

# SIMCOE ADVOCATE

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## Exemption policy approved for waste collection

County to transition to new service in the fall

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

Young families and people with medical conditions may be able to apply for extra waste capacity when Norfolk County brings in a new collection system in the fall.

As staff continue to work towards transitioning to a new system, councillors approved a staff recommendation at the Jan. 13 council-in-committee meeting that provides, among other things, two exemptions for the biweekly waste collection limit. Those exemptions are to deal with excess diaper waste for homes where there are three or more kids under the age of four, and excess waste from medical equipment.

The county's waste collection services will be changing in September. A new weekly organics pickup will begin and garbage collection will transition to every other week. Homes will also be given standardized bins that trucks with automatic scoops are able to collect and empty.

These moves are being made in large part to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfills. Tipping fees in the province are increasing as landfill space becomes increasingly sparse.

However, the staff report suggested accommodations should be made for people who generate ex-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



On a frigid Saturday evening, Kelsey Steinhoff, Markie Perrier, and Jori Doek enjoy the Handy Henry outdoor rink on Norfolk Street South, Simcoe.

(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTO)

## Outdoor ice makers learn from experience

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

Henry Knelsen is not a professional ice maker. But Knelsen, his Handy Henry Concrete staff in Simcoe, and friends, are getting there. "Now that we've done it a few years, now it's all about timing,"

said Knelsen Saturday evening on their homemade temporary outdoor ice rink on property they lease across the street from Handy Henry Concrete on Norfolk Street South. It opened mid-January for the 2026 winter season, and the community is more than welcome to use it. "This year, whenever it was cold, it was so windy. It was flooded, then

it took a while to freeze, so it was 'wrinkly' just because of the wind. So it was hard to get the ice smooth this year. You want to flood just before it gets super cold." The rink was re-flooded – and it's been in great shape since. Volunteers from the community have pitched in to help clear the surface of snow. And there's been a lot of snow.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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# Outdoor ice makers in Simcoe 'learn as they go'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"There were a bunch of kids here, and we said, 'You guys shovel it, we'll flood it tonight.' And that's kind of what we did. Last year we had to do all the shoveling. This year people here have been shoveling it so it's been a lot easier to maintain."

There are a couple of cracks, he noted, but they are working on those.

"You learn as you go. Now I know you've got to use slush (to repair cracks). Make the slush/snow wet, rub it in. We've still got the homemade 'Zamboni' – actually one of my guys built it and it works pretty good. Now that we have a system down, it's been pretty simple."

The 'use at your own risk' rink is being used seven days a week, he said. Pucks and nets have been donated. They even have strings of lights for evening skating.

"If you go by here during the day, you'll see people."

Years from now, he hopes people will still remember it and say, "Hey we played on that Handy Henry rink!" Initially, it was a great way to give back to the community. Paying it forward, they said. Today, that goodwill has come back tenfold.

Living next door, Knelsen said, "It's kind of cool when you look out the window during the day and see kids playing. It's really encouraging to keep it going. Plus, it's fun for us too."

Now in their fourth year of ice-making, Knelsen remembers some struggles with their first rink in the winter of 2022-23 when they had brought in some fill, graded the gravel and packed it down. Using wooden concrete forming boards and greenhouse plastic they created the foundation.

Results were mixed, he said. It was a mild winter, particularly in January 2023, and it had to be rebuilt early in February for end-of-season skating. The greenhouse plastic had attracted heat... less than ideal for a skating



(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTO)

**Henry Knelsen is looking forward to a good winter of skating and hockey on the Handy Henry outdoor ice rink in Simcoe.**

rink. And the gravel had poked holes in it.

"The second year, we didn't have it quite level, so we really had to flood the one end. But now, we have a system and it's flat. We have a sand base – Morris Trucking and Excavating donated the sand. Now when we flood it, it's got even thickness everywhere so it freezes evenly.

"We also learned not to flood it too early because if it

stays unfrozen, neighbourhood kids sometimes walk on it when it's slush and it's hard to fix that.

"So it's been a learning experience, but it's good. I'm just glad to be part of it." Looking at long-range forecasts, Knelsen is optimistic.

"I think we're going to have a regular winter. So this will most likely go into March. It seems like a normal year."

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# Brantford man charged in Simcoe shooting

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

A 25-year-old Brantford man has been charged in a shooting incident that prompted Norfolk County OPP to issue a shelter-in-place order for part of Simcoe on Jan. 10.

Reports of a gunshot at an address on Kent Street North between Union and Young streets led police to order nearby residents to shelter in place around 1 p.m. while tactical officers, crisis negotiators and the OPP canine unit responded.

The order was lifted by 8:20 p.m., though officers returned to the scene on Kent Street North five days later to continue investigating.

On Friday, officers from the OPP Repeat Offender Parole Enforcement (ROPE) Squad arrested two men in Tillsonburg wanted for allegedly dealing drugs in Norfolk.

Police searched the pair and allegedly found suspected fentanyl and methamphet-

amine, a loaded gun and cash.

The Brantford man was wanted on a warrant after police identified him as a suspect in the Simcoe shooting.

He stands charged with three counts of forcible confinement, two counts of robbery using a restricted or prohibited firearm, pointing a firearm and a half-dozen more weapons charges.

He is further charged with drug trafficking, possessing the proceeds of crime, unauthorized operation of a motor vehicle, breach of probation and disobeying court orders.

A 21-year-old of no fixed arrest was also arrested in Tillsonburg and charged with unauthorized possession of a firearm, drug trafficking and possessing the proceeds of crime.

The two accused were held in custody ahead of a bail hearing in Simcoe.

*- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the Hamilton Spectator. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.*



(FILE PHOTO)

The 2026 Coldest Night of the Year walk in Simcoe is Feb. 28, starting at 4 p.m. See <https://cnoy.org/locations/Simcoe> for more information on how to participate, donate, or volunteer. This year's Coldest Night of the Year starts and finishes at McDonald's on the Queensway. The event raises awareness and support for the most vulnerable members of the community, and this year funds raised will support Youth Unlimited's Teenlink program.

# Norfolk County approves exemption policy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cess waste as a result of a medical condition, or those young families or home daycares where soiled diapers can accumulate quickly.

Homes will have to apply for exemptions yearly. For exemptions as a result of excess diaper waste, homeowners will have to provide the ages of the children or the name of the home daycare. A healthcare practitioner note is required for the medical waste exemption, though Bokla said a note is good for five years.

Those who receive exemptions will have the choice of receiving a larger collection bin, or a second bin of the standard size. Merisa Bokla, supervisor of waste management, said the municipality is trying to offer some flexibility for homeowners. They're

also looking at offering smaller bins as an option for those who prefer it.

"It's kind of being flexible with individual needs and requirements," she said, adding the smaller bins may be preferred for older residents or those with strength or mobility issues.

The report also included two other updates. First, technical requirements for condos have been approved. Common collection points will no longer be an option due to the new automated collection arms being utilized on the trucks. Condos will have to be able to offer enough space for the bins to be spaced at least two feet apart. Other technical requirements under the new system include a road width of six metres and turning radius of 12 metres, as well as continuous collection routes where trucks don't have to reverse.

Condos that don't meet these requirements will be forced to arrange private garbage collection.

The report also updated rules around collection for social housing units.

"To ensure consistency across all social housing properties, multi-residential properties will be required to arrange for private collection services," the report said. "Properties that are townhouses with private internal roadways must meet the updated technical guidelines."

Those that don't meet the technical guidelines will need to arrange private collection.

Social housing properties that front onto a municipal street can receive the municipal service as long as they meet the residential requirements. The new waste collection system is set to come into effect on Sept. 29 of this year.

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# EDITORIAL

## Ploughing through snow, pre-budget consultations

**Haldimand-Norfolk  
MPP  
Bobbi Ann  
Brady**



As I travel blizzard-condition highways across the province for the 2026 Pre-Budget Consultations on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, my colleagues and I are presented with a stark, recurring reality - Ontario is at a demographic and economic crossroads.

I'm not certain if this is reassuring, but we are not alone with the challenges we witness festering in Haldimand-Norfolk. While our small communities within our beautiful riding are unique, the challenges we face are not, and there's certainly no correlation to the magnitude of the problem and the political stripe by which the area is represented.

While on the road in Eastern Ontario – Brockville, Ottawa and Pembroke – we consistently heard the ambition of government policy is colliding with the harsh math of inflation, a shrinking healthcare workforce, and a critical infrastructure shortage required to support a rapidly aging population.

Of course, the struggles within our education system

were examined, most notably the chronic shortage of professionals needed to support students requiring extra attention. Ontario continues to face a severe staffing crisis, with nearly half of schools reporting daily shortages of educational assistants and support staff. I believe we must stop thinning these limited resources across a vast number of schools and instead consolidate them into designated classrooms or specialized centres. When I asked presenters if they would support such a bold consolidation, the consensus was clear: the current model is failing all students, not just our vulnerable learners. The majority felt the time has come to prioritize concentrated, high-quality education over the status quo, ensuring every student has reliable access to the specialized support they deserve.

Many committee discussions centred on the desire for seniors to age at home, a widely-praised concept that is an ideal goal. However, the effectiveness of this approach hinges entirely on having proper supports in place. Organizations like Senior Support Services of Haldimand-Norfolk are currently forced to do more with less.

Lori Holloway, the CEO of the Ontario Community Support Association, emphasized strategic investments in community and home care are not just about senior comfort - they are a necessity for the entire healthcare system. By appropriately funding these sectors, we can divert patients from over-capacity hospitals and long-term care waitlists, which currently exceed 50,000 people in Ontario. Freeing up these resources ensures institutional care is available for those with the most complex needs while allowing others to live with dignity in their own communities. Ms. Holloway made it clear government will not build its way out of this crisis. I concur because the environment to build

long-term care beds does not exist and government is not willing to help, case in point Dunnville's Edgewater Gardens.

Switching to the tobacco file, the Committee heard from my good friend Lexi Ensor of Rothmans, Benson & Hedges. She emphasized the existential harms of contraband tobacco in Ontario. As I have often stood in the House and said, this is not a victimless issue. Beyond the well-documented links to organized crime, it's an industry continuing to undermine public health and erode respect for law. Simultaneously, the province is forfeiting nearly a billion dollars each year in lost tax revenue - dollars that could be applied to the province's challenges. Ms. Ensor called on the government to include in the 2026 Budget a further crackdown, which I said could include the adoption of the Quebec model where contraband incidence rates sit around 12 per cent compared to Ontario's 50 per cent.

This week, I'm back on the committee trail in Southwestern Ontario. New reports forthcoming.

\*\*\*

As promised in my last newspaper column, I said I would highlight some of the Haldimand-Norfolk-relevant presentations from my travel with the Ontario Government's Finance Committee as we conduct pre-budget consultations.

Last week, while the committee was snowed in, seeing Rothmans, Benson & Hedges (RBH) appear before us in Pembroke was a reminder of home, where the tobacco industry has long been part of our local economy and rural

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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# Lynnwood Arts Centre pitches two options

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

A Norfolk arts group may have to move out of its namesake building, one of two national historic sites in Simcoe.

Citing the need for extensive repairs and its suspected inability to meet fundraising targets on timelines Norfolk County deems necessary, the Lynnwood Arts Centre has offered two possible solutions to county staff and councillors.

Presenting at Norfolk's council-in-committee meeting on Jan. 13, chair Paul Hammond said the organization envisions one of two futures for the group.

The first, it could purchase the Lynn-

wood property for a nominal fee, which could ease time pressures for capital upgrades. Failing that, the group is proposing to move to the Eva Brook Donly building.

"We've come to the realization that the status quo under the current agreement is not really sustainable," Hammond said.

The group entered into a lease agreement with the County in 2021 to re-establish Lynnwood Arts at its original location. Under the agreement, Norfolk provided some financial support for the group in the form of utilities and maintenance, as well as an annual grant that started at \$50,000 and decreases by \$10,000 annually.

Hammond said efforts by the board and Lynnwood staff to create a stable and

thriving centre for the arts in Norfolk have proven largely successful. Attendance has increased, now hitting 7,500 visitors annually and several partnerships - including an Indigenous Arts program, the Creative Expressions program with the Alzheimer's Society, and collaboration with the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board - show the value the centre adds to Norfolk.

"I joined the Lynnwood board because I believe arts is critical to the community... I think it adds a lot of value to the community," Hammond told councillors.

"We see lots of opportunity to grow and enhance our programming into the future."

Councillors directed staff to have further discussions with the group and report back this spring.

