

STRATFORD TIMES

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Election day is Oct. 26

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Oct. 26 is Municipal Election Day, ending a long election cycle and setting the stage for the City of Stratford's civic future. Here's what voters need to know ahead of casting their ballots.

The 10-day voting period takes place from Oct. 16 to Oct. 26 at 8 p.m. Voters will once again cast their vote over the internet or telephone, continuing a tradition started in 2010.

Internet and telephone voting allows eligible voters to cast their vote from anywhere, even the comfort of their own home, as long as they have an internet connection and/or access to a telephone.

Options to cast your vote include a desktop or laptop/computer, a smart phone (mobile device), a tablet device or touchtone phone. Internet and telephone voting increases accessibility, convenience and is more environmentally friendly.

A Voter Help Centre will be available in the community halls of the Stratford Rotary Complex on Oct. 24 (from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.), Oct. 25 (from 1-4 p.m.) and Oct. 26 (from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.). The centre can offer assistance for anyone needing help casting their vote. Laptops will be available for use.

The city is reminding voters to bring their Voter Information Letter and identification to vote at the Voter Help Centre. They will need to show two pieces of ID which contains their name and address, such as an Ontario driver's licence and health card (photo card). For a full list of acceptable documents, visit tinyurl.com/2u6ub74d.

Additionally, a Voter Help Desk has been open in the clerk's office of city hall, answering questions from

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Clarence McCallum and Tom Soper, the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 8's oldest serving members, unveil the memorial bench at the Stratford Cenotaph in honour of the legion's centenary.

Local legion celebrates 100 years of celebrating service

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

On Oct. 13, the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 8 celebrated its centenary – a hundred years of dedicated service and gratitude for Stratford and area's veterans.

"It's been a big undertaking," said Frank Mathieson,

president of the local legion. "This would be my 44th year here. So it's a trip down memory lane ... People are surprised, but I mean, anybody can know the history if you just take the time to learn it."

The Royal Canadian Legion was started in 1926. After the First World War ended, numerous veterans associa-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



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AMDSB trustee candidate deemed ineligible by city

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Jamie Lee Wagler, who has been running to be an Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) trustee this municipal election, has been deemed ineligible to run for the office by the City of Stratford.

According to a news release from the city, "under the Education Act, R.S.O. and the Municipal Elections Act, a school board employee seeking election as a trustee must meet specific eligibility requirements, including taking an unpaid leave of absence for the prescribed period."

"I won't pretend this isn't disappointing. It's heart-breaking, frustrating, and honestly, incredibly difficult to process," Wagler stated in an update on her campaign Facebook page. "I submitted my nomination in June, well before receiving employment documentation from the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) in August. Although the board has identified Aug. 6 as my employment commencement date, I have never accepted a teaching assignment, worked a single day or received a single penny from AMDSB."

"... I recognize that election laws exist for a reason, and I respect the importance of those laws. But I also believe they must be applied accurately, consistently, fairly and transparently," Wagler continued. "I am not asking to be above the law. I am asking for a fair opportunity to ensure that the law has been applied correctly. I stepped forward in this election because I care deeply about public education, the well-being of children, the



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Jamie Lee Wagler has been ruled ineligible to run for AMDSB trustee by the City of Stratford. Any votes cast for her will not be counted.

voices of families and the educators who show up for our students every day. I believe in accountability. I believe in transparency. I believe in listening to people, even when conversations are difficult. And I believe that the people who step forward to participate in our democratic systems deserve a fair and meaningful process. Those beliefs have not changed."

Wagler stated she was disappointed in how her deemed ineligibility was handled and is currently seeking legal advice, though remains unsure about the future.

Per the city, any votes cast for Wagler this election will not be counted.

Election day is Oct. 26

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

voters and providing a scent free voting area. It will be available by phone on Oct. 24 (from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.) and Oct. 25 (from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.). It will also be open for in-person inquiries on Oct. 26 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Voter Help Centres will also be available at various times across Stratford's retirement homes.

For the 2026 municipal elections, eligible electors can cast their vote for one mayoral candidate and up to 10 councillor candidates. They may vote for two Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) trustees and one Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) trustees. The candidates for the Office of Conseil scolaire viamonde (French language public district school board) and Conseil scolaire catholique providence (French language catholic district school board) have been acclaimed.

The candidates

For mayor, there are five candidates in the running: Jo-Dee Burbach, Mark Hunter, Andrew Rea, Martin Ritsma and Robert Ritz.

For councillors, there are 26 candidates vying for a spot: Brad Beatty, Lesley Biehn, Bill Boon, Taylor Briscoe, Amy Brodhagen, Naireta Chatterjee, Jason Davis, Ryan Doyle, Andrew Fraser, Christopher Giannakopoulos, Matthew Hartney, Bonnie Henderson, Adrienne Johnson, Anthony Kane, Larry McCabe, Sarah Merkel, Ian Morton, Harj Nijjar, Gary Robinson, Cody Sebben, Elaine Strawbridge, Amber-Leah Margaret Timmons, Ken Wood, Geza Wordofa and Jefferson George Wright.

For AMDSB trustee, there are four candidates listed, though only three candidates have been determined as viable, according to a recent decision by the city (for more on that, see our story opposite this one): Michael Bannerman, Deepika Mishra and Ed Montgomery.

For HPCDSB trustee, there are three candidates: David Charlesworth, Heather Marcy and Laurie Thomson.

More information on the candidates, including links to their respective platforms, can be found at tinyurl.com/yxztnykj. Additionally, the Stratford Times has published Q-and-As with councillor candidates for the last few months, and profiled each of the mayoral candidates in September.

For more of the Times' coverage, visit granthaven.com/stratford-times.

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Local legion celebrates 100 years of celebrating service

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

tions and groups began to pop up, though with resources spread across multiple smaller groups, their projects were fragmented and often unsuccessful. Veterans called for a unified group and in 1925 the Canadian Legion was founded in Winnipeg, Man., later receiving royal patronage in 1960.

The local legion was started in October of 1926 (and the Ladies Auxillary began a year later in 1927). It was the eighth legion to start in Ontario, hence its name, and the 10th to be chartered in Canada. Maj. James Cardwell Makins was its first president.

The legion was located at what was formerly called the Scholz House on the southeast corner of Church Street and St. Patrick Street, though it was renamed the Loghrin Memorial Home after a city councillor who was killed in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The legion would reside in the Loghrin Memorial Home until 2018, when it moved to their current location on Ontario Street due to rising maintenance costs.

Over the years, the function and scope of the legion has changed, though they have always been devoted to the "perpetuation of remembrance," and the uplifting of the community's veterans, members, seniors and youth, through various events, bursaries and education.

Although membership has been in decline in recent years, the legion was giving out free membership for the 100th year, bringing in about 50 new members thanks to the centenary program. According to Mathieson, the legion boasts about

340 members in total as of the celebration weekend.

The planning for the 100th anniversary events started in 2024 with a committee of 14 people, all organizing the big celebration last weekend.

On Friday, the celebration began with a tombola casino night. On Saturday, there was an all-day open-house, barbecue, cake cutting, meat draw and evening dance. The weekend ended with a roast beef dinner on Sunday night.

Though, perhaps one of the most lasting events for the anniversary was the dedication of a bench at the cenotaph. Area dignitaries were in attendance for the laying of wreaths and readings by legion members on the morning of Oct. 17. Afterwards, it was the legion's two longest serving members who unveiled the bench's plaque, Clarence McCallum and Tom Soper.

Mayor Martin Ritsma, speaking at the dedication, said he thinks of two things when looking at the bench. One, its an opportunity for Stratfordians of today to sit and reflect on those that made the ultimate sacrifice.

"The second piece is around the 100 years of service of the Stratford region, 100 years of supporting veterans, 100 years of remembering and reflecting those veterans or those individuals that served and sacrificed, and 100 years of giving to the City of Stratford in many ways," Ritsma said. "... When you think of Canada, you think of a nation that has served and has done its part in this world for peace. So, on behalf of the City of Stratford, city council, past, present and future, I thank the legion for their ongoing work ..."



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

McCallum and Soper are the first to sit on the bench after its unveiled.

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St. Marys pulls out of PC Connect, asks staff to explore local transportation subsidy

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

St. Marys will withdraw from the PC Connect regional bus service at the end of 2026, with council deciding the money being spent on the service could be better directed toward transportation options tailored to local residents.

At its Oct. 13 meeting, council voted to end the town's participation effective Dec. 31 and directed staff to complete a preliminary assessment of an internal transportation subsidy, potentially helping residents pay for taxis or similar services for trips to medical appointments, grocery stores and other destinations within St. Marys.

The decision comes while St. Marys, Stratford and

North Perth are still waiting for the province to respond to a joint Ontario Transit Infrastructure Fund (OTIF) application intended to help launch an improved version of PC Connect.

The existing service connects St. Marys with Stratford, London and Kitchener-Waterloo. St. Marys contributed roughly \$150,000 toward the service this year, while approximately \$260,000 remains in reserve between the three municipal partners. Staff had recommended using those reserves to continue operating PC Connect until March 31, 2027, providing more time for a provincial decision and for the incoming council to consider its future.

Instead, council opted to withdraw.

From Jan. 1 to Sept. 29, PC Connect recorded 818

pickups and 843 drop-offs in St. Marys, averaging approximately four of each per service day. Coun. Marg Luna said she struggled to justify the municipal contribution given the level of use.

"I would think that money could be better spent with some kind of a transportation subsidy for people that are needing it to travel for work or medical purposes or whatever," Luna said.

Coun. Jim Craigmile agreed, suggesting the town could potentially provide a much less expensive local subsidy for taxi trips to doctors, dentists, grocery stores and other destinations.

"I'd rather have something internal," Craigmile said, later moving the successful motion to end PC Connect in St. Marys and have staff investigate a local subsidy for consideration during the next budget process.

Deputy mayor Brogan Aylward also supported withdrawing, saying the town has "bled a lot of money" for results he does not believe justify continuing the investment.

Mayor Al Strathdee said another factor was Perth County's decision to discontinue its rural PC Connect route when provincial Community Transportation funding expired in March 2025.

At the time, county council chose not to pursue continuation of the rural service despite later learning it could apply for provincial funding under a model that would gradually reduce provincial support over five years.

Strathdee said Perth County's withdrawal was a significant blow to the broader regional concept and criticized the lack of consultation with municipal partners before that decision was made.

"I believe the system could have been more efficient or saved or more attractive for the government to fund it if there was some sort of modification," Strathdee said, suggesting an on-demand regional model may have been one possibility.

CAO Brent Kittmer told council St. Marys is the first of the remaining partners to formally withdraw. North Perth had been prepared to support extending the existing service into 2027, while Stratford staff were also expected to recommend using reserves to buy additional time.

Kittmer acknowledged St. Marys' decision will likely undermine the outstanding provincial funding application for the remaining partners.

Council also emphasized the need to notify PC Connect users quickly. Staff will contact Stratford and North Perth and begin public communications through the town, Voyago – the transit service provider for PC Connect – and, if possible, the service's booking system.

Stratford CAO André Morin said St. Marys' withdrawal creates uncertainty for the future of PC Connect, particularly with the municipalities still waiting on the province's decision on their Ontario Transit Investment Fund application.

"Without expanding the service and more time to build ridership, it will be difficult for the partners to justify the annual burden on their respective property taxpayers," Morin said. "The OTIF grant is intended to give the funding partners the opportunity to build a sustainable system and, without the funding in place, it will be difficult for the municipalities to continue with this service."

Morin said Stratford will meet with the remaining municipal partners to determine alternatives to the original OTIF application and the city has also scheduled a meeting with provincial staff to discuss possible options.

"Ultimately, transportation is a continued challenge in our rural communities and we are hopeful further discussions can lead to viable transportation solutions," he said.



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Perth County doubles roadside tree replacement requirement, approves policies to protect and enhance tree canopy

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For every tree Perth County removes from its roadsides, it will now aim to plant at least two in its place, following council's approval of two policies Oct. 15 aimed at protecting, maintaining and enhancing the county's tree canopy.

Council approved an updated Roadside Tree Replacement Policy and a new Tree Canopy and Natural Vegetation Policy, making amendments to both following discussions about the need to lead by example in tree preservation while recognizing the challenges of planting trees along busy county roads.

The roadside policy, presented by executive director of legal and corporate services Stefan Zhelev, establishes guidelines for tree removal, replacement and maintenance within county-owned road allowances, facilities and municipal properties.

Under the policy, tree removal will only be considered when no reasonable alternative exists, with trimming and maintenance taking priority. Removal may be warranted where trees interfere with infrastructure, obstruct sightlines, pose structural or health risks, or have been damaged by storms, collisions or flooding.

While staff initially recommended replacing removed trees at a minimum one-to-one ratio, several councillors pushed for a more ambitious target.

"I would prefer to see a three-to-one, not a one-to-one," Coun. Bob Wilhelm said, also suggesting the county establish minimum size requirements for replacement trees.

Deputy Warden Sue Orr agreed the county should be planting more trees than it removes, particularly given its efforts to encourage private landowners and farmers to increase tree planting.

"We just went through a whole series in trying to get the farmers to plant more trees, and yet we're not leading by example," Orr said. "I'd like to see us go two for one at minimum, if not three for one."

Coun. Walter McKenzie supported the two-to-one ratio, noting replacement trees do not necessarily need to be planted in the same locations where others were removed, provided the overall result is an increase in trees across the county.

Coun. Todd Kasenberg also supported increasing the ratio and establishing guidelines to ensure newly planted trees are appropriately sized and have the best chance of surviving.

However, executive director of public works John McClelland cautioned that county roadsides are not always ideal locations for trees, particularly given road-salt exposure, underground utilities, drainage infrastructure, increasing traffic volumes and safety concerns.

"We're not in the business of tree removal. We're into the maintenance of trees," McClelland said, explaining staff prioritize trimming to improve visibility and tree health wherever possible.

Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz raised concerns about trees near intersections obstructing the view of drivers operating larger trucks and agricultural equipment.

McClelland suggested working with lower-tier municipalities to identify alternative planting locations, including municipal parks, where roadside replacement is not feasible.

Council ultimately approved three amendments to the roadside policy: increasing the minimum replacement ratio to two trees for every tree removed, requiring replacement trees to be of an appropriate size and tolerant of roadside conditions, and directing staff to work with lower-tier municipalities to replant trees where replacement within county road allowances is not possible.

The policy also requires the county to notify affected property owners and establishes approval requirements for community organizations and other external groups wishing to plant trees within county road allowances.

Orr pointed to a recent tree-planting partnership between Perth South and the Stratford Rotary Club as an example of how community organizations could help the county meet its planting goals.

Council also approved a Tree Canopy and Natural Vegetation Policy, establishing an overarching framework for protecting and enhancing the county's tree canopy, currently estimated at 9.4 per cent.

Zhelev explained the policy fulfils requirements under the Municipal Act and brings the county's existing tree-related initiatives, including its tree-injury bylaw, stewardship programs and official plan, under a coordinated framework.

The policy establishes objectives for protecting existing trees, encouraging responsible planting, monitoring tree loss and replacement, and developing a comprehensive inventory of trees on county-owned and managed lands using geographic information systems data.

