

# STRATFORD TIMES

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## Support worker charged after St. Marys death

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A former developmental support worker with Community Living St. Marys and Area has been charged following the death of a 40-year-old woman at a residence in St. Marys last month.

According to the Stratford Police Service, the charges stem from an investigation into the death of the woman, who was pronounced dead despite the efforts of paramedics in a Community Living supportive-living residence on March 11.

Police have charged the former employee with criminal negligence causing death and failing to provide the necessities of life.

Media relations officer Const. Darren Fischer said the death was preventable and resulted from the actions of the staff member at the time.

"The death of the resident was preventable and only resulted due to negligence of the staff member at that moment," Fischer said.

Fischer added there were no concerns about the condition of the residence itself, and police are not investigating any other employees or the organization.

"There was no concern with the living conditions of the home," Fischer said. "Stratford Police Service is not investigating any other employees or the agency itself. We are grateful for the participation and cooperation we have received from all staff and administration at Community Living St. Marys and Area throughout this investigation."

Police would not provide the address or specific lo-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Stratford Warriors forward Dominic Marshall scores with 3:04 remaining in the first period of Game 2 of the GOHL West-ern Conference Finals against the St. Marys Lincolns at the Allman Arena on April 12.

## City's portion of GTR project could equate to 1% yearly tax levy increase

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While the total cost of the Grand Trunk renewal (GTR) project has been historically cited as being anywhere from \$43 million to \$300 million, City of Stratford staff believe that the cost born by the municipality would only be a fraction of that – and could result in a relatively low tax levy if spread across many years.

As previously reported by the Times, the GTR project represents the revitalization of the former shops

grounds on the edge of downtown, an 18-acre site that has been eyed for market and affordable housing, a new YMCA, a new library and much more. Council has yet to make any concrete plans for the parcel but has directed staff to investigate locating the community hub, housing the new Y and library, outside of the superstructure. As chief administrative officer (CAO) André Morin presented last month at a GTR workshop, if located outside the superstructure, the community facility could cost about \$47.3, \$49.9 or \$65.4 million, depending on how council wishes to proceed.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



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# City's portion of GTR project could equate to 1% yearly tax levy increase

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

At the latest and last workshop on the GTR held on April 9, Morin shared plans for long-term financial planning considerations, which included a projection of a total \$15 million the city would invest into the community hub portion of the project.

Morin shared that with that figure coming from the city, \$10-\$15 million coming from the YMCA of Three Rivers, \$4-\$5 million from the Stratford Public Library, \$2-\$10 million coming from development charges, \$1.2 million from a grant for child care and \$5-\$8 million through fundraising, most of the costs for the facility would be covered. A projected funding gap between \$200,000 to \$17.8 million is projected, though Morin spoke candidly about how that gap could be filled.

"How do we fund that potential gap, right? Is there op-

portunities for federal, provincial grants?" Morin rhetorically asked. "Is there opportunities for the Green Municipal Fund, which is a fund that would fund \$10 million in loans, up to 15 per cent of the capital cost in grant, if you build a green building?"

"... There's some opportunities there," Morin continued. "The federal government just announced this week their funding program. Part of that is continuation of formally the gas tax. So we'll continue to get that. They're going to have a provincial stream where they're going to partner with the province, and the province will come out with some programming around again, investment in housing, etcetera. And then they have, as well, a direct to the federal government application stream, which really talks about community buildings. So you know the timing is right as well, in regards to this, where we're at."

Importantly, Morin said that with a regular reserve contribution of \$100,000 a year through the first 10 years, \$200,000 through years 11-25, and \$750,000 through years 25-50 (which would be a period of post-debt and major reinvestment for the city), the asset management costs would be built in a sustainable manner.

In the modeling staff have done, around \$1 million in capital transfer was shown to be a sweet spot for sustaining levels.

"That million is approximately one per cent of the levy," Coun. Lesley Biehn pointed out during the work-

shop. "So you're saying that we get these facilities for approximately a one per cent increase per year, correct?"

"Correct," Morin answered. "Let me back that up ... We're investing \$15 million, or we're presuming to invest \$15 million, but if all the rest of it doesn't come to fruition, or there's no provincial, federal funds to help fund whatever gap we have, then when I come back to you in a year from now, it might be there's not enough money. We can only do 'this,' or we need more money to put in the pot, or let's look at an alternative option."

The next step for council and the city is to formalize agreements with the YMCA and library with memorandums of understanding (MOU). As Morin said, the roadmap presented at the workshop is meant to be a living document akin to its asset management plan – and the good news is that the city's partners are all on the same page.

"The YMCA is ready to have resourcing and start to assist with funding that operational component of this," Morin said. "The library is ramped up on their fundraising side of things. ... We have about \$300,000 in our budget for the Grand Trunk to move things forward as well ..."

A special council meeting to hear public delegation takes place April 20. City council will consider a staff report with recommendations at its next regular meeting, the following Monday, April 27.

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## Support worker charged after St. Marys death

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

cation of the residence, citing privacy and safety considerations for current staff and residents.

"I can only confirm that the residence is in the Town of St. Marys but cannot provide the location for safety and privacy of current staff and residents," Fischer said.

In a statement issued on behalf of co-executive directors Kim Monden and Jayden Nancekivell, Community Living St. Marys and Area expressed condolences to the family of the deceased and confirmed the organization has cooperated fully with authorities.

"We want to assure you that we are taking this matter very seriously," the statement reads. "Upon learning of this incident, we took immediate steps to respond, including notifying the appropriate authorities and the family of the

individual involved. We fully cooperated with the authorities as they investigated the matter."

The organization also confirmed the employee involved is no longer working with Community Living.

"We promptly reviewed our organization's protocols and procedures. We can confirm there is no ongoing risk to the health or wellbeing of the people our organization supports," the statement continues.

"We would like to express our deepest condolences to the family and all those affected. Out of respect for the integrity of the process and the privacy of those involved, we are not able to provide further comment at this time."

The accused was arrested on April 1 and later released from police custody. She is scheduled to appear in court on May 11.



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# Jake's Bowling Social raising money for Ronald McDonald House for sixth time

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Jake Sippel, 18, is once again giving back to the charity that helped him and his family during a hospital stay.

The sixth Jake's Bowling Social will return to Mike's Bowling Lanes on May 31 with slots starting at 11:30 a.m. The event will raise money for Ronald McDonald House Southwestern Ontario and will feature a penny raffle and bake sale. Sippel is also hoping to have every lane sponsored by local businesses.

"My whole goal is to give back to the charity that helped me and hopefully help provide some comfort to kids going through potentially similar experiences," Sippel said. "I know for me having my parents was amazing and I know it would be that way for every single kid out there so if I can help even just one family, one kid, have their parents close to them during their time of need, that's really what I'll do it for."

When Sippel was three years old, he stayed at the London Children's Hospital recovering from second-degree burns on 40 per cent of the lower half of his body from a hot tub accident. His family stayed at the Ronald McDonald House Southwestern Ontario during his recovery, and it made the hospital stay more comfortable.

"I remember specifically the tub, like a bath tub kind of thing so you can wash, I remember that being very scary so luckily my mom was able to come with me to those appointments and because she was so close and so having her for that was really nice because I was sleeping somewhere that wasn't my own home," he said.

Throughout the years of Jake's Bowling Social, there are new and returning players ready to bowl to support the charity. The event also grows year after year.

"From year one, we only started at two timeslots. This year, we're trying to fill up four, so seeing that really shows how the community has come together and realized how much one community can really do for such an

amazing charity," Sippel said.

For more information, contact Sippel by either sending an email to [jakesippel33@icloud.com](mailto:jakesippel33@icloud.com) or call or text 226-860-1881.



(JAKE SIPPEL PHOTO)

Jake's Bowling Social, a fundraiser for Ronald McDonald House Southwestern Ontario, will return to Mike's Bowling Lanes on May 31.

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# Perth South begins 2026 budget deliberations with proposed 7.5% tax increase

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth South council has begun deliberations on its 2026 draft budget, which proposes a 7.5 per cent increase to the municipal – township and county – portion of the tax bill for local property owners.

Council reviewed the draft operating and capital budgets during a special meeting April 2, marking the first step in a budget process that will continue over the coming weeks before a final budget is adopted later this spring. According to chief administrative officer (CAO) Will Jacques, the township's 2026 budget timeline differs from some neighbouring municipalities due to Perth South's decision not to use strong mayor powers, allowing the entire council to participate collaboratively in the process.

"Mayor (Sue) Orr made the decision in the fall of 2025 to include all of council in the budget process, and therefore not proceed using strong mayor powers," Jacques said, noting that decision meant council was not able to formally begin budget deliberations until after Feb. 1. "We had hoped to commence the process closer to Feb. 1, but we experienced some scheduling challenges which slightly delayed our

process."

The draft budget includes a proposed levy increase of \$499,500, representing a 10.65 per cent increase over 2025. Factoring in assessment growth of \$13,497,000, the resulting tax rate increase for the township portion of the tax bill is estimated at 3.92 per cent, translating to an overall increase of about 7.5 per cent on the final tax bill inclusive of both the township and county portions. Perth County council approved a 2026 budget with an 8.75 per cent levy increase back in February.

Based on those estimates, the impact on a property assessed at the average 2016 value of \$500,000 would be approximately \$195.96 for residential properties, \$49 for farmland and \$244.38 for commercial properties.

The township's draft operating budget includes increases in several departments, including general government, protective services and transportation services.

According to the draft operating budget document, overall general government spending is projected to increase in 2026, driven in part by rising salary and benefit costs, technology expenses, continued investment in municipal administration and services and costs related to the 2026 municipal election. In total, the general

government budget is proposed at roughly \$630,000, up by more than \$185,000 over 2025.

Protective services costs, including policing, fire services and contributions to conservation authorities, also represent a significant portion of the township's operating expenditures – proposed at nearly \$1.7 million, an increase by almost \$100,000 over 2025.

Transportation services continue to account for a substantial share of municipal spending, including road maintenance, winter control and equipment-related costs needed to maintain the township's road network. The transportation services budget is proposed at nearly \$2.6 million, up from nearly \$2.3 million budgeted in 2025.

Perth South's draft 2026 capital budget includes 16 capital projects and purchases this year, totalling approximately \$5.24 million funded through a combination of reserves, grants and tax levy contributions.

Planned capital spending includes road reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, equipment purchases and information-technology investments such as server replacement and records-management improvements.

Among the larger road projects proposed for 2026 are improvements to Road 134/

Station Road, Perth Line 15 (Perth Road 122 to Perth Road 130), Perth Line 16 (Perth Road 130 to Perth Road 122) and Perth Line 14 between Perth Road 130 and Perth Road 125, along with work on Bender Drive.

The capital plan also includes investments in municipal technology and administrative infrastructure, including upgrades intended to improve efficiency and service delivery.

Jacques said council has discussed implementing a consistent approach to reserve transfers and capital levy contributions to avoid large fluctuations in the tax rate from year to year and support long-term infrastructure sustainability.

"As part of the budget process, council has also discussed moving forward on a plan to provide consistent reserve transfers and capital levy contributions to keep rates from fluctuating greatly from year to year, and to provide for greater sustainability for the township's infrastructure," Jacques said.

Council will continue reviewing the draft budget at its April 21 meeting before considering adoption later this year. Council comments and any proposed amendments to the draft budget will be incorporated as deliberations continue.

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# Perth South approves summer schedule changes aimed at improving efficiency, work-life balance

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth South council has approved two new initiatives designed to make better use of staff time while supporting improved work-life balance during the summer season.

At its April 7 meeting, council approved a change to the public works department's summer work schedule, moving from a traditional five-day, eight-hour work week to a four-day, 10-hour-per-day schedule. Council also approved a summer hours pilot program that will allow municipal office staff to shorten their lunch breaks to close the municipal office early on Friday afternoons.

"Similar ideas here, but they are from different perspectives," township chief administrative officer (CAO) Will Jaques told council. "... From the public works perspective, under normal circumstances, this type of decision would be management based – making sure that the right employees are at the right spot at the right time. But in fairness to council, we did think it appropriate to bring forward.

"... For public works in particular, I can tell you that this is quite a common process for many municipalities during the summer months. Part of it is certainly a benefit to the operator, but there's much more benefit to the municipality."

According to a staff report presented by

Jacques and deputy CAO/treasurer Tracy Johnson, the revised public works schedule is intended to improve operational efficiency and productivity while providing staff with greater flexibility during the summer construction and maintenance season.

Under the approved change, public works staff will work four 10-hour days each week between June 1 and Sept. 30, with the possibility of starting as early as May 1 depending on coordination with subcontractors and service providers.

Staff noted that longer workdays allow operators such as grader and mower crews to remain in the field for longer periods without needing to return to the shop early, reducing travel time and minimizing disruptions to projects. The extended workday is also expected to create more time for equipment maintenance, helping ensure machinery remains in good working condition throughout the busy summer season.

The report also highlights the benefit of a consistent additional weekday off, typically Friday, giving employees more time for personal appointments, errands and family commitments without needing to take time off during regular work hours.

Staff noted the schedule change may also reduce overtime costs while supporting the township's strategic priority of delivering efficient municipal services.

"If you're telling me everything is going to be covered, I'm all for it," Coun. Jeff Bell said. "I've been in similar situations

... and maybe if there's one full-time employee or they rotate or whatever where someone's got Monday off and they work Tuesday to Friday (that would) just ensure there's always staff in.

"I'm not directing you on how to approach it, but to me it certainly makes sense and I support it."

Others around the council table echoed Bell's support for the initiative, with Coun. Jaime Martin pointing out it makes the township a more attractive employer by offering greater work-life balance.

Councillors did note, however, there could be some complications when it comes to coordinating staff hours with the schedules of contractors and subcontractors. Johnson said staff will clearly communicate any schedule changes to the township's outside contractors, and either they will adjust their schedules, or the township will adjust staff schedules to ensure all necessary work is completed under township supervision.

Council also approved a summer hours pilot program that will allow administrative staff to adjust their lunch schedules to allow for an earlier office closure on Fridays.

Under the pilot program, staff will be permitted to shorten their lunch break to 30 minutes Monday through Thursday and forego a lunch break entirely on Fridays, allowing the accumulated time to be applied toward closing the municipal office at 1:30

p.m. each Friday from the first full week of June until the Labour Day weekend.

According to the staff report, walk-in traffic at the municipal office is typically minimal on Friday afternoons during the summer months, reducing the impact of the earlier closure on residents. Staff will continue to monitor operational needs to ensure any essential Friday afternoon services remain available if required.

Municipal staff identified the pilot program as a no-cost initiative intended to support recruitment and retention efforts while promoting employee morale and productivity.

"It might be a little more about work-life balance, it might be a little more about something staff can (take advantage of) a little bit, but not at the risk of the ratepayer," Jaques said. "Having said that, I appreciate fully that there would be fewer office hours and less availability on that Friday.

"... We are in 2026, which is an election year. There may be things on a Friday that need to be done. Staff will adjust accordingly for that. Very much the same if the office needs to be open for something. If someone has to be there on Friday, we will make those same adjustments."