The county has identified \$1.26 million in capital work needed on the property. Under the lease, Lynnwood is expected to pay for 60 per cent of capital investments and with the County eyeing a 2027 timeline to complete the work, Hammond said they're skeptical they could raise enough money in time.

However, if the County sold the property to the group, Hammond said they could then undertake the improvements under a more relaxed timeline. He told councillors the board has done some work on a capital plan under that scenario.

"I would say we have a good first start on a five-year plan," he said.

As part of his deputation request, Hammond outlined some of the benefits of selling the property to Lynnwood Arts. First, it would allow the group to stay in its eponymous home, which offers a large space ideal for the group's planned programming expansion.

It would also remove County obligations to the national historic site, though Hammond said Lynnwood Arts would like to negotiate ongoing municipal support under the plan.

Moving to the Eva Brook Donly building would be more financially viable for Lynnwood Arts and it would allow the building to be fully utilized in partnership with Norfolk County Archives. However, it has a smaller footprint than Lynnwood and would mark a departure from the more than 50-year relationship between Lynnwood Arts and the historic property.

"It's got a lot of meaning to our operations and the community at large," Hammond said of the property.

Other than directing staff to come back with a report, Norfolk councillors didn't say much on the issue. Coun. Chris Van Paassen did ask if the board would be open to a sale where the neighbouring parkland is severed. "I think we're open to ideas," responded Hammond.

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# OPP consider offender management program

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

When the courts place conditions on a person living in Norfolk, the local OPP detachment will be paying attention.

Staff Sgt. Gene Laarman told members of the Norfolk OPP detachment board at its Jan. 14 meeting of their plans to implement an Offender Management Apprehension Program (OMAP) in the county. The program would see a member of the detachment receive special training to monitor people who have had conditions placed on them by the courts. These could be situations such as when an accused is released from jail to a surety, or someone who has a GPS tracking device.

"These are people who are dealing with the courts on conditions, on bail, maybe there's outstanding warrants or they have GPS trackers. We're looking to hold these people accountable," Laarman said.

The staff sergeant said the program also helps local police with people who may otherwise not even be on their radar, since the program would alert them of people who were put under judicial conditions elsewhere and ended up in Norfolk. He gave the example of an accused in Toron-

to who was released on a surety, and that surety is the person's mother, who lives in Norfolk.

"That person may not be on our radar and they've shown up and they're in our community. Well now, with this OMAP system, what we're hoping to do is identify that person and we as the OPP can check in on them and verify that their conditions are being held," Laarman said.

Police on Manitoulin Island implemented their own OMAP last spring, and according to a media release issued in July, the program offered some early signs of success. It registered 40 people over that time, and in 36 compliance checks found 72 per cent of people were following their conditions. The program in Manitoulin Island seeks to reduce repeat offending, while also offering services to those who get registered into the program.

"We're already seeing the difference that the OMAP is making in our community," Wikwemikong Tribal Police Service Chief Ron Gignac said in the news release. "This isn't just about keeping track of people. It's about supporting recovery, building trust, and working together to make our community safer for everyone."

Coun. Kim Huffman, who is also chair of

the OPP detachment board, welcomed the new program, saying there's a lot of public frustration over things like people breaking the conditions of their bail.

"I think this is a great program in trying to get ahead of the issue," she said.

Laarman said the plan is still in its early stages, and the detachment is looking for the right person to undertake the necessary training.

## Early Resolution Program

Laarman told board members of a second program the local OPP detachment is looking at implementing.

Early resolution programs allow cases to be resolved outside of court, freeing up valuable resources and time for everyone from police officers to potential witnesses. Laarman said in several cases it can also be a welcome option for the defendant.

"It reduces stress actually for the accused as well so they feel like they can actually solve some of this problem outside of court," he said.

Laarman said it's typical to have three to six officers on day shift tied up in court as they await trial. Early resolution could reduce that, allowing them to perform regular police duties in the community.

"And who's often overlooked is wit-



Kim Huffman, Norfolk Ward 7 Councillor.

nesses... you have a witness come up for a POA (Provincial Offences Act) trial, they take a day off work, they're nervous because they've never testified. So now they're waiting in the body of court waiting for their turn to testify at trial," he said.

Discussions on implementing the program began just before the holidays.

# Patches From Heaven helps the homeless in Norfolk

J.P. ANTONACCI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

It takes about 80 hours to make a wool blanket destined to be wrapped around a precariously housed person in Norfolk County.

"That's a lot of love and time that goes into each blanket," said James Durka of Port Dover.

Durka and his wife, Barb, run Patches From Heaven, a volunteer group that has donated nearly 2,100 warm, colourful blankets over the past 30 years.

Each blanket contains 36 knitted patches and measures six-by-six feet.

"It wraps right around you," said Durka, a retired teacher who started the knitting program as a challenge to his Grade 6 class in Caledonia.

"They loved it," he recalled. "I figured it was going to be a three-month thing. Thirty years later, here we are."

Knitting and sewing at recess and throughout the summer, Durka's students — with help from adult volunteers — made hundreds of blankets for Good Shepherd and Mission Services of Hamilton in the two decades after the initiative launched.

Then, 11 years ago, the Durkas moved to Port Dover and their basement shelves again filled with balls of yarn and stacks of knitted squares.

"When we moved from Haldimand, I figured the program would end. But when we heard the stories and the need that they had, we just continued on," said Durka, who was moved by accounts of people freezing because they were sleeping under bridges and along trails.

"Our big problem out in Norfolk is the hidden homeless," he said. "People who are going back and forth sleeping on couches or in a tent."

Patches From Heaven now sends blankets to a half-dozen local agencies, including the women's shelter and the Salvation Army in Simcoe.

Residents at two supportive housing complexes in Simcoe built by Hamilton-based non-profit Indwell have received blankets, as have people living in encampments.

"Some of the blankets are used for bedding in the shelter itself. Others are given away to help our homeless ward off frostbite during the frigid winter days," said Virginia Lucas, director of an overnight shelter in Simcoe run by local charity Church Out Serving.

"Many of our local homeless are more senior in age and are particularly vulnerable to the cold," Lucas added. "Blankets and extra clothing layers can literally make the difference between life and death on the street in below-zero temperatures."

Along with a perpetual need for four-ply yarn — chosen for its warmth and durability, Durka explained — the group is looking for new knitters to augment a dedicated core of 40 who are getting up in age, with the oldest volunteer still knitting at 97.

A Hamilton woman in her late 80s has been knitting patches for 29 years and is still at it, with her son — who lives in Dover — delivering her work to the Durkas.

Another volunteer put together 30 blankets last year after losing her husband and getting back into sewing.



James and Barb Durka run Patches From Heaven, a Norfolk-based group of volunteer knitters who make and donate blankets to residents in need.

"For some of our seniors, it's given them hope and something to look forward to," Durka said. "It gives them another direction that keeps them going."

Attached to each colourful blanket is a note telling the recipient they are not alone and their blanket was made "with tender loving care."

"I know they get a blanket, but what's really important is it provides them with hope," Durka said.

"It shows them that people haven't forgotten about them."

Patches From Heaven does not accept monetary donations, but gifts of yarn and time are welcome. To learn more, email [patchesfromheaven@gmail.com](mailto:patchesfromheaven@gmail.com) or call the Durkas at 519-583-0915.

*- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the Hamilton Spectator. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.*

# Will the 2026 Budget tackle contraband tobacco?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

heritage, supporting generations of farm families while continually navigating significant transition and change.

As the representative of Canada's largest tobacco-growing region, my responsibility is to stand up for local producers who operate within a tightly regulated, legal market. Tobacco remains a lawful product in Canada, and while public health efforts rightly focus on reducing consumption, there remains a cadre of people who choose to use it. So long as that reality exists, I believe it is important that the economic benefits of the tobacco industry remain in our local communities.

The greatest threat to our legal tobacco industry is illegal and contraband tobacco, which is largely controlled by organized criminals who operate in sophisticated networks. Not only does this undermine legitimate farmers and businesses, but it also deprives communities of jobs and tax

revenues while fueling other criminal activity like illegal guns, drugs, and human trafficking. It is believed Ontario is losing between \$750 million and \$1.8 billion in annual tobacco tax revenue due to the illegal contraband market.

What might be surprising to readers is that RBH is committed to a smoke-free future and Lexi Ensor, who appeared before us at committee, began her presentation with: If you don't smoke, don't start. If you smoke, quit. If you don't quit, change. One of my colleagues on committee was confused by a tobacco company committing to a smoke-free Ontario. The short answer is that a smoke-free Ontario does not mean a nicotine-free Ontario but rather reducing the most harmful form of consumption by eliminating combustibles. For those who know the industry, this is comparable to the conversion to indirect-fired tobacco kilns around 2001.

As part of this commitment, RBH is asking the Ontario Government to step up and

strengthen the province's efforts to fight contraband tobacco, citing that law enforcement needs the right tools, paired with bold action and support from government, to meaningfully combat this serious issue.

Industry leaders like RBH have had my support in calling on the Ontario government to adopt Quebec's model, which empowers law enforcement through specific legislation, ultimately increased the powers of local police to combat contraband. ACCES Tabac is composed of about 60 full-time officers with the Quebec government investing about \$15 million in their efforts. Ontario, by comparison, supports about eight full-time officers with less than \$4 million. Contraband incidence rates in Quebec have been lowered to about 12 per cent, while in Ontario that number is above 50 per cent.

Sources have indicated to me that Quebec's model was set to be written into the provincial budget in 2019 but was pulled as the document was about to go to print.

Kicking the can down the road on illegal tobacco activity has only bolstered criminals who have seen how easy it is to create financial force multipliers. Now, like tobacco, illicit vaping and nicotine pouches are going down the same crooked road.

Credit where it's due, in the 2025 Budget, the Ontario government called on the feds to act against the growing issue of contraband tobacco, sold through online platforms. This must become a priority as kids are now accessing far more than tobacco online and it can be brought to the door by carrier platforms or by Canada Post allegedly.

As we look toward the spring budget, contraband tobacco must be addressed, not through symbolism but through evidence-based policy. It's time we confront the realities of this illegal industry, which undermines public health, fuels organized crime and deprives the province of revenues that could be utilized in critical sectors like healthcare and education.

## Coldest Night walk raises awareness in Norfolk

LEAH BAUER

Advocate Contributor

As the cost of living continues to rise across Canada, more people in Norfolk County are finding themselves struggling with homelessness and food insecurity. This growing reality is what drives the annual Coldest Night of the Year walk, an event that aims to raise awareness and support for the most vulnerable members of the community.

This growth in vulnerable people is something that Dan Avey noted as he discussed this year's Coldest Night walk on Feb. 28. Avey is a Waterford native and a youth minister who has been working with young people for decades.

"We are in our seventh year of running Coldest Night here in Simcoe. We have seen the issue of the hurting homeless and hungry in this community rise over the last number of years," said Avey. "Coldest Night is a part of the awareness component helping people to be aware that we have a lot of hurting homeless and hungry in this community."

