

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Motor vehicle collisions in Oxford up substantially this winter

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This winter has been the most volatile and dangerous for Oxford County and Wilmot Township motorists, leading to a record number of collisions. But, according to one member of the Oxford Ontario Provincial Police detachment, it doesn't need to be that way.

Const. Randi Crawford said the OPP doesn't have rankings of causes for winter collisions, but the top few are very obvious. Driving too fast for the conditions and following too closely.

"It happens all the time and with any type of vehicle, be it a commercial motor vehicle, a small car, an SUV or a pick-up truck. All types of vehicles seem to be driving too fast for the conditions."

When it comes to being too close to the vehicle in front, Crawford said tractor-trailers aren't always at fault.

"When one jackknifes, people may jump to the conclusion that the truck was going too fast for the road conditions, which could have been a contributing factor. But people sometimes cut them off and those trucks take time to slow down, and if they have to slam on their brakes in this weather, they are going to jackknife."

Crawford added driving distracted and, in a hurry, can also cause collisions in winter weather.

"If the world were an ideal place and we could all drive properly and not have to be defensive, but when you are driving in unpredictable weather, you have to prepare yourself to deal with unpredictable behaviours by other drivers."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



SOUTH GATE CENTRE EXPANSION OPENS

(ANITA LAGOS PHOTO)

Woodstock's South Gate Centre's \$7 million expansion was officially opened at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday, Jan. 21. Story on page 12.

Area municipalities take part in ROMA conference

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The annual Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) Conference was held last week in Toronto, and many area politicians attended the three-day event.

ROMA is the rural voice of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). A number of its executive members serve on the AMO board of directors. ROMA undertakes policy, research and advocacy activities through AMO.

The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) were present at the event, engaging with provincial leaders to advance priorities that strengthen communities across

Western Ontario. The conference provided a platform for WOWC to share municipal perspectives, address pressing challenges, and explore collaborative solutions with provincial partners.

"Western Ontario municipalities are dealing with complex challenges that affect residents' daily lives, from staffing shortages in essential services to the need for robust municipal infrastructure that supports growth, community safety and well-being," said WOWC Chair and Oxford Warden Marcus Ryan. "ROMA provides a vital opportunity to bring these local realities directly to provincial leaders, ensuring decisions reflect the needs of our communities and support practical, sustainable solutions."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 5



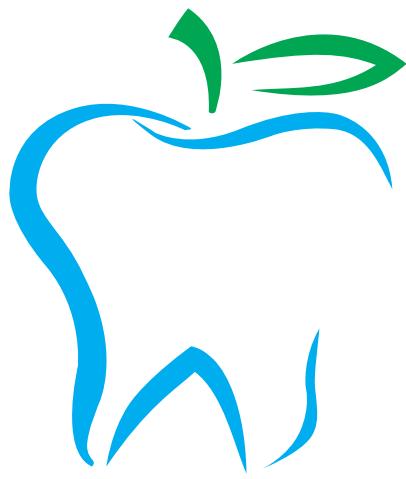
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OPP offers advice on staying safe

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Crawford said there has been about a 40 per cent increase in collisions this winter compared to the last two.

“Those are a lot of collisions we have to deal with. It takes a lot of our frontline officers’ time to respond to so many of them,” she added.

Crawford said winter driving courses offered by some driver’s education companies are a great option for unsure or inexperienced drivers, as well as tractor-trailer drivers.

“Maybe some companies can reflect and ask if we have given our drivers winter driver training or even if they have any experience driving a big truck in the snow. The time and the cost it takes to get a tractor-trailer out of the ditch is high, and often main highways need to be shut down for hours as a result.”

“If you are someone who doesn’t feel confident driving in snow, that’s something to look into. People also need to do that self-reflection. Do you feel prepared to drive in this weather today? Do I need to? Sometimes we convince ourselves we really need to get to whatever it is, but when you really assess it, do you really need to do it that day?”

She added having a safety bag with a flashlight, blanket and snacks is also a good idea, along with a full tank of gas.

“Or, if you have an electric vehicle like I do, make sure you have it charged before you head out. If you’re out there and you don’t feel comfortable or safe, turn around and think about cancelling where you’re going. Is it worth it? You could hurt yourself or someone else.”

Crawford explained winter tires are an important part of being safe on the roads in inclement winter weather but admitted the cost can be a barrier for some people. She added having winter tires doesn’t mean people can drive like it’s a bare road.

“Just because you have them doesn’t mean they’re magic tires. It doesn’t mean you can go faster than everyone else on the road.”

One situation seen on urban streets and rural roads during this winter’s heavy snow is vehicles driving with immense amounts of snow on them, many times obscuring a driver’s view. Crawford said a little effort goes a long way.

“Wipe off the hood, the back and the top of your vehicle. You might be able to see out your windshield momentarily, but when that snow starts shifting, it’s going to slide down in front of you or fly off on the vehicle behind you. It’s part of being a responsible driver and making sure your vehicle is safe.”

Ontario’s Highway Traffic Act prohibits its drivers from operating a vehicle with a dangerous accumulation of snow or ice that could pose a hazard to other road users. Upon



(OPP PHOTO)

Jackknifed tractor-trailers and passenger vehicles in ditches have been a common scene over this winter, but one member of the Oxford OPP is sharing her expertise to keep drivers safe.

conviction, fines range from \$50 to \$500 for private vehicles and from \$100 to \$1,000 for commercial vehicles.

Crawford said some people may not be able to reach the top of their vehicle to clear snow off, but using a leaf blower is one way to get around the situation. It’s also important people know to refrain from using their four-way flashing lights while driving in challenging weather conditions.

“I can appreciate people wanting to let others know they are driving slower than the expected speed, but when you have your four-ways on, it interferes with your brakes illuminating properly to let people behind you know you’re slowing down or stopping.”

She added it’s also a good idea to have your entire headlight system on during inclement weather.

One trend on social media in recent years has been people looking for driving advice. It is common to see posts in this area asking how the drive on 59 is from Tavistock to Woodstock or New Hamburg to Kitchener. Crawford said a far better idea is to go to www.511on.ca for updated driving conditions.

“It is a great resource, and when I had to drive to London the other day, I also checked Google Maps and Waze. They are often updating their road situations and will let you know where there is a slowdown or collision.”

She added drivers have different opinions on road conditions and when it’s safe to venture out on the roads.

“You might be more comfortable driving in bad weather and I might be petrified but I head out because someone said it was fine. By the time people read a comment the conditions could have changed.”

Crawford said it all comes down to self-awareness.

“How do I feel today? Can I get out there and make that drive? Do I really need to go to where I am supposed to be? If not, treat yourself to a pyjama day and a hot chocolate. Talk to your employer to see if you can work from home or even adjust your hours.”

MOTOR VEHICLE COLLISIONS IN OXFORD COUNTY	
DATES	# OF COLLISIONS
NOV. 1, 2023, TO JAN. 27, 2024	475
NOV. 1, 2024, TO JAN. 27, 2025	465
NOV. 1, 2025, TO JAN. 27, 2026	616

Statistics from Oxford Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police

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POLICE BRIEFS

Oxford OPP briefs

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Quebec man facing charges

A Quebec motorist has been charged after police observed a vehicle travelling without its lights on.