The pilot program will be evaluated at the end of the summer, with staff expected to report back to council on any benefits or challenges and provide recommendations on whether the program should continue in future years.

## Light Up the Night Kayaking returns with themes, silent disco, breast cancer awareness

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Light Up the Night Kayaking will illuminate the waters in Stratford and St. Marys this year with a variety of themes on dock.

The first Light Up the Night Kayaking event will be on May 23 with a Passionate Pink paddle in support of Breast Cancer Awareness. Co-Founder Sue Clark said the event has had great reception so far since the announcement, near and far.

"I was actually down in the states and I had a lady stop me when I was talking to somebody and she came over in the store and said 'Excuse me' and she just wanted to say her sister went through it and beat it and was so glad that to hear we were doing something," she said.

Light Up the Night Kayaking will have a variety of themes from June to October like Canada Day (June 27), Christmas in July (July 25) and Flower Power (Aug. 15), which will also be silent discos run by Destination Stratford and the Boathouse. The Superhero paddle and silent disco, so far scheduled for Sept. 19, is tentative as the Stratford Dragon Boat Race is happening the same weekend. There will be the Lantern paddle on Oct. 17 and a Halloween paddle on Oct. 24 to conclude the season.

There will also be three paddles in St. Marys including the Wild Wild West (June 13), Hawaiian (July 11) and Full

Moon PJ Paddle (August 28).

Clark invites anyone to join the event, even just to watch and bring their friends, kids and dogs. She said many participants said riding a non-motorized watercraft at night relaxing.

"You're more at one with the water during the night than you are during the day," she said. "A lot of people feel like celebrities as well out there when they're getting their picture taken."

Many friendships have been made through the kayaking program and even new participants are treated like family by friendly long-time participants.

"We're all on the water and we're all kayaking and I think it's cool that when you look around and you see the friendships that are building through it," said Clark. "People are actually camping together that have met there which is nice."

The event is also free to join, other than the cost of lights and decorations for the kayak, canoe, or paddle boat and boat rentals from the Boathouse.

"I think that's one of the things people like the most because you don't have to in times like this you don't have to say 'Oh, now I've got to come up with this money so I can go join in,'" Clark said. "As long as you have lights, that's the only absolute requirement we ask for."

More information can be found online through the Light Up the Night Kayaking on Facebook.

## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the smallest unit of matter?
2. What is an eight-sided shape called?
3. What does a funambulist walk on?
4. What is the hardest natural substance on Earth?
5. In what year did the Titanic sink?
6. Which gender of mosquito is responsible for mosquito bites?
7. What is the rarest blood type?
8. What year did the first human land on the moon?
9. What are the three states of matter?
10. What is the name of Mickey Mouse's pet dog?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

# Can you tell the difference? Replica handgun sparks major police response in Stratford

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

What was initially reported as a man carrying a handgun in Stratford last month turned into something quite different – but not before prompting a large police response and raising ongoing concerns about realistic replica firearms in the community.

On March 26 at approximately 12:30 p.m., the Stratford Police Service received a report of a male walking along Devon Street while carrying and racking what appeared to be a black handgun. Officers quickly responded, alongside members of the Ontario Provincial Police, and the area was temporarily shut down as they worked to locate the individual.

In total, 12 officers were involved in the response, which lasted roughly eight hours.

As it turned out, the weapon was not a

real firearm, but an airsoft or BB gun designed as a direct replica of a Glock pistol.

“The investigation throughout the day revealed that the handgun was actually a pellet gun,” said Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer. “This is a growing concern, as it’s happening on a more regular basis, and to some degree, these pellet guns are more realistic looking and becoming much more prevalent within the community.”

While pellet and airsoft guns may not meet the legal definition of a firearm under the Criminal Code of Canada, they can look nearly identical to the real thing, said Fischer.

In some cases, even the movement and mechanics – like the racking action – closely mimic an actual handgun, despite serving little purpose for the device itself.

For police responding to a call, they treat any threat as if it could be a real handgun. “When that call comes in, we ultimate-

ly don’t know if that’s a real handgun or a pellet gun or some other type of replica firearm, so we have to treat every incident as if it’s a real handgun until we’re able to determine otherwise,” Fischer said.

In this case, the individual was cooperative and no criminal charges were laid, though police noted there may still be court-related conditions and this individual may lose his right to own a firearm in the future.

But incidents like this don’t come without impact. A call of this nature requires a significant police presence, pulling resources and time into what officers must treat as a potentially high-risk situation.

Police say the realism of these replica guns is making their job increasingly difficult. In a recent demonstration, these seized pellet guns were placed alongside service-issued firearms, which shows that both are almost identical to each other.

There are currently no consistent regu-

lations governing the sale of replica firearms, other than that purchasers must be over 18, and retailers are not required to follow specific guidelines.

To address the issue, the Stratford Police Service is working on an educational initiative, including an information guide for residents who purchase airsoft or replica guns. The goal is to promote safe handling and to discourage people from carrying these items in public.

“Ultimately, we want to provide information that’s going to help individuals be able to utilize these devices in a safe manner and allow them to recognize what the possible repercussions are in regards to police response,” Fischer said. “Hopefully, this can prevent further incidents from happening.”

Police are also reminding residents that a city bylaw prohibits the use of pellet guns, BB guns and similar weapons within Stratford city limits.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTOS)

Dave Frei of the Stratford Police Service holds a service-issued handgun alongside a replica airsoft version. With both appearing nearly identical, police are asking: can you tell which one is real and which one is a replica?

## Province injects \$500K in local company as it invests \$12M to protect 80 jobs and create 30 new ones

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

On April 8, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae announced \$500,000 in funding for the local manufacturing company Magest Building Systems Limited. This investment through the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund, alongside Magest’s own investment of over \$12,320,000, will create 30 new good-paying jobs and protect 80 jobs.

“By investing in Magest’s expansion, we’re protecting local jobs and helping build more homes,” said Rae in a media release. “This means increased production in Stratford and more supply to meet

demand. This investment is strengthening our manufacturing sector and supporting workers across Perth-Wellington.”

With this investment, Magest will complete building additions, install automated equipment and adopt new software to support growth. Additionally, with the increased space and equipment, Magest will begin a new production line. This expansion comes at a critical time when Magest is at capacity. This growth represents an increased demand for housing materials and this project will allow Magest to meet the demand. By expanding their operations Magest will be alleviating pressure on the housing sector and helping to build more homes across Ontario.

“Employing more than 800,000 workers across the province, Ontario’s manufacturing sector is the economic engine of our nation,” said Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. “Our government is proud to support local companies like Magest Building Systems Limited as they expand their operations, and we thank them for their contributions to Ontario’s dynamic and growing manufacturing ecosystem.”

“Magest is proud to receive support from the Southwestern Ontario Development Fund (SWODF) for our new hollow-core production facility in Stratford. This investment has created 30 local jobs, strengthened vertical integration across

our operations, and expanded capacity for the multi-residential housing sector,” said Brock Martin, president of Magest. “By increasing efficiency and production, this project supports the Government of Canada’s Build Canada Homes Faster initiative and helps address the growing demand for housing across the region.”

Ontario is investing over \$230 million through its Regional Development Program to help manufacturers across the province grow while supporting distinct regional priorities. To date, Ontario has supported more than 180 projects through the program, leveraging more than \$2.6 billion in new investments and helping to create over 5,500 jobs.

# Stop VAW event aims to spark conversation on sports culture in Perth County

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A nationally recognized sports journalist will be in Stratford next month as part of a community effort to encourage discussion about respect, accountability and healthy relationships in sport.

Stop Violence Against Women (StopVAW) Perth County is hosting Tackling Sports Culture Together featuring TSN senior correspondent and author Rick Westhead May 5 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the Burnside Agriplex. The free public event will explore how sports organizations, families and communities can work together to foster safer and more respectful environments for young athletes, particularly in light of recent high-profile cases involving hazing, abuse and sexual violence in Canadian sport.

Jen Olenewa, manager of public education at Optimism Place Women's Shelter and coordinator with the StopVAW coordinating committee, said the idea for

the event came after she heard Westhead speak previously and recognized the relevance of the conversation for Stratford and Perth County's strong sports community.

"I know we've got a big sports community here and that this is an issue that we all should care about," Olenewa said. "What Rick talks about in his book really helps people understand not only the experiences of women who have been sexually assaulted, but also the male-on-male violence that can happen within locker rooms as part of hazing. It's harmful and it's often silenced."

Westhead's book, *We Breed Lions: Confronting Canada's Troubled Hockey Culture*, examines the culture surrounding hockey in Canada and the systems that can enable harmful behaviour, while also highlighting efforts to create change through education and accountability.

Olenewa said one of the goals of the event is to broaden the conversation beyond supporting survivors and encourage more engagement among men and boys.

"We can protect survivors all we want, but if men remain disengaged from the conversation, then we never see an end to this," she said. "We need to start having honest conversations about how behaviours that are normalized in locker rooms can have impacts far beyond sport."

The event will include a presentation on *Coaching Boys Into Men*, an evidence-based program designed to help coaches promote healthy relationships, consent awareness and positive team environments among young athletes.

Olenewa said coaches, parents, athletes and sports organizations all play an important role in shaping the culture young people experience.

"Coaches often spend more time with these young people than almost anyone else in their lives, so they have an opportunity to help shape who they become," she said. "If we're teaching respect, consent and healthy relationships, those young people will carry that into the community."

Organizers are encouraging anyone involved in sports, including athletes, parents, coaches, team officials and community members, to attend.

"We want people to be part of this new conversation," Olenewa said. "If we want safer communities, we need to be willing to look at how sports culture influences behaviour and what we can do differently."

A youth-focused session for Grade 11 and 12 students involved in sports is also being planned earlier in the day May 5, from 2-4 p.m., giving young leaders an opportunity to discuss how they can help foster positive team environments.

A few weeks after the event, organizers hope to hold a community debrief session to continue the conversation and identify practical next steps for local organizations.

Community members interested in attending either the evening or afternoon session can learn more by contacting [stopvaw@optimismplace.com](mailto:stopvaw@optimismplace.com).

# Bestselling author Tayari Jones speaks with Stratford Arts and Lectures at the Bruce Hotel

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Stratford Arts and Lectures hosted another fascinating evening at the Bruce Hotel, this time with bestselling, award-winning author Tayari Jones, who has written an unforgettable novel, *Kin*, that reads with wit, intelligence and deep feeling about two lifelong friends whose worlds converge after many years apart in the face of a devastating tragedy.

Jones has only three stops on her Canadian book tour, and Stratford is one of them – and the first. She is from Atlanta, Ga., and is the award-winning author of *An American Marriage*.

Her conversation with Stratford Arts and Lectures founder Rina Barone focused on Jones' creative process and personal journey as a writer, emphasizing themes of identity and voice.

Jones discussed the influence of moving back to the American South and rediscovering her unique voice, and explored the nuances of African American speech and its untranslatable nature.

"One of the words in African American speech is the word trifling, because you can give examples of, but you can't explain exactly what it means," she said. "... And I wanted to capture that in this novel, this way that people confidently speak a language within a language."

She also reflected on the challenges of writing a novel about modern America versus the 1950s, emphasizing the importance of empathy and understanding across generations.

"I think I wrote this book with less con-

fidence, because when I was writing the things that I knew, I felt confident that I was right about the order of things, the customs, etcetera, so I think, this time, I was writing with a different kind of humility," she said. "I think it's always good when we are humble. I think it makes you pay more attention to each word, because you're really thinking about it more. So that was a good experience."

Her new novel, *Kin*, is about Vernice and Annie, two motherless daughters raised in Honeysuckle, La., who have been best friends and neighbours since earliest childhood but are fated to live starkly different lives.

Raised by a fierce aunt determined to give her a stable home in the wake of her mother's death, Vernice leaves Honeysuckle at 18 for Spelman College, where she joins a sisterhood of powerfully connected Black women and marries into an affluent family. Annie, abandoned by her dissolute mother as a child and fixated on the idea of finding her and filling the bottomless hole left by her absence, sets off on a journey that will take her into a world of peril and adversity, as well as love and adventure, and culminate in a battle for her life.

Jones said she never knows an ending when she starts writing, but she enjoyed this project and learning about her characters.

"I'm not one of those writers that knows the ending. I don't know the ending when I start, but I do like to think that I know what it's about, but I just had to kind of surrender in the process."

The novel is about mothers and daugh-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

**Stratford Arts and Lectures founder Rina Barone speaks with bestselling author Tayari Jones during an event at the Bruce Hotel in Stratford.**

ters, friendship and sisterhood and the complexities of being a woman in the American South.

The Stratford Arts and Lectures series, in collaboration with the Bruce, has

grown significantly since last year and has now doubled in attendance.

Tickets for upcoming events can be found at [www.stratfordartsandlectures.com](http://www.stratfordartsandlectures.com).

## Ghost Light

(in memory of Graham Greene –poem extract from Graham's Celebration of Life programme, April 19th, 2026 )

Do not wonder for whom  
the ghost light burns, dear Graham,  
it burns for thee.

It burns for your voice  
cured in cedar and rivers,  
it burns for your ancestors  
so seared in your soul,  
it burns for the stillness  
you blessed into the camera's eye,  
that grin and your whimsy  
that so beautifully countered  
the script of this world.

Lennie or Kicking Bird,  
Crow Horse and foodie,  
Shylock or playful jokerster,  
you shed the masks  
of expectation as bark  
peeled from the healing tree,  
bold pathways blazed and  
lighted so others might  
follow without apology.

And such for thee does that  
ghost light burn, dearest Graham,  
so the camera might lean  
forever into the prideful gravity  
of your Oneida gaze,  
the boards warmed always  
with the trademark honesty  
of your every line, the precious  
weight of your truth.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

# Creators of the Classic City: John Corry Wilson Daly

PAUL WILKER

*Times Correspondent*

Directors of the Canada Company concerned themselves a great deal with the community named Stratford. The second man they sent to the settlement was their agent John Corry Wilson Daly, age 37. He was a short, quick-tempered Ulsterman, born in Liverpool, England, in 1796. In Stratford he was something of a little dictator and ruled for a decade. He had reached Canada by way of Cooperstown, New York, and joined the Canada Company in Hamilton.

Educated in Ireland, he had worked as a surgeon's assistant. For the Canada Company he was the doctor-clerk in Guelph. He came to Stratford in the summer of 1833. Choosing the most commanding location he could find, he built the hamlet's second frame building, on the vacant side of the wooden bridge. From there he could look straight down the Huron Road, the main street.

In taking over the Canada Company's mills, he added a machine for carding wool to attract farmers who were establishing themselves in the surrounding townships. Before long he provided sawn lumber for buildings, flour and oatmeal for food, and yarn for clothing. He became the first postmaster. He was the local medical authority, the local banker and an officer of the militia. As a justice of the peace, he performed marriage ceremonies. He took over just about all the responsibility and occupation of a newly formed community, except that of a hotelkeeper.

His wife saw to it that they lived in a suitable manner and the lifestyle of the Daly family was elegant for the time and place. They ate from good china, poured wine from glass decanters, used elegant white chamber pots and threw their broken glass and crockers into the ash pile, which later would be found under the water mains being dug in the lawn of the Perth County Courthouse building.