It also calls for reassessing tree canopy coverage at least every five years, where practical.

Council approved an amendment proposed by Kasenberg to remove references to tree-planting and incentive programs operated by lower-tier municipalities, Stratford and St. Marys from the policy's existing-programs section, leaving only the Perth County Stewardship Program.

Kasenberg argued the county's policy should focus on programs and responsibilities within its own jurisdiction rather than outlining initiatives operated by other municipalities.

The amended policy was subsequently approved by

council.

Both policies are intended to balance environmental protection and increased tree cover with agricultural operations, public safety, infrastructure requirements and the county's available resources.

Optimist Club of Downie Inc.

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Oct. 6	Robin Mountain, St. Marys	\$50.00
Oct. 7	Anne Marie Hunt, Stratford	\$50.00
Oct. 8	Mike & Karrie Helohan, Baden	\$50.00
Oct. 9	Cameron Stuth, St. Marys	\$50.00
Oct. 10	Ken Smale, St. Marys	\$200.00
Oct. 11	Sandra Mohr, Stratford	\$50.00
Oct. 12	Bentley Armstrong, St. Marys	\$50.00
Oct. 13	Lindsay McCann, Stratford	\$50.00
Oct. 14	Bill Bent, Plympton/Wyoming	\$50.00
Oct. 15	Roxanne Houben, St. Pauls	\$50.00
Oct. 16	Elizabeth Seamans, Angus	\$50.00
Oct. 17	Ralph Taylor, Lakeside	\$200.00



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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" hangs in what museum?
2. What is the only food that can never go bad?
3. Nearly all fossils are preserved in what type of rock?
4. What is the fifth sign of the Zodiac?
5. Who is Barbie's little sister?
6. Which month of the year is National Ice Cream Month?
7. The first iPhone was released in what year?
8. Whitney Houston went to the top of the music charts in 1992 with which Dolly Parton song?
9. What is the name of Elvis Presley's Memphis home?
10. Who wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

STRATFORD TIMES

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MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES Q&A

Council candidates: Jefferson George Wright



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I am a theologian, gardener, radical ecologist and land acknowledger. I am a believer in the innate spiritual value of Stratford and its heartfelt citizens. My work experience is varied, but primarily in the film/tv industry, specializing in location management and assistant directing. I think critically, analyze all matters thoroughly and come to decisions with an open mind. I am adamantly

opposed to secret meetings, because I see leaders and citizens as equally valued shareholders of the corporation of the city, always deserving the same information.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

Activate youth and progressive environmentalism through voting – 16 and 17 year olds are now able to vote, if council affirms it! Tear down the GTR immediately and clean the soil – various plans to be approved are the current cause of the paralysis when the first step must still be accomplished – beautify downtown by abolishing the blight of the derelict factory! Understand “cultural preservation education” as Stratford’s core asset, and expand upon the Shakespeare Festival and culinary expertise to include fashion, film history, training insti-

tutions and more! Disallow an unregulated encampment that makes the city unsafe for all – provide compassionate housing ...

Next year’s budget, like last year’s, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

I propose that all funds in the Municipal Accommodation Tax reserve fund should be prioritized to offset any proposed increase in the tax levy. The fund is meant to support tourist initiatives and citizen well-being, and 50 per cent is already in use by Destination Stratford and the Tourism Alliance. For the other 50 per cent, give the citizens a break and reward their patience and support of the tourism industry. Also, enhance bylaw enforcement against non-compliant inns and B-and-Bs to ensure

100 per cent MAT remittance. **Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?**

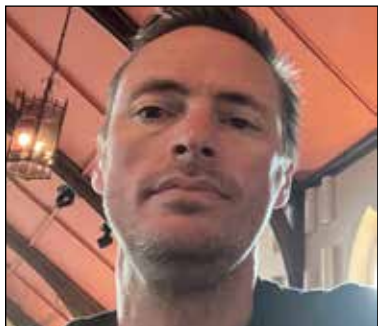
I support an overarching compassionate housing strategy, as housing problems are endemic and not just confined to the “unhoused.” I propose a municipal census on housing to assess a better prioritization of wants and needs, and activation of housing stock to put young families into heritage homes, seniors into affordable, shared, supportive housing and the unhoused into private, non-market electrified housing. The way we conceive of land, its ownership and usage, is a continuation of the error of exploitation from initial European “discovery.”

Compassionate housing involves a complete rethinking of capitalist real estate logic.

Are you in favour of the current council’s direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

Your question suggests the renewal project is underway – but is it, really? I worry that the current plan is designed to solve too many of yesterday’s problems, and not remaining agile to the problems of the present and future. In an AI world, will a medieval information-hub library be required, and does a 19th century Christian recreation organization best serve the public in 2026? Until the building is down and the soil is clean, I think the vision of what best serves the community and culture of Stratford should be withheld. Just enjoy the open vista and dream bigger!

Council candidates: Matthew Hartney



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

My name is Matthew Hartney. I was born in St. Thomas, Ont. and moved with my family to Stratford in 1987 – this is my hometown. I grew up here and after high school trained at the Stratford Chefs School. I later studied pure and applied science in Montréal and attained bachelor and masters degrees in architecture

from the University of Waterloo. I have spent my – as yet brief – career in the hospitality and architectural design fields.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

The focus of my campaign is on city building and transparent, accountable governance. Stratford is set to grow to 50,000 people in the next 20 years and if that happens in an irresponsible, 1950s suburban fashion, as it has been for some time, we will be stuck in a property tax trap that forever increases the levy beyond the cost of inflation. We need dense urban development and need to utilize vacant land to build new housing. As to proper governance – we require community outreach, open door meetings and a rejection of “strong mayor” powers and other

anti-democratic measures ...

Next year’s budget, like last year’s, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

Having studied the current year’s budget and projections for the next five years, it seems difficult, if not impossible to freeze property taxes at their current rates. Stratford residents are subject to a very high levy already and so the goal of council should be, at the least, to keep property tax increases indexed to inflation. It is also important to ensure that the tax burden is fairly balanced between businesses and industry and residents. We need to generate more economic activity in the city, but I do not support tax deductions for this ...

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

I support the city’s efforts to build supportive housing at 398 Erie St., but this is just a start. We require more facilities to house vulnerable people and I would support acquiring existing vacant buildings (the former Wild Rose tavern at Downie Street and Kent Lane comes to mind) to build additional facilities. Stratford needs dedicated spaces for youth who are experiencing homelessness and I would like to see a focus on this from the next council. I am not an expert in this field, so my goal if elected would be to work

with those who do have expertise ...

Are you in favour of the current council’s direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

The current strategy has all of the right parts but lacks focus and direction. It seems that the city and other private proposals are looking for a magic answer. That answer is not coming. We need to start right now. I have released campaign videos on this topic that go into further detail, but generally we have an incredible building that can be redeveloped in phases, turning a liability into an asset. This will require private partners. The city should finalize a site plan for the building and then move to partner with outside investors to get things moving ...

Council candidates: Elaine Strawbridge



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I am a fourth generation Stratfordite and I am deeply invested

in this community. I am a former teacher and a retired minister in the United Church of Canada. I believe all voices should be heard and together we can create a stronger, healthier, more sustainable and caring community. I like to foster communication, engagement and I believe strongly in democracy and that it should be protected.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

Some of the issues that have come into focus for me are home-

lessness, housing affordability, environmental sustainability and transparency. As noted above, I would like every citizen of Stratford to know that their voice matters and I invite feedback and engagement at all levels. I am a skilled listener and as a councillor I would welcome input from everyone. We also need to tackle the Grand Trunk site and I would advocate moving forward with a staged construction beginning with a new YMCA including an aquatic centre for all ages and a

new public library ...

Next year’s budget, like last year’s, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

Keeping the tax levy low is important to me because I pay what I consider to be very high taxes for what I own. As for specific actions I would take, I would have to first see the mayor’s budget and go through it carefully to see where savings can be found. Even if we just account for in-

flation our taxes will increase over three per cent every year and that is substantial when you considered over five or 10 years. I would consult with staff and other people who will be directly affected by cuts.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

CONTINUED TO PAGE 7



Council candidates: Elaine Strawbridge

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

I firmly believe that everyone who wants housing should be housed. One strategy that the city can undertake to create more housing units is encouraging densification. Those on larger lots can be encouraged to build

a one- or two-bedroom suite or those living in larger homes could be encouraged to make a duplex of their home. This would only be part of the solution. The city needs to move ahead with the proposed 12-unit housing complex with wrap around ser-

vices. The time for talking about it has come to an end ...

Are you in favour of the current council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

I am in favour of the city's current proposal for the Grand

Trunk site as far as partnering with the YMCA and the Stratford library to build new facilities. However, with over 12 acres available for development, the city needs to seek more stakeholders who have the capital to invest in infrastructure like a

performing arts space, grocery store or geared to income housing. We also need a centrally located seniors' centre and this should be part of the early plans for the site. With an aging population we need to keep seniors top of mind.

Council candidates: Naireta Chatterjee



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I am Naireta Chatterjee, a Stratford resident, a mother and a wife, a property manager, and the person behind Mirapac Home-Care. My professional experience has shown me how housing, affordability and responsible decisions affect everyday life. With my Southeast Asian background, I also understand the importance of making our community welcoming and inclusive. I am running for city council to bring practical,

common-sense leadership, listen to residents and help build a Stratford where families, seniors, young people, newcomers and local businesses can thrive.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My priorities are affordable housing, responsible property taxes, safe and connected neighbourhoods and support for local businesses and agriculture. I also want to strengthen food security, improve access to community services and create more opportunities for young people to live and work in Stratford. I believe residents should have a stronger voice in local decisions, and public money must be spent carefully. My goal is a city where people can afford to live, businesses can grow and everyone feels included.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a coun-

cillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

As a councillor, I will carefully review every budget item, question unnecessary expenses and prioritize essential services and infrastructure. I will ask for clear cost estimates before approving major projects and consider long-term maintenance costs. I will also explore grants, partnerships and other funding opportunities to reduce the burden on property taxpayers. While working collaboratively with the mayor and fellow councillors, I will advocate for transparent spending, responsible financial decisions and better value for every tax dollar. My goal is to keep tax increases as low as reasonably possible without compromising essential services.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is

the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

Stratford needs more affordable housing, but we must also make better use of the housing already available. I would support identifying vacant and underused properties, encouraging owners to bring suitable units back into use and exploring ways to match available rentals with people who need them. We should also encourage a mix of affordable rentals, smaller homes and supportive housing, while reducing unnecessary development delays. Working with non-profit organizations and other levels of government, we can improve access to housing and support services for people experiencing homelessness. Our goal should be to make the best use of existing resources ...

Are you in favour of the current

council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

I support revitalizing the Grand Trunk site, but I believe we need a clear, practical plan with realistic timelines, costs and measurable outcomes. I would favour exploring all viable options, including phased redevelopment, partnerships with private developers and opportunities for housing and community use. Before committing significant taxpayer money, council should clearly communicate the financial implications, investigate available grants and consider long-term maintenance costs. Residents deserve transparency and meaningful input into the site's future. My priority would be to turn this underused property into a valuable community asset while protecting taxpayers and ensuring the project meets Stratford's needs.

Council candidates: Jason Frey



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

Who is Jason Frey? I'm a construction professional with over 35 years of experience. Resided in Stratford since 2021. Born in Cambridge (Galt), raised in Kitchener. This is the first time stepping up to be part of council with hopes of making a difference. Numerous years of tendering projects in cities throughout Ontario allows me the unique opportunity to have knowledge of costs of city

amenity and capitol structures. Involvement in other projects are the Sobeys Mall and Stratford Mall plus parking structures for Guelph and Humber College. My experiences allow collaborative options for cost savings on all projects.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My core issues are simple:

- Reduction of taxes through proper management of the city budget by elimination of overbudgeted predictions and using proper procurement procedures.
- Construction of city amenities for residents like a seniors and youth centre.
- Expansion and development of current and new city run venues and events that promote and encourage city-wide involvement.
- Growth of the farmers mar-

ket to promote competition and allowing for lower food costs.

- But all issues of this city essentially are on the list to accomplish and solve.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

To keep the tax levy low is to firstly ask questions of how values were obtained, costs are either tendered or budgeted values. For the 2026 budget it was noticed that the same values are spread across the new few years with no changes, so where does the excess go? It was also noted that in the description of reason that the information was pretty vague. Also, taxation on housing needs to be balanced, currently there are homes with a value of \$775,000

paying \$7,020/ year and \$1.2 million paying \$5,400 ...

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

I feel the realty industry is responsible for homes being unaffordable. Houses built for \$200,000 or less are now worth \$700,000 due to associated values of what it costs to build today. Housing materials cost more because wages continually increase that are used to manufacture those materials. Builders say its development fees, those fees are used for schools and infrastructure, everything has a cost, developers tend to be the ones continually getting wealthy and want to pass any liability to others. Pricing of

a home should be based on tax value, this would make all older homes more affordable.

Are you in favour of the current council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

This topic has invested a lot of time, money and energy, it's a love hate/ relationship for this structure. I feel council has got it wrong, they have let emotions direct decisions to refurb a dilapidated building thinking it has value. Heritage doesn't not have to be represented in the old but could be represented in new structures, if mandated to do so. I feel the building needs to be removed, the land remediated and then sold as smaller development lots to recoup city dollars to go towards the library and other city amenity required structures, saving future tax levies.

236056 23RD LINE, LAKESIDE**\$825,000****NEW LISTING!****YOUR PRIVATE COUNTRY OASIS IS HERE!**

Looking for space, serenity, and endless possibilities? Welcome to nearly 1.75 acres of pure country bliss—perfectly situated within easy commuting distance to Stratford, London, and area!

Property Features:

Over 3,000 sq. ft. of living space.

Unique fusion of an original 2-bedroom Victorian house + a spacious ranch addition.

Ideal layout for multi-generational living or income potential.

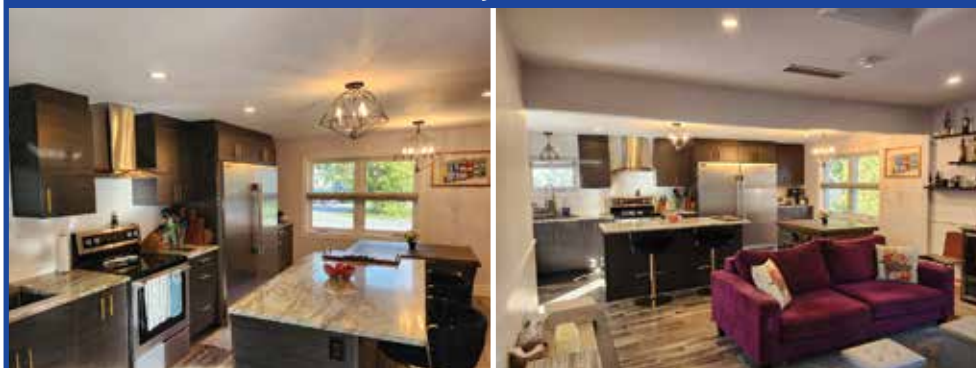
Impressive 25' x 40' shop + separate garden shed for all your tools & toys!