At 11:30 p.m. on Jan. 26, members of the Oxford OPP were conducting traffic enforcement on the 401 near Ingersoll when officers observed the vehicle.

Officers stopped the driver over, and further investigation revealed that the vehicle was reported stolen. The driver was also found to be impaired by alcohol.

A 35-year-old male from Victoriaville, Quebec, has been charged with impaired driving, dangerous driving, possession of property obtained by crime over \$5,000, having care or control of a vehicle or boat with Cannabi-

dis readily available, having care or control of a vehicle or boat with an open container of liquor and driving without proper lighting.

The accused was held for a bail hearing and has since been released from custody. They are scheduled to appear before the Ontario Court of Justice in Woodstock on Feb. 17.

Hit and run leads to charges

A driver who failed to remain at the scene of a collision is facing multiple charges.

Police received several calls regarding a two-vehicle collision on Canterbury Street in Ingersoll on the evening of Jan. 14. It was reported that one of the drivers failed to remain at the scene.

Thanks to the immediate calls from the public, police were able to locate and arrest

a 42-year-old from Strathroy and charge him with dangerous driving, failure/refusal to comply with a demand, failing to remain at a collision and failing to report a collision.

No injuries reported and the accused has been released from custody and is scheduled to appear in a Woodstock courtroom at a later date.

Photo of suspect released following Ingersoll theft

The Oxford Provincial Police (OPP) are seeking the public's assistance following a report of a break and enter. Police responded to a report of a theft from a business on Thames Street South at 1 a.m. on Jan. 26, where an unknown suspect or suspects broke in and took various items.

Through investigation, po-



(OPP PHOTO)

Oxford OPP have released this photo of a male suspect wanted in connection with a break and enter at an Ingersoll business on Jan. 26.

lice obtained surveillance footage of a possible person or persons of interest.

The Oxford OPP are seeking the public's assistance to

identify the person of interest involved in this incident.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Oxford OPP at 1-888-310-1122 and

reference report number E260111376. Information can also be provided anonymously to Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Clarification:

In the Jan. 14 edition of the Echo, a story titled 'Influenza continues to cause havoc in Oxford County' attributed quotes from the Woodstock Hospital to Chelsea Fagan, the hospital's Communications Officer. The quotes should have been attributed to Cindy Smart, the VP of Patient Care and CNO.

Contribute to your local community newspaper! Send articles, sports or event recaps, and photos to info@theecho.ca

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Area municipalities take part in ROMA conference

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

WOWC met with Parliamentary Assistant Silvia Gualtieri (Ministry of Solicitor General) to discuss challenges with Vulnerable Sector Checks, including delays affecting timely hiring in long-term care and early childhood education, inconsistent interpretations across jurisdictions, and impacts on staffing stability and service delivery.

The Caucus also sat down with Associate Minister Sam Oosterhoff (Ministry of Energy and Mines) to discuss broadband and cellular infrastructure priorities for Southwestern Ontario, focusing on building on provincial investments, addressing remaining service gaps, and supporting economic development, public safety, and quality of life in rural communities.

The caucus met with Hydro One staff to explore opportunities for ongoing collaboration on regional infrastructure and energy initiatives, reinforcing the importance of strong municipal-industry partnerships in supporting local growth and sustainability.

Woodstock City/Council Councillor Bernia Martin also attended ROMA and took to her blog to detail her experience, including an education session on Rural Road Safety featuring Scott Butler, Executive Director for Good Roads, Jessica Jaremchuk from Intact Insurance, and Mike Pearsall from MTO.

“Scott spoke about the enormous financial commitment municipalities are facing when it comes to roadways and transportation infrastructure. He also spoke about the return on investment for spending on rural road safety initiatives that reduce the severity of collisions and ultimately save lives,” said Martin.

She also attended the Minister’s Forum, where 2,000 elected officials filled the hall and had the opportunity to question provincial government ministers. Martin asked a question about traffic safety and calming measures.

“When the Province introduced legislation to prohibit Automatic Speed Enforcement, it released road safety funding that is only available to municipalities that previously operated speed



(WOWC PHOTO)

WOWC Vice Chair Kevin Marriott (Lambton) and Chair Marcus Ryan (Oxford) discuss broadband connectivity in Western Ontario with Associate Minister of Energy-Intensive Industries, Sam Oosterhoff.



(TOWN OF INGERSOLL PHOTO)

The Town of Ingersoll delegation met with Honourable Neil Lumsden, Minister of Sport. (Photo taken by CAO, Michael Graves. Left to right are Councillor Shannon Hutson, Deputy Mayor Lindsay Wilson, Mayor Brian Petrie, Minister Neil Lumsden, MPP Ernie Hardeman, and Councillor Rick Eus

cameras. As a result, municipalities like Oxford that did not previously have this revenue source are not eligible. How does the Province intend to support road safety initiatives in municipalities that did not benefit from speed camera revenues but still face the same safety challenges and costs associated with implementing appropriate road safety initiatives?”

An answer came from Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy.

“By all accounts, the (minister) really didn’t answer my question, but it is my opinion that his non-answer was very much an indication of the government’s intentions for hundreds of elected officials who are all tasked with funding expensive infrastructure in an effort to improve road safety,” Martin said.

The Town of Ingersoll was also well-represented, and one of the most important meetings was with Minister of Sport Neil Lumsden. The town’s grant request to help build and pay for the Multi-Use Recreation Centre fell short by millions of dollars.

A meeting was also held with Vic Fidei, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, to discuss the idled GM CAMI Assembly plant. A conversation was also held with

The Town spoke with the Ministry of Finance about local tax challenges.

“Thank you to the provincial officials who met with the Town of Ingersoll at ROMA,” said Mayor Brian Petrie. “These discussions help us match our local goals with provincial plans. It is a small but important step toward a better future for our community. We look forward to working together.”

This year’s ROMA conference featured speeches by Ontario Premier Doug Ford, party leaders, and various provincial ministers. Delegates participated in two Minister’s Forums and workshops on corporate sponsorship, waste management, economic development, housing, arts and culture, community safety, healthcare and reconciliation.

Southside pool closed again for repairs

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Southside Aquatic Centre will be closed for maintenance until further notice.

All lessons and drop-in programs have been cancelled, and participants will receive a credit on their account.

“A replacement has been ordered for the domestic water heater, which controls the water temperature for the showers and sinks in the changerooms. Provincial regulations for public pools require change rooms, toilets and showers to be available for swimmers and for swimmers to take a cleansing shower with warm water and soap before entering the pool,” explained a city social media post.

“We will share an update when the work has been completed and the pool is able to reopen,” it added.

The city expects to provide an update at the end of this week and residents should look to Woodstock’s social media channels. Full-time and front desk staff are still working, notifying registrants of the cancellations and answering any questions. Other part-time staff will be



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

off until the pool reopens.

The centre was closed for extensive pool repairs and maintenance in late 2025. The city confirmed the pool was shut down to address damage and undertake necessary work on the pool basin before reopening.

It opened ahead of schedule on Tuesday, Jan. 6, for drop-in programming, including aquafit, lane, adult and child, and public swimming.