Daly's prickly disposition did not appeal to early settlers, nor did his wife's attitude endear her to all the women. Dinner guests were seated in strict protocol, and it



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The first house erected in 1833 was the frame residence of John Daly and family. The house was demolished in 1885 for the new courthouse. The drawing (coloured) is by Tim Mosher of Tavistock.

was an insult to be seated below the salt at the Daly table or worse still banished for dinner into the barn.

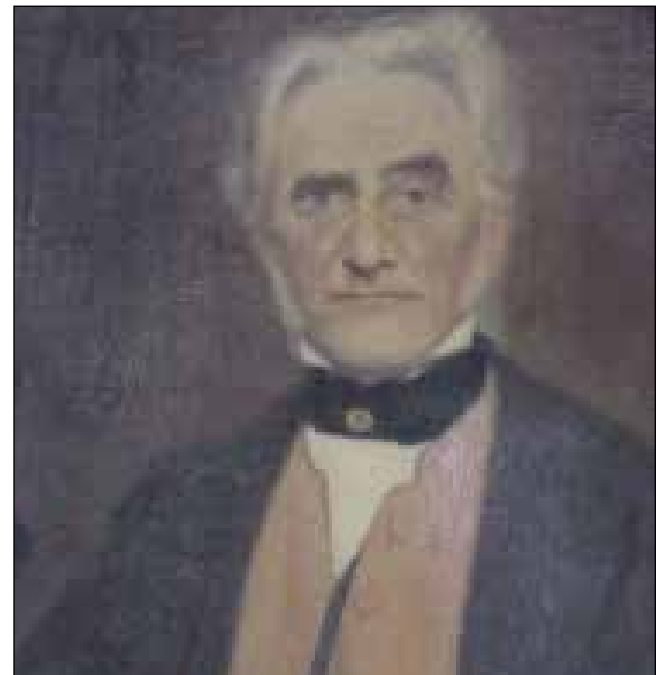
An autocrat he might have been, but Daly always worked single-mindedly for the advancement of his village and for that he was sometimes called its founder. Stratford was a star to which he hitched his wagon as he assembled a choice acreage in the area. In his opinion, what was good for Daly was good for Stratford and vice versa. They were indivisible.

John Daly was Stratford's first mayor in 1859. He married three times. A son, Thomas Mayne, born to his wife Leonora Mayne, and a grandson, also Thomas Mayne, were politicians.

Thomas Mayne Daly Sr. was the son of John Daly. He was mayor of Stratford twice and represented the riding of Perth North in the House of Commons. Thomas M. Daly Jr. was called to the Law Society of Upper Canada in 1876, and practiced law in Stratford until 1881. In the same time period, he became a town councillor, chaired the public school board and was mayor of Stratford from 1876-1878.

"Creators of the Classic City" is an ongoing Times series written by Paul Wilker, co-author of the e-book of the same name by him and Gord Conroy. Interested readers can find the free book online at <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ypken/pqiv/>.

Streets of Stratford can be found at <http://www.streetsofstratford.ca/>.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

John Daly was Stratford's first mayor in 1859, and sometimes called the Classic City's founder. He became the first postmaster. He was the local medical authority, the local banker and an officer of the militia. As a justice of the peace, he performed marriage ceremonies. He took over just about all the responsibility and occupation of a newly formed community.

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# Stratford comes together for Earth Day cleanups and contests

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

April 22 is Earth Day, and the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) and community members are working together to freshen up the city after a long winter.

Earth Day, celebrated annually, is the world's largest environmental movement, dedicated to promoting sustainability, environmental awareness and action to protect the planet.

This year, kicking things off is the first annual Avon Riverbank Cleanup, taking place Saturday, April 18, at 10 a.m. Hosted by the Boathouse Stratford in partnership with local realtor Shane Oosterhoff, the event encourages volunteers to help remove winter debris from the Avon riverbanks and surrounding park areas.

"This is really a community event to help bring people together to raise awareness about the river itself," said Oosterhoff. "The idea stemmed from last year when the river was really low and the boat-house had to shut down, and how people showed up with the bucket challenge. We just thought this was a great opportunity to follow suit from that experience and put together this event that will hopefully turn into something that we can do every year."

Anyone can come out to help clean up the riverbank, and cash donations will also be accepted to support Climate Momentum, a local group working to bring people together around climate action and environmental initiatives in Stratford.

Cleaning supplies, garbage bags and gloves are included, along with light refreshments after the cleanup.

A special dirty soda, called Avon Glow Up, will also be available April 18 at Corner Store Candy Co., and a free boat pass for use this summer will be given to all who participate in the river cleanup.

On Earth Day itself, Tuesday, April 22, the BIA invites local businesses to take part in the annual Clean Sweep Contest, where businesses are encouraged to form a "Clean Team" and tidy up sidewalks and storefronts while competing for fun prizes.

"We're hoping for sunny skies and all hands on deck," said Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the BIA.

Three contest categories will award \$100 in Downtown Dollars to the winners. Categories include best before-and-after photo, best team clean costume and weirdest thing found.

"We made it fun by having a contest with three categories," said Kim Griffiths, membership and animation liaison for the BIA. "It's been interesting over the years to see the different things that come in for the weirdest thing found."

Griffiths noted that in past years, winners found cookbooks and even a bicycle while cleaning up downtown.

Also on April 22, community members can take part in a sweet incentive to help keep Stratford clean. The Sutton Team has partnered with JENN & Larry's for their annual Earth Day giveaway. Residents who spend time picking up litter in their neighbourhood, a local park or a favourite trail can snap a photo or video as proof and bring it to JENN & Larry's between 2 and 7 p.m. on April 22 to receive a free kid-sized ice cream, compliments of the Sutton Team.

Businesses can enter the Clean Sweep Contest by posting and tagging @downtownstratford on Instagram or Facebook, or by emailing photos to kgriffiths@downtownstratford.ca.

Winners will be announced April 23 at 5 p.m.

For more information on downtown initiatives, follow @downtownstratford on social media.

## HPPH looking for dog involved in an incident

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is looking for a dog involved in an incident in Stratford on Saturday, April 11 at 12 p.m. The incident took place on Snake Hill Road (Richard Monette Way/Lake-side Drive).

The dog involved in the incident is described as medium-sized with short black hair. The breed is unknown. The dog was unleashed when the incident occurred and was thought to have come from the Romeo Street/Ontario Street direction.

The person presumed to be the own-

er of the dog is described as a tall, thin male, about mid-30s and with brown hair. He was wearing jeans and a plaid shirt.

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

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

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

# COBS Bread Stratford raises more than \$4,000 for Local Community Food Centre

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

On March 7, COBS Bread at the Stratford Mall donated \$2 from every six-pack of hot cross buns sold to support local charities through its Doughnation Day initiative. From Feb. 7 to March 7, the bakery also accepted in-store monetary donations.

The Local Community Food Centre was this year's recipient, receiving more than \$4,000 to help support and feed community members in Stratford.

Across North America, COBS Bread raised \$475,159 through this year's Doughnation Day. Since the initiative began, the company has raised \$2.2 million for local charities.

Jerry Arai, owner of COBS Bread Stratford, said the initiative is a fundamental part of the business's commitment to community service, and selecting the Local was an easy decision.

"Even before the store was built, we came out and met with Julie and saw what they were doing at the Local, and we just fell in love with the concept," he said. "We came to meet Julie and stayed for the community meal a couple of times."

In addition to Doughnation Day, COBS Bread supports local organizations through daily donations of unsold bread and in-kind contributions.

"We like to donate through in-kind contributions to the Local and other

charities, but financial contributions can really help as well," said Arai. "They're well-loved within the community, and we saw just how supportive people were during Doughnation Day."

The donation comes at a time when the Local Community Food Centre is seeing a significant increase in demand. Julie Docker Johnson, community connector at the Local, said meal service numbers have reached record highs in recent months.

"The Friday lunch during March Break saw 324 meals served, and the previous record was 224," she said.

The funds will be used to support operational costs, which Docker Johnson said are often the hardest to cover.

"Generally, with grants or fundraising, it's for specific initiatives, which is very much needed," she said. "But receiving funding to help with operational costs – things like rent, gas, snow removal or keeping the lights on – isn't as visible, but it's just as important, if not more."

With growing concerns around food insecurity and food waste, COBS Bread locations across North America donate unsold products daily to local charities.

"It's fundamental to what we do," said Arai. "My wife is the principal of this business, and supporting communities is her true passion. The community supports us so we can continue doing what we love – baking and selling fresh bread. It's only right that we support the communities that support us."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO) Julie Docker Johnson of the Local Community Food Centre accepts a cheque from COBS Bread Stratford owners during a presentation at the Local.

[WWW.STRATFORDTIMES.COM](http://WWW.STRATFORDTIMES.COM)

# Your Library Corner: Celebrating the heart of our library this Volunteer Appreciation Week

BRANDI GILLET

Stratford Public Library

During Volunteer Appreciation Week (April 19-25), we take the opportunity to shine a light on the extraordinary people who give their time, talents and care to support the Stratford Public Library (SPL). Our volunteers are a vital part of who we are, strengthening every corner of the library and helping us serve our community in meaningful ways.

In 2025, 107 dedicated volunteers contributed an incredible 1,908 hours in support of library services, programs and collections. Every one of those hours mattered. Whether helping someone navigate technology, keeping shelves in order, repairing wellloved books or delivering library materials to those unable to visit in person, volunteers helped ensure SPL remains welcoming, accessible and responsive to community needs.

Volunteers supported a wide range of services across the library. Our Tech Tutoring volunteers played a key role in building digital confidence, assisting 220 people across 134 sessions and answering 343 questions. From email and smartphones to online forms and software, these volunteers patiently guided users through challenges that can otherwise feel overwhelming.

Visiting Library Service volunteers helped extend the library beyond its walls. Through 346 delivery trips, they brought 2,124 books directly to community members,



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Public Library volunteer Tracey A, whose 20 years of service supporting the library's recycling efforts, among many contributions, is being celebrated along with her peers next week during Volunteer Appreciation Week, ensuring access to reading and information regardless

of mobility or circumstance. These deliveries represent more than numbers – they reflect connection, dignity and care.

Behind the scenes, volunteers also kept the library running smoothly. Shelf Readers spent 298 hours organizing collections so materials are easy to find and enjoy, while our Mender dedicated 38 hours to repairing damaged books, extending the life of shared resources and keeping beloved titles in circulation. Volunteers also supported literacy and learning through programs like Reading Buddies, encouraging young readers and fostering a life-long love of books.

We are especially grateful to the many volunteers who have supported library services over the long term. Those who have served for five, 10, 15 and even 20 years reflect a remarkable commitment to the Stratford Public Library and to our community. This includes Tracey, whose 20 years of service – supporting the library's recycling efforts among many contributions – reflect that same care and commitment.

From publicfacing services to behindthescenes care, library volunteers show up with generosity, patience and commitment. Every hour matters, and together those hours add up to a stronger library and a stronger community.

To each of our volunteers: thank you for your time, your kindness, and your belief in the power of the public library. We are deeply grateful for everything you do.

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# Downtown businesses thrilled with Nashville Takeover success

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Stratford was filled with people in the core walking from venue to venue in their Nashville best with denim jackets and dresses, cowboy hats and flannel on the weekend.

The Nashville Takeover stopped by Stratford from April 10 to 12 and had a variety of country singer-songwriters from Canada and the United States perform across eight Stratford venues like the Bunker Performance Lounge, Copperlight and Chuck's Roadhouse.

Downtown businesses also got into the Nashville spirit by either serving special menu items inspired by southern flavours like sweet tea, peaches and cornbread, or offering promotions like earning a free cowboy hat with a qualifying purchase and Dolly Parton-inspired salon blowouts.

"I think it went very well. It was very well attended. Stratford was alive and buzzing," said Jamie Pritchard, Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) general manager. "I spoke with some restaurant owners that were involved in it and they were very busy serving dinners and lunches and all that

kind of stuff, so it really brought (a) bustling feeling early April, which is usually not there as much because April is kind of a shoulder season month and in-between things."

Pritchard added that each of the participating performance venues offer a unique entertainment experience, even for the same event.

"Each offered their own flavour or different style from the Copperlight that had theatre-style and sanctuary to the Bunker that had a great little listening room there. Chuck's was alive. I talked to most of the venues and they were all very pleased with how things went," he said.

There's still a chance to try a taste of Nashville throughout the month of April with nine participating restaurants serving Nashville hot chicken sandwiches throughout the month of April as part of a contest. Spicy sandwiches can be purchased at either the Bunker, Black Swan, Gilly's Chuck's Roadhouse, Features, Joe's Diner, Mercer Hall, Fosters Inn, and Work Pub & Eatery. Diners can rank the sandwiches for a chance to win Downtown Dollars.

Stratford was one of the 13 cities across



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Fawn Adair of revel, one of the Downtown Stratford restaurants that had a Nashville Takeover-inspired menu featuring items such as cheddar cornbread muffins, peach sweet tea and spiced honey pecan donuts.

Canada selected for the Nashville Takeover. The music showcase will next be at Essex County from June 5 to 6 and will

be in Port Stanley, Chatham-Kent, Burlington, Orangeville and others throughout the year.

## Shelf Help with SPL

ALIDA LEMIEUX

Stratford Public Library

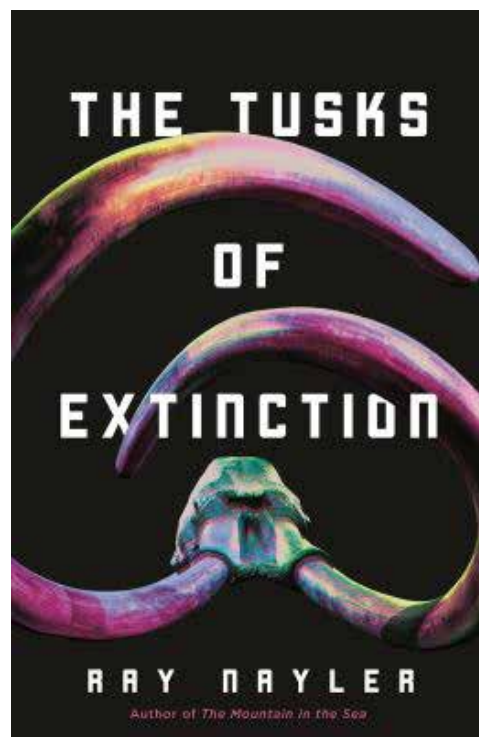
*The Tusks of Extinction* by Ray Nayler  
@SPL: FIC Nayler

Imagine a future where woolly mammoths have been brought back from extinction, roaming the windswept, grassy steppes of Russia. Leading the herd is Dr. Damira Khismatullina: a renowned Russian elephant biologist brutally murdered by poachers in Kenya a century prior. Damira's consciousness, downloaded by the government in a medical procedure prior to her death, has been implanted in the body of the mammoth matriarch. Using her extensive knowledge of elephants, now long-extinct, Damira teaches the mammoths the skills they need to survive.