Whether you need room for extended family, a home business set up, or just room to breathe, this property delivers. Country living at its best!

You won't be disappointed. Call your REALTOR today and schedule your personal showing! MLS X14091084

132 ASH ST., CRYSTAL LAKE**\$175,000****OPEN HOUSE Saturday 10a.m. to 12p.m.**

Is home ownership in your future? Perhaps this mobile home with so much potential would get you there? Same owner for over 40 years and now its time to put your stamp on this three bedroom, one and a half bath home nestled in the quiet community of Crystal Lake Mobile Home Court...call your REALTOR today and come check it out! MLS X13886358

**OPEN HOUSE Saturday 2p.m. to 4p.m.
Sunday 10a.m. to 12p.m.****195 CEDAR ST., CRYSTAL LAKE****Turnkey Living in a Peaceful Setting!**

Nestled in a quiet community ideally located between Stratford and Mitchell, this move-in ready home offers the perfect blend of peaceful living and convenience, just minutes from all amenities.

Completely gutted and thoughtfully expanded with two permitted additions, this home delivers approximately 1,300 sq. ft. of beautifully updated, open-concept living space.

Interior Highlights:

Gourmet Kitchen & Living: Bright open-concept layout featuring sleek granite countertops, perfect for everyday living and entertaining.

Modern Comforts: Includes 5 appliances and a cozy wood stove for supplemental heating—with all wood included!

Primary Suite Sanctuary: Unwind in the stunning, custom-designed 10' x 16' walk-in closet and a spacious ensuite with integrated main-floor laundry.

Private Primary Deck: Step out onto your private deck complete with included deck furniture and TV, overlooking a serene, park-like backyard.

Outdoor & Extra Features:

Main Outdoor Living: Entertain on the spacious 16' x 20' main deck, fully equipped with included deck furniture and a newer gas BBQ.

Hobbyist's Space: An 8' x 12' wired shed with hydro, ideal for projects, a workshop, or extra storage.

With top-to-bottom upgrades making it feel like a brand-new home, there's nothing left to do but move in and enjoy.

Schedule your private showing today!

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Wordofa cleared by IC, but still has legal costs

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After months of innuendo surrounding an unspecified Integrity Commissioner (IC)'s report, Coun. Geza Wordofa is breathing a little easier.

That IC report, dated to April 2025, found Wordofa did not contravene the City of Stratford's code of conduct by making "impugned" comments on the city's diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) department during a budget debate that same year.

"I am so happy," Wordofa said, after being cleared to discuss the investigation. "I am so blessed when I get this report, because I am waiting for a long time."

During the budget debate which started the whole saga, Wordofa advocated for dissolving the DEI department to save the municipality \$240,000 a year, he claimed. He inferred the services are easily duplicated by other programs, such as Youtube videos or other community groups – notably from church groups or volunteers of the Huron-Perth Multicultural Association (MAPH), which he is the founder and president.

Though, as explained by IC David Boghosian in his report, Wordofa does not receive any remuneration from MAPH. Wordofa further clarified that neither he nor MAPH provide DEI training, rather they have discussions with groups on DEI matters.

"My question then as now, is what would the city achieve by spending \$250,000 or more on a DEI department?" Wordofa stated in a clarification included in the report. "As far as I could tell, there was no specific

program laid out and no objectives by which we could measure achievement. It looked to me like some amorphous, unmeasurable program. It did not look like it had a defined result as its purpose, but just some sort of feel-good program costing \$250,000."

In Boghosian's analysis, he found Wordofa acted consistent with the city's code of conduct requiring members to act with decorum and treat others, including staff, respectfully and in a non-derogatory fashion.

"For a municipal government to function properly, members must be able to debate whether certain programming is necessary," Boghosian stated in the report. "It cannot constitute a breach of respect or decorum, and in turn the code, for a member to express that the elimination of a department is warranted, so long as they do so in a manner that does not impugn the reputations of staff. Coun. Wordofa limited his comments to opining on the necessity of the department itself, not the efficacy or performance of staff."

Furthermore, since Wordofa does not receive a salary or remuneration from MAPH, Boghosian found he does not have a direct or indirect pecuniary interest.

On Wordofa's legal fees

This summer, Wordofa petitioned Stratford city council to reimburse \$13,003.48 of his legal fees, which he told the Times related to this specific investigation, a similar petition to one he made in September 2025 when he asked for about \$14,500 to be reimbursed. Both requests were denied.

According to Wordofa, he was informed of the IC investigation in 2025 and quickly retained private legal counsel to defend him-

self, even though counsel is not typically required for an IC investigation.

ICs are independent officers appointed by council for confidential guidance related to ethics, conflicts of interest and conduct rules. They investigate formal complaints from the public, council members or staff regarding alleged ethical or code of conduct violations of council members and submit reports with findings. If members of council are found to be in breach of the code, ICs will recommend penalties to council, which will ultimately be the body which imposes said penalties.

Penalties may include reprimands or suspension of pay, among other things.

Wordofa was born in Ethiopia and educated in Russia before coming to Canada. English is not his first language, nor his second language, for that matter. He told the Times he hired a lawyer and incurred fees simply because he was frightened by the notice and understood that he needed to protect himself – especially since he has a language barrier.

"Because I have to prove I'm true," Wordofa said. "Because somebody (has) to guide me. Somebody they have to be helping. That's it ... I'm Ethiopian. I speak eight languages. The way I'm talking sometimes, I'm speaking (with) my hands or the way (I'm) talking is not properly ... In different countries, some people they're using hands, right? That is, you know, miscommunication – misunderstanding."

According to chief administrative officer (CAO) André Morin, each term of council the city provides training and orientation on the city's code of conduct and the responsibility of the IC, as part of the onboarding

process for new and returning councillors.

"The city has liability insurance, including errors and omissions," Morin stated. "This coverage covers council members, board members and committee members when acting in their capacity as those members. If an issue is determined eligible based on the insurer's review of the case facts approved, the city insurer will assign legal representation on behalf of the council member. In relation to code of conduct or conflict of interest complaints investigated by the Integrity Commissioner, legal counsel is not necessary and is up to the individual whether they choose to be represented by separate legal counsel."

When asked about a municipality's responsibility in training and informing members of council, Zack Taylor, director of Western University's Local Government Program and an associate professor with the school's department of political science, told the Times that training is administered and procured by a municipality, so varies town to town, city to city.

"On the one hand, 'ignorance of the law is no excuse,'" Taylor wrote to the Times. "In any job, people must understand their duties and rights. On the other hand, municipalities should probably organize a thorough onboarding process for newly elected politicians, and ensure that they have access to high-quality advice during their tenure in office."

"Nevertheless, if a politician does not take advantage of what is available, or makes no effort to learn about their job, it ends up being their own problem."



2026 STRATFORD MUNICIPAL AND SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION

Voting is underway in Stratford's 2026 municipal and school board election, and will continue until Monday, October 26 at 8:00 p.m. Vote anywhere, anytime during the voting period, including from the convenience of your home using the internet or telephone. To vote you will need a Personalized Identification Number, which can be found in your Voter Information Letter, along with your date of birth. The Voter Information Letter also contains the information you need to access the internet or telephone voting system.

You can check whether you are on the Voters' List or add or update your information online through the City's website at stratford.ca/elections.

If you need assistance with internet voting, need to be added to the Voters' List or have your information updated, you can visit the Voter Help Centre at the Stratford Rotary Complex, 353 McCarthy Road West on:

- Saturday, October 24, 2026 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Sunday, October 25, 2026 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Monday, October 26, 2026 from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Computers are also available for use by eligible electors at the Stratford Public Library during its business hours.

Need help getting to the Rotary Complex on Monday, October 26? The City will be offering free transit for the entire day.

If you have questions relating to the election and voting, please call the Voter Help Desk at [519-271-0250](tel:519-271-0250) extension 5237 or email elections@stratford.ca during the following dates and times:

- October 16, 2026 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- October 19-23, 2026 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- October 24, 2026 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- October 25, 2026 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- October 26, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

DON'T DELAY, VOTE! TODAY!



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES AND BOARDS

The City of Stratford is looking for a diverse range of volunteers to lend their unique voices and perspectives to the City's advisory committees and boards. Community members serving on advisory committees and boards help guide the City's decision making and provide advice and feedback to City Council in a variety of areas, including but not limited to the environment, accessibility, active transportation, heritage and safe communities.

Why serve on a committee or board? Volunteering makes a difference in our community and is a great way to give back. It's also an opportunity to help influence decision-making in your local government and be part of democracy in action. You will learn new skills, build your understanding of how municipal government works, and make connections with other passionate members of the Stratford community.

These opportunities are open to Stratford residents and eligible electors who are at least 18 years of age (with the exception of the Youth representatives who can be under 18 years). Additional qualifications may apply depending on the advisory committee you are interested in. Experienced and new members are encouraged to apply.

Please ensure you are available to attend meetings in person on the day and time listed in the description for each advisory committee or board.

If you are interested in volunteering on one of the City's committees or boards listed below, please complete the application available on the City's website at www.stratford.ca. The deadline to apply is 4:30 p.m. on Friday, October 30, 2026.

The applications can also be printed from the website or picked up from the Clerk's Office and returned through one of the following means:

Email: adviscom@stratford.ca

In-person or mail to:

The Corporation of the City of Stratford,
Attention City Clerk,
Clerk's Office, Ground Floor, Stratford City Hall
P.O. Box 818,
Stratford, ON N5A 6W1

Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)

Date, Time and Location of Meetings: Meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 12:00 p.m. in the Mansbridge Room at the Stratford Rotary Complex. Please ensure you are able to attend on this day and time.

Purpose: The purpose of the AAC is to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to full participation in the community. Members of the AAC will be paid remuneration in the amount of \$125.00 per Committee meeting attended and \$50.00 per site plan review meeting attended.

Available Positions: Four (4) citizens positions are available for appointment for 2-year terms.

Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)

Date, Time and Location of Meetings: Meets the fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Mansbridge Room at the Rotary Complex. Please ensure you are able to attend on this day and time.

Purpose: The purpose of the ATAC is to serve as a forum for the public to raise their viewpoints on particular active transportation issues and/or other findings and to bring these interests to the attention of the appropriate staff, departments or standing committees. The ATAC also acts to educate, promote and enhance active transportation in the City of Stratford.

Available Positions: There are three (3) citizen representative positions and one (1) Cycle Stratford representative position available for 2-year terms.

Communities in Bloom Advisory Committee

Date, Time and Location of Meetings: Meets on the second Thursday of the month at 12:00 p.m. in the Mansbridge Room at the Rotary Complex. Please ensure you are able to attend on this day and time.

Purpose: The mandate of the Communities in Bloom Committee is:

- foster civic pride, environmental protection and beautification, through community participation;
- to improve the tidiness, appearance and visual appeal of neighbourhoods, parks, open spaces and streets;
- to focus on environmental awareness and preservation of heritage and culture;
- to co-ordinate a host program as required;
- to be financially sustainable.

Positions Available: There are three (3) citizen representative positions available for 2-year terms.

Energy & Environment Advisory Committee

Date, Time and Location of Meetings: Meets on the first Thursday of the month at 4:00 p.m. in the Mansbridge Room at the Rotary Complex. Please ensure you are able to attend on this day and time.

Purpose: This Committee provides advice to Council on matters relating to waste reduction initiatives, water and energy conservation and preservation of natural areas.

Positions Available: There are four (4) citizen representative positions available for a 2-year term.

Heritage Stratford Advisory Committee

Date, Time, and Location of Meetings: Meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. in the Mansbridge Room at the Stratford Rotary Complex. Please ensure you are able to attend on this day and time.

Purpose: Heritage Stratford deals with matters relating to the promotion of architectural designing and conserving of heritage architecture and heritage designations. Members of the Heritage Stratford Committee will be paid remuneration in the amount of \$125.00 per Committee meeting attended and \$50.00 per site plan and permit review meeting attended.

Positions Available: There are two (2) citizen representative positions available for 2-year terms.

Stratfords of the World - Ontario Committee

Date, Time and Location of Meetings: Meets periodically throughout the year at the call of the Chair. Typically meetings are held between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. in the Mansbridge Room at the Rotary Complex.

Purpose: The mandate of the Stratfords of the World Committee is:

- to encourage community partnerships which provide additional opportunities;
- to assist with the recurring reunion program with other Stratfords every two years;
- to ensure that the annual Friendship Flower Bed is updated;
- to be financially sustainable.

Positions Available: There are five (5) citizen representative positions available for 2-year terms.

Board of Park Management

Date and Time of Meetings: Meets on the second Monday of the month at 3:30 p.m.

Purpose: The Board of Park Management deals with matters regarding the maintenance, improvement and expansion of the City's park system.

Available Positions: There are six (6) citizen positions available for a 4-year term concurrent with the term of Council.

Committee of Adjustment

Date and Time of Meetings: Meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 4:00 p.m.

Purpose: The Committee of Adjustment is a quasi-judicial tribunal appointed by City Council and is independent and autonomous from City Council and City Administration. The Committee of Adjustment has the authority, given by City Council under the Planning Act, to make decisions on applications for certain changes to buildings, properties, and land. These include applications to vary zoning rules (Minor Variance) and divide or adjust property lines (Consent).

Available Positions: There are five (5) citizen positions available for a 4-year term concurrent with the term of Council. Individuals with experience in urban planning, architecture, environmental planning, land development, surveying, legal/administrative law, contracting or other related fields are encouraged to apply.

Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA)

Date and Time of Meetings: Meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 6:15 p.m.

Purpose: The BIA deals with matters concerning promotion and beautification of the downtown core. To be eligible for appointment, you must be a downtown property owner or business operator. Provincial eligibility requirements for persons who may be appointed to the Downtown Stratford BIA are:

1. persons who own property that is in either the commercial or industrial property class in the designated city centre and who are shown on the last revised assessment roll;
2. persons who operate businesses, either owning the business premises or holding them under a lease requiring the payment of property taxes;
3. persons operating businesses in leased space under a gross lease entered into on or before June 11, 1998;
4. nominees of persons who qualify under (a), (b) or (c).

Incorporated members shall be represented only by a named person so designated in the corporation's official designation letter for that purpose filed with the City of Stratford.

Available Positions: We are looking for between 3 to 9 individuals to serve on the Board for a 4-year term concurrent with the term of Council.

Stratford Police Service Board

Date and Time of Meetings: Meets monthly at the call of the Chair usually at 4:30 p.m.

Purpose: The SPSB is the civilian body governing the Stratford Police Service. It is responsible for ensuring the provision of adequate and effective policing in the municipality. Its duties are set out in the Community Safety and Policing Act.

Positions Available: There is one (1) community member position available for a 4-year term.

Stratford Public Library Board

Date and Time of Meetings: Meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 6:45 p.m.

Purpose: Operating under the Public Libraries Act, the Board is responsible for the governance of the public library. Its focus is on policy development, planning and advocacy.

Available Positions: There are ten (10) citizen representative positions available for 4-year terms concurrent with the term of Council.