The spray and play wading pool at the Southside location closed permanently in 2024.

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Woodstock Public Library collecting winter accessory donations

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Bringing new and gently used winter accessories to the Woodstock Public Library as part of their Warmest Hearts for the Coldest Nights Drive ensures residents can stay warm during the winter.

The Woodstock Public Library is collecting donations of winter accessories like scarves, mittens, hats, and gloves for the Coldest Night of the Year until Feb. 28. The library is also encouraging residents to consider donating larger items like winter coats and snowsuits directly to Operation Sharing, the organization supported by the Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser. Items in clean and good condition can be placed on the tree inside the library.

"We're a smaller library system and we wanted to try and do something to support Coldest Night of the Year," said Ailish Farrelly, community outreach librarian.

The winter accessory drive is in its third year and was inspired by other libraries having similar donation trees. Farrelly said donations are starting to come in, but more are welcome.

"This year, it's been a little bit slower because of the cold and the weather that we've had this year. I think no one was

really ready for it, but that's why we're really trying to promote it."

Operation Sharing is a non-profit supporting people facing homelessness in Oxford County through services offered by the donation-based shelter. The organization on 22 Wilson St., Woodstock, will collect donations from Monday to Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Operation Sharing is particularly in need of adult winter coats for all genders.

"There aren't a lot of items for men and women right now, so anyone who has a coat and wants to donate, they can donate to Operation Sharing," Farrelly explained.

Woodstock Public Library Staff will be participating in the Coldest Night of the Year Walk on Feb. 28, a Canada-wide fundraiser supporting shelters across the country. As of Jan. 27, there are 296 walkers and 63 teams registered for the walk and \$64,396 raised for Operation Sharing, 42 per cent of the \$150,000 fundraising goal.

"It's good for people to get out there, even though it is a cold night," Farrelly said.

More information about the Coldest Night of the Year in Woodstock, including the opportunity to donate, can be found online by visiting <https://en.enoy.org/location/woodstock>.



(AILISH FARRELLY PHOTO)

The Woodstock Public Library is looking for donations of hats, mittens, gloves, and scarves to keep residents warm as part of Coldest Night of the Year. Donations can be brought to the library until Feb. 28.




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(WPS PHOTO)

Norwich Avenue was closed for several hours on Tuesday as crews battled a residential fire at the Montclair Drive intersection. The street was closed between Parkinson Road and Juliana Drive. No word yet on the cause or extent of the damage

Cheesy Cow Co.'s February macaroni and cheese preorders to support Woodstock Wolverines

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

The Woodstock Wolverines Football Club will receive a boost in funding thanks to Cheesy Cow Company's macaroni and cheese February fundraisers.

Cheesy Cow Co. will host two macaroni and cheese pre-orders with a portion of proceeds from the sales supporting the Woodstock Wolverines Football Club. Those looking for a tasty Superbowl Sunday meal can purchase a bundle featuring Cheesy Cow's family-sized mac and cheese, which serves between 10 and 12 people, two pounds of chicken wings from the Butcher Barn, and a jar of Norfolk BBQ sauce for \$55. The family-sized mac and cheese trays are also

available for pre-orders for Family Day weekend.

The cheese shop and deli will donate \$5 of each pre-order sale to the Wolverines.

Wes Mazur, head cheesemonger, became acquainted with the Wolverines after one of his kids joined the football club and met executive officer Joe Brown at Cowapalooza. He discussed with Brown about how the Cheesy Cow Co. can support the team and first launched the Family Day Mac and Cheese fundraiser. After getting some requests from customers to offer the dish for the Super Bowl, the Super Bowl bundle was also created.

"It's an amazing two-way street. Joe's promotion and the parents of kids of the

Woodstock Wolverines have been helping promote these things, and it's gaining traction, so it's just absolutely a win-win," Mazur said.

The fundraiser for the Woodstock Wolverines comes at a tough financial time for local organizations and small businesses alike.

"Everybody needs money and we know and have heard there are so many local organizations, whether they're sports teams or otherwise, that are struggling to get the regular sponsorships that they've had in the past, right?" explained Mazur. "Everybody's had to batten down the hatches because of the economy."

Most of the ingredients in Cheesy Cow's mac and cheese, along with the

chicken wings and barbeque sauce, come from local producers in Oxford County.

"Aside from the noodles, everything is made in Oxford County. We're very proud of that and it stays right in our community in terms of not just supporting our business and our staff but the sports club that's going to benefit from it too."

Pre-orders for the Super Bowl Bundle close on Feb. 2 and Family Day pre-orders close on Feb. 9. To pre-order either mac and cheese special online, visit <https://tinyurl.com/superbowl-bundle> for the Super Bowl Bundle and/or <https://tinyurl.com/family-day-mac-and-cheese> for the Family-Sized Mac and Cheese for Family Day.

Woodstock Art Gallery kicks off 2026 community programming

ALEX HUNT

Echo Contributor

The Woodstock Art Gallery is expanding its programming to meet growing community demand for art classes and workshops.

Head of Education Stephanie Porter said the rising popularity of after-school programs has led to waitlists, with plans underway to expand capacity and accommodate more children.

After-school programs provide essential components to youth development by building a child's social and problem-solving skills.

Offered programs include adult drawing classes, Saturday workshops, and a monthly program starting in March. Porter said that there will be something for everybody.

"We have grown our audience," said Porter. "There are more workshops and activities that we have scheduled in our programming," Porter explained that local feedback allows the gallery to stay current with the community and serve them where they're at.

"It's nice to hear positive feedback from the community. It helps us see what's working and reminds us that our programs are having a real impact," said Porter.

"The gallery is a great place for people to observe, express themselves and develop skills such as creative thinking and problem-solving. Art provides a healthy, balanced way of life, and I believe it should be part of everyone's daily routine."

The gallery is looking for volunteers to help with the year's scheduled programming. Porter said all applications are screened before onboarding.

"It's always good if you're interested in art to immerse yourself in an environment that you desire to be in and learn more about," explained Porter. "It's always good to come in regularly and talk to the people that work here, experience some of the classes and activities that are happening here and fill out an application."

To fill out a volunteer application or learn more about the gallery's 2026 programming, visit the website at <https://www.my-wpl.ca/index.php?>



Stephanie Porter, head of education at the Woodstock Art Gallery.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

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Strong farms, strong communities: why agriculture engages with municipalities

SARA WOOD

Vice President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

This week, representatives from Ontario's rural municipalities are gathering in Toronto for the annual Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) conference. And as we have for the last few years, Ontario farmers will be right there with them.

Some might wonder why farmers care about municipal issues – and the answer is simple: when agriculture is strong, so are rural communities.

That's because in Ontario, the agri-food sector is one of the biggest pillars of the provincial economy. We contribute \$51.4 billion in economic activity and support jobs for 867,000 Ontarians. That's about 10% of our provincial workforce. On top of that, our sector generates about \$28 billion in agri-food exports for Ontario every year.

Those are significant numbers, making agriculture and agri-food as important for investment, policy support and infrastructure as, for example, the automotive industry.

And that's what we're at ROMA to talk about.