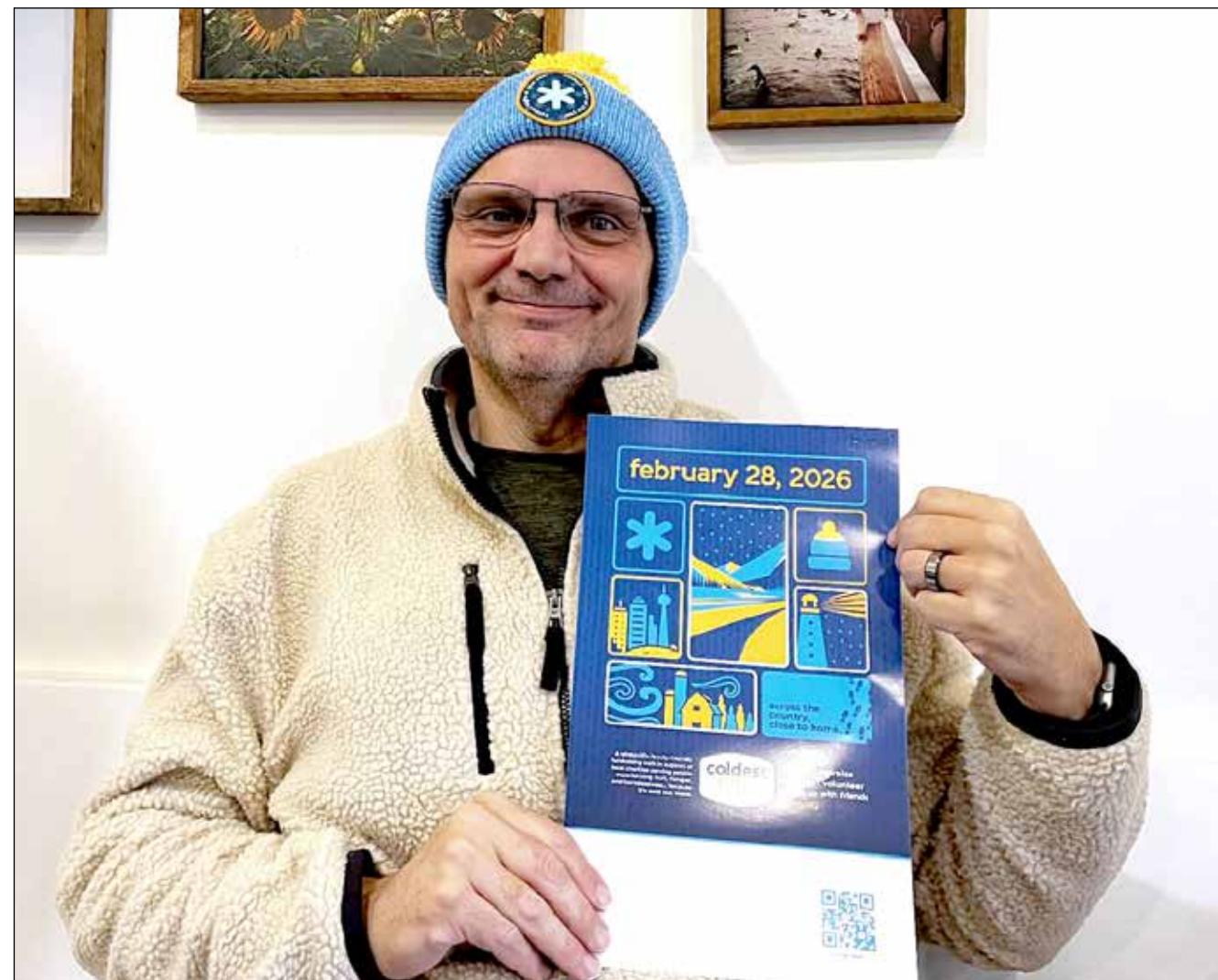
Homelessness awareness is a big motivation for why Avey works so hard to organize this event every year. The event is meant to draw people's attention back to those who are less fortunate in our community. The 2026 walk is on Feb. 28, starting at 4 p.m. See <https://cnoy.org/locations/Simcoe> for more information on how to participate, donate, or volunteer.

The walk itself is no small feat, but it is an important night, as it starts conversation and raises awareness about housing and food insecurity.

"The walk starts at McDonald's. We will go up to the Superstore, then cross the street and come back down Queenway to Wendy's. After that we will move downtown, and the turnaround is Kingfisher Cafe. Then we're going to go up to Colborne Street. We will pass by the Youth Unlimited buildings and then head back up to the starting point of McDonald's."

The main purpose of the Coldest Night walk in downtown Simcoe is to raise awareness, but the second aspect of the walk is to raise money for Teen Link. Teen Link is a program run by Dan and his wife Suzanne. Suzanne and Dan combined their skills to launch Teen Link, which is a product of Dan's many years working as a youth minister, and Suzanne's work as a therapist.

The Teenlink program begins on Feb. 5, and runs for eight weeks with the participants meeting every Thursday night from 6-9 p.m. The program is open for any young



Dan Avey holds a promotional poster for the Feb. 28, 2026 Coldest Night event in Simcoe.

(LEAH BAUER PHOTO)

person from Grade 8 to Grade 12. It is a great way to meet friends, and learn about various aspects of safety, mental health, and relationships in an open environment.

Dan remarked, "So a lot of what we do here is kind of the prevention, the early intervention as well."

Teen Link focuses on prepping teens with a toolkit of skills and knowledge so that they are able to break cycles of abuse, learn about mental health, and leadership as they navigate their teens. There is a \$50 fee associated with reg-

istration for this program which helps to cover the cost of the professionals and instructors who come in to educate the youth. Interested people can register at <https://yfcnorfolk.com/teenlinknew/>

Money raised from the Coldest Night event on Feb. 28 will help to run Youth Unlimited's Teenlink program, which works to educate teens in our community about suicide, abusive relationships, and mental health. Support the cause and join the walk!

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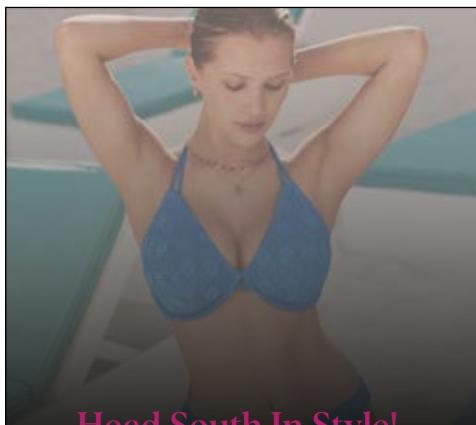
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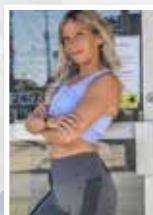
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# 2026 levy increase ‘uncomfortable but necessary’

## Median residential property will see a roughly \$213 increase on property taxes in 2026

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

They may have settled into different seats, but after nearly eight hours of discussion, Norfolk County councillors approved a 2026 levy operating budget that was in the same ballpark as what staff presented, and perhaps even in the same section and row.

Councillors have approved a 7.4 per cent net levy increase, which when taking into account other factors like 1.3 per cent assessment growth, will come to a 5.5 per cent median residential increase. That means the median residential property assessed at \$246,000 will pay around \$213 more in property taxes in 2026.

“It’s not comfortable but it’s the right thing to do,” said Mayor Amy Martin as the lengthy meeting drew to a close.

During the meeting Martin said staff had already gone to great lengths to keep the increase as low as possible while also maintaining a commitment to closing the infrastructure gap and putting the municipality on a sustainable path for the future.

Things got a little testy towards the end of the meeting. In a recorded vote, only Coun. Doug Brunton voted against the increase. He said he couldn’t support the increase after council passed significant increases to the levy budget and the water/wastewater budget in recent years.

“There’s a lot of people out there who cannot afford this,” he said, though he did say staff tried to do a good job.

While other councillors did acknowledge how difficult the past few years have been, they otherwise showed a united front that the increase was needed.

“It’s super uncomfortable,” said Coun. Alan Duthie. “This, for lack of a better term, sucks.”

However, they also challenged Brunton to put forward ideas to trim the increase. Earlier in the meeting he broached the idea of cutting the transfer to reserves. The 2026 budget includes another 2.5 per cent increase in reserve transfers as the county tries to get to a point where it has enough money to maintain its assets over the long term. He suggested a cut for 2026 wouldn’t have a huge impact on 2026 projects and the municipality could resume those transfers in future years.

But his proposal didn’t get much support from fellow councillors or staff.

“It solves a today problem, but it creates a big tomorrow problem,” said Duthie.

“I can’t saddle them (future residents) with more tomorrow problems than they’ve already got.”

Treasurer Amy Fanning also said making such a cut would create both short and long term challenges for the municipality.

Duthie said he genuinely wanted to hear of any other ideas Brunton had to save some money.

Coun. Kim Huffman was more direct and critical of Brunton after Brunton requested a recorded vote to voice put his opposition on the record.

“You always bail on these votes,” she said.

One change from past practice that staff proposed was to use all of the assessment growth to offset the 2026 increase. Previously some of that would have been included in reserve transfers.

While the final dollar figures look similar to what staff proposed, councillors did make a few tweaks. They removed a staff proposal to hire a new fleet training and compliance officer, cutting just under \$134,000.

They also cut \$45,000 from a plan to hire a bylaw en-

forcement officer. The money was to purchase a new vehicle for the officer, but councillors directed them to make do with the existing fleet.

On the flip side, councillors did approve a few discretionary items that were up for council’s decision. Those included funding for a part-time training coordinator for the Norfolk County Public Library, and a full-time project manager position for the Haldimand Norfolk Housing Corporation. With those changes, the 2026 tax levy remained virtually unchanged from the \$146.6 million staff proposed, which is a \$10 million increase over last year.

Some of the major areas beyond service level changes and infrastructure/reserve transfer that are driving the increase include a \$1.2 million increase for OPP services, and \$1.6 million for wage and salary increases.

Service level change increases that affect the levy include the aforementioned bylaw officer, \$300,000 for a CCTV stormwater inspection program that’s the result of regulatory changes, \$103,000 to hire ServiceNorfolk agents at the Gilbertson Administration Building, and \$26,000 for a new development compliance technologist in the engineering department.

Two other new positions, a risk and compliance officer and a full-time mechanic, were also approved but won’t impact the levy. Similarly, support requested for the Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice build was approved but won’t affect the levy since council voted to use money from the Legacy Fund to make that donation. With a commitment to Norfolk General Hospital that saw them set aside \$500,000 a year wrapping up, Coun. Chris Van Paassen’s motion called for the county to simply keep setting that money aside for the next two years but to use it for the hospice build.

# Norfolk council to debate property tax increase

J.P. ANTONACCI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Norfolk County residents who saw their water bills rise by more than 10 per cent on New Year’s Day will soon find out how much more property tax they must pay in 2026.

Councillors met to debate the rural municipality’s operating budget, with finance staff proposing to raise residential property taxes by 5.5 per cent.

That increase would add \$212.71 to the median home’s annual property tax bill.

Some of the tax increase is already locked in, such as a 2.5 per cent bump to the capital budget to fund infrastructure, pay down debt and replenish neglected reserve funds, along with a non-negotiable 0.9 per cent increase to the policing budget as dictated by the Ontario Provincial Police.

Councillors are left to debate how much to spend on increasing services or simply maintain existing service levels as expenses climb due to inflation. The cost to haul the county’s trash is also set to rise in September, when Norfolk enters into a new waste-collection contract.

Mayor Amy Martin said the draft \$146.6-million operating budget “is about balancing fiscal responsibility with the need to invest in critical services and infrastructure that matter most to our residents.”

“We’re working hard to minimize the burden on households while ensuring Norfolk County remains resilient and prepared for the future,” Martin said in a statement.

Continuing a multi-year effort started by the previous council under mayor Kristal Chopp, council members and staff are trying to find money to upgrade neglected infrastructure, while replenishing the county’s reserve accounts, which in past years were raided to keep property tax increases low.

Martin said the municipality will not take on new debt

while spending \$69.4 million this year for needed roadwork and bridge repairs, fire truck replacements, stormwater system improvements and other infrastructure projects.

“Council’s continued focus on strengthening our financial position is working, and our commitment to a responsible financial strategy is unwavering,” the mayor said.

The sharp increase to residents’ water bills continues a trend in Norfolk, where water and wastewater rates have gone up more than 37 per cent since 2022 and are now among the highest in the province.

The county has five separate water treatment systems in Norfolk’s areas, but only about 60 per cent of residents are hooked up to municipal water.

About 16,000 households pay to support an aging system that needs hundreds of millions in new spending but has thus far not attracted major investment from Queen’s Park or Ottawa, save for money to upgrade existing plants in Port Dover and Port Rowan.

It all adds up to what treasurer Amy Fanning described as “an ongoing struggle between significant infrastructure needs and resident affordability.”

Norfolk has budgeted just under \$10 million to upgrade sewage pumping stations and rehabilitate Port Dover’s water tower this year, but it is unclear how the county plans to cover \$417 million in forecasted capital spending needed to modernize the water system over the next decade.

That projected price tag “is not only significant, it is monumental,” said Martin, stressing the need to push for financial support from upper levels of government “to ensure this vital work continues.”

Budget talks start at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday inside Simcoe town hall. Two days are scheduled, if needed. Residents are welcome to attend in person or online.

To review the 2026 budget documents and those from past years, visit [norfolkcounty.ca/budget](http://norfolkcounty.ca/budget).



Norfolk Mayor Amy Martin.

- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the Hamilton Spectator. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

# Rotary Club of Simcoe honours Perks' legacy

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

A \$45,000 legacy from Robert (Bob) Perks and his sister Joyce has been donated by the Rotary Club of Simcoe to ShelterBox Canada.

Bob, who passed away in 2024, joined The Rotary Club of Simcoe in 1990 and he was an active member for over 35 years. In 2023, he became an Honorary member. He was a Paul Harris Fellow in 2009, 2014, 2018 and 2020.