Additional information regarding these committees and boards are available on the City's website or upon request from the City Clerk's Office, 519-271-0250, extension 5243.

PIF names Flowing Futures' winners

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

According to Jazlyn Burrell, a Flowing Futures entrant and recently announced winner, the Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF)'s recent contest on the Avon River has changed how she thinks about the iconic river cutting through the heart of the Festival City.

"I think about my renewed hope, restoration and the beautiful consequence of the butterfly effect," said Burrell during the contest's awards night on Oct. 17. "If there's anything that we take away here from tonight, I pray that it's a place of hope and some excitement for what is to come."

Burrell was one of seven announced winners of the Flowing Futures: Avon River Design Challenge, a contest which invited citizens to tap into their imagination, do the research, and think of their collective environmental responsibility when it comes to the river.

Flowing Futures invited artists, students, environmental thinkers, designers, community organizations and residents to imagine what the river could become. The initiative generated 37 completed submissions, along with additional statements of interest, spanning ecological restoration, water quality, accessibility, active transportation, recreation, public art, storytelling, digital experiences, youth engagement and new community gathering spaces.

The independent expert jury faced difficult choices because of the quality, originality and range of the submissions. Seven juried awards were presented at the Flowing Futures Awards Celebration at Copperlight. A separate People's Choice Award reflects the proposal selected as most compelling by visitors to the exhibition.

"Flowing Futures began with a simple question: what could Stratford's Avon River become in the years ahead?" said Mark Rosenfeld, PIF founding director, in a media release. "The response revealed an extraordinary depth of creativity, knowledge and commitment within our community. These awards celebrate outstanding proposals, but they also recognize every person who took the time to share an idea, a concern or a possibility for the river's future."

PIF sincerely thanks the Flowing Futures jury for the time, expertise and thoughtful attention they brought to reviewing the submissions: Theresa Douthwright and Karen Winfield of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority; Christina Phillips of Destination Stratford; Hanna Domagala of the BMI Group;



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

PIF founding director Mark Rosenfeld addresses a packed Copperlight hall on Oct 17, introducing the Flowing Futures awards night.

Shabnam Tashakour of Nancy Campbell Academy; Jack Nahrgang, an artist and former teacher; and Rachelle Mingail, an artist and musician.

The award night and prizes were funded by MTE Consultants. In addition to this support, MTE contributed environmental expertise through the Flowing Futures River Clinic and offered free consultations to participants as they developed their proposals.

Flowing Futures was launched by PIF as a collaborative undertaking with the BMI Group, Our Stör(y), Pathways to Poetry Festival, Stratford Public Library, The Boathouse Stratford, MTE Consultants and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. The initiative was made possible in part through financial support from the Destination Stratford Development Fund and RTO4 Tourism, along with financial and organizational support from the BMI Group. StratfordToday.ca provid-

ed in-kind advertising support.

PIF extends its deepest appreciation to everyone who submitted a completed proposal or statement of interest.

To view all of the entrants, visit tinyurl.com/27fz5ru. The award winners are:

Flowing Futures Grand Prize – \$600

Flowing Features – Jordan Cook. A science-based and practical restoration framework that addresses water-quality throughout the Avon River watershed and Lake Victoria. Rather than responding only to the visible symptoms of pollution, the proposal addresses agricultural runoff, sediment and nutrient loading, and disrupted natural flows, creating healthier aquatic habitats and long-term municipal benefits.

Transformative Vision Award – \$150

Lakeside Reimagined – Anu S Kumar. A bold plan to transform the Lake Victoria waterfront into a continuous, accessible

civic landscape integrating native shoreline restoration, sensory gardens, cultural programming, year-round activity and community gathering spaces.

Ecology and Climate Resilience Award – \$150

Stratford Floating Wildflower Islands – Jazlyn Burrell. A scalable pilot using floating platforms planted with native wetland species to absorb excess nutrients, improve habitat for fish and pollinators and create an outdoor classroom for community-based ecological learning.

Community Connection and Accessibility Award – \$150

Forest Playground – Denise Iszczuk. A secure, nature-based riverfront play space for young children, using natural fencing and reclaimed wood to support imaginative outdoor learning, family access and intergenerational community participation.

Arts, Culture and Placemaking Award – \$150

ARTxTERRA Land Art Festival – Kevin September. A multi-site autumn festival of live-built, site-specific installations made from natural, locally sourced and biodegradable materials, designed to deepen environmental connection while extending Stratford's cultural and tourism season.

Postsecondary Innovation Award – \$150

Avon River Way Framework – Andra Popp, Sam Ma, Lulit Meray, Sydney Robb, Khalil Heron and Victor Constantinescu. A University of Waterloo capstone project presenting a corridor-scale planning framework that connects ecological restoration, universal accessibility, active transportation, public art and Indigenous placemaking through a phased, evidence-based implementation strategy.

Intermediate School Vision Award – \$150

Avon River Fishing and Clean-Up Video Game – Cameron Fuhr, Zach Moses and Dominic Morris. An interactive educational game that links fishing, litter removal and improved water quality, using creative coding to help younger audiences understand pollution, native aquatic species and river stewardship.

People's Choice Award

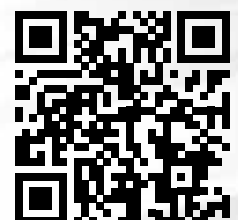
ARTxTERRA Land Art Festival – Kevin September. A multi-site autumn festival of live-built, site-specific installations made from natural, locally sourced and biodegradable materials, designed to deepen environmental connection while extending Stratford's cultural and tourism season. Selected through public voting by visitors to the Flowing Futures exhibition.

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2026 Stratford Film Festival returns with five days of feature films and shorts

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

For five days in November, the Stratford Film Festival (SFF) has programmed outstanding films and shorts, Q-and-As, film forums and parties with filmmakers. The 2026 edition of the SFF honours the first, now 70 years past. The inaugural film festival in 1956 by Tom Patterson was one of the first in the country to screen international films and SFF proudly follows in those intrepid footsteps.

"With an extra day and night this year, we've been able to broaden the program and bring even more exceptional films to Stratford," said festival director Megan Smith-Harris. "There's an incredible range; from major international award winners to a wide array of Canadian fare and films our audiences will be among the first to discover. That mix is what makes a film festival so much fun. You come for the films everyone's talking about and leave raving about films you'd never heard of when you walked in."

Countries represented through film include Australia, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Morocco, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. From about 600 submissions the screenings have been whittled down to 43 features and shorts to take in.

The opening night film, *Primavera* is a sweeping, visually stunning period drama set in Venice in 1716. It is centered on a young orphan, Cecilia, who is also a gifted violinist. Antonio Vivaldi arrives as her new music teacher and becomes an important catalyst for her journey. While Vivaldi is a key figure in the film, it is really about the protagonist Cecilia and her musical and personal journey.

Opening night begins at 6 p.m. with a red-carpet reception featuring Venetian cicchetti, traditional small bites, provided by opening night hospitality sponsor Paz-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Come for the free SFF Actors Forum: Women on Screen to see Sheila McCarthy and Alegra Fulton, both with experience behind and before the camera, as they share their careers in conversation.

zo, along with prosecco and wine. Guests will enjoy classical music performed by 14-year-old Stratford violinist Tessa Bell.

Another noteworthy film will be the world premiere of the film *Fallen Star: The Shooting of Ukrainian Airline PS752*, a documentary by Moze Mossanen. Screening this premiere is a continuation of the relationship between SFF and Mossanen whose previously screened documentary, *You Are Here: A Come From Away Story*, was a huge success. Following the screening is a Q-and-A with film editor Mike Lalonde and Mossanen.

"This was my vision for the film festival, to nurture relationships with filmmakers and bring them back, introduce them to Stratford audiences and then just treat them so well," said Smith-Harris.

And TIFF People's Choice Documentary Award winner *Darlene Love: I Know Where I've Been*, directed by Canadian

filmmaker Barry Avrich, tells the remarkable story of one of popular music's most recognizable voices – and the barriers Love faced on her journey from an uncredited singer to a music icon. Avrich and producer Mark Selby will participate in a post-screening Q-and-A.

On Saturday night will be the official SFF party at the soon-to-be-open Queen's Cue, where guests will sip on drinks and enjoy late night nibbles in Stratford's most anticipated new venue. Here is the opportunity to mingle with other festival goers and filmmakers at the same time.

This is a festival with more. There will be free Filmmaker Forums featuring Truth Be Told: The Art and Business of Documentary with Smith-Harris (also a filmmaker), Mossanen, Avrich, Selby and Larry Weinstein where they discuss creative choices, ethical questions and practical realities of documentary filmmaking, and Close Up: Women on

Screen where actor and filmmaker Sheila McCarthy and Alegra Fulton share behind-the-scenes stories and insights into their careers, the changing landscape for women in the industry and the creative possibilities of working both in front of and behind the camera.

Stratford is represented in two short films. In her directorial debut is Fulton's short film *A Small Service*, in which a desperate request from a dying sister sends an older woman into an unfamiliar neighbourhood at night. Look for Stratford's Deanna Leblanc in this jaunt. The second is *When The Party is Over* by Peer Wahlquist and Amelia Auster, imagining a group of friends throwing one last party as the world appears to be ending.

The festival closes Sunday night with John Dower's *The Balloonists*, the exhilarating true story of Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones – two men whose tenacity and audacity changed aviation history. In 1999, the unlikely pair took on some of the world's finest pilots and vastly wealthier competitors, including billionaire Richard Branson, in pursuit of one of aviation's last great prizes: becoming the first people in history to circumnavigate the globe nonstop by balloon. Against the odds, Piccard and Jones did it.

"Film festivals give audiences something streaming simply can't," says Smith-Harris. "You watch a film in a room full of strangers – sometimes with the filmmaker or the subjects sitting only a few feet away. Then the lights come up and the conversation begins. For five days and nights, we get to discover extraordinary films, meet the artists behind them and have a lot of fun along the way. And we can't wait to see you at the movies."

The festival runs from Nov. 4-8 and tickets can be purchased singly, by day pass or full festival pass. New is the NextGen pass for those under 30 that will be of interest. For a full list of SFF films, trailers and to purchase passes and tickets visit stratfordfilmfestival.com.

Learn more about honey varieties at Hive + Honey tasting events

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Kin Cabin in Shakespeare, Ont. will collaborate with a Waterloo-based beekeeper to provide a sweet tasting experience.

The Hive + Honey tasting experience, run by the Kin Cabin and Casamel, will offer a selection of honeys to taste with food pairings like meats, cheeses and fruits to guests. The experience is similar to wine tasting and provides an opportunity to learn more about how a variety of factors can influence the taste, texture and other aspects of honey.

"Most people really like honey but they just think of it as a sweetener and they think all honey tastes the same because maybe they haven't been exposed to different types of honey," said Melanie Noble, the founder of Casamel and beekeeper guiding Hive + Honey tastings. "In wine tastings, there's all sorts of wines and they're all called something different like the grape is different or something like that. In honey, it's kind of similar depending on the nectar source and the location and the time of year. There are so many different factors that make honey taste differently."

Noble and Kin Cabin founder Sam We-

ber became acquainted years ago when Weber hosted a girls' weekend with her friends that included a private honey tasting hosted by Noble.

"When Sam and I got together and did this event at the girls' weekend, something clicked so we thought this is something that we really want to get it out there to more people and so it was the perfect space when Sam opened the venue to connect with local businesses and showcasing products," said Noble.

"She blew our mind with bee facts," Weber added about Noble's tasting. "I think that's got me really excited about it as well."

An Oct. 6 press release from Perth County Tourism announced that Hive + Honey is supported as a signature experience run by the county's tourism department.

"It's really cool to have someone else believe in what we what we did and think that it could be an experience for other people to experience," said Weber.

Hive + Honey will have its first tasting event on Nov. 19 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Kin Cabin on 2203 Line 34, Shakespeare. Tickets are \$95 plus service fees. To find out more information about the honey tasting and other Kin Cabin programming online, visit www.thekincabin.ca/workshops.

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Warriors blaze past Stars and spin past Cyclones in statement sweep

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors made another statement this weekend, extending their winning streak to seven with victories over St. Thomas at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Oct. 16 and Listowel on Oct. 17.

Two Warriors players reached their 100th-game milestone on Oct. 9 against the Sarnia Legionnaires, as announced on social media.

Francesco Sanita and Drew Hodge commented on playing their 100th game, reflected on their careers in the Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) to date, and shared their thoughts on the forthcoming weekend games.

“It feels pretty good. I think I already hit 100 when we played Sarnia, but yeah, it’s

pretty cool. It feels like just yesterday was my first game,” Sanita said. “Just keep the wins coming. We’re on a run, a little bit of a hot streak right now, and we’re just looking to keep that going.”

“Yeah, it’s a good milestone to hit, especially with one group. It’s been a fun 100 games,” Hodge said. “These are two teams that are ahead of us in the standings right now, so we just need to come out with 100 per cent effort and just stick to our game, and hopefully we can come in with two wins.”

McQuen Haylock has been on a scoring tear, emerging as a key offensive contributor during the Warriors’ winning streak. After being held off the score-sheet in the first three games of the season, the Wolverine Lake, Mich. native has scored in four of the last five games.

Playing alongside newcomers Ethan Bridges and Declan McCotter, Haylock says he enjoys taking on a veteran role.

“I think it’s been awesome. It’s really fun to play with two young guys. It’s fun to teach them stuff. They obviously are learning new things, and it’s awesome to see them grow. You know, they’re a bunch of young guys. It’s awesome to play with them and watch them grow as humans and players. It’s been awesome,” Haylock said.

Winners of five straight, the Warriors faced the St. Thomas Stars on Oct. 16.

The Stars opened the scoring at 8:50 in the first period, but Coen Galbraith tied it for the Warriors at 4:48, assisted by Max Wildfong and Colin Slattery. Galbraith scored his second goal of the game and third of the season at 6:53 of the second period, with assists from Grady Murphy and Gibson Grendel. Haylock followed at 8:57, scoring his seventh of the season with assists from Aaron Green and Bridges.

The Warriors put the game out of reach early in the third period when Haylock scored his second of the night, assisted by Bridges for his second assist of the contest. Stratford netminder Noah Bender improved to 4-0 with a 23-save performance.

Stratford welcomed cross-region rivals the Listowel Cyclones for a rare Saturday night game on Oct. 17. This game also marked the 100th career GOHL game for team co-captain Colin Slattery, the third different member of the Warriors’ roster to eclipse the milestone in under ten days.

The Warriors jumped out to a 2-0 lead with goals from Sanita and Haylock. Galbraith notched his third goal of the weekend on the powerplay from Jaxon Broda and Murphy at 1:15 of the second period, giving the Warriors a comfortable 3-0 lead.

Listowel got on the board on a power play at 7:46 in the middle frame to cut the Stratford lead to 3-1. While on their second power play of the period, the Cyclones made a costly miscue behind their own net as three Cyclones players made an ill-advised turnover, leaving Dominic Marshall to score in an empty net for his second goal of the season with 5:53 left to extend the lead back to three.