I'm a Vice President with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), as well as a livestock and grain farmer near Stratford, Ontario. This will be my fourth year attending ROMA on behalf of Ontario's farmers, carrying the message that agriculture matters and that we share common interests, values and goals with our municipalities.

A key priority for our members – and we know it is for rural municipalities too – is rural infrastructure.

This means roads and bridges, high speed internet and proper cellular coverage, as well as affordable and reli-

able energy. But it's also about education, health care and social supports, like schools, hospitals, long-term care and affordable housing for our rural areas.

We need services, investment and infrastructure to attract and keep people in rural communities and give strength to jobs and businesses in those areas.

The Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF), which funds rural infrastructure, has declined from \$656 million in 2005 to \$550 million in 2025. Adjusted for inflation, 2025 funding would

need to increase to nearly \$1 billion to match 2005 levels. The provincial government committed to increase its funding of OMPF to \$600 million in 2026 in last fall's Economic Statement and that's a positive step — but it's not enough to meet critical rural infrastructure needs.

Just as important for farmers, though, is for municipalities to know how important agriculture and agri-food is in their communities and how they can support our sector. An example of that is through bylaws and regulations that encourage business growth and don't unnecessarily add costs or hinder competitiveness. That's another big reason why the OFA makes sure to be part of the ROMA conference every year.

A growing agri-food sector needs stable and reliable long-term land use planning that protects farmland, supports smart urban growth (including housing) that respects agricultural and rural land, and attracts and keeps businesses from all parts of the agri-food value chain.

Agricultural Impact Assessments conducted by qualified professionals are a tool for municipalities to support land use planning, and we encourage municipalities to draw on the agri-food expertise in their own communities to establish Agricultural Advisory Committees that



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

can advise councillors and staff on the needs and perspectives of the sector.

And finally, OFA urges municipalities not to forget agriculture when it comes to economic development.

This is about attracting and keeping farms and related businesses – from vet clinics and feed mills to farm equipment dealerships, farm supply stores and more – but also about maximizing growing opportunities presented by agritourism and local food.

The public's interest in local production, local experiences and supporting homegrown businesses has never been stronger, particularly when it comes to anything food related. Expanding agritourism and local food will diversify local economies by bringing new jobs, generating additional revenue and attracting visitors.

This ultimately supports community health and well-being with the added benefit of helping Ontarians get a better understanding of our food system and where and how to buy local. Now that's a win-win.

Woodstock landlord and business owner fined for fire code violations

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A combined \$17,000 in fines has been handed down following a pair of fires in the city.

Woodstock Fire Department firefight-

ers responded to a report of a fire inside a residential house located at 91 Tenyson Street on Sept. 22, 2025. Upon arrival, they found an active fire in the basement, which they successfully extinguished. Before the fire department arrived, a smoke alarm activated in

the upper unit, alerting residents who evacuated the lower unit basement occupants.

A post-fire inspection revealed Ontario Fire Code infractions, and the homeowner was charged with having an unapproved additional residential dwelling unit in a single-family house, failing to replace a smoke alarm as per the manufacturer's instructions, failing to maintain a smoke alarm in operating condition and failing to test smoke alarms annually and after every change in tenancy. He was also charged with failing to install a carbon monoxide alarm adjacent to each sleeping area and failing to test carbon monoxide alarms annually and after every change in tenancy.

The homeowner pleaded guilty to all charges on Jan. 15 and was fined \$10,000 plus a victim surcharge and court costs.

"These efforts enhance citizen safety and awareness while reinforcing the importance of adhering to fire safety regulations," said Fire Chief Jeff Slager. Fire crews responded to a blaze in a paint booth at Jemar Winches Ltd., located at 34 Bysham Drive, on Nov.

13, 2025. The company, which has been operating for more than 40 years, specializes in the design and manufacture of heavy-duty winching solutions. Firefighters arrived within minutes and quickly brought the fire under control. After an investigation by the Fire Prevention Division, several violations of the Ontario Fire Code were uncovered and filed with the Oxford Provincial Offences Court. The charges included failing to check and clean spray booth ducts and filters, failing to keep records of inspections and paint deposit removal, failing to prepare and implement an approved fire safety plan, and failing to inspect the fire suppression system protecting the spray booth.

The business owner pleaded guilty to all charges on Jan. 15 and was fined a total of \$7,000 plus a victim surcharge and court costs.

"We are committed to community safety through rigorous Fire Code enforcement," said Slager. "Our continued efforts will ensure that Woodstock business owners and landlords understand their responsibilities, thereby ensuring the safety of workers, customers, and business locations."

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Bomber Squad's Robocio wins Oxford Invitational Youth Robotics Challenge

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

It may have seemed like a stretch at the time.

But seven-year-old Ivan Meadows' love for computer games would actually have a bearing on a future career path.

"I love computer science," said the Grade 12 member of the Ingersoll DCI Oxford Invitational Youth Robotics Challenge (OIYRC) winning Bomber Squad. "Obsessed since I was a kid."

While an affinity for Minecraft or LittleBigPlanet may once have appeared to be purely recreational, high school computer classes discovered in Grade 10 and involvement with the OIYRC have provided a gateway to a potential future—one that would be difficult to argue will not be in demand.

"Something with programming at the very least," said Meadows, who enjoys the 'click and drag' approach of Scratch block coding, the 'easy entry' into coding through the program layers of visual model games. "They're a way to express yourself and tell a story."

Having recently completed its 18th iteration, the OIYRC is a community-based partnership exposing area youth to the potential of careers in technology, engineering and skilled trades. Hosted on Nov. 27, 2025, inside Woodstock's Goff Hall, it is open to school, club or youth group teams of at least four members, supported by teachers and adult mentors who must act only in an advisory role. This year's 16-member field came from across the Thames Valley District School Board, the London District Catholic School Board and Rehoboth Christian School in Norwich. A list of community sponsors supports the event and/or individual teams,

with the latter encouraged to tour sponsor locations where possible to extend the learning opportunity.

"Just to help kids understand how robotics will apply to real life," said Trevor Jackson, Maintenance Manager with Hydra Dyne Tech of Ingersoll. The company sponsored the Bomber Squad, hosted a celebratory pizza party for the team in its cafeteria, and provided a plant tour for its members.