Unbeknownst to Damira, the mammoths' benefactor is leading a hunting party into the game preserve. Big game hunters will pay enormous sums for the chance to shoot a mammoth, which ironically pays for the mammoths' protection. Poachers, too, are tempted onto the preserve by the prospect of mammoth ivory, risking discovery by government drones.

At just under 100 pages, *The Tusks of Extinction* doesn't waste time getting into the action – and a caution: it is bloody. Yet Nayler still manages to immerse the reader in the setting and conjure complicated characters who grapple with moral issues. It's a great dip into science fiction

for someone (like me) who likes to read nature nonfiction. All the scientific advancements in the book, from robotic mules to de-extinction seem within the realm of possibility. One-part Jurassic Park, one-part Gorillas in the Mist, *The Tusks of Extinction* is a succinct, powerful commentary on poaching, human greed, and the tendency of history to repeat itself.



## Region's unemployment rate increased to 5.3% last month

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

In March, the unemployment rate in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region increased by 0.2 percentage points to 5.3 per cent, yet remained the lowest unemployment rate in the province for the past three months. Meanwhile, the provincial unemployment rate also increased 0.2 percentage points this month to 7.5 per cent, both unadjusted for seasonality. Employment in the region decreased by 3,600 (-2.1 per cent) in March, with loss in full-time employment (-2.7 per cent; -3,700) and gain in part-time employment (+0.5 per cent; +200).

In March, the region's overall population aged 15 and over increased by 300 whereas the labour force size decreased by 3,400 people. The number of people not in the labour force in the region increased by 3,800. This reduced the region's participation rate by 1.2 per cent to 61.1 per cent. Employment in the region decreased in both the goods-producing sector (-3.1 per cent; -1,900) and the services-producing sector (-1.4 per cent; -1,600).

The goods-producing sector saw a decrease in overall employment numbers in March (-3.1 per cent; -1,900). Losses were experienced in agriculture (-14.3 per cent, -1,300) and construction (-7.2 per cent, -1,600), whereas gains were

seen in utilities (+5.6 per cent, +700) and manufacturing (+0.6 per cent, +100).

Overall employment in the services-producing sector saw a decrease of -1.4 per cent (-1,600 people) in March. Other services (except public administration) experienced the biggest percentage decrease in employment (-16.7 per cent, -1,600), followed by health care and social assistance (-11.8 per cent, -3,300) and education services (-6.6 per cent, -600). On the other hand, transportation and warehousing experienced the largest percentage increase in employment (+24.3 per cent, +900), followed by wholesale and retail trade (+8.2 per cent, +2,100) and business, building and other supportive services (+6.4 per cent, +300).

"Although this month shows another decline in the participation rate for the region we continue to monitor changes for seasonal rebounds" said Dana Soucie, executive director for the Four County Labour Market Planning Board. "As a rural region with a chronically low unemployment rate, collaborations and continued services to support sectors in need are critical to the health of our future workforce".

Current job postings for the Bruce, Grey, Huron, Perth region have increased overtime since the pandemic and can be found at [www.connect2JOBS.ca](http://www.connect2JOBS.ca). The current number of job postings currently exceeds 1,500.

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The Township of Perth South Public Works Department is seeking a qualified Equipment Operator. Reporting to the Operations Manager, applicants will be experienced with the ability to operate and maintain various pieces of equipment, such as road graders, wheel loaders and tandem dump trucks. The candidate will also be required to complete roadside maintenance activities including, trees, signage, potholes, and debris clean up.

Applicants should have road maintenance and construction knowledge, experience in equipment operation and maintenance and a valid "DZ" license. This position is subject to weekend and winter scheduling and some emergency call-out.

The 2026 salary range for this position is \$27.63 – \$33.67 per hour based on a 40-hour work week.

The Township of Perth South offers excellent benefits and a competitive compensation package. For a detailed job description of this position, please visit [www.perthsouth.ca](http://www.perthsouth.ca)

We thank all candidates for their interest, however, only those applicants selected for an interview will be contacted.

Interested candidates are invited to submit a detailed resume expressing their interest to the undersigned clearly marked as "Equipment Operator" by Monday May 4, 2026.

Ken Bettles, Director of Public Works  
Township of Perth South  
3191 Road 122  
St. Pauls, ON N0K 1V0  
E-mail - [kbettles@perthsouth.ca](mailto:kbettles@perthsouth.ca)

Information gathered is under the authority of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and shall only be used for candidate selection purposes.

# Fantasy author with Stratford ties returns to Festival City

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At a very young age Caitlyn Paxson was thrust into Shakespeare – and into fantasy. When she was only three years old, she played a fairy in a production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.

That experience proved to be formative. Years later, Paxson is still a lifelong lover of Shakespeare, theatre and fantasy, a love that has crystallized in her debut novel *A Widow's Charm*.

*A Widow's Charm* is a historical fantasy story set in a distinctive world with allusions to regency-era stories, stories like the works of Jane Austen, for instance. It follows Lady Hildegard "Hilde" Croft, a maidservant who recently married Lord Thorgoode Croft. Hilde has big plans for the estate and its people, before Lord Croft unexpectedly died, leaving her plans dashed and her position unstable. Hilde's salvation arrives in the form of Lord Elmwood, a neighbouring necromancer that can resurrect her dead husband – with a little blackmailing, of course.

Paxson was in Stratford as part of a regional tour promoting her book. As she told guests at Fanfare Books on April 10, she holds the Festival City in a special place of her heart.

"I actually went to school here many, many years ago," Paxson laughed. "I was a student at Nancy Campbell Collegiate (Academy) and I came here to attend that school specifically because in my teenage years I really wanted to be a Shakespearean actress, that was my career aspiration. And I loved the idea of attending all the plays.

"... It was a really important year for me because I actually met my husband and we're actually about to celebrate our 20th anniversary."

Although the book's allu-

sions to the regency era are self-evident, Paxson shared that Shakespearean comedies were also inspirations. The story is split into three acts and the characters and plot are reminiscent of the bard's madcap comedies *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *Much To Do About Nothing*, for instance.

Paxson also spoke with the Times about the subgenre she is writing in. Romantasy is a genre exploding in North America at the moment, a blend of the romance and fantasy genres, with Sarah J. Maas' *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and Rebecca Yarros' *Fourth Wing* being prominent examples. While Romantasy is a popular subgenre, and her book is a fantasy romance, Paxson was hesitant to describe it as such – instead calling it a fantasy rom-com.

"Romantasy is really a marketing category and it's often, I think, applied to any book that is both fantasy and romance, so technically my book is a Romantasy," Paxson said. "... I tend to call it a romantic fantasy rather than Romantasy when I talk about it because I feel like the tentpole books of that genre have certain plot expectations and arcs that are not necessarily what I'm delivering with this book. This book ... is as much a comedy as it is a fantasy."

*A Widow's Charm* is not her first written novel, rather her fifth. It was picked up by her literary agent Christabel McKinley and subsequently sold to her publisher Doubleday Canada, a fulfillment of a lifelong dream.

For her readers, Paxson hopes they have a good time.

"It's a book that is intended to make people feel good," Paxson said. "I hope that they think it's funny, that they enjoy the humour. I hope that they find the romance very earnest. What I love about romance as a genre is that it's really about people and about how we work, how our insides work ... So I hope that they take something away from the journeys the characters go on emotionally."

The Township Of Perth South

### DEPUTY CLERK

#### Position Summary:

The Deputy Clerk will play a key role in supporting the administrative, policy, and procedural functions of the Township of Perth South. Under the direction of the Clerk, the role will support the administration of Council, and Committee meetings, assist in developing and implementing the Municipality's Records Management system, and lead the administration of Municipal licensing and permitting.

#### Duties:

- Attend Council meetings and provide technical support for live streaming.
- Support the Clerk with completion of statutory requirements for licensing and permitting.
- Provide administrative support and act as backup administrative support for Council, and Committee meetings, including preparation of agendas and minutes and drafting reports.
- Support the development and implementation of a Municipal Records Management System.
- Provide communications support through various municipal platforms including the Township website, social media, and the Township engagement platform.
- Provide support for organizing and executing public relations, special events, and meetings.
- Support the Clerk with policy research and development as needed.
- Assist the Clerk with the delivery of municipal elections.
- Provide backup customer service support to the front counter as needed.
- Perform such additional duties as assigned.
- Acts as Clerk, in the absence of the same or as required, performing statutory duties.

#### Minimum Qualifications:

- Post-secondary education (College Diploma or University Degree) with a major in Business Administration, Political Science, Communications, or related programs.
- 2-3 years of related experience in a municipal or public sector setting. A combination of education and experience may be considered.
- Excellent verbal and written communication and interpersonal skills. Ability to deal with difficult and emotionally charged situations while maintaining a high degree of customer service at all times. Strong analytical and problem-solving skills.
- Demonstrated political acuity, tact and diplomacy skills and the ability to handle confidential matters with discretion.
- Intermediate computer skills in Microsoft Office Suite.
- Project management skills, with the ability to meet tight deadlines.

#### Salary:

The salary range is \$68,747 to \$85,934 (2026 rates) based on a 35-hour work week and a comprehensive benefit package.

#### How to Apply:

Applications must be received no later than **Sunday, May 3, 2026**, at 11:59 p.m. and sent to the attention of the Clerk at [lscott@perthsouth.ca](mailto:lscott@perthsouth.ca)

We thank all applicants for their interest; however, only those selected for an interview will be contacted.

#### Accommodations:

The Township of Perth South is an equal opportunity employer. The Township of Perth South will attempt to provide reasonable accommodation for known disability for an applicant or employee if requested.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Caitlyn Paxson sits down with fellow fantasy author C.S.E. Cooney at Fanfare Books on April 10. Paxson's debut novel *A Widow's Charm* is out now.

**SUBMIT YOUR LETTER  
TO THE EDITOR TO US!  
CALL 519-655-2341 OR EMAIL  
STRATFORDTIMES@GMAIL.COM**



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Retired Women Teachers of Ontario (RWTO) Stratford president Patty Brine accepts a certificate from Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma on April 9, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the organization. The RWTO was created in part to equalize the pay gap between women and men in the teaching field. As members shared that day, because of the hard work and dedication to the cause, that disparity in the field is a thing of the past now.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Bridge to Nowhere at the Ted Blowes Memorial Garden will be lit up blue and yellow this month to commemorate RWTO's milestone.

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# STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

## Warriors square off with the Lincolns in the Western Conference Final

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The highly anticipated playoff series between the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors and the St. Marys Lincolns has finally occurred, with both teams vying for a place in the Sutherland Cup.

Following their practice on April 8, Warriors head coach Dave Williams expressed his excitement for the series, highlighted the strong support from both fan bases, and emphasized the importance of maintaining their recent success from the Chatham series.

“Really exciting for both teams, organizations and communities. So, I mean, both teams are really well-supported. It should be an exciting series to have the opportunity to play them in the final,” Williams said.

“We just got to keep playing the way we have. I think we've played some of our best hockey here the last three or four weeks. So hopefully we can take the confidence from the last two series and get off to a good start against St Mary's. So you know, we've played two very good teams so far, given the parity, and you know, this round won't be any different. St Marys is a very good hockey team. Got a number of guys who were there last year when they had some really good success as well.”

Evan Arnold talked about the team's re-



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Stratford Warriors Drew Hodge, Quinn Kipfer, Joseph Curtin, Colin Slattery and Jonas Schmidt celebrate Curtin's first-period goal against the St. Marys Lincolns during Game 2 of the GOHL Western Conference Finals on April 12.

cent success, their readiness for the challenge ahead, and their plan to keep playing together as a unit, just as they have all season.

“So far, great. We're coming out of some big wins against Chatham and beat them, and ready for St Marys,” Arnold said. “Obviously, they're a great team. We had to come out and play our game, and it's been the same all season.”

Jaxon Broda mentioned the great atmosphere among fans and the challenge of moving on to the next round. He said the team's plan is to keep building on positive shifts, even if things don't always go their way, to beat the Lincolns and reach the Sutherland Cup final.

“You know, it's obviously a good feeling. You guys have been happy, and just gotta figure out how to get to the next round,” Broda said.

“Stack as many positive shifts as we can together. Obviously, there's gonna be some shifts that maybe don't go our way or get some bad bounces, but as long as we come out of the next shift and get right back to.”

Max Wildfong is enjoying his first time on a team that has made it this far in the playoffs. He credits their success to sticking to their systems and believes the Warriors need to keep playing fast and aggressively, with strong defence and goal scoring.

“Yeah, it's awesome. I've never really been on a team that's gone really far in the playoffs, and it's just a great experience. We're sticking to our systems, and I think that's why we're in the spot we are today,” Wildfong said.

“I think just stick to our systems. Play hard, play fast. That's how we've been doing it the whole year. Nothing has to change. We just have to keep scoring goals and keep playing defence, and I think we'll

have a good outcome.”

The conference championship series began at the St. Marys Pyramid Recreation Complex on April 11. For the Warriors, Colin Slattery returned to the lineup after being out for several weeks.

Rhyse Brown, with help from Grady Murphy and Dominic Marshall, scored Stratford's first goal midway through the opening period. In the second, McQuen Haylock scored on a breakaway pass from Arnold, and just 12 seconds later, Slattery scored off a faceoff from Coen Galbraith, putting the Warriors up 3-0 heading into the last period.

Ryan Hodgkinson scored for the Lincolns just 71 seconds into the third period. The Lincolns kept up the pressure, but the Warriors sealed the win when Brown scored his second goal into an empty net with 2:51 left. Ethan Weir added a late goal for St. Marys with 40 seconds remaining, but Stratford took the first game 4-2.

Stratford goalie Noah Bender had another strong game, stopping 29 of 31 shots, including 12 in the third period. Over the last five games, Bender has been outstanding for the Warriors, with a 5-0 record, a 1.80 goals-against average, and a .950 save percentage.

Stratford aimed to extend their series lead in front of their home fans at the William Allman Memorial Arena in Game 2 on April 12.

Galbraith scored his seventh goal of the playoffs, assisted by Cruz Ferguson and Joseph Curtin, at 8:53 of the first period to give the Warriors a 1-0 lead. Later in the period, Curtin got his first playoff goal with help from Jonas Schmidt and Quinn Kipfer, and Dominic Marshall added an unassisted goal, putting the Warriors ahead 3-0 before the period ended.

The second period was action-packed, with both teams scoring six goals in total.

The Lincolns got four goals – two from Hodgkinson and one each from Chase McQueen-Spence and Weir – while the Warriors answered with goals from Jaxon Broda and Kipfer, keeping Stratford in the lead going into the final period.

In the third period, Haylock scored an unassisted goal at 3:30 to put the Warriors ahead. Hodgkinson completed his hat trick at 6:47, cutting Stratford's lead to 6-5. Max Wildfong then scored the game-winner at 8:19, making it 7-5. Blake Elzinga brought the Lincolns within one midway through the period, but the Warriors held on for a 7-6 win and a 2-0 series lead.

Game 3 was held April 14 in St. Marys, with the Lincolns coming back with a 6-1 win. Game 4 is set for the Allman Arena on April 15 (after press time). Game 5 will be on April 17 in St. Marys, and if needed Game 6 on April 19 at the Allman Arena and Game 7 on April 21 in St. Marys.

