeo Public School until her retirement. She was an animal lover and enjoyed the company of her grand dogs.

A celebration of Linda's life will be held in the Reception Centre of the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street, Stratford on Monday, April 13, from 2-4 p.m. Memorial donations in her memory may be made to the Stratford Perth Humane Society. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com



Sandy and Linda Paul Celebration of Life

Please join the family in celebrating the lives of Sandy and Linda on Saturday, April 4, 2026 from 1-4 pm at the Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans Hall, 151 Lorne Avenue East, Stratford. Words of remembrance at 2pm. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

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