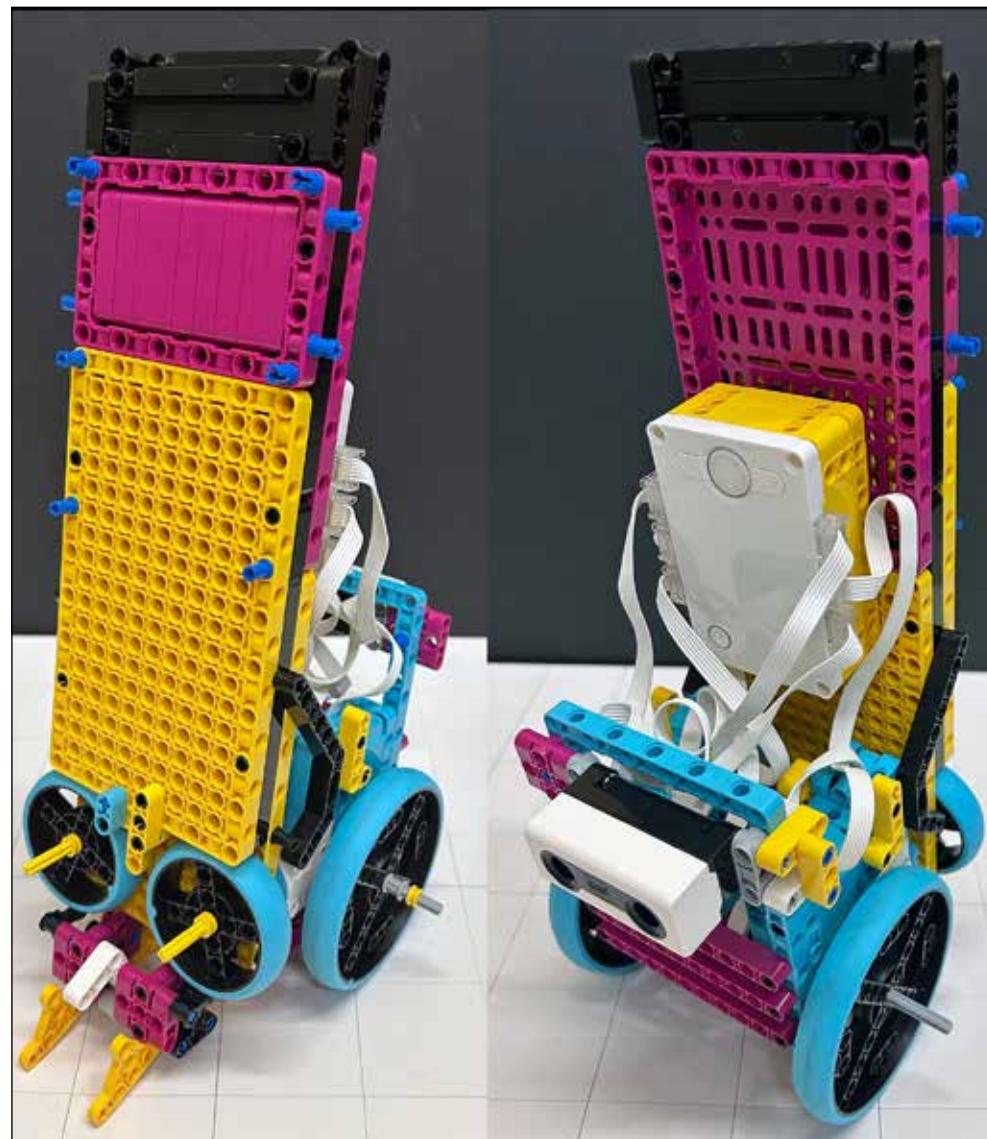
"We like showing kids the possibility of what you can do with different aspects of their education," added Hydra Dyne Manufacturing Manager Nathan Van de Kemp.

Exposing youth to broader possibilities through events like the OIYRC or accepting co-op students can also be beneficial to the company, said Van de Kemp. Educating young people that good, well-paying careers, including robotic technician or CNC operator, exist can expand their perspective talent pool into those previously only considering more traditional options like medical professional, educator or firefighter. "This is what's out there."

This year's challenge was building and programming a functioning robotic fertilizer applicator from a Lego Spike Prime kit, able to apply or not apply beads representing fertilizer from an onboard hopper to specific target areas on a colour-coded Lego 'field', three beans on green, two on red and one on white.

"The competition was pretty much run it and get judged," said IDCI computer programming teacher and mentor Elaine Di Stefano (along with Greg Hiemstra).

To get to that point, entries had to qualify through a process including a written report, operational video and oral presentation. Programming is an integral com-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

'Robocio', the IDCI Bomber Squad's Oxford Invitational Youth Robotics Challenge winning entry.

ponent to success, but the challenge is designed to require other applicable skillsets, including engineering, construction, communication and management.

Ana Potter unofficially filled the latter role, a Grade 13 student first exposed to robotics challenges in Grade 6, who Di Stefano describes as a hard recruiter. Ana's Grade 11 sister Becca got there through her influence and a liking for Lego, while Grade 9 Hannah Madanant's motivation was a combination of personal interest and future growth.

"It was a good opportunity to understand how the process looks for next year."

Grade 11 Milo Herbert's interest in music, art and animation was sourced and fellow Grade 11 Kurtis McNutt was invited - perhaps coerced - following an appearance at the previous year's OIYRC team ice cream party.

"It was fun, it was interesting... and Becca made me," McNutt laughed. "I was an indentured coder."

The Bomber Squad's commitment stretched into two-and-a-half months of non-classroom time at lunch or after school. In practice, Ana Potter took point on coordination and the movie with her sister, Meadows was lead programmer, Madanant compiled the written report, and the two Potters, McNutt and Herbert, were involved in construction.

Robocio, the Bomber Squad robot, was a gender-fluid creation, depending on performance, laughed Di Stefano.

"When it was being finicky, it was a he, when it was behaving, it was a she."

There were undoubtedly challenges, and it was with mixed excitement and nervousness that they greeted OIYRC judges midway through the competition in Goff Hall. Becca Potter had been among those sneaking glances at competitors' performances, noting one robot laying three rows of beans down perfectly, before suffering turning issues.

"I got so nervous," she admitted.

As the Bomber Squad held its collective breath, Robocio performed at least as well as expected.

"For the most part," said Ana Potter. "It jammed a couple of times, but it dropped more beads than anyone else."

"They (the judges) said it was the best so far," added Meadows.

Thus encouraged, the Bomber Squad waited nervously as the judging crew completed its rounds, ultimately announcing they had indeed won the 2025 OIYRC challenge.

The success and effort were very much student-driven, according to Di Stefano, impressed with the team's level of commitment and time spent on the project.

"They wanted to work hard to be competitive; they didn't want it just to function, they wanted it to be excellent."

"It felt rewarding with how much time we put in," Ana Potter concluded. "To see results come from it was a really good feeling."



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The Oxford Invitational Youth Robotics Challenge winning Bomber Squad was treated to a celebratory pizza party and plant tour by sponsor Hydra Dyne Tech of Ingersoll. Pictured are Bomber Squad members, front row, left to right: Milo Herbert, Hannah Madanant, Ana Hopper and Becca Hopper. In the back are Ivan Meadows, Ingersoll DCI mentor Elaine Di Stefano, Hydra Dyne Maintenance Manager Trevor Jackson, Hydra Dyne Manufacturing Manager Nathan Van de Kemp, IDCI mentor Greg Hiemstra and Kurtis McNutt.

Thrive Oxford receives Rural Community Award 2026 at ROMA

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Ontario's Minister of Rural Affairs presented the Rural Community 2026 award to Thrive Oxford as part of the Rural Inspiration 2026 celebration at the Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) conference.

"Thrive Oxford is being recognized for their efforts focused on assisting entrepreneurs thrive, just not by building their business, but by building a future in rural communities throughout the County of Oxford," said Lisa Thompson. "In particular, this program helps women entrepreneurs develop the skill set to start and grow sustainable small businesses, to positively impact the local economy in their communities."

Recognizing the importance of networking, Thrive Oxford hosts local International Women's Day events as well.