Coverage of the rest of the series will appear in next week's edition of the Times.

**GOHL Western Conference Final (#3 St. Marys Lincolns vs. #4 Stratford Warriors)**

Game 1 – Stratford 4 St. Marys 2  
Game 2 – St. Marys 6 Stratford 7  
Game 3 – Stratford 1 St. Marys 6  
Game 4 – St. Marys vs. Stratford (William Allman Memorial Arena) April 15, 7 p.m.

Game 5 – Stratford vs. St. Marys (Pyramid Recreation Complex) April 17, 7:30 p.m. (if needed)

Game 6 – St. Marys vs. Stratford (William Allman Memorial Arena) April 19, 6 p.m. (if needed)

Game 7 – Stratford vs. St. Marys (Pyramid Recreation Complex) April 21, 7:30 p.m. (if needed)

*Stratford leads series 2-1 (as of press time).*

### Stratford Warriors Player Stats (Playoffs) (as of April 13, 2026)

Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Quinn Kipfer	F	14	9	6	15
Coen Galbraith	F	14	7	6	13
Jonas Schmidt	F	12	5	6	11
Dominic Marshall	F	13	5	6	11
Max Wildfong	F	14	5	6	11
Cruz Ferguson	F	14	4	6	10
Aaron Green	D	12	3	7	10
Jaxon Broda	D	14	4	5	9
McQuen Haylock	F	14	5	3	8
Rhyse Brown	F	14	4	4	8
Joseph Curtin	D	14	1	7	8
Will Coward	D	13	0	8	8
Grady Murphy	F	14	2	5	7
Haden Frayne	D	14	1	5	6
Evan Arnold	F	13	2	3	5
Lucas Minard	F	12	2	2	4
Dax Vader	F	13	1	3	4
Drew Hodge	D	14	1	3	4
Colin Slattery	F	2	1	0	1
Mateo Craievich	D	5	0	0	0
Colten Brenzil	F	3	0	0	0
<b>Goalies</b>	<b>Record</b>	<b>GAA</b>	<b>SV-%</b>		
Noah Bender	10-4	2.72	0.911		

# U18 Aces compete at the Provincials

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Aces competed in the U18 OWSA Provincials, held in Etibicoke and Mississauga from April 9-12. They competed in Group E, facing the Durham West Lightning, Sudbury Lady Wolves and Ancaster Avalanche in the two-day preliminary round.

With only the top finisher in each group advancing to the next round, there is minimal margin for mistakes. As the team got ready for the tournament at William Allman Memorial Arena, head coach Sean Cameron reflected on the family-like environment fostered since August and expressed pride in how much the team has improved, especially considering their solid finish and provincial qualification.

"Pretty special. I mean, we've been together since August, and that's what we talked about in our closing circle, which we do every practice. It's amazing how long you spend with these girls to become part of your family, and we have a very family atmosphere here," Sean said.

"It's a bit sad, but you know what? We've worked really hard to get here. It would have been a lot worse if we weren't in provincials, but it's a pretty sweet opportunity for us, especially how we started our year out. We've really finished off strong, and I'm proud of the 17 girls tonight."

The final practice of the season at the Allman was heartfelt for Stratford's Sloan Cameron. Meanwhile, Kylin Wilson, Brooklynn Ahrens and Meghan Graham reflected on the bittersweet emotions connected to their accomplishments and team development. They highlighted the significance of family, teamwork and playing with passion as they prepare for the upcoming provincial competition.

"It's kind of a surreal moment to have the last practice at the Allman Arena. I'm one of two on the team who is from Stratford. It's my hometown. It's my last year, and stepping on the ice with these girls for the last time in an Aces jersey is hard. So I'm really happy with the season, and I'm just so excited for provincials and hopefully to get a medal. That's the goal," Sloan said.

"The game plan is to go in and do our job every time we have 17 girls on our team who know what it takes to get a win. And you know, also going into this ... it's all about family. We're a family here. We get it done together. We win together. We lose together. We're hoping to get a medal together and finish off our season strong. So it means everything to us."

"It feels really great, like we've been working hard at practice and the efforts there, and it is sad for our graduating players, and our team is going to be broken up, but honestly, we just go out there in provincials and give it all we've got and

hopefully bring home a W," Ahrens said.

"Honestly, we just have to play with the logo on the front of our jersey and not the name on the back of our jersey, and we just have to come together as a team, and the effort just has to be there. We just have to play with our hearts."

"For me, it's a bittersweet feeling like this team has come so far from the start of the season, and I'm so unbelievably proud of all the effort and work that's been put in. And I think we can go out and make a pretty good run at provincials if we keep working hard," Wilson said.

"Play with our hearts on our sleeves. Come out. Work hard. You win or lose as a team. So as long as you come out as a group, we'll be good to go."

"Yeah. I mean, this arena is pretty special. The first goal I ever scored as an Ace was here against Waterloo. It was pretty sick. So, I mean, it's a little

sad, it's a little bittersweet to be finishing the season, but I have another one, and I'm looking forward to coming back here next season with that in mind," Graham said.

"We all have a job on this team. We're playing some fast, younger teams, and I think we can catch them off guard. We have experience on our side; if we just come out, we play hard and do the things we know how to do, I think we have a real shot."

Ranked 35th in the province according to My Hockey Rankings, Stratford opened their tournament play against Ontario's 5th-ranked Durham West Lightning on April 9.

Josephine Binning scored first for the Aces 6:03 into the first period. Later, with 5:30 remaining in the opening frame, the Lightning equalized with a shot that just slipped past the Aces' netminder Callie Aldridge's glove side.

Stratford's major chance to take the lead in the second period came with just over three minutes remaining when Macey Fischer received a breakaway pass, but she couldn't score. After a scoreless second period, the Lightning finally took the lead for good 97 seconds into the third. The Aces pulled goalie Aldridge for an extra skater with 1:55 remaining, but they couldn't score the tying goal.

After the game, coach Sean praised his team's effort despite losing to Ontario's top-five-ranked team. He highlighted effective forechecking and the need for more shots and said they are prepared for upcoming games against Sudbury and

Ancaster while maintaining a positive atmosphere.

"I'm just so proud of those girls. You know what? I'm not gonna lie. That game hurt. That is the number four team in Ontario, and we're number 33, and at the end of the day, we were that close. I thought we played a great game. Forecheck was working. Would have liked to see a little more pucks on net, but ultimately, I'm very proud of the way the girls played. We gave it everything we could," Sean said.

"You know what? It's a great start. We just talked about turning the page and getting ready for Sudbury tomorrow, then Ancaster in the afternoon. So not the outcome we wanted. But, man, very close game. Well played. Durham West, the credit to them, they got us tonight."

On the afternoon of April 10, the Aces played their second round robin game against the 13th-ranked Sudbury Lady Wolves. Both teams, initially winless in the tournament, aimed to stay in contention for the provincial title with a victory.

The Aces took control of the game with first-period goals from Isabelle Pruim and Kylin Wilson and overcame a controversial no-goal call and rough ice playing surface to shut out the Lady Wolves 3-0 to improve their tournament record to 1-1. Stratford netminder Cameron picked up the shutout in the victory.

Sean spoke to the Times after the afternoon game about the big win to keep their tournament aspirations alive.

"That's what we had to do. That's exactly what we talked to our team about, coming back and coming out with a big win, winning three nothing, especially in game two, is important for us. Jobs not done, though. We got to go play Ancaster. They're gonna be a tough battle tonight," Sean said.

Wilson and Pruim commented on the key win and pointed out that the team was particularly motivated for the important

game in the evening against the Ancaster Avalanche, which could determine their quarter-final birth.

"It's honestly such a great feeling. We knew they were going to be a hard team coming out. We had a tough loss yesterday, two, one, but to come out and score three goals today just felt great," Wilson said.

"Got to go between games and get good fuel, good sleep, good hydration and then next game, you just gotta go out and give it everything you got, leave it all on the ice and play with your heart on the sleeve."

"It was definitely what we needed coming up after that loss, and we're going to make sure that we go out and beat that next game (against Ancaster)," Pruim said.

"Yeah, the preparation in between games is super important. We've got to make sure we're putting everything out there, because it could be Sloan, Bronwyn (Hawkins) and my last game with this team. So we've got to make sure that we're putting all of our effort out there and scoring as many goals as we can."

After Durham West secured a point against Sudbury in their early game and moved into first place, the Aces aimed to conclude their season positively against the Ancaster Avalanche in the evening match. Aldridge played the first two periods, with Sloan taking over for the final period.

Despite their efforts, the Aces couldn't beat the Avalanche and lost their final game 3-0. Stratford finished third in Group E with a 1-2 record, ending the season with an overall 21-28-11 record.

Sean looked back on the season, highlighting his pride in the team's development and the strong bond they shared.

"From where we started to where we are today, leaps and bounds better than what we thought," Sean said. "I'm so proud of this crew. We've definitely gone through a little bit of a marathon here, but at the end of the day I'm lucky. I get to coach a fantastic team, and that's all that's important to me, and that dressing room is very special. It hurts because you just want the best for them, and we got the best out of them, and I'm just proud of that crew, to say the least."



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# Three former Stratford Aces win ACHA Div-One hockey title

SPENCER SEYMOUR

*Times Regional Reporter*

Victoria Campbell and Jaden Greenlee of Stratford and Kiara McGregor of St. Marys, three close friends who grew up together in the Stratford Aces minor hockey program, helped Midland University in Fremont, Neb., capture their first-ever American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division-One women's hockey championship St. Louis, Miss., March 16-22.

Greenlee described the experience of her first year of university hockey as allowing her to grow in many ways.

"Being able to play at Midland University this season has been a great opportunity for me," said Greenlee. "I've learned a lot both on and off the ice, and it's helped me grow a lot as a person and player. Over the course of this season, I feel like I've grown significantly. My time at Midland University has helped me develop a lot of discipline and confidence on the ice that I have been able to translate into my life off the ice, too."

For Campbell, the environment at Midland allowed her to feel welcomed immediately.

"This season at Midland has honestly been such an incredible experience," Campbell told the Times. "Coming in as a freshman, I didn't really know what to expect, but the team culture, the competitiveness and the support from everyone made it really special."

"I think I've developed a lot in my confidence and consistency. At the start, everything was new and more intense, but over time, I adjusted to the pace and became more comfortable making plays and trusting myself. I think I've also grown mentally just learning how to stay composed and focused in big moments."

The trio has spent many years playing alongside one another after growing up as teammates in the Stratford Aces system, which McGregor described as adding to her first year of university hockey.

"To me, it was a really cool experience playing with Victoria and Jaden," McGregor said of playing with her lifelong friends and teammates. "They're two of my best friends. We played most of our minor hockey days together, and then being able to experience playing collegiate-level hockey together was a cool experience."

Campbell and Greenlee echoed the sentiments expressed by McGregor.

"It's honestly so special playing with Jaden and Kiara," Campbell remarked. "We've come such a long way from playing minor hockey together, so to be able to share this experience at this level is pretty



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

**Pictured from left to right are Victoria Campbell, Kiara McGregor and Jaden Greenlee, a trio of former Stratford Aces who helped Midland University in Fremont, Neb., win their first-ever ACHA Division-One National Championship in women's hockey in St. Louis, Miss., March 16-22.**

surreal."

"It's incredibly special to play with Kiara and Victoria," added Greenlee. "We grew up playing minor hockey together, so being able to continue our careers at the collegiate level and win a national championship together is unreal."

McGregor explained the team's mentality heading into the national championship.

"When we went to the national tournament, we just knew we had to have fun and see what we could do, and we ended up winning. The atmosphere is what stands out most to me. Some of our men's team came down to support us, and all the parents who were there and fans everywhere and interviews going on, in addition to such good hockey, it just made it an even better experience."

"I knew that we had to win every game," McGregor continued. "We couldn't lose. We couldn't take our foot off the pedal, and just had to keep our heads focused. Being a freshman, I wanted to take in the experience as well, and our team made that happen for us. Just being able to have fun, and we made sure that we just focused on the games, but then also got to enjoy it after, which made it a less stressful experience."

same time, you're so locked in that you almost don't feel it in the moment. Every shift felt huge, and the energy being so high. It's the kind of game you dream of being part of. Honestly, it didn't even feel real at first (when the overtime winner went in). I think it was just pure excitement and adrenaline. Seeing everyone jump on the ice and celebrate together was such an unreal moment."

McGregor added it was the team's top leader who came up clutch for the sudden-death game-winner.

"In the moment, it was crazy since it was our captain (who scored in overtime)," noted McGregor. "It was our senior teammate who led us through the whole year and scored our goal. No one could really believe it. I don't even think it's hit me now, but just being able to win and do it with such an amazing team was great. No one could believe that it actually happened."

According to Campbell, the win was a cap-off to her rookie campaign she couldn't have dreamed up any better.

"Especially as a freshman, you come in just hoping to contribute and learn, so to be able to be part of a national championship team in my first year is something really special," Campbell stated. "That's what you work for all season, so to see all the hard work pay off and share that moment with the team is something pretty special."

Greenlee felt similarly, noting it was incredibly fulfilling to help Midland win its first-ever women's hockey title.

"Coming in as a freshman and winning a national championship in our first year was an incredible experience," said Greenlee. "It was so rewarding to see all the work we put in over the season finally pay off, especially since we clicked as a group so early in the season. Having lost to Liberty in conference finals, and then coming back to beat them in triple overtime for the national title was huge. It's a memory I'll never forget."

McGregor gave credit to the team's veterans for helping the younger players, including the three former Stratford Aces, learn how to embody the team's culture and spirit.

"I feel like we had such a great senior corps where they had worked so hard for four years and they'd put in everything they could, that we just wanted to really do it for them as well and make sure that they could experience it just as much as we could," McGregor said. "They've helped us freshmen to never give up and make sure that we're always supporting each other and having each other's back, as no one should ever stand alone."

Midland met the first-place team in the country, Liberty University, in the championship final, which ended up going into triple overtime before Midland fired home the game-winning tally to claim their first-ever women's hockey title, with McGregor noting the lengthy final battle was an exhausting yet thrilling experience.

"It was definitely a mental battle making sure that we were able to get pucks deep, and Liberty (University) being very experienced and winning. We knew that we had to take the chances where we got them and not waste too much of our energy, especially in the first and second overtime. We were trying to cycle pucks and use each other and pass as much as we could, so we weren't wasting as much energy as needed."

"There were a lot of nerves," McGregor continued. "Everyone was just trying to support each other and have each other's backs. We definitely tried to ease the nerves as much as possible. But obviously, in those situations, you can't really, so you've just got to try to play through it."

Campbell described playing into triple overtime before the game-winning goal finally went in.