The \$45,000 was bequeathed to the Rotary Club of Simcoe, with Bob's wish to donate it to an international charity.

"That's important for all of us to contribute not only to international causes, but to local causes," said Dave Ferris, president of the Rotary Club of Simcoe. "We have committees covering both."

"Bob stipulated in his bequest that it go international."

Stephanie Christensen of ShelterBox Canada, who accepted the donation, made a presentation to the Rotary Club of Simcoe on Jan. 12.

"We are really, really excited at ShelterBox to be working with all of you to honour Bob and Joyce's legacy," said Christensen.

"We have launched a memorial matching campaign. We have a ShelterBox Hero Program that recognizes Rotary clubs that donate to ShelterBox to make a difference around the world through our partnership. So clubs that donate \$1,200 or more in a Rotary year are Bronze Heroes; \$3,600 or more are Silver Heroes; and \$6,000 or more Gold Heroes."

"We're using this matching campaign to get more clubs across the country to donate and get involved. We're hoping that this will attract new donors, create national visibility of this amazing match and what the Rotary Club of Simcoe is doing as well."

"We are really grateful to all of you for choosing ShelterBox for this legacy and I think we can make a really incredible difference to honour them."

\*\*\*

In her presentation at the Simcoe Legion, Christensen said an estimated 123 million people are currently displaced around the world.

"This is why ShelterBox exists. More and more people are being displaced. By 2050, we expect that number to be over 250 million."

"ShelterBox is one of the only humanitarian organizations that solely focuses on emergency shelter. And shelter is really important. Not only is it a human right, it is necessary for survival, but it is also really the foundation for life. When you have a safe shelter, you can start to rebuild your communities, you can rebuild your livelihoods. You can come together as a community, it's really the starting point for recovery. Having shelter does so much."

ShelterBox has been recognized by the United Nations as one of the leaders in emergency shelter provision after crisis.

"So we do one thing and we do it really, really well. We're always ready for whatever happens next."

ShelterBox originally started as a Rotary



(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTO)

**A \$45,000 donation from the Rotary Club of Simcoe, on behalf of Bob and Joyce Perks, who bequeathed the money to the club, was recently made to ShelterBox Canada. From left are John Featherstone, Chair of Rotary Club of Simcoe's International Committee; Stephanie Christensen, Executive Director, ShelterBox Canada; and Dave Ferris, president of Rotary Club of Simcoe.**

Club project in 2000.

"Since then we have grown into a professional humanitarian organization, separate from but still closely partnered with Rotary International since 2012. Not only do Rotary clubs around the world, across Canada, help support ShelterBox's work, to make it possible for us to be on the ground, but we also work really closely with Rotarians... on the ground in many of our responses."

Rotarians have been known to find access to warehouses, translators, and connecting with the communities.

"There's been a lot of situations, too, where it's because of our connection to Rotary that we've actually been able to get in to a country," she said, noting Ecuador was one of those situations.

"So it's a really, really wonderful partnership that accomplishes so much around the world."

Some ShelterBox emergency shelters, if there are no building materials available, include five different types of custom-made tents.

"These tents are really robust. They can withstand 120 k/hr winds, monsoon rains, they are completely fire-retardant, and they are really weather-proof."

Shelter kits include tarps, tools, and building materials that allow people to repair damaged shelters, and stay in their homes, or build locally appropriate shelters from scratch.

"When there are some building materials available, this is often a better option than tents because it allows people to recover to semi-permanent or permanent homes faster. They are really versatile – we can adapt it to the climate."

Essential supplies include water purification, solar lights, cooking equipment, blankets and tools.

"All the basics that people need to make

their shelter a home."

ShelterBox also uses 'cash assistance' in their humanitarian aid, including vouchers at building hardware stores.

"Giving a small cash grant, along with various aid items, gives people agency to recover the way they want."

"We also, as much as possible, try to get aid locally. So if there is aid locally available – of a high enough quality – we will buy it in country. This does a few things... it supports the local economy, which helps the community recover. It's cheaper, which means our aid can go further. And it is also more environmentally friendly because we're not having to ship goods around the world or far distances. So it's a bit of a combination between local procurement when we can, and then bringing things in internationally."

Current ShelterBox responses include

the Philippines, Myanmar, Jamaica, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and more.

"Hurricane Melissa was the largest (recorded) hurricane to ever make landfall... it was absolutely devastating in size and strength," said Christensen, noting its impact in Jamaica.

"We had a team on the ground two days after the storm. We've been working really closely with a number of local Rotary clubs and the local district there to reach a number of communities on the island. We had aid for 5,000 people stored in Barbados, so that was being distributed within a week. And we had aid for another 5,000 stored in Panama... so it all happened quite quickly, we were able to provide people with those shelter kits, solar lights, mosquito nets, cooking equipment..."

To learn more about ShelterBox Canada, visit [shelterboxcanada.org](http://shelterboxcanada.org) online.

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**THE PERK'S MEMORIAL MATCHING CAMPAIGN**

- Amplify Bob and Joyce's legacy
- Celebrate the Rotary Club of Simcoe
- Attract new Rotary Club donors across Canada
- Generate national visibility of this incredible gift, and of the amazing work ShelterBox and Rotary do together to unite for good
- Increase the number of people we can support with emergency shelter from this gift
- Create a lasting legacy for your Club and the Perks, as Clubs new to ShelterBox Canada through this campaign are likely to continue to donate in future

# Growing through the generations

BRENDA MOSER

Advocate Correspondent

As a child growing up in this area, I never fully appreciated the true value of living in a rural area.

While we weren't too far from the town of Simcoe, venturing there was a 'treat.' Your circle of friends included the kids across the road and the ones we used to say were 'just a stone's throw away.' They were a small circle of friends but the best ever.

Agriculture and tobacco made up a large number of the local farms and farmers, but as growing tobacco slid by the wayside for many, they chose to branch out while keeping the family farm in the family and operational. We are fortunate to have a 're-invented' tobacco farm close by that now serves many purposes and the owners wear many different hats.

Heidi Mungal, owner of Generations Marketplace and Learning Centre, and her family have been offering a wide variety of events and classes from their fifth-generation family farm at 200 Concession 13, Townsend. The interest continues to grow as we become more conscious of what we eat and where it comes from.

This year will mark the seventh season for Generations Marketplace with lots of things to do for all ages. The business is 'growing' - to say the least.

"We will be re-opening in May and will offer tours and hands on learning experiences. The newest addition to our lineup is a beginner homesteading course for those who are looking to start their self-sufficiency journey.

"Lots of people want to learn how to homestead but it can be quite overwhelming so we're offering an eight-week course to provide them with all of the knowledge needed to get started on this journey."

They run classes all year long.

"In the winter we like to partner with Sawaya Gardens to offer a warm, large, comfortable space to run our workshops. Coming up, we will be offering workshops and classes on sourdough making, fermentation, from scratch hygiene products, freeze drying, soap making and more.

"Right now, we are running two kids baking classes and will run a young chefs and gardeners class starting in May."

Heidi explained, "We focus on sustainable farming practices... Our mission is to educate and inspire individuals of all ages."

When they re-open in May there will be some changes to their store hours but they will continue to provide tours, events, classes and good food for the community.

"There will be animal and garden tours, wagon rides, visit with the baby animal days, and a large event in the fall with information coming out soon for all of these."

In February you can sign up for their



(FILE PHOTO)

**Waterford Seedy Saturday 2026 Garden and Homestead Market is Feb. 7, 12-5 p.m. at Waterford District High School.**

CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) where you pre-pay to receive weekly produce boxes right from their farm from June to October.

"They are very popular as we have a large variety of items that we grow on the farm, so no two weekly boxes are ever the same," adds Mungal.

If you would like more information on any or all of their classes and events you can find it by checking their website at [www.generationsmarketplace.ca](http://www.generationsmarketplace.ca), on their Facebook page or on Instagram.

"If you have any questions you need answered send me an email," said Mungal.

## WATERFORD SEEDY SATURDAY

Mungal is excited to partner once again with Jenn Thompson to put on the upcoming Waterford Seedy Saturday 2026 Garden and Homestead Market.

"There will be something for everyone. You will also be able to purchase preserves from my booth," said Mungal.

The Seedy Saturday event will take place on Saturday, Feb. 7, at Waterford District High School, 227 Main Street South, Waterford. It's a great way to see the resources

available, support local and connect to others with similar interests.

The event runs from 12-5 p.m. and the entry fee is a canned good donation. There will be 70 plus vendors as well as guest speakers and a seed exchange. You can check out some of the vendors by checking out the event on Facebook. It is a definite must to attend if you are an avid gardener or are just wanting to take that first step to living a healthier life. Kudos to Jennifer Thompson, Heidi Mungal and their volunteers for all of their hard work in the planning and organizing of this event.

More and more people have become conscientious about what they eat and where it comes from and Heidi is more than willing to answer your questions. A visit to Generations Marketplace and Learning Centre is a great way to spend a family outing. Check out the classes offered on their Facebook page. You can also get more info on their website ([generationsmarketplace.ca](http://generationsmarketplace.ca)). Be sure to sign up before they fill up. If you would like to talk to Mungal, be sure to stop by her booth at Waterford Seedy Saturday.



Heidi Mungal checks her vegetable patch.

(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

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# 'Make mealtime family learning time'

LISA TIMPF

Advocate Contributor

Very simply put, literacy is the ability to read and write. Though some might take literacy for granted, many people struggle with literacy skills. According to a recent study, 49% of adult Canadians have literacy skills that fall below a high school level, which negatively affects their ability to function at work and in their personal lives.

Since 1999, ABC Life Literacy Canada has teamed up with schools, libraries, literacy organizations, and other community groups across Canada to promote the importance of literacy, and to offer resources. The organization spearheads Family Literacy Day activities, which take place each year on Jan. 27.

This year's Family Literacy Day theme was "make mealtime family learning time." The theme highlighted the importance of oral literacy skills, such as talking and listening, which support written literacy by expanding vocabulary, creating an understanding of word sequencing, and letting children practice organizing their thoughts.

The ABC Life Literacy Canada website notes, "In today's busy world, where screens often take centre stage, setting aside mealtime for conversation is a simple but powerful way to reconnect as a family." The site suggests asking open-ended questions to spark conversation; for example, instead of asking "Did you have a good day?", try "What made you laugh today?"

Parents can also use mealtime to build literacy skills by getting children involved in following recipes, planning menus, or making shopping lists.

Each year, Norfolk County Public Library celebrates Family Literacy Day locally. This year, the library held a Family Literacy Day event Saturday, Jan. 24. Supported by EarlyON, Norfolk County Recreation, and Norfolk County Fire, the event included crafts and games, story time, science activities, and literary resources for families.

Jennifer Carrier, Community Engagement Coordinator for the Norfolk County Public Library, notes that "early literacy shapes school readiness and long-term learning."

It's important to have strong early literacy programs, she says, because they "help children build vocabulary, develop communication skills, and gain confidence."

When children are struggling with literacy, early intervention is important, says speech-language pathologist Marianne Ward. Ward is co-owner of Speech Hens, a private speech and language clinic located in downtown Simcoe. She notes that over half of the Speech Hens' caseload is literacy clients.

Ward notes that "being a strong reader and writer can change the trajectory of your life." For that reason, it's critical to be proactive when literacy struggles show up.

Laura Downey, also a speech-language pathologist and co-owner of Speech Hens, notes that children who missed Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten due to COVID, in particular, may have missed a lot when it comes to literacy foundations.



(GINETTE PIEPER PHOTO)

Using fun activities to create confident readers is part of Speech Hens' strategy. Here, (from left) co-owner Laura Downey, Amanda Bradstreet, co-owner Marianne Ward, Jaylene Martinow, and Kayleigh Godschalk pose with some of the books, games, and crafts they use in their literacy work.

Both Ward and Downey note that methods of teaching reading in the school system have changed over time. Methods are now more aligned with the science of how we learn to read. But even with optimal teaching methods, reading can be a difficult skill to master.

"You have to work hard at it," says Ward. "Some children need to work extra hard. But the reward is worth it."

She notes that when initially reluctant readers catch on, you can see the switch. At that point, instead of asking "what do we have to read today," it's more like "what do we get to read today."

Becoming a skilled reader, says Downey, involves more than phonics, spelling, and word recognition. The complex processes involved in reading are shown graphically in "Scarborough's Reading Rope," which notes the intertwined importance of verbal reasoning, vocabulary, background knowledge, understanding of language structures, and other factors. Downey notes that every strand of the reading rope "is one piece of being a competent reader. If one part is weak, it pulls the whole rope apart."