Green’s unassisted goal late in the period put the game well in hand for the home side. Murphy added one more for insurance in the third period as the Warriors stormed past the Cyclones 6-1. Netminder Gage Hurst stopped 27 of 28 shots on goal for his third straight win.

After the game, Warriors head coach Dave Williams discussed the team’s weekend performance, attributing its current seven-game winning streak to more consistent play than earlier in the season and a continued commitment to the team philosophy.

“I think we’ve just gotten a little bit more consistent than we were earlier in the season. You know, I still liked a lot of the stuff we were doing earlier, but I think we’re just doing it more often and doing it better. So I thought it was a good weekend for us, two tough teams to play and no back-to-back nights, and really proud of how we were able to play this weekend,” Williams said.

“I think we’re probably scoring a little bit more. We’re getting to the inside ice and generating better scoring opportunities, and I think off the other side of the puck, I think we’re defending better.

I think we’re getting into better spots. I think we’re working harder when we turn pucks over to get above pucks and make teams have to come through more bodies, so I just think in general we’re just doing things a little more consistently than we were doing earlier in the year. You know, we haven’t changed the way we played.”

For Murphy and Galbraith, the reason the team is clicking is that they are playing their system effectively. The two also shared their thoughts on Slattery reaching the century mark.

“It’s been very good. We’ve been playing real hard, just being simple. After the first three games, I think we started getting a little more confidence with our play and started connecting with the teammates and had more bonding and stuff, which helped out,” Murphy said.

“He’s a great friend. He’s a great teammate and especially a great leader. Yes, I’ve played with him growing up my whole life, and it’s been a good journey.”

“Yeah, I know we’re doing everything right these past eight games. Getting pucks deep, doing the small things, little things. You know, back checking hard. We’re just doing everything right, and we’re getting rewarded. We got a lot of team bonding. I feel like we have good chemistry now. You know, we know where each other are on the ice, and it’s been working out for us so far,” Galbraith said.

“Great guy. He’s a leader out there. He’s one of our captains, so it’s good to see him get this milestone here.”

Slattery says he feels grateful for his career with the Warriors and for reaching the milestone in his hometown.

“Yeah, you know it’s pretty crazy how it’s only 100 games. It feels like it was yesterday. I was just coming in as a 17-year-old kid, so it’s pretty cool to play 100 games, especially all here in Stratford,” Slattery said.

On Oct. 19, Hurst was announced as the GOHL Western Conference Player of the Week. In his two starts, Hurst went 2-0 with a .931 save percentage and a 2.00 goals-against average.

With two straight wins, the Warriors sit fifth in the GOHL Western Conference and aim to extend their streak with two games this weekend. They host the Strathroy Rockets on Oct. 23, then travel to Elmira to face the Sugar Kings in an evening matchup on Oct. 25.

Stratford Warriors 2026-27 Stats (as of October 19, 2026)					
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Colin Slattery	F	9	5	5	10
McQuen Haylock	F	10	9	0	9
Grady Murphy	F	10	3	6	9
Ethan Bridges	F	10	2	7	9
Dominic Marshall	F	10	2	7	9
Coen Galbraith	F	10	4	4	8
Max Wildfong	F	8	3	5	8
Aaron Green	D	10	2	4	6
Jaxon Broda	D	10	1	5	6
Will Coward	D	9	0	6	6
Francesco Sanita	F	10	3	2	5
Declan McCotter	F	10	0	4	4
Gibson Grendel	D	9	0	3	3
Drew Hodge	D	10	2	0	2
Chase Martin	F	8	1	1	2
Colten Brenzil	F	7	1	0	1
Carter Brownlee	D	7	1	0	1
Mateo Craievich	D	9	1	0	1
Ethan McPhee	F	6	0	1	1
Lucas Minard	F	8	0	0	0
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	4-0-0-0	2.72	0.916		
Gage Hurst	3-2-0-0	2.82	0.898		
Travis Vanderzwaag	0-1-0-0	4.12	0.778		

U13 Lakers continue to stay unbeaten, overtake first place in ALLIANCE standings

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The U13 AAA Huron-Perth Lakers remained undefeated with road victories over Waterloo and Brantford last week.

After earning three of four points in two exhibition games against the Buffalo Jr. Sabres at Stratford Rotary Complex the previous weekend, Huron-Perth travelled to RIM Park on Oct. 16 to face the Waterloo Wolves.

The game remained scoreless until fewer than five minutes were left, when Tyler Walker put the Lakers on the board. Soon after an unsuccessful power play, Louis Nadon scored a highlight-reel backhand goal to give the Lakers a 2-0 lead at the 3:08 mark of the second period. Walker scored his second of the game with 7:06 remaining in the middle frame, giving the Lakers a commanding 3-0 lead after two

periods.

The Lakers' offence and power play came alive in the third period. Goals from Reed Henderson, Max Mari, Tripp Matthews and Brooks Wood helped secure a 7-0 win. They went 2-for-4 on the power play and were perfect on the penalty kill, stopping both chances.

After the game, head coach Shawn Walker said he wants the team to play consistently and make better use of its scoring opportunities, especially with the new additions made before the season.

"Pretty good. I still think we're not quite up to our full potential yet. We got a few new kids and are just kind of getting used to lines and playing with some things. We've been playing fairly well, though. It's just that we're getting some tough puck luck in front of the net, and a few kids are gripping the sticks a little tight," Walker said.

"But we're working hard, and we just ran up against a good goalie tonight. We probably had 50 shots tonight, and he saved a lot of rubber. So yeah, we're just sticking to the process, playing the game the right way, and yeah, we're looking to get the mid-season form here soon."

Mari discussed his experience with the Lakers with the Times, including comparisons to his playing style and his aspirations for the team this season.

"It's amazing! It's a good group of boys, and I'm proud to be a part of it. I love watching Tim Stutzle. I'm a (Ottawa) Sens fan. Really like the way he plays and moves the puck," Mari said.

"In my opinion, the focus for the team is to just connect to each other, get some wins, just have fun."

The win put the Lakers in sole possession of the top spot in the U13 AAA Alliance league, setting up a matchup with the

second-seeded Brantford 99ers the following night, Oct. 17, at the TD Civic Centre in Brantford.

Huron-Perth scored the lone goal in the first period with 8:04 left. The Lakers poured on the offence in the middle frame, starting with the only power-play goal of the game 1:06 into the period, then rang up four more to a 5-0 lead. The visitors added a pair of goals in the third, as the Lakers extended their first-place standing with a 7-0 win.

As of press time, the Lakers are 5-0-1 with 11 points, three points ahead of Brantford in the league standings. They have a busy weekend ahead: a road game against the Jr. Rangers at Sportsworld Arena in Kitchener on Oct. 23, a two-day exhibition series in Michigan, and a late-afternoon home game against the Sun County Panthers at the Rotary Complex on Oct. 25.

Aces bounce back for the weekend sweep

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Aces had a strong weekend, winning both games at home at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

Meghan Graham, Brooklynn Ahrens and Kylin Wilson shared with the Times what the team expects from the season ahead.

"I think last year was sort of a good warm-up. We've been together now for two years, most of the girls on this team, and so I think that as we go into this next season, the expectations are to win and to go further, a lot further than last year. And I think I see that coming as we go," Graham said.

"... We have more chemistry. We're all used to playing together now, so it's just

about bringing the new girls in and getting them to be part of everything. And so far, it's worked," Ahrens said.

"We ended last year with a great season, so we're trying to bring that into the beginning of this season and start off strong instead of starting later in the season," Wilson said.

The Aces opened the season earlier this month with a 2-0 loss to the Windsor Wildcats on Oct. 3, then bounced back the next day with a 3-1 road win over the Owen Sound Ice Hawks. The following weekend, the team competed in the Durham West Tournament, finishing with a 0-2-3 record.

Looking to regain their form, the Aces opened the scoring against the London Devilettes on Oct. 17 at the Rotary Complex when Joey Binning found the net 2:35 into the first period. London tied it early

in the second, but Skylar Macey set up Binning for the game-winner with 51.9 seconds remaining. Stratford then held off a late London rally with an extra attacker during the final 34 seconds to secure its first home win of the season, a 2-1 nail-biter.

After the win, Binning and Macey discussed the result with the Times.

"Definitely felt good. We had a really good start with the first no third shift. We got a goal. We let them back in for a bit, and then we capitalized right up here again," Binning said.

"It feels really good after our tournament where we didn't win a game to come back to the regular season and get a win," Macey said.

Aces head coach Sean Cameron says the team's performance against London was its best of the season so far.

"That was one of the first complete games that I, as a coaching staff, felt that we played. We played all three periods, and there was a battle. Credit to London; they played a very good game. I thought we forechecked the puck really well, and we had a good combination, with Sky Macy and Joe Binning scoring both our goals. And you know, Binner put a puck in with 51 seconds left to secure us the win. It just feels good," Cameron said.

The Aces hosted the Bluewater Hawks in an Oct. 18 matinee and won 6-1. The victory improved their record to 3-1, putting them in second place, two points behind the first-place Windsor Wildcats in the OWHA-Southern League's West Division.

Next up for the Aces this week is against the Owen Sound Ice Hawks at the Rotary Complex on Oct. 24.



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SMHA AA Weekly: Warriors get the split

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford AA Warriors posted a similar split in their results over the past week of ALLIANCE AA/A regular-season play.

Stratford U18 played on Oct. 17 against the Cambridge Hawks and on Oct. 18 against the Woodstock Jr. Navy

Vets.

Against Cambridge at the Stratford Rotary Complex, the Hawks struck first in the opening period before the Warriors responded with over five minutes remaining. Stratford took the lead 37 seconds into the second period and added to it with 3:40 left in the period.

Cambridge closed the gap to within a goal at 5:36 into the third period, but the Warriors poured on three more in a span of 2:24 to put the game away in a 6-2 win, putting Stratford at a .500 mark.

At the Reeves Community Centre in Woodstock, the Warriors opened the scoring with a lone goal 54 seconds into the first period. In the second period, Woodstock tied the game with 7:05 left in the middle frame. The home side took the lead 4:31 into the third, but the Warriors tied it at the midway mark of the final frame. Woodstock scored late with under five minutes left, giving the Warriors their third loss of the season.

The U18 Warriors play their only game of the week at the Rotary Complex against the Kitchener Jr. Rangers on Oct. 24.

The U16 Warriors played three games in under a week, all on home ice at the William Allman Memorial Arena and the Rotary Complex.

Stratford's homestand began on Oct. 14 at the Allman Arena against the Mount Brydges Cougars.

Cole Morris opened the scoring with under six minutes left in the first period. Early in the second period, the Warriors ended two Cougars' power plays and doubled their lead on a goal by Liam Kelly with 9:09 left in the middle frame. Stratford endured more time on the penalty kill later in the period, with more success on both occasions as the period drew to a close.

In the third period, the Warriors couldn't extend their lead and eventually surrendered it when Mount Brydges scored twice late, spoiling a strong defensive effort and an excellent performance by netminder Jake Price and resulting in a 2-2 draw.

On Oct. 17 at the Rotary Complex against the Sarnia Jr. Sting, the visitors took the early lead in the first period

on a breakaway goal. Zachary Nicholls tied the game for Stratford with under six minutes left in the first period. The game remained deadlocked until the midway mark of the second period when Sarnia scored twice in over three minutes to take a 3-1 lead.

Stratford pulled one closer early in the third period, with Sam McCarthy scoring at 2:48. But Sarnia restored their two-goal lead for good at 5:52, giving the Warriors a 4-2 defeat.

The U16 Warriors wrapped up their homestand with a late-afternoon matchup with the Jr. Stars at the Allman Arena.

Stratford opened the scoring less than 90 seconds into the game, but St. Thomas tied it over a minute later. St. Thomas took the lead with 6:38 left in the period and held onto the 2-1 lead heading into the third period.

In a wild offensive third period, the Stars extended their lead 62 seconds into the final frame. But the Warriors stormed back with three unanswered goals in less than four minutes courtesy of Kelly, McCarthy and Kesler Carroll. St. Thomas tied the game with 5:59 left, but Carroll replied with the game-winning goal seven seconds after. The Stars fell into late-period trouble and couldn't muster an equalizer as Stratford ended the homestand on a positive note with a 5-4 win.

After the win, U16 Warriors head coach Jamie Morris praised the team's efforts following a week of mixed results.

"The team had a good bounce-back effort here after our Saturday game. We kind of talked going from Wednesday to Saturday to Sunday about playing a full 50 minutes, a full third period. Wednesday kind of didn't necessarily get the result we wanted. We felt we played a pretty good game, and it was nice for the boys to bounce back and stick to the systems and trust each other," Morris said.

Stratford U16 travels to Kitchener on Oct. 23 to face the Jr. Rangers, then returns home to play Kitchener at the Rotary Complex on Oct. 24. On Oct. 25, the team hosts the Woodstock Jr. Navy Vets at the Allman Arena.

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SAL's Bookbar finds a permanent home, the icing on the cake

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Stratford Arts and Lectures (SAL), known for its unique events throughout Stratford, now has a permanent home for its micro-bookstore, SAL's Bookbar, inside Matilda Gallery & Art Bar at 85 Downie St. in downtown Stratford.

The bookshop has been housed inside the art gallery for almost a year, and its popularity has steadily grown thanks to its unique selection of books, from Pulitzer Prize winners and theatre and art books to new and popular fiction and nonfiction. Owner Rina Barone said the collaboration is now permanent.

"Books and art just go together," said Barone. "People love to pop in, and it's getting more and more popular through word of mouth, which has been really exciting."

Alongside its events for book lovers, SAL's Bookbar offers unique sticky-note recommendations throughout the store. Prompts such as "My favourite book this year," "Profoundly moving" and "Laugh and cry" help readers find exactly what they're looking for.

"The sticky notes are actually really great conversation starters," said Barone. "People will ask, 'Is this really the best book you've read this year?' and it starts a conversation about books and leads to all different things."

The shop also carries a range of bookish merchandise, including the popular "Humans Not Algorithms" t-shirts, book totes and sweatshirts.

Alongside the art and books, Matilda Gallery & Art Bar, owned by Sarah Fil-

ion, offers alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, as well as coffee and tea. Visitors can stop in for a drink or coffee, browse the books and artwork or settle in for a little reading in the gallery's unique atmosphere.

Ironically, Barone and Filion both lived around Collingwood for years and owned businesses close to each other. They knew of each other but never crossed paths until they moved to Stratford.

Filion said SAL's Bookbar was the "icing on the cake we didn't know we were missing."

"What began as an offer to host some of her events grew into one little bookshelf, and then a permanent part of the gallery," she continued. "Along the way, Rina brought together my Collingwood and Stratford worlds, which had always felt surprisingly separate."

Beyond its permanent location, where readers can drop in and shop, SAL's Bookbar offers several book-themed events. These include the Spilling the Tea events, which have repeatedly sold out at the Bruce Hotel, as well as the Book Lovers Club, a membership option that lets readers return previously purchased books for a discount on their next read.