"We applaud Thrive Oxford for enabling opportunities for entrepreneurs to plan for and build successful businesses in communities throughout Oxford County," added Thompson.

"We're grateful for this recognition from the Minister and for the opportunity to represent the work happening in rural Ontario. At Community Futures Oxford, it's both our role and our privilege to strengthen local entrepreneurs through access to skill-building, capital, and trusted support," said General Manager Allan Simm. "Through initiatives like Thrive Oxford and our ongoing International Women's Day events, we're proud to help create spaces where women entrepreneurs can learn, connect, and lead."

Thrive Oxford supports rural communities throughout the year and is a business development program designed to meet the needs of women starting or growing a sustainable business in Oxford County. The program offers three key benefits: access to professional advice, a supportive group environment built on confidentiality, trust and accountability, and access to capital when needed.

Community Futures Oxford was awarded \$48,000 from the Libro Prosperity Fund in December 2019 to develop

Thrive Oxford, a program that supports women entrepreneurs.

"I am proud to congratulate Thrive Oxford on receiving the inaugural Rural Inspiration Award," said Ernie Hardeman, MPP for Oxford. "This recognition highlights the leadership and innovation of women entrepreneurs who are strengthening our rural economy while making a meaningful difference in the lives of people across Oxford County."

Rural Inspiration 2026 was an inaugural event at the Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA) conference.

Thrive Oxford is hosting a breakfast and workshop in recognition of International Women's Day on Feb. 25, at Ingersoll's Elm Hurst Inn. The event takes place from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Tickets are \$50 and available on Eventbrite.

Lisa Grogan, the Founder and CEO of Overlap Associates, is presenting. She runs the boutique strategy and experience firm that helps organizations strengthen customer and community experiences through practical, human-centred methods. Over the past



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Oxford Community Futures GM Allan Simm is presented with the Rural Community 2026 award on behalf of Thrive Oxford. The award was given to Simm by Oxford MPP Ernie Hardeman, left, and Minister of Rural Affairs, Lisa Thompson.

decade, Lisa has supported teams to clarify what matters most, understand

the people they serve, and turn insights into action. Her work is known for being warm, grounded,

and highly practical, with tools participants can use immediately in their business.

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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. Alex Honnold solo climbed Taipei 101 on Jan. 23, 2026. What country is that in?
2. What does WEF stand for?
3. What does China's Terracotta Army protect?
4. What animal species did Jane Goodall study?
5. How many years ago did the Ice Age end?
6. Williams and Bosc are varieties of which fruit?
7. Which basketball team became the first to reach the milestone of 3,000 wins in 2010?
8. In beer, what does IPA stand for?
9. The gopher is a member of what order of mammals?
10. What vehicle is used to smooth an ice rink?

This week's answers are found on pg. 31

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Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Release program a change in direction for local feline wellness organization

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

The Woodstock Kitten Nursery and Rescue, soon to be known as the Oxford County Feline Wellness and Outreach Programs, is launching a trap, neuter, vaccinate and release (TNVR) program aimed at improving outcomes for cats across Oxford County.

The organization will be shutting down its traditional rescue operations to instead focus on addressing the root causes of feline overpopulation. The TNVR program's first appointments will begin on Feb.10 with 10 spots booked every two weeks.

"Our long-time supporters have expressed excitement about the renewed

focus on TNVR and community outreach, recognizing it as a natural next step to create broader, lasting change in Oxford County," said founder Cathrine Black. "We've seen continued generosity through donations, participation in fundraisers like bingo nights and our 50/50 raffle, and enthusiasm for the new educational programs. Community members, especially those in farming areas and families, appreciate the emphasis on humane population management and resources that prevent issues before they start."

The TNVR will target free-roaming and stray animals through low-cost vaccination and spay-neuter services, along with colony caretaker training and resources. It will also collaborate

with local programs such as Whiskers and Wellness, Paws and Whiskers, and planned therapy visits in seniors' homes, with an emphasis on prevention over reaction. The program is 95 per cent volunteer-run and funded through donations.

"In Oxford County and surrounding areas, stray and free-roaming cats can lead to uncontrolled breeding, overburdened resources (especially on farms), ecosystem disruptions, and heartbreaking outcomes for kittens and adults," Black said.

She also said that TNVR prevents new litters and allows cats to comfortably explore familiar environments.

Although the soon-to-be-named Oxford County Feline Wellness and Out-

reach has changed over the years, starting from running a rescue and nursery in a basement in 2020, Black said the community support remains strong and she is grateful for it.

"Even as we pivot from traditional rescue operations, the heart of our work remains: saving lives and building a more compassionate Oxford County through humane, innovative approaches," she said.

More updates about the organization will be posted online through the social media channels, still under Woodstock Kitten Nursery and Rescue for now, and signing up for the Scratching Post newsletter. To learn more about the TNVR program online, visit <https://woodstock-kittennursery.com/tnvr-program>.

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South Gate expansion officially open

Woodstock's South Gate Centre officially opened its upgraded facilities last Wednesday with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, marking the completion of the \$7-million expansion.

On Saturday, the Centre held an open house to unveil the extensive Reeves development to the public. The free event provided community members with an opportunity to tour the upgraded facility and learn about the expanded programs and services now available.

Attendees explored the building through self-guided tours and viewed photo and video presentations detailing the construction and design process. Live demonstrations highlighted the breadth of activities offered at the Centre, while staff and volunteers engaged with visitors

to discuss programming, membership, and upcoming initiatives.

The expansion introduced several major additions, including the Boughtflower Great Hall, a large multi-purpose space that can be divided into three sections and features panoramic views of Southside Park. Guests also toured the Toyota MMC Lounge, a new bar and Grab and Go area, and the Woodstock Rotary Community Kitchen, all designed to support increased community use and future growth.

The open house marked an important step in showcasing how the Reeves expansion enhances South Gate Centre's ability to serve adults 50-plus and strengthens its role as a hub for connection, wellness, and lifelong learning.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



A snapshot of the many visitors who came to explore the South Gate Expansion during the Open House.



Lynn and Winston, Marge and Gary and Judith and Ron, shared the variety of dance lessons available at South Gate.



Welcoming visitors with enthusiasm were David Hilderly, Chair of Capital Expansion, and Chris Cunningham, Executive Director.



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Kim, a Fitness Instructor at South Gate, guided a lively group through strength-building exercises.

PUBLIC NOTICE
pursuant to Sections 17(15)(d)) & 28(4) of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, as amended
COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN
in the
CITY OF WOODSTOCK

City of Woodstock
P.O. Box 1539, 500 Dundas Street
Woodstock, ON N4S 0A7
Telephone: 519-539-1291

DATE: Tuesday, December 23, 2025
FILE: CIP 2026; Revised City of Woodstock
Community Improvement Plan

Purpose and Effect of the Proposed Community Improvement Plan

The City of Woodstock has initiated a revised Community Improvement Plan to replace the current City of Woodstock Downtown Community Improvement Plan. The current Plan, which was adopted by Woodstock Council in March 1999 and subsequently amended in September 2004, April 2011 and November 2012 outlines a range of possible municipal actions, including potential economic incentive programs intended to stimulate private investment in the downtown area and encourage property maintenance and urban renewal. The intent of the revised CIP is to expand the geographic area where these programs could potentially apply to the entire City.