Speech Hens offers one-on-one programming to fit the

needs of the clients, depending on which aspects of the "reading rope" they are struggling with. They also provide strategic information for parents so they can support their child's efforts.

Reading to your child can help build literacy skills, says Downey. "Sounding out words, modelling how to do that - there are so many benefits."

How do you know when intervention is necessary to address literacy issues? By the end of Kindergarten, children should know letter sounds, while in Grade 1, they should be starting to learn to sound out words independently.

Ward notes that the school systems are "doing a lot of early screening to pick up difficulties," and that talking to someone at the child's school is a good place to start if you have concerns about their reading. Literacy resources are also available at websites like reading.com.

ABC Life Literacy Canada also offers literacy resources at abclifeliteracy.ca. These resources include information about Family Literacy Day, as well as information about digital literacy, numeracy, financial literacy, and other items.

## Masschaele continues as SWIFT board member

### Organization's goal is to expand broadband Internet access in southwestern Ontario

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

A familiar face has been returned to the board of an organization working to expand high speed Internet access across southwestern Ontario.

Norfolk Coun. Tom Masschaele will stay on as the county's representative for the SWIFT board. He's been the local rep on the board since 2019. Board appointments

are for two years and Masschaele's most recent term was up.

"Thank you council for your support. I'm just kind of reminded that one of the guiding principles of this whole SWIFT project was that if people don't have access to adequate broadband service, they are not able to participate in the broader economy," he said, after being nominated by Coun. Kim Huffman, a nomination endorsed by the rest of council.

"The SWIFT program has kind of evolved from the 1.0 where we had Norfolk County projects which are now completed. But SWIFT 2.0 is now going to focus on serving all of those hard-to-reach and hard-to-serve areas throughout southwestern Ontario but also in Norfolk County."

Masschaele said he was happy to continue serving on the board. "With a view to making sure that all Norfolk County residents have high speed Internet," he said.



Tom Masschaele, Norfolk Ward 1 Councillor.



(FILE PHOTOS)

The 2026 Coldest Night of the Year walk in Simcoe is Feb. 28, starting at 4 p.m. See <https://cnoy.org/locations/Simcoe> for more information on how to participate, donate, or volunteer. This year's Coldest Night of the Year starts and finishes at McDonald's on the Queensway. The event raises awareness and support for the most vulnerable members of the community, and this year funds raised will support Youth Unlimited's Teenlink program.

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# SIMCOE ADVOCATE SPORTS

## Junior basketball Raiders grow as a unit through Friendly City Classic consolation title

JEFF TRIBE

Advocate Contributor

The Delhi Raiders junior boys basketball team grew as a unit during a consolation championship run through the 2026 Friendly City Classic basketball tournament.

“Our defensive play improved, we competed hard against stronger opponents and players stepped up in key moments,” said coach Bryan Sweazey. “We represented the school well with effort and sportsmanship, kept together and played unselfish.”

The Raiders downed Stratford St. Mike’s 47-32 in the consolation final Saturday, Jan. 17 at Woodstock Huron Park, paced offensively by Evan Weber’s 25 points. Jayden Collens added 12, Maks Poirier four, Akin Eccleston and Deklan Ruitenbeek a three-point field goal apiece and Darrin McCauley two free throws.

Delhi had opened against the Woodstock College Avenue Knights the previous afternoon, suffering a competitive 61-42 loss to the Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast-leading team. The Knights’ offence was led by Kameron Roos with 16 points, Greyson

Padfield added 14 and Lukas Mickevicius had 13. Weber had 13 for the Raiders, Eccleston and Collens nine each, Poirier five and Josh Sanders, Ruitenbeek and Jaxon Ford two apiece.

Delhi advanced to the consolation final with a solid 70-56 win over the host Huskies, breaking open a tight 34-30 halftime lead with a 17-12 run through the third quarter. Eccleston had a two-point field goal for the Raiders, Sanders and James Hamilton each a trey in four and five-point performances, respectively. Poirier added six, Collens 16 and Weber a team-high 37, including a pair of three-pointers.

Coach Sweazey hopes to use the positive experience to build toward the Athletic Association of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk post-season. In particular he cited tightening up team defence while switching from different zone approaches to man-to-man, and valuing offensive possessions to allow the Raiders to control the game at their pace. Playoffs represent a whole new season and challenge, he concluded.

“But if we can prepare the right way and continue to play as a team, we’ll be at our best.”



Delhi Raider Jayden Collens (right) battles for possession of the ball with College Avenue’s Faud Alezzi in front of Delhi’s Evan Weber.



Delhi Raider Evan Weber stretches to deny College Avenue’s Greyson Padfield a clear shot during Friendly City Classic Action in Woodstock.



Delhi Raiders guard Josh Sanders (right) elevates to get a shot off against College Avenue Knight Faud Alezzi.



Delhi Raider Akin Eccleston cuts past a College Avenue defender during Friendly City Classic Action in Woodstock.



Delhi Raiders guard James Hamilton (right) brings the ball upcourt against defensive pressure from College Avenue's Faud Alezzi.

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# Homick, Buelow qualify for ISU Junior Worlds

JEFF TRIBE

Advocate Contributor

As Summer Homick looked ahead to the ice dance competition at the 2026 ISU Junior Figure Skating Championships in Tallinn, Estonia, she looked back on the humblest of beginnings in the Langton Arena.

For her first carnival, a three-year-old Homick was dressed as Belle from Beauty and the Beast, wearing both a yellow dress and hockey headgear.

"I don't think it was safe enough to be on the ice without a helmet," she laughed. "I don't know if that little girl could see where I am now if she'd even believe it."

"It kind of feels surreal."

Homick and partner Nicholas Buelow effectively qualified for world juniors with a personal best 157.78-point silver medal performance at Canadian championships, completed Jan. 7 at Centre Slush Puppie in Gatineau, Quebec.

"It's pretty position-based at nationals," said Buelow, pleased with subsequent confirmation they will be joining gold medallists Layla Veillon and Alexander Brandys in Estonia, earning the second of two berths. Charlie Anderson and Cayden Dawson finished with bronze medals and a score of 146.31.

"It was a big goal for us," added Homick. "But we knew we'd have to fight for our spot."

There are two program components to ice dance competitions, rhythm and free, both containing required elements but the former more technically-based, the latter offering increased latitude to individual team strengths. Homick and Buelow's 2.5-minute rhythm program was skated, as per 1990s pop music criteria, to The Back Street Boys Larger Than Life and Everybody.

With a world junior berth on the line, Homick admitted to feeling both pressure and nerves heading into the skate. However, once on the ice, she found her 'centre.'

"We knew we had trust in each other and we'd be fine. We just had to do what we do every day."

In general, said Buelow, they skated strong technically, although he felt they might have 'opened up a bit more' in a couple of sections.

"But other than that, we thought it was a pretty good skate."

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(DANIELLE EARL PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO)

From left, Summer Homick and Nicholas Buelow (left), Layla Veillon and Alexander Brandys and Cayden Dawson and Charlie Anderson on the podium at Canadian junior ice dance championships in Gatineau, Quebec.

The judges agreed, awarding the pair a personal best tally of 62.77, placing them in second, a narrow 1.54 points up on Anderson and Dawson heading into the free dance portion.

"We were in a good place and we just had to get one more program done," said Homick.

Their free program was 'opposite' to their opener, said Buelow, in that they skated a lot freer.

"But there were some technical things that needed to be cleaned up."

However, the judges would confirm they not only held onto their position with a score of 95.01, they would finish with their highest overall total to date.

"We left some points on the line but after we saw our score, breathed a huge sigh of relief," said Homick. "And got a personal best too."

Her career began in Langton, shifting to Tillsonburg under coach Penny Jelsma until Homick was 13, before heading to Brantford and ultimately, Barrie. She began ice dancing with Buelow in April, 2024, their rise to competitive excellence rapid in 'skating time.'

"We have the same work ethic, the same goals," said Homick. "Everything just kind of clicked for us."

Their route to Canadians included 2025 junior grand prix circuit bronze medals in Baku, Azerbaijan and Varese, Italy.

"To achieve that was both a confidence boost and an indication we are going somewhere and doing some good things," said Buelow.

They also cleared a crucial hurdle at the 2025-26 Skate Canada Challenge at the Seven Chiefs Sportsplex in Calgary, Alberta. During competition Saturday, Nov. 29 and Sunday, Nov. 30, Homick, who was coming off an injury, and Buelow laid down rhythm and free dance program scores of 62.18 and 94.54 respectively, finishing first out of 15 teams. Their overall mark of 156.72 was 3.54 points ahead of Anderson and Dawson.

"I feel that was a confidence booster we could be in the running for junior worlds," said Buelow.

The 2026 ISU World Junior Championships are scheduled for March 3-8. Homick and Buelow are planning on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

# Homick, Buelow skate personal best at nationals

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

competing in the Bavarian Open in Oberstdorf, Germany Jan. 27 to Feb. 1 as a tuneup, in addition to ongoing work on speed and connection.

“The teams at junior worlds are going to be strong,” said Homick. “Speed and connection with each other are things that are going to keep us up there with them.”

The main goal heading in says Buelow, is putting down two programs they can be happy with, with an eye to a top-10 finish.

“We think that could be a realistic goal too.”

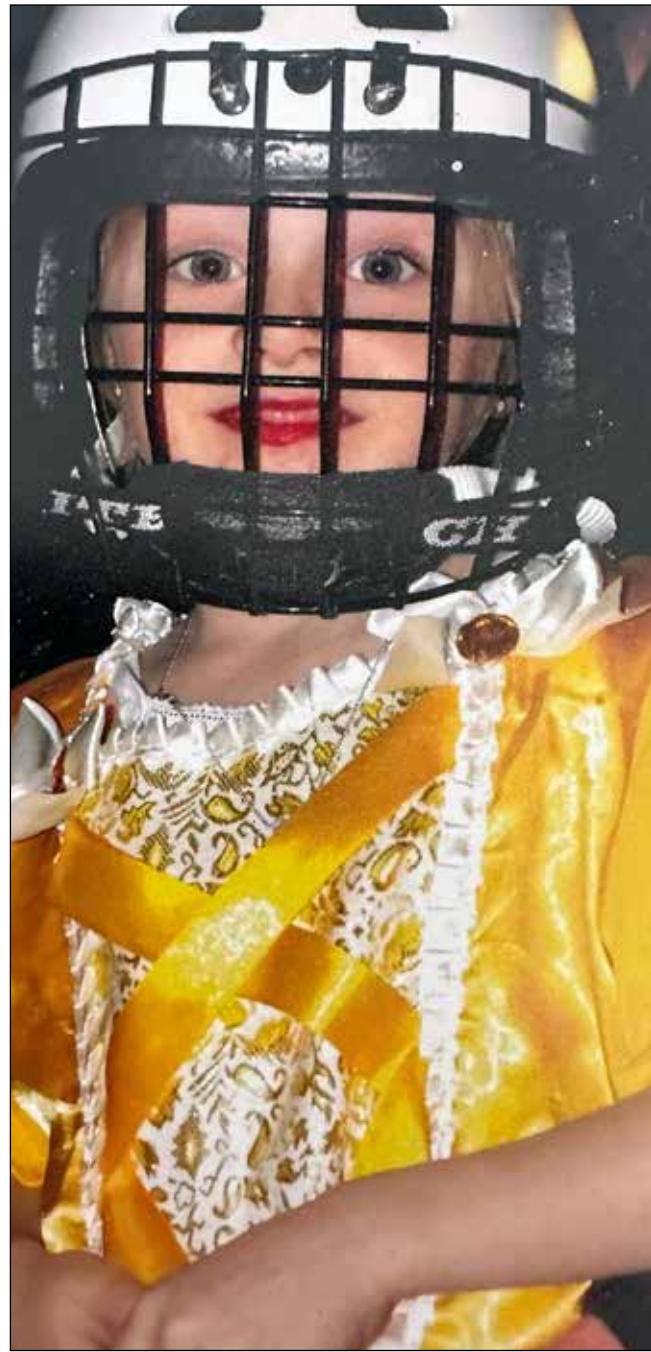
“We did what we needed to do,” said Homick. “The pressure is off, now we just have to go to junior worlds and rack up some more points.”

Obviously, they want to skate well she added, and their finish is important in that with higher positioning, the two Canadian teams could earn an additional berth for next year’s junior worlds.

“We hope we’ll be among those three teams as well,” Homick laughed.