"It was crazy," said Campbell. "Physically and mentally exhausting, but at the

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# Bowling League High Scores

**Men's**  
 Brent Furtney 330  
 Tyler Cook 834  
 Zachary Clarke 327  
 Jon Gagan 343

**Monday Seniors**  
 Steve Van Klooster 221, 207-613

**Tuesday Morning**  
 Helen Fulton 250

**V-Ettes**  
 Karen Gale 242

**Wednesday Ladies**  
 Debbie Freeman 204

**YBC Scores**  
 Bowlasaurus  
 Dominic Rowe 129  
 Evangeline Butcher-Bontrup 104  
 Audrey Parker 104

**Pee-Wee & Bantam**  
 Addi Kollman 108-275  
 Rowan Eckert 112  
 Kylie Smith 125  
 Lincoln Brown 125

Patrick Adair 161, 165-474 series  
 Roland Rains 162, 166-453 series  
 Stella Hurley St. Pierre 111-282  
 Grey Davidson 102, 125-324  
 Scarlett Illman 265 series  
 Coen Everitt 223 series

**Junior**  
 Ruby Parker 169  
 Mckenna Morris 170

## Grand River bowlers shine at Ontario Open Provincials, earn national berths

**NICHELE BUTCHER-BONTRUP**

*Times Contributor*

The lanes were alive with energy as the Ontario Open Provincial Championships wrapped up across Mike's Lanes, C&D Lanes and Echo Bowl, a four-day tournament April 1-4, as local bowlers competed for a spot at nationals.

Among the standout performances was a dominant showing from the Grand River team, who delivered impressive results across multiple divisions and secured spots on the national stage.

Leading the charge was the Grand River mixed team of Brooke Louwagie, Christine Mair and Kevin McKenna of Mike's Lanes Stratford, as well as Kitchener and area teammates Elizabeth Nicoll, Nikkolas Jackson and Derek Klomp, who captured the gold medal in the open mixed team division.

Their victory not only earned them the provincial title but also punched their ticket to compete at nationals and represent Ontario. The team's chemistry and consistency proved unmatched throughout the competition, culminating in a celebratory finish that had sup-

porters cheering and proud.

The success didn't stop there for Grand River athletes. On the ladies' side, Caylie Butcher of Mike's Bowling Lanes helped power her team, also including Sarah Bacvar, Melissa Schneider, Karol McDonnell, Krystal Graham and Shannon Wright, to a silver medal, finishing only 45 pins behind first.

In other divisions, Dan Clark, alongside coach Fred Clark, battled hard to secure a seventh-place finish, demonstrating determination against some of the province's top talent. Meanwhile, Marlene Crerar of Mike's Lanes repre-

sented Grand River on the senior team, finishing fifth overall, narrowly missing a spot in the stepladder finals.

Hosted across multiple venues, including the senior events at Mike's Lanes, the championship brought together some of Ontario's best bowlers for several days of high-level competition, sportsmanship and community spirit.

With gold and silver medals in hand and Nationals on the horizon, the Grand River teams have plenty to celebrate. Congratulations to all competitors for representing their region with pride and excellence.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured from left to right are coach Kasey Schwemlein, Nikkolas Jackson, Elizabeth Nicoll, Derek Klomp, Kevin McKenna, Brooke Louwagie and Christine Mair. The Grand River mixed team captured the gold medal in the open mixed team division at the Ontario Open Provincial Championships.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured is Caylie Butcher of Mike's Bowling Lanes. Butcher helped power her team to a silver medal at the Ontario Open Provincial Championships April 1-4.

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# U13 BB Warriors capture Alliance Championship

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The U13 BB Stratford Warriors earned the Minor Hockey Alliance Championship banner March 20-22.

Head coach Dean Burdett called his team's championship weekend showing a strong team effort.

"I thought the boys played very well as a team this weekend," Burdett told the Times. "We had different games where different players stepped up and contributed. I felt our top players played well and led the way. We had been passing the puck very well, got the puck deep in the opposing team's end, forechecked hard and were solid defensively."

Burdett added the weekend heavily reflected the group's development over the course of the campaign.

"My biggest takeaway was how much our team has improved overall this season," said Burdett. "Our detail to passing and the good choices we made with the puck got better as the weekend went on. We really stressed team play and making sure they bought into what we asked. They peaked at the right time, with some playing through injuries. I felt we played well in tight games."

The team's improvement was also shown in their overall record, going from being near the bottom of their league last year to an Alliance banner this season.

"I felt from the beginning, our staff knew we had a good group of players," Burdett remarked. "From the year before, when we only won a few games and finished at the bottom with a 12-27-3 record, to winning the Alliance this year with a 28-15-6 record was huge. I was so happy for the boys on the team from the previous year to experience this success, and the new players we added bought in and were great additions to the team."

The bench boss described a galvanizing moment after one of the team's earliest games that pushed the Warriors to go undefeated in the round-robin.

"When shaking hands Friday night after our win versus the London Bandits, the team we went on to beat in finals, one of the coaches made a comment saying they would see us Saturday night in the semis,"



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The U13 BB Stratford Warriors became Alliance Minor Hockey Champions at the March 20-22 finals. Pictured in the first row, from left to right, are Parker Vollmer and Greyson DeGroot. In the second row, from left, are Keegan Brighton, John Clarence, Carson Schenck, Bryce Burdett, Easton Mathieson, Grayson O'Donnell and Keaton Weesjes. In the third row, from left, are Aiden Weicker, Colton Donelle, Wyatt Rose, Tyler Binkle, Gavin Jones, Brock Czajkowski, Damien Lonergan and Hayes Francis. In the fourth row, from left, are assistant coach Blair Clarence, assistant coach Dustin Rose, assistant coach John Jones, head coach Dean Burdett and manager Alicia Houston.

said Burdett. "They already thought we would lose our Saturday morning game. We won that game and went straight to the finals. Underestimating us gave us a bit of a push."

Burdett recalled a special moment in the dressing room before one of the team's later games in the weekend.

"Towards the finals, I mentioned to the boys before the game about how far they had come this year, how proud we were of them and what they had done this weekend so far. We emphasized how important it was to stay disciplined against London,

to use our speed, to work each system we have, depending on the score and period. The focus was there, and they won because of it."

In the finals, the Warriors came up against the London Bandits. After a scoreless first period, Bryce Burdett used his speed to get by a London defender before burying a backhand goal, the only one of the second frame.

The Bandits tied the game at one apiece just under a minute into the third, with the game staying deadlocked until with just four minutes and five seconds left in the third when the team's season-long MVP, Aiden Weicker, put home the go-ahead goal from Hayes Francis. A clutch faceoff win by Bryce led to Francis firing it into an empty net.

According to the head coach, the tournament win was a fantastic culmination to their season.

"For this only being the second year most of our boys have been together, I felt winning a championship was just absolutely awesome. Plus, knowing what a hockey town we are, I thought this was so awesome for this group. This is great for our boys to see that teamwork and hard work do pay off.

"I mentioned to them about my experience winning an All-Ontario Championship and how I still talk to the friends I played with years ago," Dean continued. "They will see this banner hanging in the arena and will always remember this

amazing accomplishment and their teammates and friends they met that season."

Dean added there was no shortage of great contributors throughout the Alliance Championships.

"I felt our defence, led by Colton (Donelle) and Hayes (Francis), really bought into getting pucks out of our end and for a lot of heads-up plays. It was nice to see Keegan (Brighton), Easton (Mathieson), Carson (Schenck), and Tyler (Binkle) score a goal and help contribute to us moving on. I have to give credit to our goalie, Greyson (DeGroot), who won a big game for us on Saturday versus the North London Nationals. He also had a heads-up play in the finals, coming out of his net and clearing a possible scoring chance."

Dean further expressed gratitude to the entire team for creating such a special end to their season.

"I could feel a difference in the boys' focus before our games this weekend. When we came in the room before to talk to them, all eyes were on me, and they listened to our gameplan. I felt our defence tighten up and helped clear pucks and make good plays out of our end. I have to say a big thanks to our assistant coaches, Blair (Clarence), John (Jones), and Dustin (Rose), and to our manager, Alicia (Houston), for all her hard work and dedication to our team. All in all, it was a great finish to our season, with a great coaching staff and an even greater group of boys."

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# Another successful drug seizure by Stratford Police Street Crime Unit

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

In 2025, the Stratford Police Service Street Crime Unit (SCU) partnered with the Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario (CISO) to launch Project SAPPHIRE, which led to the seizure of over \$266,000 in illegal drugs, approximately \$91,000 in Canadian currency and led to seven individuals being charged with various criminal offences related to drug trafficking.

In 2026, as a continuation from Project SAPPHIRE, the Stratford Police Service SCU began an investigation into a potential possession for the purpose of trafficking a controlled substance case in the city.

On March 24, uniformed officers arrested a 33-year-old male from Kitchener for Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking a Controlled Substance.

The Stratford Police Service SCU then executed a Controlled Drugs and Sub-



stances Act search warrant in Kitchener.

As a result of the search warrant, police seized the following:

134.3 grams of cocaine.

Five oxycodone/hydromorphone pills.

\$7,350 in Canadian currency.

The drugs seized have a street value of over \$13,000. The 33-year-old male from Kitchener was charged and held in custody. A 24-year-old female from Kitchener is also facing Controlled Drugs and Substances Act charges.

Local police would like to thank their partners, including CISO, for their assistance during this investigation. The Stratford Police Service values the partnership between agencies to allow for a collaborative effort to combat drug crime.

The successful completion of this investigation was made possible through funding provided by the Ontario Government, Ministry of the Solicitor General.

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# Editorial

## Would a four-day work week work for you?



**GALEN SIMMONS**

*Regional Editor*

To me, four-day work weeks have always sounded like something I'd appreciate in theory, but not in practice.

As a journalist and newspaper editor, I have strict weekly deadlines to meet. Regardless of holidays, sick days or work interruptions, my colleagues and I need to fill a paper with the news, sports stories and advertising our readers have come to rely on each and every week. Often,

our week includes working evenings and weekends, and taking a full day off each week simply doesn't make sense.

But in other workplaces, including nearby at the Township of Perth South, four-day work weeks are becoming more commonplace.

At its April 7 meeting, Perth South council approved a summer schedule allowing public works staff to work four 10-hour days per week between June and September, giving employees a consistent extra weekday off while maintaining service levels.

The change is intended to improve operational efficiency, reduce downtime and provide employees with greater flexibility during one of the busiest seasons for municipal maintenance and construction. Township staff also pointed to benefits including improved morale, better productivity and enhanced recruit-

ment and retention potential.

While the change is modest – and seasonal – it reflects a broader conversation happening in workplaces across Canada about whether the traditional five-day, 40-hour work week still makes sense.

Supporters of the four-day work week argue the benefits go well beyond giving employees a longer weekend.

Research and pilot programs have shown employees working compressed or reduced schedules often report better work-life balance, lower stress levels and improved overall job satisfaction. Having an extra weekday available allows people to schedule appointments, manage errands or spend time with family without needing to use vacation days or rearrange work schedules.

Employers may benefit as well. Many organizations that have tested four-day schedules report

improved productivity, reduced absenteeism and lower employee turnover. In a competitive labour market, offering flexible work arrangements can also help attract qualified applicants and retain experienced staff.

Obviously, a four-day work week is not feasible for every job. Emergency services, health-care providers, customer-facing roles and many retail positions require consistent availability across traditional business hours. In other workplaces, reduced hours could create scheduling challenges or place additional pressure on remaining staff.

Yet Perth South's approach shows there are practical ways to adapt the concept without sacrificing service. By extending daily hours slightly, staff can complete the same amount of work while benefiting from a more flexible schedule. Longer shifts can also reduce time lost

to travel between job sites, meetings or equipment preparation.

It is also worth noting the municipality's changes come at no additional cost to taxpayers, while potentially improving efficiency and employee satisfaction.

Flexible work arrangements will not look the same in every workplace, but the conversation is worth having. As employers compete to attract skilled workers and maintain high-quality services, small changes to scheduling can make a meaningful difference.

A four-day work week may not be a universal solution, but initiatives like the one adopted in Perth South show it is an idea worth exploring.

On the other hand, maybe it's time to start exploring the concept of a universal three-day weekend. I could definitely get behind that, though my boss may say otherwise.

## LTTE: Help support Rob Ritz April 20

Another phase of Rob Ritz' plan is a Library and YMCA facility.

The YMCA facility would include a day care with 198 spaces, a swimming pool and 52 high end apartments would be above the pool, on the upper floors.

The high end apartments would generate \$10 million dollars, in revenue. The apartments would be 1,000 square feet.

This part of the plan could be located outside the GTR, on the east end of the GTR.

The library annex by the senior's centre would not be a full library.

I am still overwhelmed by the Rob Ritz plan, as it fills most of the needs of Stratford's citizens. Come on Stratford, if you really love your city, I ask you to support Rob Ritz's plan.

Another part of the plan could allow the citizens of Stratford Street and Argyle Streets to enter the GTR over a bridge over the rail line into the GTR.

This would give the residents of these two streets access to the centre of the downtown. This would certainly help the downtown. In addition, it would allow the peo-

ple in the south end to enjoy the interior development of the GTR.

Rob's plan is for the citizens of Stratford, not for the tourists.

I would encourage the citizens of Stratford that love this city, show up at city hall, when Rob Ritz presents his plan to the council.

His presentation will be:

APRIL 20, AT STRATFORD CITY HALL AT 7 P.M.  
HELP SUPPORT ROB RITZ. HIS PLAN IS INCREDIBLE.

*Lorne Bolton,  
Stratford.*

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# Opinions

## Reconnecting with nature: Finding our way back to what sustains us



**IRENE ROTH**

*Times Columnist*

In a world shaped by schedules, screens and constant demands, it is easy to forget that we are, at our core, part of the natural world. Our days often unfold indoors, guided by artificial light and digital notifications, leaving little room for the quiet rhythms that once grounded human life.

Many of us move from one obligation to the next without

pausing long enough to notice the sky above us or the ground beneath our feet. Yet, beneath this fast-paced existence, there remains a deep and steady longing—to reconnect with nature and, in doing so, reconnect with ourselves.

Reconnecting with nature does not require anything elaborate or far removed from everyday life. It begins with small, intentional moments. A walk through a local park, the feeling of sunlight warming your face or the simple act of noticing the changing seasons can gently draw us back into awareness.

Even opening a window to let in fresh air or listening to the sound of rain can create a sense of connection. Nature is always present, offering its steady companionship, even when we have drifted away from it.

There is something profoundly calming about the natural world. The rustle of leaves in the wind,

the rhythm of waves against a shoreline or the quiet persistence of birdsong can soothe a mind that feels overwhelmed.

These experiences remind us that life unfolds in cycles—growth, rest, renewal—and that we, too, are part of these patterns. When we spend time in nature, we begin to release the constant pressure to do and instead allow ourselves to simply be. In these moments, even a few minutes can feel restorative, as though something within us has gently settled.

For many, reconnecting with nature also brings a sense of perspective. The vastness of a forest or the openness of the sky can gently shift our focus away from daily worries. Problems that once felt all-consuming may begin to soften at the edges. Nature does not erase our challenges, but it offers a wider lens through which to view them. It invites us to slow down, to breathe more

deeply and to recognize that we are part of something much larger than ourselves. This awareness can be both humbling and comforting at the same time.