The shop also hosts pop-up events tied to highly anticipated book releases. One example is the upcoming sold-out Sarah J. Maas midnight release party for the sixth book in the A Court of Thorns and Roses (ACOTAR) series. Readers can get their hands on early copies and enjoy themed drinks, activities and crafts inspired by the "Massiverse."

"Now Matilda is home to the literary



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Rina Barone, owner of Stratford Arts and Lectures, stands outside SAL's Bookbar at Matilda Gallery & Art Bar in downtown Stratford, its permanent home.

arts as well as the visual, with delicious cocktails named after artists and literary figures to keep the conversation going," said Filion. "I named the gallery after Roald Dahl's Matilda, whose world

opened up through books; I can't help but think she'd approved."

To learn more about the bookshop, book events or membership, visit stratfordartsandlectures.com.

Downtown Stratford BIA's hosts Trick-or-Treating

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Trick-or-treaters of all ages will frolic to downtown Stratford for the annual trick-or-treating event on Halloween afternoon.

The Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) will host the annual Trick-Or-Treating event on Oct. 31 from 1-3 p.m. As of Oct. 20, the day of the interview with the Times, 68 downtown businesses and organizations have signed up to participate and hand out candy and other items. Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the BIA, said there will likely be more businesses joining the list of participating vendors.

"I'm really excited about the participation this year," he said.

The last Trick-Or-Treating event held on Oct. 25, 2025 brought in around 450 kids to the BIA's station at Destination Stratford. Pritchard is expecting around 600 kids to participate in the upcoming event.

"It's really great to see how busy the streets are with flocks of ghosts and goblins and superheroes all running down the street," Pritchard said.

The event also brings in plenty of foot traffic for downtown Stratford's businesses.

"Everybody enjoys it and I hear all the stories of them running out of candy and having to run to the drugstore, Shoppers or Sinclair's to buy some more bags of



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Trick-Or-Treating will return to Downtown Stratford during the afternoon of Oct. 31 with 68 businesses signed up so far. Pictured here are Avalyn, Sophie, Ella, and Harrison at the 2025 event.

candy to keep themselves going," said Pritchard.

The BIA Trick-Or-Treating event ensures a safe trick-or-treating environment for families and gives parents a chance to go shopping, eat lunch and/or have a coffee in the area.

"I'd like to invite everyone to come down and enjoy the Halloween tradition and just experience down-

town at its best," Pritchard said.

The annual Pumpkin Parade will follow at Stratford City Hall on Nov. 1. Residents can drop off their pumpkins for one last display before they are brought to the landfill.

To view a list of participating vendors online, visit <https://tinyurl.com/49unyddd>.

Here For Now Theatre's 2027 season explores the stories we tell, the lives we lead and the legacies we leave behind

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

What makes a life meaningful, and what sort of legacy do we leave behind when our time on this planet comes to an end?

Those are the questions at the heart of Here For Now Theatre's 2027 season, which will explore the stories we tell about ourselves, the stories we inherit and the marks we leave on the world through seven mainstage productions, two limited engagements and three public readings of new Canadian plays.

And while those questions may seem rather heavy, founding artistic director Fiona Mongillo says audiences can expect plenty of laughter along the way, with five of the seven mainstage productions being comedies.

"I read a lot of plays this past year. We had a lot of submissions, like a record-breaking number of submissions to the company, and I just chose plays that really moved me, that I felt had a deeply authentic voice," Mongillo said.

"I didn't program with the theme of legacy in mind. But when I sat down to write my note, I realized that actually it is a very strong through line in the plays."

Mongillo said the number of comedies

is unusual for Here For Now, but she was surprised by the quality of comedic writing submitted this year. While comedy can be difficult to write and direct effectively, she said it also provides an opportunity to explore difficult subjects by allowing audiences to lower their emotional defences through laughter.

"I think you feel a lot more when you laugh. ... Those gut punches really hit because you open your heart up through your laughter."

The season features three world premieres, two Canadian premieres and one Ontario premiere, continuing the company's commitment to presenting new and underproduced work by Canadian playwrights.

The mainstage season opens April 27 to May 12, 2027, with the world premiere of *Dancing on the Elephant*, written by Lisa Hagen and directed by Sheila McCarthy, who also starred in the play's film adaptation.

The comedy follows two elderly women, Nora and Edna, whose unlikely friendship at a retirement home brings laughter, mischief and renewed meaning to their lives. Mongillo said she was particularly drawn to the opportunity to tell a story centered on older women, whose experiences are

too often overlooked onstage.

Next is *Love Story*, running May 25 to June 9. Written by Stratford-born playwright Aurora Stewart de Peña and directed by Sabryn Rock, the Canadian premiere follows a young woman who, despite having died, continues to appear at rehearsals as she attempts to reclaim the narrative of her life.

Mongillo said the play's emotional depth and unconventional structure moved her to tears, while its surprisingly light touch prevents the subject matter from becoming overwhelming. Having premiered in New York, the production also represents something of a homecoming for Stewart de Peña.

The Canadian premiere of *The Shoe*, by award-winning Québécois playwright David Paquet and translated by Leanna Brodie, follows from June 22 to July 7. Directed by Bob White, the dark comedy uses the meltdown of an eight-year-old boy to explore mental health, caregiving and the complexities of human relationships.

Mongillo said the play's unusual style and humour immediately captured her attention. She also hopes presenting Paquet's work will help bridge the divide between English- and French-language theatre in Canada.

"There's so many interesting Québécois playwrights, and it would be great to start having more cross-pollination with that world as well," she said.

The Last Days of Jude, by east coast playwright Jody Stevens McCluskey, makes its world premiere July 20 to Aug. 4 under the direction of Rosemary Dunsmore.

Set in Nova Scotia, the play follows a family gathering during the final days of a father's life, exploring the complicated relationships, unresolved issues, memories and moments of laughter that emerge when loved ones come together to say goodbye.

Mongillo described it as a surprisingly hilarious and deeply moving comedy about death, where the ordinary concerns of daily life fall away to reveal what really matters.

The Ontario premiere of Daniel MacIvor's *An Ordinary Afternoon in 1974*, directed by Fiona Highet, runs Aug. 17 to Sept. 1.

Set in a suburban kitchen, the intimate two-person drama follows two women confronting the ends of their marriages and the expectations placed on women in the 1970s. Mongillo said the production will explore the sacrifices women were once expected to make and provide an opportunity for two actors to shine in Here

For Now's intimate performance space.

Just in time for Halloween, *The Last Hanging at Redbridge*, by Paul Van Dyck and directed by Peter Hinton-Davis, makes its world premiere Oct. 26 to Nov. 10, 2027.

Set against the political tensions of 1830s Upper Canada, the historical comedic thriller blends murder, rebellion, revenge and competing accounts of the truth. Mongillo hopes its irreverent humour, mystery and Halloween timing will attract younger audiences and people who might not otherwise attend live theatre.

Finally, Mark Crawford's *Ruby and the Reindeer* returns Dec. 7-22, 2027, with Irene Poole directing once again. The Christmas comedy, set in 1989 Perth County, follows a young girl's discovery of a reindeer in her family's barn.

Following its popular 2025 run, Mongillo said the return is something of an experiment, with the long-term possibility of rotating newly commissioned Canadian Christmas productions and building a holiday theatre tradition in Stratford.

Beyond the mainstage, Here For Now will present two limited engagements: *DORA MAAR: Picasso's Wicked One*, June 14-17, returning after its 2026 engagement, and *Monks*, July 12-15, an award-winning interactive clown comedy created and performed by Annie Luján and Veronica Hortigüela.

The company's play-development reading series will also feature *Talking Sex on Sunday*, a musical comedy by Sara-Jeanne Hosie and Nico Rhodes, Aug. 9; *What Did You See?*, by Paul Dunn, Aug. 30; and *Listen*, by Steve Ross, Nov. 1.

Mongillo said the readings are an important part of Here For Now's role in supporting playwrights from the earliest seeds of an idea through to full productions.

Playwrights spend three mornings working with actors and afternoons developing their scripts with Mongillo and a facilitator before presenting a pay-what-you-will public reading, followed by audience discussion.

The experience allows writers to discover what works, what doesn't and where their scripts might go next, while giving local audiences a rare opportunity to participate in the creative process.

"Even without the talkback ... you can feel when the audience is really with a story and when they are not. And that's so clarifying," Mongillo said.

"They're kind of invited into the process of theatre, not just the production."

For tickets and more information about the 2027 season, visit www.herefornowtheatre.com.

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Local Musician Barry James Payne begins series of concerts collaborating with others

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Beginning Oct. 24 at the Bunker Performance Lounge and Café, Barry James Payne sets off on a jaunt of central Ontario performing in rural venues, London and four dates in Stratford.

Just down the road in Harrington a concert is planned featuring fan favourite recording star Emm Gryner with Payne and international star Luna Keller opening the evening. Keller is an artist from Spain that now lives in Germany coming to Canada for the first time.

"I contacted Emm because she is well connected and I know that Emm loves to support young artists and so do I, so I thought it would be a really nice combination to have Luna and Emm and I together on a show," said Payne.

Payne first became aware of Keller during the pandemic when artists pivoted to online audiences and musician pods on the internet.

"What we were trying to do is ramp up awareness online so people were doing live shows and they were releasing music as much as they could record at home. I

was in this one musician pod and Luna was a member of that pod. She contacted me and asked me if I wanted to be a guest on a show that she was running called 'Why hasn't everyone heard these songs?' and we've been in touch ever since," said Payne.

When Keller posted on social media that she was planning on coming to Canada, Payne learned that of all places she could have chosen, she was going to be in St. Marys, just down the road, and they swiftly planned gigs together. They will be together in Harrington, the Bunker, Utopia, London and in Dorchester with Brent Jones who recently opened for the uber talented Bob Wiseman here in Stratford.

As part of the singer/songwriter series at the Bunker, Payne, Keller and Julia Godden will each be doing a set on Oct. 30, offering an intimate opportunity to experience Keller in town.

Upon completion of the rural and London dates remain two great shows that will attract crowds. First up is the fundraiser for Shelterlink with the 35th Black Swan Coffee House reunion featuring many artists. Perhaps most fondly

remembered is Perth County Conspiracy (does not exist) which could draw the likes of Cedric Smith, Terry Jones and David Woodhead along with other Conspirators. Payne will be appearing with his full band Stringbone for an afternoon of folk songs performed by special guests.

Finally, appearing at Grayson Mills on Nov. 20, Payne will be playing with his Blue Rodeo tribute band, Diamond Mine, which has caught the attention of Wiseman, founding member of Blue Rodeo who appeared in Stratford recently.

"I'm a huge fan of Blue Rodeo and to be able to sing their songs, a whole evening of their songs and play with a fantastic band and have the audience sing along to a lot of these songs is just such a great experience. We try to play venues that Blue Rodeo just never gets to so it's a great evening for Blue Rodeo fans," said Payne. "I was contacted in August of this year by Bob Wiseman who is a good friend of Kelly McIntosh, executive director of the Stratford Perth Museum who presented our band Diamond Mine this year. Bob receives the newsletter and when he saw the notification of the event,

he contacted Kelly and asked for my contact information," shared Payne.

Upon learning of Diamond Mine, three things came to Wiseman's mind which he communicated to Payne in a message. First, he thought it was kind of funny. Second, he thought they must be pretty talented if they're playing Blue Rodeo songs and third, he wondered what it would be like to jam with these guys. And jam they did.

Something else on Payne's mind is the new mural Strike up the Band, located on Ontario Street. Two bands in which he has had the pleasure of performing, Stringbone and Rant Maggie Rant, are depicted on the record in the mural celebrating local artists.

"It's an honour and a validation of the work that I've done for almost 20 years of promoting music in Stratford. I played guitar in Rant Maggie Rant for 12 years and co-managed the band. We were at a point where when we played Knox Church we would sell 450 tickets, which can be hard to do in this town unless you are of a certain stature," said Payne.

For a complete listing of concert dates and to buy tickets, visit stringbone.ca



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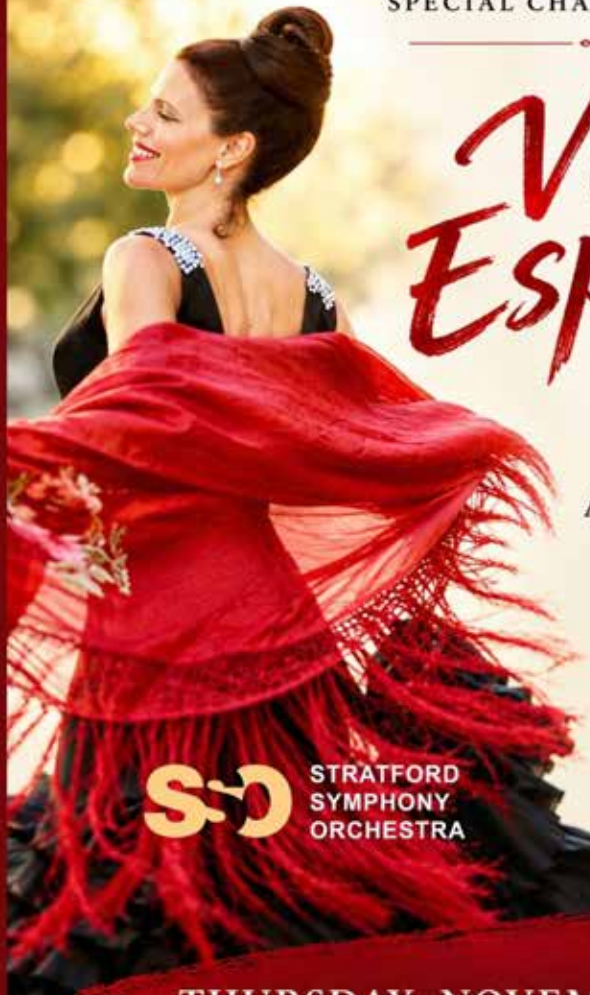
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ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Editorial

Who's voting for the future of our communities?



AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Here's a hot take: I think municipal elections are among our most important elections. And when you look at how few people vote in them, I think we need to ask why.

I recently came across statistics on voter turnout in southwestern Ontario's 2022 municipal elections, and some of the numbers surprised me.

In Waterloo Region, overall turnout was just 25.34 per cent. In Guelph, it was 27.96 per cent. Stratford did considerably better, with 43.9 per cent of eligible voters casting a ballot, while Wilmot Township recorded 40.35 per cent turnout.

That means roughly one in four eligible voters participated in Waterloo Region. Even in Stratford, which had the highest turnout of the communities mentioned here, more than half of eligible voters stayed home.

In Tillsonburg, voter turnout was about 37.6 per cent in 2022 – higher than Guelph's 27.96 per cent, but still meaning that most eligible voters did not cast a ballot.

It makes you wonder why some communities see more people showing up than others. Personally, I'd like to think it's because we have such amazing local news sources keeping people informed, but I might be a little partial. Wink, wink.

The numbers also raise questions about who is participating. A City of Guelph survey of 500 residents about the 2022 municipal election found that 29 per cent of respondents said they had voted. Among respondents aged 18 to 24, that figure was just 12 per cent, compared with 57 per cent among those aged 75 and older.