In closing, she extended a warm thank-you to family, friends, community and coaches Mitchell Islam, David Islam, Kelly Johnson and James Callan who continue to support her competitive skating journey. Homick looks forward to extending the message in person following an invitation for the pair to perform in this year’s Tillsonburg Skating Club show.

“We are both excited to be able to skate there.”



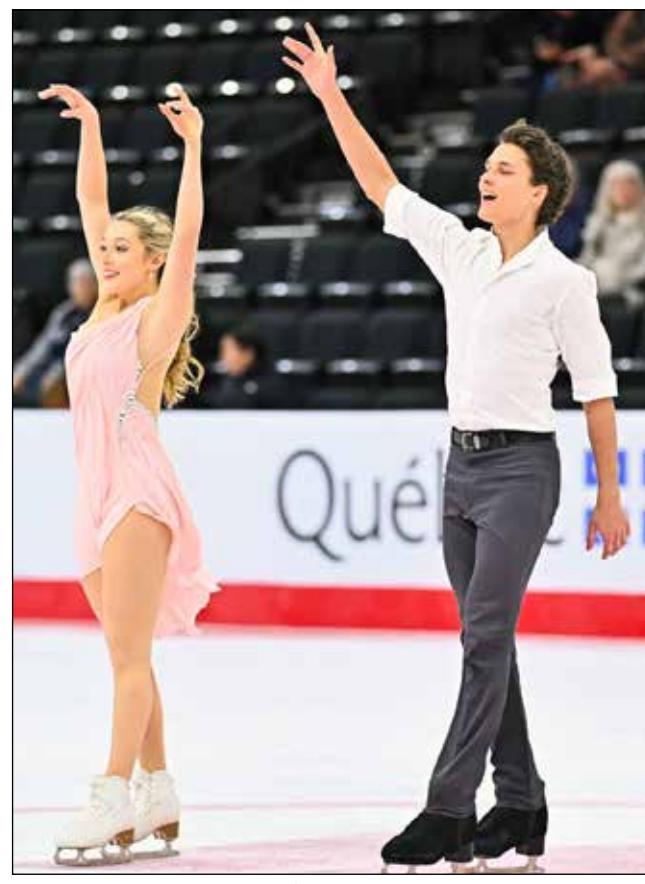
(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

A photo of Summer Homick at her first carnival inside the Langton Arena.



(DANIELLE EARL PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO)

Summer Homick and Nicholas Buelow competing at the Canadian junior ice dance championships in Gatineau, Quebec.



(DANIELLE EARL PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO)

Summer Homick and Nicholas Buelow during Canadian junior ice dance championships in Gatineau, Quebec.

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# Courtland's Tosha Hains featured on Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame panel discussion

JEFF TRIBE

Advocate Contributor

Judging by her resume, Tosha Hains' participation on the 2026 Canadian Women In Baseball Panel Discussion may not be her only association with the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame (CBHF).

But it's a good starting point.

"Just being considered to do this panel is quite humbling," said the Courtland native, describing herself as both pleased and surprised. "But very honoured."

The virtual panel is scheduled on National Girls & Women in Sport Day Wednesday, Feb. 4 at 7 p.m., hosted by the CBHF in conjunction with Rawlings Canada. It features four women with significant impact in the sport on the field, behind the scenes and in MLB front offices discussing their work how they got there. The event will be streamed via Zoom and is free of charge although donations are welcome. Interested persons need to pre-register via [baseballhalloffame.ca](http://baseballhalloffame.ca), pulling down the 'What's On' option near the top, middle of the website, and from there, clicking on Canadian Women In Baseball under the 'News' heading.

Invited for her pioneering and ongoing work as a woman umpire, Hains will be joined by Baseball Canada Women's National Team centre fielder Sena Catterall; consultant, on-air analyst and former Director of Major League Ops. for the New York Mets Liz Benn; and Andrea Goldstein, Vice-President of Communications for the Toronto Blue Jays.

The then Tosha Winters began playing fastball in Tillsonburg, enjoying the sport but not the travel required as she moved into older age divisions. Wanting to stay in the game she loved, Hains began umpiring as a teenager in 1988. Traditionally, female umpires began and stayed in fastball, men doing baseball. However, Hains received zero push-back when she broke an invisible barrier by umpiring the latter, in fact was welcomed to do so.

"It was 'Oh great, another umpire,'" recalled Hains, who several years later, would also be the first woman baseball umpire in London. "I was blessed to be in Tillsonburg that way."

Setting her sights high, Hains attended the Brinkman/Froemming Professional Umpire school in Cocoa Beach, Florida first in 1992, and again in 1994 as the lone woman on both occasions. One of three professional umpiring schools at the time. Its five-week course was the first qualifier for a selection process for a second six-week program, and thence onward for potential job offers at the minor league level, the first step toward the ultimate goal of a major league umpiring career.

"It was boot camp," said Hains, who quickly realized how much she still had to learn about baseball.

The experience, while tough, was also productive despite the fact she did not advance. Hains did however form friendships and facilitate positive networking that would lead to other opportunities, while also advancing her own understanding of her craft.

"That gave me the confidence and skills to become a better umpire and move into the national program."

She joined the Baseball Canada national program in 1988, the starting point for a full count's worth of lifetime achievements. Hains umpired her first national championship in 1999, going on to umpire/supervise 10 such events. She was the first woman to umpire in Ontario's Inter-County Baseball League, the first in the Frontier League (1999) and in 2005, became the first woman to umpire in the Canada Cup, first to do so twice with a 2024 return. Hains officiated at the 2001 International Women's World Series in Toronto, working with USA catcher Jen Pawol during the gold medal game. Pawol went on to be the first woman umpire at the MLB level. In 2022, Hains



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Courtland native Tosha Hains (centre) had home plate for the inaugural 2025 Women's Summer Games in Newfoundland, pictured with crewmates Skylar Blanchette and Margaret Jean Willis.

umpired during the Women's Team Canada versus Team USA Friendship Series and also had home plate for the historic first game at the 2025 Women's Summer Games in Newfoundland.

"It was just incredible," said Hains. "The whole game was electric on the field and in the stands."

She is also a Baseball Canada Master Course Conductor and Umpire Supervisor.

In short, Hains has been a pioneering woman in a male-dominated space, breaking through glass ceilings and creating a roadmap for others to follow.

"It hasn't been easy, but it has been worth it."

As an illustrative point, Hains referred to the national level certification course she attended for years with fellow umpire Lisa Turbitt.

"We always knew who we'd be rooming with because there was only the two of us."

That was the case for years said Hains, but more recently, they were two of nine women at the event. Modest change perhaps, slow in coming, but undeniably, change Hains has been a role model for, humbled when other women umpires tell her there are there, 'because of her.'

"Being that mentor, being that person someone turns to is satisfying."

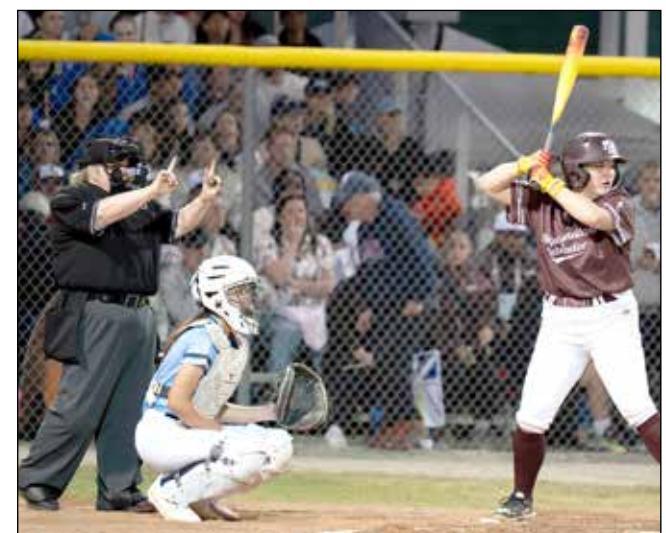
Hains is inspired by the enthusiasm of young women umpires, encouraged to see them taking advantage of the opportunities she and others like Turbitt created.

"We're passing that torch and these girls who are picking it up and taking it forward are going to be able to do so much more than we did. We got to shine a little bit, but

they're going to shine even more."

Hains and husband Blair, also a national level umpire, reside in Milton and have one son. She is grateful for the many opportunities umpiring has afforded her - admittedly would accept one more international assignment as a career 'pinnacle' - and sustained by her love for the game.

"I loved playing but I think I love umpiring more," Hains concluded. "It's just a different side of the game."



(KIM OPHEIM PHOTO)  
Tosha Hains marks the count during the 2025 Women's Summer Games.

# Flames, Thunder rivalry continues in Delhi

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

The Tillsonburg Thunder and Delhi Flames came out blazing Saturday night at the Delhi Community Arena with the home team outshooting the visitors 16-14 in the opening frame.

But it was the Thunder who took a 2-1 lead on goals by Sebastian Guastadisegni and Hunter Monkhouse. Tillsonburg added three more in the second period, and two in the third to clinch a 7-3 Ontario Elite Hockey League victory.

Monkhouse, a 'net-front presence guy,' led the Thunder with a five-point night, scoring twice and adding three assists to earn Tillsonburg's Player of the Game.

"I love getting the dirty goals," Monkhouse smiled.

Monkhouse also has a five-point night one week earlier when the Thunder blanked Delhi 8-0 at the Kinsmen Memorial Arena in Tillsonburg.

"Definitely a rivalry," said Monkhouse, who played for the Delhi Flames last season. "Being so close together, it's been a heated rivalry. It's always an intense game against Delhi. They come to play physically and it was a great game from all of our team."

"Great way to finish (the regular season), gives us some momentum going into the playoffs, for sure."

With five wins since early December, Tillsonburg has been gaining ground in the nine-team OEH South Division. Currently sixth, the 9-12-1 Thunder are waiting to learn their first-round playoff opponent. Monkhouse said Petrolia was a possibility.

"Earlier, there were some times when we had a couple close losses, but we started working together more as a team, getting to know each other a bit better, and it all kind of came together at the end of the season. I think we're going to have a really deep playoff run – I think we can go against any of the top teams in the league."

"I think we play a very physical game and we just play really well in front of the crowd in Tillsonburg. They are a big part of our wins too. We're just getting excited for playoffs. We knew we had to work on our systems in practice and that kind of got everyone going during the game. It's just going out there and perfecting what we were doing well at the beginning of the season and getting the chemistry. New rushes, zone play and it's been paying off for the last five games."

Thunder coach Rick Voltera agreed it's important for the team to stick to their system and play 'The Thunder Game' in the post season.

"We like to crash and bang and play physical, and we like to get to those key areas," said Voltera. "We're pretty set in our ways right now."

\*\*\*

Tillsonburg defenceman Harlen VanWynsberghe, now playing his second season with the Thunder, is carrying on a family legacy.

"Finner (Mike Findlay) played with my dad (Derek) when my dad played with the Vipers and Thunder. It's crazy."

VanWynsberghe, 28, currently living in the Hamilton area, finished his Junior B career in 2018-19, then played three years of senior hockey in Seaford. He took a year off before returning to his hometown.

"I always kind of wanted to play for the Thunder, obviously growing up in town and not missing many Thunder games as a little kid... It's kind of cool to play in the Tillsonburg arena, which is something I didn't really get to do at all after like age 10."

"It's cool – I really enjoy being on the actual ice in Tillsonburg, with the big roof. I really like it. My grandfather comes to every single home game, which is another reason why I came home. He'd watch the games anyways, because he's a hockey nut, but it's nice to let him watch the games too."

It wasn't easy getting back into competitive hockey, he

admitted, after taking off the 2023-24 season.

"It was tough. Coming out of junior, it was easy, it was just a bit of an adjustment obviously after one summer off. But after taking the year... there was definitely a bit of a learning curve... that it's not pick-up hockey and it is competitive again. You do have to do a full 60 minutes."

But the competitive drive never really goes away.

"That's the reason you play senior hockey at this level, you're a competitive person that can't really turn it off, so you need to productive way of competing and trying to beat people," he laughed. "That's kind of my mindset."

"It's been good," Vanwynsberghe concluded. "It keeps me in shape, keeps me honest."

The Delhi Flames will be back on home ice Jan. 31 to host Dunnville at 8 p.m.