This reconnection can also nurture creativity and reflection. Writers, artists and thinkers have long turned to the natural world for inspiration. There is a quiet clarity that often emerges when we step outside our usual environments. Ideas begin to flow more freely.

Thoughts that once felt tangled may begin to untangle. In this way, nature becomes not just a backdrop, but an active partner in our creative and emotional lives. It encourages curiosity, invites observation and gently reminds us to pay attention to the details that often go unnoticed.

Importantly, reconnecting with nature is not about perfection. It is not about doing more or adding pressure to an already

full life. It is about cultivating a relationship—one that is gentle, consistent, and meaningful. Sitting by a window and watching the rain, tending to a small garden, or pausing to notice the first signs of spring can all serve as powerful reminders of our connection to the earth. Over time, these small practices can become steady anchors in our daily routines.

At a time when many people feel overwhelmed, disconnected or uncertain, nature offers a quiet invitation. It asks nothing of us except our presence. In return, it provides a sense of calm, perspective and renewal that is difficult to find elsewhere.

Perhaps the most important step is simply to begin. Step outside. Take a breath. Notice what is already there. In doing so, we may discover that nature has been waiting for us all along—ready to welcome us back, one moment at a time.

## As I See It From America: A sense of decorum and respectability



**PATRICK D. BURK**

*Times Columnist*

“To think or not to think” ... that certainly is the question in my mind today. I have just finished directing a spectacular version of *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Main St. 56 Theater and I am moving on to the next project. Taking a bit of a break and a quick decision to read and look at an article in our local paper and “off to the races” goes my mind. It is true that as you age, your thinking process takes over and acts and reacts a bit differently. Especially when the article I was looking at was talking about Canada. How much time do I want to “think” about this?

As it happened, I thought about it a lot. In the article I was en-

heartened and pleased to read that the people of Canada really do distinguish between the benevolence and general kindness of most Americans versus the current government and the occupant of the White House. This is extremely important because, believe it or not, I have heard that there are some very nice Americans who are afraid to come into Canada, expecting questions and retaliation of sorts. I think that is a shame.

Time and time again I am reminded that there is something special about your country, the birthplace of my mother and home of my wife’s family. To say that we have many relatives amongst you to this date is no small statement. I probably, in fact, have hundreds of cousins in the Kingston and the Gananoque, Ont. area and my wife would have many in the Brantford area. I always remember the trips as youngsters and the wonderful times that we had crossing over the St. Lawrence and then crossing it again on a ferry to get to my Aunt Lucy’s home on Howe Island. Those were special days.

Now at the senior end of my life, my family and I travel across the many bridges of the New York State/Ontario border and go to

your fair and wonderful city of Stratford. We stay at the Arden Park or the Suburban Motel – depending on the season, and we enjoy just about everything in your beautiful community and surrounding area. Often, we find something new each time and wonder how we did not know about it until our current finding. Frequently we enjoy our favourites as we go about town meeting friends and fellow Stratford Festival goers. What a lovely place and such tremendous food!

In contrast at home, we try to not get into many conversations, often keeping our opinions to ourselves and wonder how our neighbours voted in this boorish and hateful administration without the bat of an eyelash. Could they not see the hurtful, braggart nature and the incredible amoralistic past of the candidate? Did the people of the United States only worry about their dollars in the bank and who they thought was going to increase those dollars more than they did for basic humanity and their neighbours? I guess for 77 million people that was the case, not even close to 50 per cent percent of the eligible voters and far less than the number of votes cast for Joe Biden in 2020. It seems that because of

the choice of candidates, we had many people stay home and not vote.

I do wonder if it is that way in Canada. I understand your election system is a lot different than the “Rock-em-Sock-em Robot” style that we have in the states. Our elections go on for years and often the results are not what many people expect. The millions and millions of dollars someone must have to run from a small part of New York State to represent us in the House of Representatives is astounding. I just read where one of our local candidates has raised over \$10 million for her campaign to date. The district has just over 775,000 residents. If both candidates end up in the \$14 million range – which is expected by the way – that is just over \$36 per resident and close to \$60 per registered voter. To think that for congress this must happen every two years, there is no wonder why it is such a chore and often ignored. Voting here has become big business and not representative anymore.

I am looking for some more information on your elections. Like I said, I have some ideas and I am familiar with your multi-party system, but I need to know more. How does it work? Does it

work better than ours? Is it truly more representative? In this day of age when I cringe at another bomb falling on another country, one more blockade and pompous threat, an all-night posting festival on websites of memes depicting the “leader” of the United States as Jesus Christ and his ongoing threats to citizens around the world, I need to know that a democratic system somewhere is working. I would like to hear about some positive approach to selecting leaders. I would like to understand a system that appears to have many viewpoints but maintains a sense of humanity. I need to know that there is some hope out there.

To Stratford we come in a week’s time. If anyone knows of a book or a website or some source of information on your election process that I can obtain, please let me know. I am eager to learn and to share that our adjacent country, that welcomes their neighbours with open arms, has a system of selecting their leaders with a sense of decorum and respectability. I would find that refreshing, or perhaps I am just thinking too much?

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

# Opinions

## WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH EARTH DAY



**SHEILA CLARKE**

*Times Columnist*

As the Earth rose from beyond the moon, we were treated to that beautiful blue and green jewel we inhabit, along with so many other amazing creatures. In the last column I introduced Ankosé, the Algonquin word for Everything is Connected. Earth Day is our chance to help Earth on home territory. There's a lot going on for Earth Day in Stratford! There are many opportunities for everyone to be involved!

Want to roll up your sleeves and get to work? Here's your chance! Come to the Boathouse on Saturday, April 18 at 10 a.m. for a clean-up hosted by the Boathouse Stratford in partnership with local realtor Shane Oosterhoff. Volunteers are in-

ited to help remove winter debris from the Avon riverbanks and surrounding parks. It's a free community event, but donations would be welcomed by Climate Momentum, a local group supporting environment in Stratford. Cleaning supplies, garbage bags and gloves are included with light refreshments after the cleanup. A free boat pass to use this summer will be given to participants!

Also on the 18th, the Stratford Rotary Club is leading a tree planting event in partnership with UTRCA to help increase our tree canopy from its concerning low of nine per cent. A healthy level of tree cover to support biodiversity is 30 per cent. As well, trees sequester carbon and give us oxygen. Bring your muscle and energy to 3639 Perth Rd. 112 at 8:30 a.m. this Saturday and join with members of the Rotary Club of Stratford, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA), the Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Eco-Club and the wider community to help green Perth County!

At SDSS, the Eco-Club has organized speakers, workshops and trips for students to celebrate Earth Week, from

April 20-23. Topics include greenwashing, green investment, trashion fashion, outdoor learning and EV/hybrid technology. Wonderful!

The Stratford Public Library is hosting an Earth Day screening of *The Nettle Dress* on Wednesday, April 22 from 2-4 p.m. at the Tim Taylor Lounge in the Rotary Complex. The film follows textile artist Allan Brown's seven-year journey to create a hand-stitched garment from locally foraged stinging nettles, highlighting slow craft and nature's healing power. Cost is free, but registration is recommended. Email or call the library if you have questions.

The library also has an "earth-friendly" collection which supports a more sustainable lifestyle: battery, mask and craft recycling, carbon dioxide and radon detector kits.

On Earth Day the BIA is encouraging Clean Teams from local businesses to clean up the downtown with prizes for costumes, before and after photos, and the weirdest thing found in the cleanup – I wonder what that will be? Businesses can enter by posting and tagging @downtownstratford on Instagram or Facebook, or by

emailing photos to [kgriffiths@downtownstratford.ca](mailto:kgriffiths@downtownstratford.ca).

JENN and Larry's on York Street, sponsored by the Sutton Group, will be offering a child-size cone for photo proof of clean-up activity. So get out there and make Stratford shine!

On April 23, bring your green thumb to the Local for the launch of *Nature in the City: A guide to ecological gardening in Stratford, ON*. The energy and environment committee and the City of Stratford will be launching this wonderful booklet filled with ideas for connecting the dots in your garden. There's that Ankosé again. The birds, the insects and the native plants all work together to support our environment – everything is connected! Register at [tinyurl.com/52c9ubed](http://tinyurl.com/52c9ubed) (the event is free and you will receive a copy of the booklet).

And last, but certainly not least, don't forget the Earth Day Party at Factory 163 on Saturday, April 25 from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Come for the music, delicious food vendors and the chance to view climate opportunities in our community. The Stratford Public Library will be there along with the Tri-County Master Gardeners, who will be sharing samples of native

plant seeds (Mark the 13th of June for their native plant sale at Avondale). The Canadian Federation of University Women will be there with the Sustainable Shopping Cart, as will the Eco-Club, UTRCA and Festival Hydro – with many more wonderful exhibits and bonus activities for the younger set. Come and meet your climate community and celebrate the Earth! We know that we all need to work together to protect this precious jewel in space – Join the celebration! It's a happening!

### UPDATES:

1.) Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of April 11, 2026: 430.54 ppm (0.30 ppm increase over April 11, 2025).

2.) Endangered species no longer have protection in Ontario, beyond their actual nest or den. The habitat they need to survive is no longer protected, according to Bill 5. If you care, call or send a note to your MPP.

*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.*

## Movie theatres: The show(s) must go on...

**JULIA SCHNEIDER**

*Times Columnist*

A few weeks ago I experienced something I never thought possible: I went to see a movie and found I was the only one there. This isn't possible, I thought to myself. Where is everyone?

I'd gone to the Stratford Cinemas intending to see (future Canadian cult classic) *Nirvana the Band the Show the Movie* but found it started the next week. As an alternative I bought a ticket for *Crime 101*, a fast-paced policeman/bad guy flick that had been lauded in reviews as a cross between *The Fast and The Furious* and a Michael Mann classic. I thought it would bring out all the fans of both those types of movies and expected to find myself in the midst of a mostly male group of car crazy kids and young adults. I was mistaken.

When it comes to movies, my tastes are eclectic: I will watch almost anything that has a good cast, an interesting plot and characters, good production values and good hype. Actually, that sounds quite particular! As a cinephile, I like to go to movies in a theatre and with an audience; movies offer an escape, but watching them with others is also a social experience. On

this particular day, however, I was denied that experience and, although I really enjoyed the movie, for the first time in six decades I realized just how strange being alone in a theatre felt.

I went to two other movies at the Stratford Cinemas just after my *Crime 101* experience. *Nirvana* turned out to be just as wacky as I had expected; *EPiC* (Elvis Presley in Concert) was absolutely not-to-be missed. At both, however, there were fewer than 10 other viewers the night I went.

What's happening with the movies?

It isn't that there aren't good ones around. Though streaming platforms have limited what a viewer can go out to a cinema to see, there are still large and small productions that are superlative by any standards, as my *EPiC* experience shows.

Seeing a movie in a theatre is not the same as viewing it through streaming: it's a far more social activity. You react with others in real time and, despite the possible irritation of noisy popcorn crunchers, this makes it special, a shared experience.

The pandemic seriously restricted all shared experiences, including theatre attendance. According to Statistics Canada, far fewer people went to the movies from

2020 to 2023 but that trend is reversing: in 2024 there were cinema revenues of \$1.6 billion, a rebound, but still 13.1 per cent less than the \$1.9 billion in 2018.

How has all this affected cinemas and their devotees elsewhere in Canada?

Looking north, the closing of the Capital Theatre in Yellowknife, N.W.T., March 31, after 79 years of operation, was extensively covered by the CBC; it left movie-goers there in a state of distress. One of those interviewed, movie fan Rob Hart, lamented that now he "can't practice his religion" and that he'd have to travel to Hay River or fly to Edmonton to do so. Sober Capital Theatre Manager Chris Hood said, "You don't recognize it's gone until it's gone," while referencing the drop in theatre-goers in recent years.

Meanwhile, in Whitehorse, Yukon Film Society member Andrew Connors was cheered after his organization received government funding for its annual festival. This ensured the preservation of "a rich art form," he said, "and a place to convene and reflect on the world."

What is the situation back here in Stratford?

In many regards we are blessed. We have the very small but very special Little

Prince Cinema downtown which screens a wide variety of movies, as well as ones rented by small groups for viewing, and the Stratford Film Festival, which features great movies but unfortunately runs mainly weekends. We also have the theatres at the Stratford Cinemas which try to show a range of movies to satisfy all viewers.

On a recent Thursday I went to the last to see the just-released blockbuster *Project Hail Mary*. There was a line-up outside – a good sign, I thought, even though I supposed that some of those in it were parents with their kids there to see the latest Mario Bros. movie.

The audience in my film was larger than any I had seen for some time; in fact, I was worried that a group of teens in the back row might be noisy during the show. Once it started, however, complete silence reigned: everyone was so engrossed in the story of how a threatened world (Earth), was saved by one very special individual (played by the redoubtable Ryan Gosling), that there was nary a peep.

This is cinema at its best!

And so, treat yourself. Go out to a movie. The show must go on but to do so you need to be there!

# COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

## STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

## CROKINOLE

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

## STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

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

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

We are night sky enthusiasts. Everyone is welcome to

attend. See our website at <https://stratfordastronomy.com/> or call 519-275-4472 for more information

## LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from 2-4pm at Infinity Dance 451 Erie St. Next meeting April 19. 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](http://www.mckinnamangement.com)

## EUCHRE NIGHT

Friday, April 24; 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. Registration is brisk, so call now.