The proposed revised CIP would carry forward the existing programs currently contained within the 2012 CIP, but would also add the following potential programs, subject to annual budget approval from City Council:

Affordable Housing Incentive Program- This would provide a waiver for the costs of applicable City planning application fees and building permit fees, building upon similar program offered by the County of Oxford.

Affordable Housing Incremental Tax Rebate Program- This would provide funding to owners of lands and buildings who undertake improvements or redevelopment related to affordable housing that would result in an increased property assessment. This program is intended to grant back the local municipal tax increase which would occur as a result of building improvements resulting in increased assessment.

Affordable Housing Studies and Reports Program- This would provide financial assistance for the initial planning and design phase of affordable housing projects, including surveys, concept plans, site plans, traffic impact assessment, environmental studies, or other site-specific studies or plans required by the City.

Brownfield Redevelopment Program- This would partially offset the costs associated with an environmental or building hazards study.

Physician Recruitment Forgivable Loan Program- This would assist with the attraction of qualified physicians to the City of Woodstock by

offering forgivable loans to eligible physicians who commit to practicing in the community for a minimum 5-year period.

Licensed Childcare Centre Program- This is intended to stimulate private sector investment in licensed childcare centres by both for profit and non-profit organizations. Incentives offered by the City may include grants or loans intended to reduce planning and initial start-up costs and may include a grant in lieu of municipal permits and approvals, as well as incremental tax financing.

Licensed In-home Childcare Program- This program is intended to provide incentives to encourage the creation of licensed in-home childcare spaces. The City may offer grants or forgivable loans to reduce planning, development, and initial start-up costs. Eligible grant items may include a grant in lieu of municipal permits and approvals. In addition, the City may offer grants to offset capital costs associated with improvements to meet the requirements of licensed home-based childcare.

As indicated, the proposed CIP would permit the above noted programs to be offered by the City, however the actual programs would require annual budget approval by City Council before being implemented.

Public Meeting

The Council of the City of Woodstock will hold a public meeting under Sections 17(15)(d)) and 28(4) of the Planning Act to consider the proposed Community Improvement Plan on:

Date: Tuesday, February 17, 2026
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Place: Council Chambers, City Hall, 500
Dundas St, Woodstock, ON N4S 0A7

Please be advised that a sign language interpreter is available to attend the Public Meeting held at the City of Woodstock. Where the services of a sign language interpreter are required, arrangements must be made with the City Clerk's Office at least seven (7) days in advance of the meeting. You can contact the City Clerk's Office at 519 539-1291 or via e-mail at jbunn@cityofwoodstock.ca.

If you wish to speak or make a presentation to City Council regarding this application at the Council meeting of Thursday, February 19, 2026, you must advise the clerk of your reasons, in writing, no later than 2:00 PM on the Tuesday prior to the meeting. Copies of any presentation must be provided at the time of the request to the City Clerk.

Other Planning Act Applications:

Please be advised that Council may approve, modify or refuse the requested application at the meeting. If you do not attend or are not represented at the meeting, the Council may proceed and may not advise you of any proposed modifications.

If you wish to be notified of the decision of the City of Woodstock on the proposed Community Improvement Plan, you must make a written request to the either the Clerk of the City of Woodstock or to planning@oxfordcounty.ca.

Please be advised that Council may approve, modify or refuse to enact the proposed Community Improvement Plan. If you do not attend or are not represented at the meeting, Council may proceed and may not advise you of any proposed modifications. If the Community Improvement Plan is approved, notice of passing will be mailed or published in a local newspaper.

If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting, or make written submissions to the City of Woodstock or the County of Oxford before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Additional information relating to the proposed Community Improvement Plan is available for review at the County of Oxford Community Planning Office at the address below, Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or by visiting the Community Planning website at www.oxfordcounty.ca/en/services-for-you/land-use-development.aspx. If you have any questions regarding the above-noted application please contact Eric Gilbert, Manager of Development Planning, Community Planning Office (519 539 9800 ext. 3216). Written comments may be forwarded to the address below or emailed to: planning@oxfordcounty.ca. Please include the File Number on all correspondence.

Yours truly,



Eric Gilbert, MCIP, RPP
Manager of Development Planning
Community Planning Office
County of Oxford
21 Reeve Street
Woodstock ON N4S 3G1
Telephone: 519-539-9800 / Fax 519-421-4712

Line dancing meets bam bouncing

Bam Bouncers Studio successfully hosted its sold-out Line Dancing in Rebound Boots event on Friday, Jan. 23, drawing a full roster of participants eager to experience a fresh, upbeat take on line dancing.

The one-hour session was held at the studio's location on 1057 Parkinson Road, offering a dynamic blend of choreography, cardio, and bounce-based fitness. Interest in the event exceeded expectations, leading to the announcement of a second class on Jan. 16 to meet community demand.

Participants praised the session for its welcoming environment, accessible in-

struction, and the added excitement of using rebound boots — with rentals included for those who required them. The event attracted attendees aged six and older and provided an engaging opportunity for families and individuals to stay active while trying something new.

The strong turnout and positive feedback underscored the growing appetite for innovative fitness experiences in the Woodstock area. Bam Bouncers Studio is exploring additional themed sessions following the success of this launch event.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Participants were guided through choreographed line dance steps in their rebound boots, moving in sync with the music.



Participants teamed up with owner/operator Alicia, buzzing with excitement as they geared up for line dancing in rebound boots.



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Local Café Evergreen Coffee Lounge celebrates second anniversary

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

On Jan. 15, Ingersoll's beloved Evergreen Coffee Lounge celebrated two years in business. Located in the heart of downtown at 111 Thames Street South, the café serves specialty lattes and baked goods, including vegan and gluten-friendly options, and has quickly become a community favourite.

To commemorate the milestone, I asked owners Shelley Brownlee and Jonathan Clow about the inspiration and journey behind Evergreen.

"We have always loved coffee and the experience of visiting new coffee shops," explained Brownlee, co-owner of Evergreen. "After a

shocking cancer diagnosis in the midst of the pandemic, we decided to take a leap and make the dream a reality," she added. "You only live once."

Brownlee, who grew up in Ingersoll, fondly reminisces about raising her children in the town she still calls home. Opening a café anywhere else was never an option. "Ingersoll is home to me; in more ways than one," she said.

Reflecting on opening day, Brownlee described it as "chaotic, but in the most extraordinary way." She takes a moment to thank everyone who showed up to support the new business. "We really didn't know what to expect, but the response from our town was overwhelming."

That ongoing support, she says, continues to motivate the Evergreen team every day. "It's what



Interior View of Evergreen Coffee Lounge in downtown Ingersoll.

(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)



Local Cafe Evergreen Coffee Lounge Celebrates 2-Year Anniversary.

(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

drives us to keep our menu interesting and maintain the high standards we try to achieve. We really appreciate Ingersoll, and it seems the feeling is mutual."

From the beginning, Brownlee and Clow envisioned Evergreen as an inclusive and welcoming space for everyone who walks through the door. Alongside a menu that caters to a wide range of dietary preferences and restrictions, the café offers a warm and inviting atmosphere designed to encourage guests to slow down and stay awhile.