## Thunder 7, Flames 3

Thunder scoring: 1. Sebastian Guastadisegni (Hunter Monkhouse, Mike Findlay); 2. Monkhouse (Luke Sinclair, Findlay); 3. Sinclair (Monkhouse, Harlen VanWynsberghe); 4. Monkhouse (Sinclair, Guastadisegni); 5. Nigel Abbott (Symon Reddin); 6. Reddin (Monkhouse); 7. Andrew Oosterveld (Tyler Johnson, Abbott).

Flames scoring: 1. Kurtis Bull (James Johnston, Brendan Briggs); 2. Briggs (Johnston); 3. Brandon Capzucca (Clinton Jameson, Mike Norris).



'He shoots, he scores!' Delhi Flames captain Brendan Briggs scores against Tillsonburg in Saturday's OEH game in Delhi.



(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTOS)

Delhi Flames' Andrew Tapsell evades a stick-check from Tillsonburg's Andrew Oosterveld Saturday in Delhi. Tapsell's shot hit the crossbar.



Winners at the Delhi-LaSalette Knights of Columbus Council 5095 Free Throw Championships in Delhi on Jan. 21 were, from left, (front row) Sienna Vilaca, Andreas Pryce, Macy Allin, (back row) Mason Bonaccorso, Oliver Deconinck, Owen Gaertner, Avery Tunks, Ayda Robyn, Avery Millen, and Logan Pardy.

## Knight of Columbus free throwers take aim

CHRIS ABBOTT

*Editor*

Students competing in the annual Delhi-LaSalette Knights of Columbus Council 5095 Free Throw Championships in Delhi took the first step on Jan. 21.

Ten winners, ages 9-13, from Delhi Public School, Saint Frances Cabrini School, and Teeterville Public School qualified to compete at the Knights of Columbus district championship, on March 1, at Holy Trinity School in Simcoe. Registration starts at 12 p.m. and they are expected to start competing about 1 p.m.

First-place winners from the district event advance to regionals in London later in March.

Co-organizer Dan Verhoeve from the Delhi-LaSalette Knights of Columbus thanked St. Frances for hosting the event, and thanked all of the schools for participating, including students and teachers, as well as the volunteers.

"They are very helpful here at St. Frances, the principal, the secretary, the teachers, amazing people," said Verhoeve.

Delhi Public School won this year's overall team championship.

"We have a decent amount of good shooters," said Delhi Public School's Logan Pardy, who won the 13-year-old boys division sinking eight of 15 shots.

"I've been working hard this year," said Pardy, who had 11 successful free throws

to qualify from his school.

"Today was a rough day for me because when I was practicing today I was feeling some anxiety. Just the event, kind of nervous."

A winter storm blew through the area earlier in the day, but did not delay the free throw competition.

"We've been doing this for about 17 years now, and twice it was cancelled," said Verhoeve.

"It was a good day today," said co-organizer Peter Bacro. "A day that ends well is a good day," he smiled.

2026 Delhi KofC local winners

- Andrew Pryce, 9-year-old boys, Delhi Public School
- Macy Allin, 9-year-old girls, Delhi Public School
- Owen Gaertner, 10-year-old boys, Saint Frances Cabrini School
- Sienna Vilaca, 10-year-old girls, Teeterville Public School
- Oliver Deconinck, 11-year-old boys, Saint Frances Cabrini School
- Avery Millen, 11-year-old girls, Delhi Public School
- Mason Bonaccorso, 12-year-old boys, Saint Frances Cabrini School
- Ayda Robyn, 12-year-old girls, Saint Frances Cabrini School
- Logan Pardy, 13-year-old boys, Delhi Public School
- Avery Tunks, 13-year-old girls, Delhi Public School





(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTOS)

Students ages 9-13, from Delhi Public School, Saint Frances Cabrini School, and Teeterville Public School competed in the annual Delhi-LaSalette Knights of Columbus Council 5095 Free Throw Championships in Delhi on Jan. 21. Ten winners qualified for the Knights of Columbus district championship on March 1 at Holy Trinity School in Simcoe.

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# Roselle Lim: How to taste life in another community

## ADVOCATING FOR AUTHORS

By  
**Dick Bourgeois-Doyle**

Sometimes when we tell a favourite story to new friends or strangers, it falls flat. Maybe it leans too heavily on an inside joke, a quirky relative no one else knows, or a “you-had-to-be-there” moment.

Skilled storytellers know how to overcome these hurdles. They have ways of sharing their experiences and their feelings without going into too much detail or spoiling the flow.

Waterford's Roselle Lim has that ability.

Lim writes novels that gracefully draw readers into a community and perspective many do not know firsthand. She does it through vivid imagery, the language of food, and just a touch of magic - always grounded in a resonating truth.

A Filipino-Chinese Canadian who emigrated from Quezon City as a child, Lim grew up surrounded by layered storytelling. Her grandmother read Filipino comics to her, and Lim herself began inventing stories to share with classmates after settling in Ontario. From an early age, she learned how to translate the experience of one world for audiences in another.

That experience became the foundation for fiction that feels richly specific but also warmly inviting. It's a quality that has carried through Lim's internationally acclaimed novels such as Vanessa Yu's *Magical Paris Tea Shop*, Sophie Go's *Lonely Hearts Club*, and *Night for Day*. But it was already evident in her 2019 debut *Natalie Tan's Book of Luck and Fortune*.

That first novel follows a young woman's return to San Francisco and her childhood neighbourhood after her mother's death, burdened by grief and family obligation. On the surface, the story is steeped in Chinese traditions, immigrant experience, and associated multigenerational expectations. Yet readers far removed from that community quickly find their footing.

That comfort comes from the way Lim presents culture: not through lengthy explanation, but through action, memory, and emotion. We recognize ourselves in the longing, loss, and renewal her characters experience. Difference isn't softened or simplified; it's intertwined with experience that is vivid and human.

Much of this comes from Lim's technical skill, especially her knack for metaphors that feel both novel and apt:



Waterford author Roselle Lim.

(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

“the strands of my long hair... flying like fluttering ribbons of black silk.”

Lim describes her approach as “painting with words,” which is evident in her visual, tactile, and carefully composed prose.

“For me, it helped that I could see things through an artist lens,” she says noting that the written word has surprisingly been a struggle for her. “Art is my first love and having that point of view has made the written language a lot more fun.”

That attention to image allows her to convey complex feelings without tipping into sentimentality and, often, to make readers smile. Her humour appears through observation, affection, and small gestures rather than declarations. Even that touch of magic in her work arrives so gently it feels like an extension of reality.

“If you think about it, every culture has their own superstitions and their beliefs,” Lim says, suggesting that magic itself can be a bridge, another way of sharing perspective.

Perhaps her most distinctive and welcoming technique is the one she places at the heart of her books: food.

“Food is the easiest way you can introduce someone to your culture,” she notes. “Food is its own language - if somebody is not feeling too good, you make chicken soup or some comfort food and they understand that you care.”

In *Natalie Tan's Book of Luck and Fortune*, the recipes, which are based on those favoured by Lim's father, are

never just lists of ingredients. They carry the stories of the hands that prepare them, the memories they hold, and the moments in which they are shared. Meals become markers of apology, grief, support, and reconciliation. The restaurant in *Natalie Tan*, for example, emerges as a sensory landscape of steam, colour, and sound. Even outside the kitchen, food imagery frames the world: “A gathering fog brewed at the base of the gate the way steam rises from a perfect bowl of noodle soup.”

What sustains this approach isn't the culinary novelty, but emotional honesty. The themes running through Lim's work - family bonds, cultural inheritance, community - draw directly from her Filipino-Chinese background. But at the same time, her ability to reach a broad audience may be shaped by where she writes today. Living in rural Ontario, Lim is also attuned to readers whose life experiences may be very different from her own.

So, having bridged the space between worlds herself, Roselle Lim brings a practiced sense of translation to her novels.

For those of us reading her work and aspiring to write in Norfolk County, she offers a reminder: stories that, on the surface, seem distant, unfamiliar, and hard to understand can be shared when told with care, craft, and creativity.

Roselle Lim knows her community and its stories well, and she also knows how to invite new friends and strangers into it.

### CELEBRATING AUTHORS

For the podcast interview with Roselle Lim and more on other local authors, check out <https://doverwrites.blogspot.com/>

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Doors @ 6:30 pm • Show @ 7:30 pm

*This is a LLBO all-ages Mudmen Inc event*

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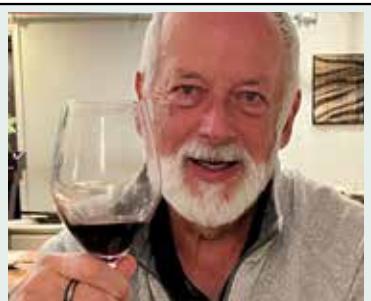
## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

- What is a second full moon in a month called?
- What was Alaska called before 1867?
- What King of England had 6 wives?
- American frontiersman “Buffalo Bill” died where?
- Eczema affects which organ of the body?
- How many individual 1x1 squares are on a chess board?
- What animal has the largest ears?
- The Archipelago Sea belongs to what country?
- What year did actor Heath Ledger die?
- What company created Clash Royale?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

# My first and last trip to the Dominican Republic



## OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO

By Paul Knowles

There are obviously a number of ways to experience the Dominican Republic. A lot of visitors opt for the “all-inclusive resort” approach, and spend a relaxing (and often well-lubricated) holiday at beach- and pool-side in one of the hundreds of such resorts. Others go for more excitement, choosing on- and under-water adventures, motorized buggy expeditions, zip-lining or waterfall experiences. And still others spend their time on some of the more than two dozen golf courses (a relative rarity in the Caribbean, where some islands have only one or two).

I went with plan C, golf, while staying at an all-inclusive. A buddy of mine who has previous spent cold months in Florida was looking for another option, and we decided to spend eight days at the Meliá Caribe Beach resort in Punta Cana; our package there (and yes, I paid full freight, unusual for a travel writer!) includ-



The course was well-populated with beautiful, tropical birds, like this egret.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

ing half-price golf at the nearby, 27-hole, Cocotal Golf course.

My post-trip assessment? Well, to adopt a well-worn cliché, there was the good, the bad, and the ugly. (Let me be clear: we’re not talking about the lovely island of Dominica.)

Let’s start with the good. That would be the golf. The course was in quite good shape (except for the bunkers, some of which had been turned into mud or something close to concrete by recent rains). But the fairways and the often tiny, tricky greens were good.

We played six days straight – which was a lot, to be honest. The 27 holes allowed us to play a different combination, most days. And the courses were essentially empty; we played 18 on several days without waiting for other golfers, or seeing anyone behind us. That is a golfer’s dream.

The final day of play was a Saturday, and it was busier, so we

actually skipped by a couple of lined-up holes, and then added make-up holes on the third nine, so we got in an 18-hole layout of our own devising.

But be warned – golf there ain’t cheap. We paid just under \$150 Canadian per round... and that was on our half-price deal. We talked to other golfers who were paying \$300 Canadian. That’s a pretty hefty price tag for a golf course that is okay, but certainly not a signature golf destination. As well, we were told the courses were not crowded because it was January – November, December, February and March see a lot more visitors, and much busier golf courses.

Now, the bad – or at least, the disappointing. Our resort is rated 4.5 out of 5 stars. Nope.

Start with my room. All of the drawers on the dresser were broken in some way; one would never close properly. I personally fixed the perpetually running toi-

let, and tightened the toilet seat. My one bar of shower soap was not replaced once in eight days. The air conditioning roared like a 747 on take-off. There were two straight-backed chairs in the room, and instead of a couch, a single day-bed... so, nowhere actually comfortable to sit. My safe didn’t work until a staffer came to fix it.

When we checked in, we were given little or no helpful information. For example – no one mentioned that there were tablets located in two places on which you could book reservations at the usually-busy restaurants. There was also one concierge desk which always had a line-up at least half an hour long.

We discovered that you could get certain services – like a golf-cart ride to your room – but only if you asked. No one had told us to ask.

The only bar or lounge where you could get a drink after dinner,

on this gigantic resort, was the lobby bar, where loud, disco-style music was a mainstay.

None of these are life-changing problems. If the resort was rated 3 stars, it would make sense. But not 4.5.

The ugly? We both got sick. Sick enough that on a couple of days, golfing was a challenge, but we’d paid the big bucks, so we mostly stuck that out, but some meals were skipped, evenings were spent in our rooms, and the trip home was on two wings and a prayer we would get back to Canada without any health crises.

I know not everyone would agree. I have talked to a number of friends since returning, and they have been surprised by my stories. They love the Dominican Republic, and would return there in a moment. We also met a lot of Canadians there who had made the trip to the DR many times, and are big fans.