These figures reflect what survey respondents said,

rather than a count of every voter in each age group. Still, they suggest that younger residents may be less engaged with municipal elections – and that's worth thinking about.

I recently spoke with Kiera Upward, a 21-year-old who ran for Ward 1 council in Wilmot Township. One reason she ran was to give people of different ages a voice at the council table. She ultimately stepped down for personal reasons, as I reported in last week's Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette.

Her story got me thinking about who gets a seat at the table when decisions are made about our communities. Who decides where new housing gets built, how much we pay in property taxes, which roads get repaired and what recreation facilities our towns need? And are younger residents – the people who will live with many of these decisions for decades – being heard?

Representation is another part of the conversation. East Zorra-Tavistock's current council has seven members, all men. That observation doesn't tell us everything about how effectively the township is represented, and a council doesn't have to mirror

CONTINUED TO PAGE 21



CORRECTION: In the Oct. 9 edition of the Stratford Times, in the article "5 candidates, 12 questions," the 288-bed long-term care home Maritn Ritsma referred to was incorrectly described as being next to Stratford General Hospital. It is located at 3188 Vivian Line 37. The Times regrets any confusion this error caused.

Quote of the Week

"On October 19, Albertans made a clear choice. They chose unity, to build together, and to take care of each other. Above all, Albertans chose Canada ... Canada is so much greater than the sum of its parts. Now it is our opportunity to take all that we have been given as Canadians – and we have been given the greatest country in the world – and make our country better for all of us."

– Prime Minister Mark Carney on Alberta's separatist referendum.

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Opinion

Who's voting for the future of our communities?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

every aspect of its population to make good decisions. But it does raise a reasonable question: who puts their name forward, who gets elected and who feels welcome in local politics?

Municipal government can sometimes seem less important than what happens at Queen's Park or in Ottawa. But local decisions affect our daily lives in very direct ways, from property taxes and road repairs to housing, parks, recreation and public services.

We often hear about the importance of voting in provincial and federal elections. Municipal elections deserve that same attention. The people elected locally make de-

cisions that can shape our neighbourhoods and communities for years to come.

So, if turnout is as low as one in four eligible voters in some communities, we should be asking why. Do people know what their municipal government is responsible for? Do they feel their vote won't make a difference? Or have we simply become accustomed to paying less attention to the politics happening in our own backyards?

I don't think there's one simple answer. But if we want our communities to reflect our needs, priorities and hopes for the future, we have to take part in choosing the people who make those decisions.

And that starts with showing up to vote.

What we choose to carry into autumn



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

October has a way of drawing our attention to what is changing. Along Stratford's streets and the Avon River, leaves loosen their grip and settle onto sidewalks, lawns and water. We reach for warmer sweaters, bring outdoor plants inside and notice how early evening arrives.

Yet while we adjust to the season around us, we sometimes forget to consider what we are carrying with us. An old obligation, a lingering disagreement or an expectation that no longer fits can follow us from one season into the next. We grow accustomed to its weight and stop questioning whether we still need to carry it.

Perhaps we agreed to volunteer when our schedule was less crowded. Perhaps we continue hosting every family occasion because we have always done so. Or perhaps we hold ourselves to an image of who we should be, even though our circumstances and priorities have

changed.

October offers a quiet opportunity to take stock. What still deserves our attention? What has become a habit rather than a meaningful choice? Where might a little breathing room make daily life more manageable?

These questions do not require dramatic answers. We can begin with something small: declining one invitation, asking someone to share a responsibility or abandoning a household standard that creates more tension than comfort. A home can welcome people without looking ready for a photograph. A friendship can remain strong when we honestly say that this week is full.

Sometimes the hardest things to release are the expectations we place on ourselves. We may believe that being dependable means always being available, or that being a good neighbour means never disappointing anyone. But dependability also involves knowing what we can reasonably offer and following through on those commitments.

Letting go can involve making room for another person to contribute. When we step back from organizing everything, someone else may discover that they enjoy taking part. When we ask for help, we give people a clearer picture of what we need.

There are also disappointments we cannot simply decide to put down. A difficult relationship, a missed opportunity or a painful change may need time and attention. We

can acknowledge that something still hurts while choosing how much of today we want to spend revisiting it. We can talk it through, write about it or turn toward an activity that helps us feel present again.

One practical approach is to examine the coming week before filling it. Leave a space that belongs to you, even if it is only an hour. Resist the urge to immediately assign that time a useful purpose. Sit outside, browse the library or enjoy your tea while it is still warm.

We can also reconsider the belongings that crowd our homes. A cupboard full of unused items may represent hobbies we once enjoyed or plans we never pursued. Passing something along does not erase that chapter of our lives. It may simply acknowledge that our interests have moved elsewhere.

As autumn deepens, consider one thing you might carry more lightly. It could be an obligation that needs renegotiating, an unnecessary purchase or the belief that every spare hour must be productive.

Then consider what you would like to make room for: an unhurried conversation, a walk among the changing trees, an evening with a book or time to finish something that matters to you.

We cannot control how quickly the leaves fall or when the cold arrives. We can, however, make a few deliberate choices about how we live through this season. Sometimes a fuller life begins with just a little less weight to carry.

A wee drap sp'ritual burn*

(on the occasion of Stratford Rotary's Scotch Mist event, Arden Park Hotel, October 17th, 2026)

I downed the sweetest dram the other night,
all peaty smoke and amber fire,
and the rain came pecking at my windows then
but I could not foretell what would transpire.

O ye golden Scotch, ye bonnie thing,
ye holy beverage of misty hills and flame,
ye melt the insides of my heart
and free those knots inside my brain.

So as I twirled my Scotch about
and warmed its gold between my hands,
I thought of Annie of the Highlands then
and how we'd loved and walked the sands.

For Scotch is more than just a drink, my friend,
it's memory set ablaze,
and while the rain silvered the ferns outside
I dreamed of Annie and our loving days.

And then a most remarkable thing occurred,
Scotch creates strange twists and turns,
for suddenly there beside my fire
stood that great poet, Robbie Burns.

He held a Scotch within his hands,
not a dram but a frickin' quart,
and he looked not at me but through me
and what he said I must report.

"Love," said he, as he sipped his drink,
"is like a red, red rose, my friend,
its blossom depends on care, me lad,
or its bloom comes to a withered end."

"And remember," he said, as his eyes glared on,
"while you ponder Annie and life's curves,
a woman may forget deeds, laddie,
but they ne'er, o they ne'er forget words."

And with one last pull on his quart of drams
behind him a great light shone,
then he clicked his heels, quoted a poem or two
and in an instant he was gone.

Oh the rain flicked away at my windows
and I knew what I had to do,
I picked up my phone and I called my Annie
and into that receiver I said, "I love you."

You see, a good Scotch is a kind of lubricant,
it juices the mind and it oils the heart,
it makes everything right in the world again
and joins together all that has come apart.

So raise a dram for humankind tonight,
raise a dram for life's twists and churns,
oh raise a dram made of mists and toffeed flame
for my beautiful Annie and for Robbie Burns.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

*Poem title a quote from the Robbie Burns poem, "Scotch Drink."

Submit your letter to the editor to us!

Call 519-655-2341

Or email stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Opinion

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL: WORK WORTH DOING



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

There are those who find it difficult, for one reason or another, to accept compliments. That is often understood and may have been experienced by you, dear reader, at some point or another, as it has for many. The simple “thank you” is choked out by the compliment itself. Why is that? I never asked myself that question when it was me at the receiving end of a compliment, struggling for words. Perhaps it was a result of our own disbelief. Perhaps it was the shyness in those early days, and often, it still is for those who merely smile in response and say nothing. I’m no longer silent. I’m no longer shy.

If you have been following my “opinion” column in the Stratford Times on a regular basis, you probably know that for all of my adult life I have looked a little deeper for the meaning of our lives (particularly my own) and have unearthed a spring of gratitude from which flows ceaseless abundance. And for that abundant gratitude – “thank you” is light upon the lips and freely spoken.

As a compassionate care worker, never am I more humbled than when there is a hug offered, a card dropped off at the funeral home, or someone has graciously picked fresh fruit or vegetables from their garden and offered them for my role in their loss. That acknowledgement always feels poignant to me. I’ve come to see, largely due to focusing on what I can contribute to this world before I die, that most of the world-machine runs as a result of a great many others who are never seen and sometimes under-acknowledged. Not because they don’t deserve recognition – they certainly do – but because they are simply not so much in the public eye. Their recognition often stems from

internal values, rather than unstable external factors. And so it should be for everyone – personal confidence in a job well done without the need for repetitive praise. Appreciation through an employer is part of maintaining a strong and satisfying work relationship of course, but knowing one’s own worth in one’s own heart is essential to joy.

The unsung toilers behind the scenes are in the majority in our world – the factory workers that produce and package what we purchase, the 4 a.m. bakers that create the fresh bread and treats that tantalize us when the cafe or bakery opens, the chefs who literally feed the experience of our visits in restaurants, the army of technicians, designers, musicians, coaches, seamstresses, hair and wig and props people that elevate our theatre magic, the custodians and straighteners of our hotel rooms, offices and buildings, the early morning deliverers of goods and supplies and the removers of our waste along our streets – all are behind the scenes of an endeavour which is the furtherance of some manner of service to the public. You might be one of them.

There are many more that simply don’t pass our mental radar until we turn it on and wonder about our good fortune and the benefits we receive from others. We simply cannot live as we do without those that feed our lives and those whose lives we feed. There is the ocean, and there are the drops that form that ocean.

We should try to become aware of the full scope of what one contributes through one’s efforts – look deeply at what the work offers, in relation to others. It is essential work. And besides the tangible result of what we undertake, there is also the manner in which it is undertaken. We contribute in many ways, beyond the work itself, to our own and another’s well-being, whether it be physical, mental or emotional.

For my own part, I have worked hard to create a funeral home that is based, first and foremost, upon clear information regarding all things related to death and dying – secondly, on the sense that I am clearly aware that those I serve are no different than myself when it comes to the inevitable end. I’ve discovered that these efforts have created a kind

of neighbourly awareness and understanding, where sadness and gratefulness are exchanged through the unspoken fact of our shared mortality – the one thing that underlies everyone’s reality.

I have struggled sometimes with the ramifications of being so transparent and forthcoming in my efforts to educate and dispel the myths of my trade, but it is that very transparency that has caused me the immeasurable gift of settling into the sobering awareness of knowing what I do makes a difference. Just as what you do does – in some way, perhaps, not yet known by you.

We are, every one of us, servers within the wider stratum and it may be seen easily enough, through the right lens. To do so, it is up to us to look beyond ourselves and what we do day to day; to know our contributions and hopefully recognize the differences we make.

Stuart is a celebrant and the manager of Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. It is his privilege to serve, dispel myths, and give information concerning his field of compassionate service.

**Invite readers to your
worship services.**

Contact

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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226 Forman Avenue 519-271-4539

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*11:00 a.m. – Fellowship and
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STRATFORD TIMES

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Quality Festival Inn
McDonald's - Ontario St.
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A&W
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Rutherford Funeral Home

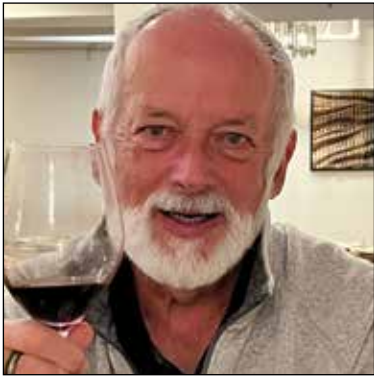
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The Livery Yard
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Annie's Seafood Restaurant
Avon Pharmacy

Pick Up Locations

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Controversial attraction reopened in Baden



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

One of the most controversial visitor destinations in Canada is located about 10 minutes from my front door. It's the Prime Ministers Path, an installation of statues of Canadian Prime Ministers in Baden. It has generated a tonne of debate, which at one point resulted in the dismantling of the whole thing – the prime ministers were relegated to an unidentified storage unit. Then, this September, came the reestablishment of the installation.

The Prime Ministers Path was conceived in 2013, a plan that would eventually see sculptures of all Canadian Prime Ministers (currently numbering 24) exhibited in an outdoor setting.

The launch of the project took place in 2016. It's understandable that the first statue put in place was of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. But it's also understandable that this installation proved to be the most controversial, because of Macdonald's undeniably horrendous policies concerning Indigenous Canadians.

Three more statues were added in 2017 – Robert Borden, William Lyon MacKenzie King and Lester B. Pearson – and Canada's first and only female prime minister, Kim Campbell, was added the next year.

But controversy was brewing, and



The newest addition to the Prime Ministers Path in Baden – Nathan Scott's "The Unfortunate Four" depicting four Canadian Prime Ministers who served briefly in office – from left, Sir MacKenzie Bowell, Sir John Abbott, Sir Charles Tupper, Sir John Thompson.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

as the nation became more aware of the horrors of residential schools and other national policies that had caused incredible harm to Indigenous peoples, protests erupted across the country, including in Baden. The statue of Macdonald attracted the most push-back, as protesters coated the sculpture in red paint.

By 2020, the local municipal council voted to remove all five statues and place them in storage in a secret location. But that action, too, prompted push-back from the community.

The most recent development has involved turning the project over to the original sponsor, Createscape Waterloo Region, which led to the reinstallation of the statues, plus a new work featuring four more prime ministers. The path was relaunched in September of this year. As before, it sits beside Castle Kilbride, the national historic site which adjoins the Wilmot Township municipal office.

But where once, Macdonald's statue stood at the front of the property, facing Snyder's Road, now, the orientation has been shifted 180 degrees, with the Prime Ministers Path sign and Macdonald's sculpture facing north, onto Wagler Avenue.

So, is this all a good idea? Opinions about this will always be strong and varied.

The Prime Ministers Path website openly admits that history is challenging. It contends that "history is complex," and adds, "Understanding our history also means understanding how it has affected Canadians and how those Canadians perceive Canada's history."

I was never comfortable with the decision to dismantle the path. In doing so, the very positive stories of Lester Pearson (who won the Nobel Peace Prize) and Kim Campbell (who broke the gender barrier) were shoved into dusty storage. But I am also not comfortable with glorifying

Canadian politicians who have made horrible decisions, chief among them Macdonald and King.

Createscape says they have worked with Indigenous groups in reintroducing the path, and that the full, complex stories of these leaders will be told. That is crucial.

I think it highly appropriate that the statues of Macdonald and King were designed by their artists (local sculptor Ruth Abernethy for Macdonald and Morgan MacKenzie for King) to include seats for visitors. I know these will be treated as selfie spots for many, but I also hope that folks will sit and ask themselves (and the spirits of the late PMs) the tough questions. "Why did Macdonald decide to strip Indigenous people of their heritage?" "Why did King think it okay to send a shipload of Jewish refugees back to Germany, where most died in concentration camps?"

These are the reality of the histo-

ry of these Canadian leaders, but as historians will tell you, the story is more complex and we need to grapple with all of this. We recently did a walking tour in Kingston where our guide acknowledged the evils of Macdonald's tenure, but also insisted, "Without John A. Macdonald, there would be no Canada." And that is also, I suspect, the truth.