**LARGE**  
**RECORD SALE SUNDAY - STRATFORD**  
Approx 20,000 records on sale  
**Sunday, April 26; 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**  
ANAF Unit 261 Hall, 151 Lorne Ave E, Stratford  
ADMISSION: Donation to Humane Society  
New and used records  
Rock • Metal • Punk • Soul • Jazz • Blues  
45 rpms \$1.00 each • CDs \$5.00 / 5 for \$20.00

**STRATFORD**  
**TIMES**

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

## PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

- 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

# Submit your letter to the Editor to us!

**Call 519-655-2341 or**  
**Email stratfordtimes@gmail.com**

## STRATFORD TIMES

Erie Street Esso	Zehrs	Athens Greek Restaurant	Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron	Stratford Chefs School
Strickland's Toyota	Food Basics	Stratford Legion	Circle K - Huron	HH Delea
Fix Auto	Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier	Gino's Pizza	West End Pharmacy	AJ's Hair
Stratford KIA	Festival Marketplace	Rosso's	Tim Hortons - Huron	United Way Perth Huron
Expressway Ford	Stratford Nissan	Buzz Stop	Stratford Hospital	Sinclair Pharmacy
McDonald's - Erie St	Stratford Subaru	Union Barber	Video 99 - Erie St	Blowes Stationery
Tim Hortons - Erie St	Stratford Honda	Mornington Variety	Jenny Trout	Stratford Tourism
Stratford Mazda	Quality Festival Inn	Split Rail	Stratford Medical Pharmacy	Coffee Culture
7-Eleven - Erie St	McDonald's - Ontario St.	Stratford Rotary Complex	Stratford Chamber of Commerce	Stratford Public Library
Joe's Diner	Papa Johns	Agriplex	A.N.A.E.	The Parlour Restaurant & Inn
The Urban Barber	Fore Everyone Golf	No Frills	Stratford Hyundai	Dick's Barber Shop
Erie Convenience	WalMart	Cozyn's	Daisy Mart	The Livery Yard
Mr. Sub	Stratford Motor Products	Sebringville Esso	Foodland	Town Crier Marketing
Balzacs Coffee	A&W	Dave's Diner - Sebringville	Stratford Variety	North End Pharmacy
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario	Toner & Ink Shop	Stratford-Perth Museum	Brch & Wyn	Annie's Seafood Restaurant
New Orleans Pizza	Rutherford Funeral Home	Sobey's	Stratford Place	Avon Pharmacy

**Invite readers to your worship services.**  
**Contact stratfordtimes@gmail.com**

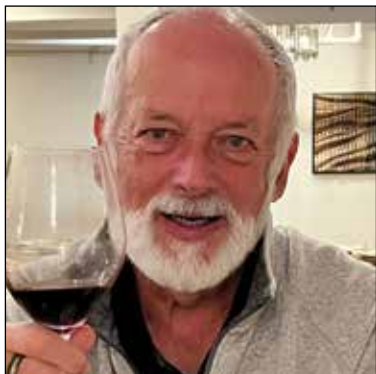
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Proclaiming Jesus Christ  
with communities of  
**LOVE, JOY, HOPE & PEACE**

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**Sunday 10:00 a.m.**  
11:00 a.m. - Fellowship and Coffee Hour

We are a Welcoming Community

# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Music is the heartbeat of Calabria



PAUL KNOWLES

*Times Columnist*

It was raining fairly steadily as we prepared to set off on a walking tour of the village of Siderno Superiore in Calabria, Italy. The folks in our group were coping in a variety of ways – ponchos, umbrellas, all-weather jackets with hoods. While the clothing options varied, we had one thing in common – a lack of smiles as we moped about the weather.

And then Massimo Diano showed up, playing a happy tune on his button accordion. The atmosphere changed immediately; suddenly, we were a jolly group following our own personal pied piper through the streets of this ancient village.

Diano played songs in the Tarantella folk-dance tradition of Calabria. He also played lots of other songs, including “Roll Out the Barrel” and we sang along. As he played, a window opened up, high in one of the stone houses that lined the narrow lanes. An elderly woman leaned out, and Diano stopped walking. “Paul,” he called me over. “Come here. We sing for her.”

“What are we singing?” I asked. “It doesn’t matter,” he laughed, and he sang, and I made possibly appropriate sounds.



**A typical group of enthusiastic, amateur musicians playing traditional Calabrian tunes.**

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

When he’s not serenading elderly Italian ladies from the street below their windows, Diano is one of the partners in a tour company in Calabria. His family business – which involves his cousin, Antonio Muia, and other relatives – had been contracted to organize our Senior Discovery Tours visit to this southernmost part of Italy.

They did their job extremely well, introducing us to all aspects of life in this lesser-known region of Italy. And one fundamental aspect is music.

Everywhere we went, it seemed there was music. One evening, a local group of four musicians gave us a concert. We listened, we sang and we danced a cumbersome but lively version of the Tarantella.

The selection of instruments used in Calabrian music is fascinating. Small “button” accordions,

of course, but so much more. Every song seems to involve enthusiastic use of tambourines, sometimes more than one. Guitars are popular – we witnessed a Palm Sunday procession in which a band of many guitar players were leading the palm-waving crowd. But as a guitar player myself, I was intrigued that, in addition to a regular, six-string guitar, the Calabrian guitarist also use a five-string guitar, with one much shorter string acting like the drones do on bagpipes.

And speaking of bagpipes, the Calabrians love this instrument, but theirs are built using the entire hide of a goat turned inside out. Most continue to have a bit of goat hair hanging from the large air sack.

Other traditional instruments include a wide variety of flutes – some of which are very similar to what we call recorders. Sometimes,

two flutes are played at the same time by one busy musician.

And then there are the lyres, an ancient instrument played with a bow.

In sundry combinations, these instruments make beautiful, lively, joyful music, and from what we saw, the singing that accompanies them is equally enthusiastic and joyful.

And as I said, we experienced a lot of music, from Palm Sunday processions to music at a meal at a family home we were welcomed into.

I have a theory: Calabria is admittedly the poorest and most isolated region of Italy. This is not sophisticated Rome or upper-class Milan. This is a place of down-home people with fewer advantages who have relied on themselves, their families and their neighbours to supply oc-

casions when they can simply enjoy themselves. And nothing does that better than music.

As I said, all two dozen or so of us were welcomed into a family home for a Sunday afternoon, home-cooked meal. It was the home of Diano and Muia’s family; the wonderful meal was prepared by three women, including Diano’s mother and Muia’s wife. This hands-on, all-friends-here approach, by the way, is not usual among professional tour companies. This was entirely exceptional, and very special.

The food was amazing. I’ll be writing, another time, about food in Calabria. My mouth is watering as I recall those flavours right now!

But what took the event to an entirely other level was, you guessed it, the music – music that reflected the personalities and the warm welcome we encountered in Calabria.

That welcome was especially evident after a very entertaining demonstration of the various traditional instruments they use. Having left all my guitars at home, I asked Diano if I could play his for a moment when the presentation was done. He happily agreed.

And the next day, a guitar was delivered to me at our hotel in Siderno, mine to use for the rest of our stay. That led to a singalong with our Senior Discovery Tour group one evening, but I did not try to play anything related to a Tarantella!

The music is one reason I hope to return to Calabria, and soon. Then, of course, there are the people, the food, the history, the scenery, and you’ll hear more about all of the above in the coming months.

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



**Massimo Diano leads his flock through the streets of Siderno Superiore.**



**Calabrian bagpipes are fashioned from the entire hide of a goat, turned inside out.**



**Guitarists lead a Palm Sunday procession in Gioiosa Jonica.**

# Crossword

## CLUES ACROSS

1. Greek goddess of marriage
5. Tropical American blue jay-like bird
10. Abba \_\_\_, Israeli politician
14. Dark olive black
15. Light, crinkled fabric
16. Notre Dame has a golden one
17. Leaked blood
18. Confronted
19. Negligible amount
20. Facilitated
22. Hill or rocky peak
23. Minneapolis suburb
24. Songs to one's beloved
27. Brake horsepower
30. Angry
31. Children's game
32. Spelling is a type of one
35. Obtained in return for labor
37. Indicates center
38. Chinese dynasty
39. Old World buffaloes
40. Slang for time off
41. Fabric
42. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
43. Defunct regional economic organization
44. Philly footballers
45. Female sibling
46. Peter Griffin's daughter
47. Digital audiotape
48. Insecticide
49. Scientific instrument
52. Pages may be dog-\_\_\_
55. Israeli city \_\_\_ Aviv
56. Type of sword
60. Middle Eastern military title
61. Wise individuals
63. French Polynesian island Bora \_\_\_
64. Popular shoe type
65. One of 50
66. Divulge a secret
67. Dish of cooked meat mixed with potatoes
68. Actress Zellweger
69. Romanian city

## CLUES DOWN

1. Greek cupbearer of the Gods
2. Ancient Syrian city
3. Small Eurasian deer (pl.)
4. Range of mountains
5. One thousand cubic feet (abbr.)
6. Spoke
7. City in Georgia
8. Theatrical
9. CNN's founder
10. Icelandic poems
11. Bjorn \_\_\_, tennis player
12. Bowfin genus
13. One point north of northeast
21. Political divisions in ancient Greece
23. Electroencephalograph
25. Cool!
26. Male parent
27. Where some gymnasts work
28. Capital of Vietnam
29. Sailboats
32. Shelter (Scottish)
33. Completed
34. Discharge
36. Arrest
37. Partner to cheese
38. Coffee receptacle
40. Stagnate
41. Satisfies
43. Snakelike fish
44. Consume food
46. Type of school
47. Erase
49. Inform
50. Girl's given name
51. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
52. Every one of two or more things
53. Northern India city
54. Seventeenth stars in a constellation
57. Weapon
58. Amounts of time
59. Isodor \_\_\_, American Nobel physicist
61. Soviet Socialist Republic
62. Witness

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## Pet of the week



### DUMPLING

Dumpling is a spirited, high-energy pup with a whole lot of personality packed into one adorable package! This playful guy is always ready for action-whether it's zooming around the yard, chasing toys, or exploring the world by your side. He thrives in an active home that can keep both his body and mind busy.

While Dumpling has a big zest for life, he can be a little unsure when meeting new people or navigating unfamiliar environments. Because of this, he'll do best with a patient and understanding adopter who can give him the time and space he needs to build confidence at his own pace. Once he feels safe, his fun-loving and affectionate nature really begins to shine.

Dumpling also has a strong prey drive, so he'll need a home that can manage this appropriately-no small animals for this guy, please! Ongoing training and structure will help him succeed, and he's a great candidate for someone who enjoys working with their dog and watching them grow.

If you're looking for an active, rewarding companion and are ready to help a sensitive soul blossom, Dumpling might just be your perfect match. Learn more at [kwsphumane.ca](http://kwsphumane.ca)



## Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

# CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire [stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

## OBITUARY



### GAYLE ELIZABETH KRANTZ

Gayle Elizabeth Krantz, age 81, of Stratford, passed away peacefully surrounded by her loving family at Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth on Wednesday, April 8, 2026. Born in Cambridge, ON, the only child of the late Irving Thomas and Sheila (Lahey) McInerney. Gayle is survived by her loving husband Kenneth Krantz of 38 years. Loving mother of Heather Hayden-Sittler (Sheldon), Colleen (Trevor) Schlotzhauer, Karen (Chris) Krawchuk, Kimberley (Quinn) Scott and her stepchildren Bill (Laurie) Krantz and Kelly Krantz (Farren Joseph). Proud grandmother of Ashley (Matt), Brandon (Shania), Jayden (Mackenzie), Pete (Mikayla), Mike (Heather), Will (Louisa), Clayton (Breanna), Brad, Blair, Blake, Austin and Deni and also a great grandmother. Gayle will be remembered by the Krantz Family and her many nieces and nephews.

Gayle was heavily engaged in the Cambridge Minor Ringette Association. Over the many years of her dedicated involvement she served as a coach, Vice President, President and Treasurer but above all she was an honored, proud parent. Everyone knew when Gayle was in the arena as she had the loudest clap around, enthusiastically cheering on her girls and the Cambridge teams. She was a true sports fan, loyal to the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Blue Jays right to the end. She was a bookkeeper by trade, working for various businesses such as Shopper's Drug Mart, Blowes Travel and Krantz Construction. She loved to cook and is well known for her huge collection of recipes. She enjoyed outings to casinos with Irene Krantz, trips and excursions with her beloved husband Ken and her best lifetime friend Mary Lillie and she cherished her mother-and-daughters' getaways. Gayle deeply loved her family and cat, Butter Cup.

Ken and his family would like to sincerely thank all the wonderful doctors, nurses and team at Verspeeten Family Cancer Centre and the phenomenal volunteers, nurses and staff at Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth. Your care and compassion along with dignity did not go unnoticed.

In keeping with Gayle's wishes, cremation has taken place, and the family will celebrate her life privately. As expressions of sympathy memorial donations may be made to Verspeeten Family Cancer Centre or Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth through the W. G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron St, Stratford, ON. [www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com](http://www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com)

## OBITUARY



### KEITH KENNETH WOLFE

Keith Kenneth Wolfe passed away peacefully with family at his side, on April 6, 2026 at Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth.

Beloved husband of Mary (Campbell), with whom he was married for 53 years. Brother of Roy and Karon. He is Predeceased by brothers-in-law Albert and Melvin and remembered by in-laws Jim (Pat) Campbell, Bob (Liz) Campbell, and Annie (Mike) Nuttall. Keith will also be missed by many nieces and nephews.

Keith enjoyed sunsets over Lake Huron, fishing, photography, and going to air shows. Always willing to meet friends for coffee and go for a drive. His '68 Firebird was always his pride and joy.

Keith's family wish to sincerely thank the nurses and volunteers at the Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth for their wonderful care, especially Katelyn, Josh and Angel.

Cremation has taken place. A Celebration of Life will be held at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, 105 Morgan St. Stratford, on Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 2pm. All are welcome.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth ([www.rotaryhospice.ca](http://www.rotaryhospice.ca)), directly, or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario St., Stratford, ON. N5A 3K1. 519-271-5062.

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WANTING TO BUY – All collectibles including sports cards, beanie babies, Funko pops and stamps. Highest prices paid. Free appraisals. Are you downsizing or need an estate clean out? We can help. Call or text Stan anytime 519-868-3814.

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I WILL PAY CASH FOR ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES – Coca Cola Pepsi any pop company, Brewery items Kuntz, Huether Labatts etc. Old radios and gramophones, Wristwatches and pocket watches, Old fruit jars Beaver Star Bee Hive etc. Any old oil cans and signs Red Indian Supertest etc. Any small furniture. If you are moving or cleaning out stuff please contact me - 519-570-6920.

The Spa Near The Tracks in Stratford is seeking an RMT, Registered Massage Therapist. Conveniently located in downtown Stratford. We are wheelchair accessible. We are paying a signing bonus. Contact: [Thespa@quadro.net](mailto:Thespa@quadro.net)

## FOR SALE

Shade Trees; Maples, Oaks, Birch, Beech, Honey Locusts, Elms, Magnolia, Hydrangea Tree, Tulip Tree, Crab apples, Ivory Silk Lilac, Chanticleer Pear, Golden Weeping Willows and more. Apples, Pears, Peaches, Plums, Apricots, Nectarine, Blueberry, Haskap etc. Lots of healthy strong Spruce, Cedars and White Pine for your privacy hedges and windbreaks. Hundred of flowering shrubs. Reg Hours 7 a.m.- 6 p.m. Mon-Sat at Martins Nursery c/o Emanuel Martin. 42661 Orangehill Rd., Wroxeter, ON

**CAMPFIRE WOOD** Seasoned hardwood, bagged and ready for your summer enjoyment. \$7.00/bag \$20/3 bags \$30/5 bags. Face cords available. Call/text for pick up or ask about delivery. Jim 519-301-1395

## JUNK REMOVAL

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6. Female.
7. AB Negative.
8. 1969.
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10. Pluto.

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	E	M	S		F	O	N		M	C	F			
	D	A	L		I	C	E		A	R	A			
S	M	I	L	O		N	A	B		M	E	I	J	I
M	A	C	A	B	R	E		U	N	M	A	T	E	D
A	N	T	I	B	E	S		L	E	A	S	H	E	S
		S	E	B	S			A	B	L	E			
I	M	M	E	R	S	E		S	E	S	S	I	L	E
D	A	I										R	A	N
A	M	A	S	S	E	D		P	A	S	S	A	G	E
			A	T	L	I		E	P	E	E			
A	D	M	I	R	A	L		S	A	L	A	M	I	S
B	E	E	L	I	N	E		E	R	E	M	I	T	E
M	Y	S	I	A		M	A	T		C	I	M	O	N
	T	N	T		M	B	A		T	E	E			
	A	G	E		A	N	S		S	R	O			

## SUDOKU

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

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