By the way, my observation was that there were a lot of Canadians, some Europeans including British folk, a lot of Spanish speaking guests, and almost no Americans. The one person from the US we talked to was wearing a button which read, “I didn’t vote for him.” I commended her for her courage.

I don’t think travel to the Dominican Republic is going to decrease because of this particular article. But if you do choose to go, feel free to ask for my room – I won’t be using it.

*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).*



Flowers abounded on the course, include lots of bougainvillea. In fact, one of the three nines was named for that plant. (The others were hibiscus and benjamina).



The lobby of the resort gives little clue of how tired the rooms are.



My unit, top right. Nice from the outside.

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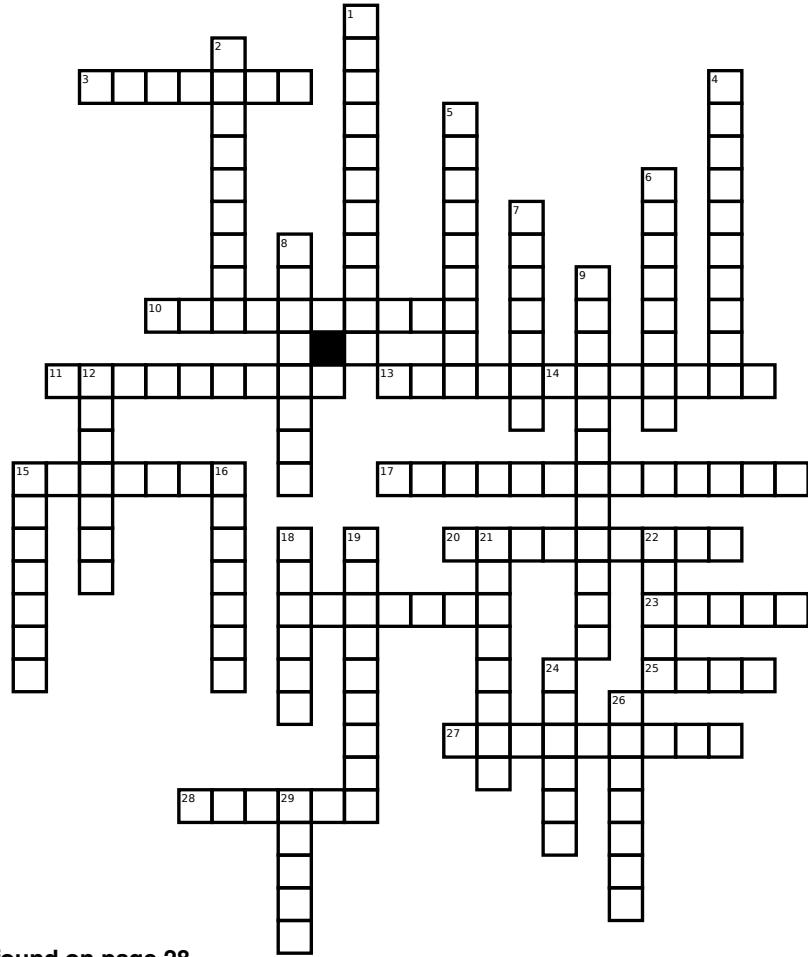
# Weekly Crossword

## THE PRODUCE PUZZLE - FAMILY FAVOURITE MEALS

BROUGHT  
TO YOU BY

Wilkinson's  
**Independent**  
Your Independent Grocer

227 MAIN STREET IN DELHI, ON



Answers found on page 28

## Clues

### DOWN

1. Meat and mashed potato bake
2. Saucy ground beef sandwich
4. Cheesy elbow pasta dish
5. Rolled tortilla with sauce
6. Two slices with filling
7. Wrapped tortilla meal
8. Classic baked family dinner
9. Fried fish with fries
12. Creamy pasta sauce dish
15. Sticky grilled ribs
16. Quick skillet meal with veggies
18. Chips with melted cheese
19. Rice cooked with veggies and egg
21. Breakfast dinner favorite
22. Folded shells filled with meat
24. Long bun with sausage

### ACROSS

3. Breakfast with pockets
10. Grilled cheese tortilla
11. Oven-baked one-dish meal
13. Oven-roasted whole bird
14. Popular protein for many meals
15. Grilled sandwich with a patty
17. Melted cheese sandwich
20. Long pasta with sauce
23. Hearty bean and meat stew
25. Warm comforting bowl
27. Saucy round bites
28. Creamy chicken pie

# Riddles

I have a heart that doesn't beat.  
What am I?

An artichoke

I can be cracked, made, told, and played—yet never eaten. What am I?

A joke

I'm taken before you can give me back. What am I?

A photo

I have an end, but no beginning, middle, or finish. What am I?

A circle

I can open doors without hands or keys. What am I?

A password

# PET OF THE WEEK

Nominate your Pet of the Week by emailing [info@simcoeadvocate.com](mailto:info@simcoeadvocate.com)



## TINY

### Meet our Pet of the Week:

Tiny is a beautiful silver Bengal with a big personality to match! She loves being the center of attention and enjoys cuddles and head scratches. Tiny would do best as the only pet in a home where she can shine, and she may need her own sleeping space while settling in. She is fully vetted, spayed, microchipped, vaccinated, and FIV/FeLV negative — ready to find her perfect person!

[www.simcoedhumane.ca](http://www.simcoedhumane.ca)



# Word Search

## JANUARY BLUES

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

Snow  
Frost  
Cocoa  
Fireplace  
Tea  
Warmth  
Balance  
Sweater  
Reflection  
Focus  
Strength  
Renewal  
Progress  
Stretching  
Planning  
Journaling  
Reading  
Walking  
Motivation  
Renewal

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# Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Email to inquire: [info@simcoeadvocate.com](mailto:info@simcoeadvocate.com)

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

### FRIDAY NIGHTS AT THE CAFE

7:00 p.m

Riversyde 83 presents - Sue Rivard, the Owner of Reveal Coaching Ontario. Speaking on The Architect of 2026: Intentional Living Put Into Action. FREE EVENT

Riversyde 83 Foodhub - 83 Sydenham St., Simcoe

### WINGS & THINGS PUB NIGHT

Starting at 5:00 p.m (Until Sold Out)

Music by Sunset DJ & Karaoke. Cash only, we do not have debit, or ATM. Wed.-Fri. 3 pm-10 pm, Sat. 1 pm-10 pm, Sun. 1 pm-6 pm. For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

The Wagner Memorial, Teeterville Legion Branch 526. 3890 Teeterville Road, Teeterville, Ontario

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 31

### OPEN JAM

Starting at 1:00 p.m

Last Saturday of every month. Everyone is welcome to bring an instrument or just come out and listen to the music. Free event. For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

The Wagner Memorial, Teeterville Legion Branch 526. 3890 Teeterville Road, Teeterville, Ontario

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

### BINGO NIGHT

7 p.m

Doors open 5:30 p.m - Early Bird 6:30 p.m Presented by ABEL Enterprises. Concession stand run by Simcoe & District Humane Society.

Simcoe Legion, West Street, Simcoe

## TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

### PORT DOVER "LOVE SONGS" SING-ALONG

7 p.m

Come out and sing your favourite romantic songs like As Time Goes By, Love Me Tender, Time in a Bottle, Somewhere My Love, Three Coins in the Fountain, and many other tunes. \$2 donation at door.

Call 416-505-1658 for more information.

Grace United Church, 18 Chapman St. W., Port Dover

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6 & 20

### JOIN US FOR A FRIENDLY GAME OF DARTS

Registration at 6:45 p.m

Starting at 7:00 p.m

Everyone is Welcome. Draw for partners. For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

The Wagner Memorial, Teeterville Legion Branch 526. 3890 Teeterville Road, Teeterville, Ontario

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8

### THE BIG GAME (SUPERBOWL PARTY)

## Starting at 4:00 p.m

Join us for the Big Game and Cheer on your favourite team. Potluck! Food and snacks will be available. Everyone Welcome! For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

The Wagner Memorial, Teeterville Legion Branch 526. 3890 Teeterville Road, Teeterville, Ontario

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9

### DELHI & DISTRICT HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY MEETING

7:30 p.m

Guest Speaker - Andrew Sloot from Andrew's Greenhouse, Waterford, On. Topic: - Pick your own fresh fruits & vegetables when in season. Should prove very interesting. All welcome to join us.

Delhi Senior Friendship Centre, 418 Queen St., Delhi, ON (Enter at rear parking lot off William St.)

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13

### WAMPUS KAT (WINGS)!

Serving from 5:00 p.m (Until Sold Out)

Wings/Fries or both available for purchase. Stay and have some fun! Cash only, we do not have debit, or ATM. Wed.-Fri. 3 pm-10 pm, Sat. 1 pm-10 pm, Sun. 1 pm-6 pm. For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

The Wagner Memorial, Teeterville Legion Branch 526. 3890 Teeterville Road, Teeterville, Ontario

### JOIN US FOR A FEW FRIENDLY GAMES OF PROGRESSIVE EUCHRE

Registration at 6:30 p.m

Starting at 7:00 p.m

Everyone is Welcome. For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

The Wagner Memorial, Teeterville Legion Branch 526. 3890 Teeterville Road, Teeterville, Ontario

### CHOCOLATE BINGO!

7:00 p.m

No cost to play. Chocolate bingo prizes. Special chocolate beverage and treats at the café! Don't be choco-LATE!

Riversyde 83 Foodhub - 83 Sydenham St., Simcoe

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14

### ROTARY NORFOLK SUNRISE FABULOUS FEBRUARY FUNDRAISER DINNER, DANCE & MUSIC BINGO

6:00 p.m - Dinner

7:30 p.m - Music Bingo with DJ Hal\*

9:30 p.m - Dance

A fun evening for singles, couples, or groups 100% of proceeds goes to support our community. \*Requires absolutely no music knowledge.

Ticket Prices: Dinner, Dance & Bingo: \$60 Dance Only: \$20. Tickets available at: Abel Enterprises, 447 Queensway W., Simcoe or online at: [rcns.events1@gmail.com](mailto:rcns.events1@gmail.com)

Simcoe Legion, 200 West St., Simcoe

## PANCAKE & SAUSAGE BREAKFAST

9:00 a.m - 12:00 p.m

Enjoy fluffy buttermilk pancakes, breakfast sausages, and fruit cocktail. Dine in or take out — gluten-free available.

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Hosted by the Marburg Community Association. Serving the community since 1863. Proceeds support the operation and maintenance of Marburg Hall.

Marburg Hall, 1345 Lynn Valley Rd (between Cockshutt Rd & Hwy 6)

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

### BINGO NIGHT

7 p.m

Doors open 5:30 p.m - Early Bird 6:30 p.m Presented by ABEL Enterprises. Concession stand run by Simcoe & District Humane Society.

Simcoe Legion, West Street, Simcoe

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

### WINGS & THINGS PUB NIGHT

Serving from 5:00 p.m (Until Sold Out) Music by Sunset DJ & Karaoke. For More Information call, the Legion at 519-443-5588 or Check out our website at <https://www.teetervillelegionbranch526.ca>.

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Simcoe Legion, West Street, Simcoe

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## SUDOKU ANSWERS

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

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**BI-WEEKLY  
PUBLICATION DATES**  
**FEBRUARY 12 & FEBRUARY 26**  
**MARCH 12 & MARCH 26**

**DEADLINE IS THE MONDAY PRIOR AT 3 P.M.**

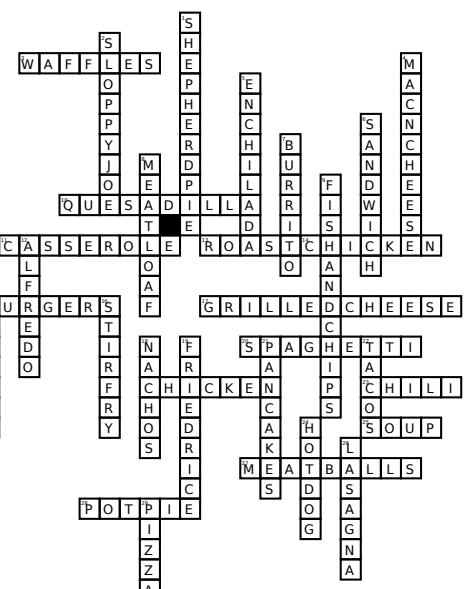
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## QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Blue moon	6. 64
2. Russian America	7. African Elephant
3. Henry VIII	8. Finland
4. Denver, Colorado	9. 2008
5. Skin	10. Supercell

## CROSSWORD ANSWERS



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