So, properly considered, the Prime Ministers Path presents a unique opportunity for visitors to consider – in fact, to confront – the complicated history of this country, perhaps even to realize that the evils of the past created problems and challenges still calling for solutions today. I hope visitors will leave the path with their heads fully out of the sand, and full of thoughts about the realities of Canadian history,

and that this is an issue largely overlooked in the controversy. They will also have the opportunity to appreciate some very fine works of art. Ruth Abernethy, a Wellesley resident, has been made a Member of the Order of Canada for her work. Other artists represented here include Nathan Scott (Borden) and Darren Byers and Fred Harrison (Campbell). As well, when the path was reopened, a terrific new piece was added – Nathan Scott's "The Unfortunate Four," four PMs who had short terms and lesser impacts on our history.

The plan is for the path to continue to grow over the next four decades. I hope there will be thousands of meaningful conversations and personal reflections sparked by this controversial but important installation.

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.



Canada's controversial first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, sculpted by Ruth Abernethy.



Morgan MacKenzie created the statue of William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Waterloo Region native who was Canada's longest-serving Prime Minister.

Crossword

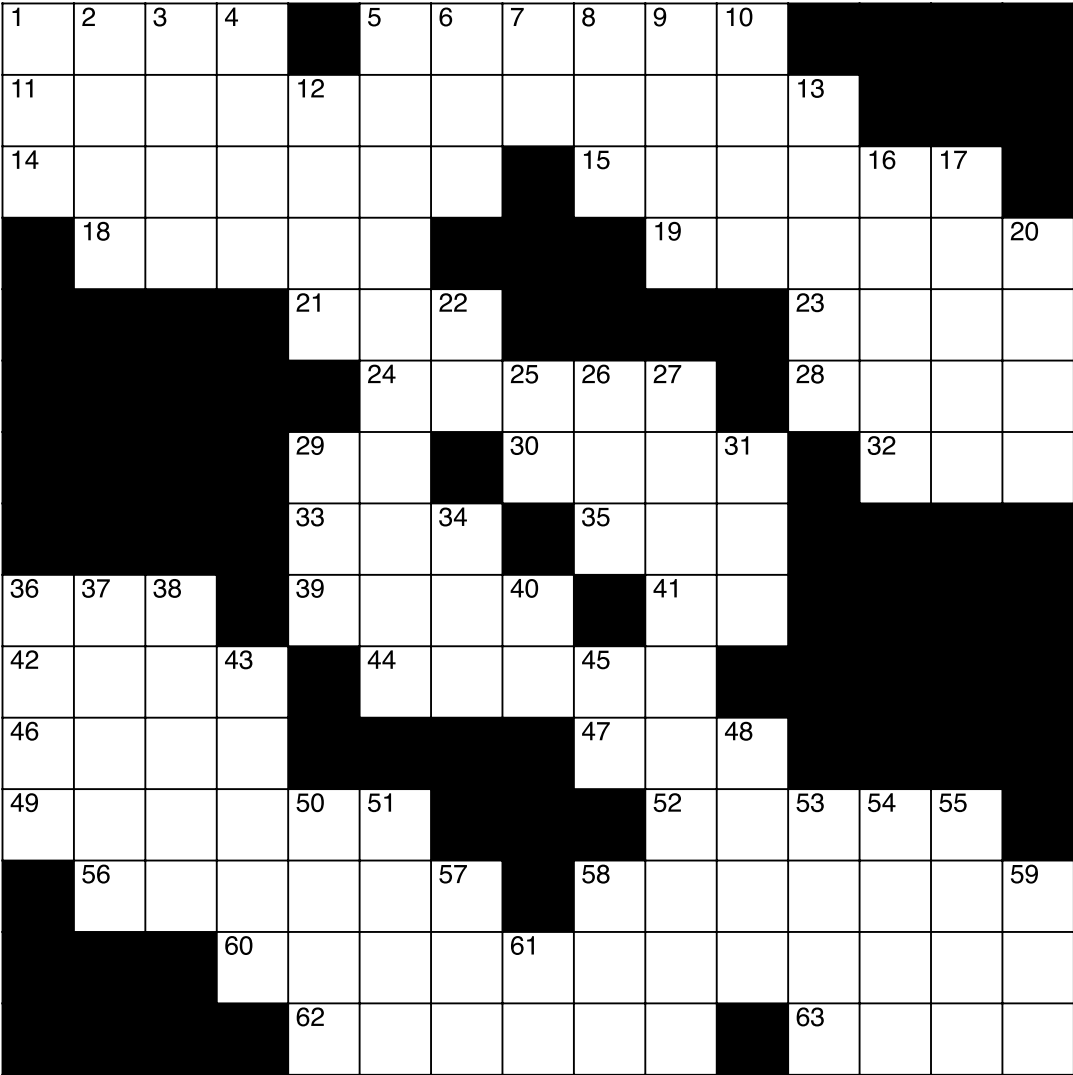
CLUES ACROSS

1. El Dorado High School
5. A sculpture representing a human or animal
11. A type of return
14. Tie the knot again
15. Washington city
18. Hairlike structures
19. Mark used over a vowel
21. Explosive
23. Popular 500 car race
24. Pile up
28. Currency
29. Commercial
30. A minute amount (Scottish)
32. Mass of fish eggs
33. Baseball stat
35. Licensed accountant
36. Japanese classical theater
39. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
41. Blood group
42. Assist in wrongdoing
44. Language of Cameroon
46. Grayish-white
47. A woolen cap of Scottish origin
49. Microorganism
52. Strong social customs
56. Calm and dependable
58. Congressman
60. Force
62. As a result of this document
63. A main branch of Islam

CLUES DOWN

1. Make a mistake
2. American DJ Rick
3. Fictional Asimov planet

4. Coughed out
5. Singing to one's lover
6. Scotland's longest river
7. One of the six noble gases
8. Body art
9. Two-toed sloth
10. Electronic counter-countermeasures
12. A foolish person
13. Of the wind
16. Mansion
17. Sound
20. English river
22. Business symbol
25. Exclamation of surprise
26. Pouch
27. Individually
29. Satisfaction
31. The bill in a restaurant
34. Japanese delicacy
36. Port in southern Japan
37. Double-reed instruments
38. Center
40. "The Mount Rushmore State"
43. Soldier
45. Indicates position
48. Beauty treatment: __-pedi
50. Nonsense (slang)
51. Republic of Ireland
53. Ballplayers' tools
54. American state
55. Clusters of a fern frond
57. Patriotic women's group
58. A person's brother or sister
59. Breed of sheep
61. Of I



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Pet of the week



BLIZZARD

Meet Blizzard, a 7-month-old rabbit who is ready to hop her way into your heart! This sweet, curious girl loves having space to explore, discover new things, and show off her charming personality.

She's looking for a loving home where she can settle in at her own pace, feel safe, and be her wonderful self. With patience, care, and plenty of love, Blizzard could make a very special companion.

Could Blizzard be the missing piece of your family? Meet this lovely girl by contacting our Stratford Centre or online at kwsphumane.ca/adopt/small-animals



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	9						8
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COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

CROKINOLE

Men's and Ladies' Crokinole is held every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Bring your fingers and cues! For more information, contact Oliver at 519-508-5664.

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathawy Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford

Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games. Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room #1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

STEPS FOR SUPPORT

Every Tuesday morning and once a month on a Monday afternoon.

Hosted by Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth www.rotaryhospice.ca

Stratford Location

This walking group is an opportunity for people who are grieving to connect while walking alongside others who are bereaved. Contact Jaclyn at sw@rotaryhospice.ca to learn more and register. This is a free program.

PROBUS CLUB OF STRATFORD

Army Navy & Air Force Veterans Unit 261

151 Lorne Ave E, Stratford, ON N5A 2N9

Probus provides Fellowship, Friendship, and Fun for all men and women in their retirement and semi-retirement years.

We meet the 2nd Wednesday - September until June from 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. Website <https://www.probusclubstratford.com/>

Email probusclubstratford@gmail.com

CAREGIVER CONNECTION

2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month at 1-2:30 p.m.

Arden Park Hotel

Caregiver Connection is a group for caregivers supporting someone with a life-limiting illness or decline due to aging. Learn about community resources, caregiver tools, and talk with others on a similar journey. All caregivers welcome whether you're a spouse, family member, friend, etc. supporting someone from near or far. Contact 226-921-7314 or referrals@rotaryhospice.ca to register. Free program.

Hosted by Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth - www.rotaryhospice.ca

YOUTH AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Mondays, 3:00-4:45 p.m., September 14/26-June 21/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free drop-in for students aged 11-18. Join us for snacks, board games, video games, and connection! Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

GRIEF SHARE

Stratford Christian Reformed Church, 190 Athone Crescent (parking on the upper level)

September 14 - December 14

Monday 1:00-2:30pm

When a loved one dies, it can feel like you're alone. Few people understand how painful & isolating your grief can be. At GriefShare, you'll find a safe, comforting place where you can talk with others about your grief. Contact: griefstratfordcrgroup2627@gmail.com Register: griefshare.org/findagroup

YOUTH LUNCH PERIOD PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., September 30/26-June 16/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free drop-in for high school students. Join us for snacks, games, connection (and occasional pizza parties!).

Questions?

www.yfcstratford.com

info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

PURE HEART PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Wednesdays, 3:00-4:30 p.m., September 30/26-June 16/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free art program for students aged 11-18. Join us for discussions, guest artists, art instruction, and more! Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

CHANGE HER WORLD FALL BOOK SALE

Friday, October 23 10:00 - 8:00

Saturday, October 24 9:00 - 2:00

Belgrave Community Centre

Accessible parking, food booth Friday & beverages Thursday & Saturday. Payment by donation

All proceeds raised support the library in Chilumba, Malawi, Africa COME STOCK -UP on winter reading.

CHRISTOPHER LEADERSHIP COURSE (CLC HURON-PERTH)

Starting October 22; 7-10 p.m.

Spruce Lodge

Overcome your fear of public speaking and learn new skills. Age 16 and over. Pre-registration is encouraged. clcnational.com or call Ben at 519-703-4157 or Darlene at 226-880-2115.

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY CIRCUIT BOOK (STAMP) FAIR

Saturday, October 24, 2026

Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street, Woodstock

10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Free Admission & Parking

Stop in and buy some stamps and meet fellow stamp collectors.

About 8 participating stamp clubs. Contact: dheaton3e3@gmail.com

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

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB [L2S]

Monthly on Sundays, 2-4 p.m.

First meeting Oct. 25 at Griffith Auditorium, Woodland Towers.

Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/hour, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamanagement.com/l2s

14TH ANNUAL STRATFORD PUMPKIN PARADE

Sunday, November 1; 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Market Square (behind City Hall) 1 Wellington St, Stratford

Pumpkin Drop-off: Starting at 12:00 PM

Give your carved pumpkins one last glowing send-off before Patch earns their degree in soil science (and becomes next year's garden

compost).

What to expect: Free Hot Chocolate donated by Tim Hortons; Ken's French Fries; Family Photo Stations; Photos with Patch the Pumpkin Drop off your pumpkin starting at 12 PM and then bring the whole family later that evening to stroll through the pumpkin display, grab some warm treats, and celebrate Halloween's grand finale Sponsored by the Stratford Communities in Bloom Advisory Committee

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday November 2; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "The Stratford Festival Gardens", by a Gardener from the Stratford Festival

Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, November 3, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

93 Morgan St., Stratford

Speaker – Kimberley Toohey RD, Dietician

'Dietary concerns and considerations for ostomates'

Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRES

Friday, November 13; 6 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

November 13 – The next Stratford Legion Friday Night Euchre is Friday Nov. 13th. Sign up your team of 2 for \$20 by calling the Legion at 519-271-4540, Dave at 519-703-6544 or Anne at 519-301-0914. Doors open at 6 p.m., games start at 6:30 p.m.

LONDON ORCHID SOCIETY

Sunday, November 15; 2 to 4 p.m.

Richards Memorial Church, 360 Edgeworth Avenue, London, ON

Meeting Topic: Dan Doucette, Niagara Falls, ON; Presentation

Hidden Gems of West Africa

The London Orchid Society meets the third Sunday of each month. Join us November 15, 2026 at 2:00pm for Dan Doucette from Niagara, ON. His presentation is on the Hidden Gems of West Africa, Wildlife, History and Landscapes of Sierra Leone and Mauritania. Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting for more information at www.londonorchidsociety.com; contact Daryl at 519-666-2927.

BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Thursday, November 19

Legion 804 Ontario St.

Doors open at 4 p.m. Take-out orders are from 5:00 – 5:30 p.m. and table service starts at 5:30 p.m. No ticket is necessary, simply show up and enjoy. Bring your friends and help support your local Legion.

SAINT JOSEPH'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS MARKET

St. Joseph's Church Parish Hall

96 Huron St. Stratford

Parking access rear of church

Saturday November 21; 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Join us for a festive market where you can purchase a variety of baked goods, crafts, 'new to you' table, silent Auction and lunch bar!

Proceeds to the church and community

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

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

CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

ANNIVERSARY

Happy 60th Anniversary



In the fall of 2026, life-long friends, Pat & Gary Smith and Diana & Paul Brown, celebrated together their 60th anniversaries in the Thousand Islands near Gananoque ON.

ANNIVERSARY

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

JUNK REMOVAL

JUNK REMOVAL – Garbage, Basements, Yards, Dump Runs. Call Mike 519-276-7766

HELP WANTED



SEASONAL EQUIPMENT OPERATOR / TRUCK DRIVER

The Township of Perth South is seeking a qualified equipment operator/truck driver who would be available to work on a seasonal basis for winter maintenance purposes from December 1st, 2026 until March 31st, 2027. Reporting to the Operations Manager, applicants will be experienced with the ability to operate various pieces of equipment, such as wheel loaders, road graders, and tandem dump trucks equipped with snow plow, wing, and sander. The operator may be required to perform other duties within the Public Works Department, along with other miscellaneous labour duties from time to time.

Applicants must have a valid "D" license with a "Z" endorsement. Experience in road and/or equipment maintenance would be an asset. This position is subject to weekend scheduling and 24 hr. call-out, with a minimum of 32 hours a week.

The salary range for this position is **\$27.73 – \$34.67 per hour** for 2026.

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

Interested candidates are invited to submit a detailed resume expressing their interest to the undersigned clearly marked as "seasonal operator" by **October 29th 2026**.

Ken Bettles, Director of Public Works
Township of Perth South
3191 Road 122, St. Pauls, ON NOK 1V0
Email - kbettles@perthsouth.ca

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

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\$ Cash Paid \$ for your RECORDS and LPs. Jazz, Blues, Rock, Pop, Folk, Soundtracks, and more. Selectively buying CDs, Cassettes, Turntables, and Stereo Equipment. For more information: **DIAMOND DOGS MUSIC** 114 Ontario St. Stratford / 226-972-5750

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

WANTED

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

WORKING TYPEWRITER – Will buy or trade for 26" men's bike or 3-wheeled baby stroller with air wheels. Call 519-753-4535.

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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

SUDOKU

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