Evergreen Coffee Lounge also hosts monthly music nights, showcasing local artists and mu-

sicians. "It brings our walls to life," Brownlee shared.

Looking ahead, the owners hope to continue hosting local events and welcoming community groups, such as the Silent Book Club and Ingersoll's very own Photography Club, to use the café space.

Brownlee and Clow express immense gratitude for the continued support from the community as they move forward. They invite residents to bring a book, some knitting, or a friend, and enjoy a quiet hour or two with a great cup of coffee at Evergreen.

SWOX Mayor David Mayberry not seeking re-election in October 2026

DEBBIE KASMAN

Post Correspondent

At its regular council meeting on Jan. 6, South West Oxford Township (SWOX) Mayor David Mayberry confirmed that he will not be seeking re-election later this year.

Mayberry emphasized the election is fast approaching and the township needs to proactively consider who in the community may be interested in running for municipal office. He stressed that a deliberate effort is required to ensure good governance.

Mayberry began serving as a SWOX Councillor in 1994 and was elected Mayor in 2006. He also served as Warden for Oxford County between 2015 and 2018. Mayberry is a 6th-generation farmer, born and raised on Sweaburg Road. He graduated from the University of Guelph in 1974 with a degree in Agriculture and later be-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

SWOX Mayor David Mayberry.

came involved with the Canadian Food Grains program in 1983 as a volunteer and donor, helping to bag corn at a local elevator.

Mayberry also job-shared the position of Ontario Resource Coordinator of the Canadian Food Grains program for 17.5 years with his wife, Catherine. He was a director of Oxford Mutual Insurance for 12 years and was involved

with Scouts as a leader for 20 years in Salford and Sweaburg.

SWOX township approved new ward boundaries last July, which will impact the election. The changes will take effect on the day the new council is organized after voting day on Oct. 26. The changes were made to ensure that each ward has a proportionate number of residents and so that every resident's vote carries equal

weight. Each councillor will represent a reasonably equal number of constituents.

Councillor Jim Pickard echoed Mayberry's comments and questioned what the next council will look like. He stressed the importance of actively encouraging community members to engage in local government, noting that change is inevitable and strong leadership, particularly from the next mayor, is criti-

cal.

Councillor Craig Gillis highlighted the need to better educate the public on municipal roles and responsibilities, including the distinction between municipal and county governance, and suggested public engagement as a key tool.

In response, council is considering holding two information sessions in the township in March in order to address

low interest in previous municipal election cycles and to encourage greater participation in running for municipal office within the township.

These sessions will cover key topics such as eligibility requirements, the nomination process, important dates and deadlines, and the roles and responsibilities of election officials. The sessions will engage residents before the nomination period.

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo **SPORTS**

Junior Warriors provide education along with 78-56 hoops victory over WCI

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

Woodstock CI Red Devils junior boys' basketball coach Chris Coyle was going through a tough patch.

The day earlier, he had been in Pittsburgh, and legendary Primanti Bros. sandwiches aside, saw his beloved Steelers eliminated from the 2026 NFL postseason by the Houston Texans, an ouster followed by the resignation of coach Mike Tomlin. Coyle got back to Woodstock in time to shower and head to the WCI Devildome, sharing in a 78-56 Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast junior boys basketball loss to the visiting Woodstock St. Mary's Warriors on Jan. 13.

"Banner couple of days," interjected senior boys coach Eric Molinaro, whose squad had prevailed 79-59 over the Warriors in the first game to run their regular season record to a perfect 7-0. "Banner couple of days."

The sun, however, was expected to come up the following morning, Coyle still 'repping' his Steelers toque. And while not exactly thanking the junior Warriors for the lesson imparted on quickness and aggressiveness, junior coach Jason Poole was appreciative of its growth potential for his team while giving St. Mary's full credit.

The Red Devils like to play a fast, up-tempo game, pushing the ball, similar in style to the Warriors approach on the day.

"They did it better," Poole credited of a Warriors squad which led 22-15 after eight minutes of play, and 45-27 at the half.

"We were a little afraid because they

barely lost to league-leading CASS (Woodstock College Avenue) and we lost to CASS by 15," said St. Mary's forward Joshua Morgan. "It was intense, very intense, they (WCI) have good shooters, very good shooters."

"Once we were able to stop the threes, we are a bigger team and got a lot of points from inside."

The Red Devils cut the gap to ten by the end of the third quarter, fuelled in part by three-point field goals from Jesiah Smith-Sutherland and Kymani Mohammed.

"We thought, OK, next goal is six with a couple of minutes to go," said Coyle. "Didn't happen."

The Warriors opened the fourth with a corner three from Tristan Manalo backed up by a steal and lay-in, setting the stage for a 25-13 run which decided the outcome.

Struggling with his shots earlier, Manalo was happy to see the momentum-shifting 'trey' find nothing but net from a gap the Red Devils' 1-3-1 zone defence struggled to cover.

"I tried to take advantage of that," he said. "It's kind of like space, so I just stayed there."

Manalo added a second three-pointer in the fourth quarter, eight points overall, part of a game-high 26, including three threes. E. Arthur added 16 for the Warriors, J. Adeoye, A. Wani and Morgan ten apiece, J. Mazurkiewics four and A. Belonio one field goal. Jude Buncher had two points for the Red Devils, Aiden Silos eight, Mohammed 13, Finn Roach 15 and Smith-Sutherland a team-high 18, including two threes.

The win lifted the Warriors to a 6-1 regular season mark, at the time tied with St.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

College Avenue Knight Faud Alezzi (lower left) battles for possession of the ball with Delhi Raider Jayden Collens (right) in front of Delhi's Even Weber during Friendly City Junior Classic basketball action Friday, January 16 at Huron Park. The Knights captured the tournament title the following day, defeating the WCI Red Devils in the final.

Thomas Parkside behind the 7-0 Woodstock College Avenue Knights. With one regular-season outing remaining, the junior and senior boys' basketball teams are turning their attention to the playoffs, which begin with a play-in round on Feb. 10. Quarterfinals are scheduled for that Thursday, followed by the semifinals and final on the subsequent Tuesday and Thursday (Feb. 19).

Last year, the junior Warriors finished third at the Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletic Association (WOSSAA) AA tournament, said Morgan, who is hoping for more this season.

"We want to see how far we can go."

The Red Devils start four Grade 9s and have a total of 12 on the roster, a serious adjustment admits Roach from Grade 8 ball.

"It's like a big upgrade."

However, optimism and ambition remain for a post-season run.

"It's not going to be easy," admitted Smith-Sutherland. "Somewhat difficult - but we can do it if we try our hardest."

Like the Steelers rebuilding their coaching staff en route to former glory, Coyle looks forward to wiping the slate clean and getting a fresh start at the next Red Devils

practice.

"We are in great shape," said Poole, looking forward to two tournaments and a league game, leading up to the goal of playing their best basketball in February.

"And we will," Coyle concluded.

Friendly City Classic Senior Boys Tournament

Convenors Jerry Kleiner and Jason Poole are welcoming 24 senior boys basketball teams from across southwestern Ontario to compete in the 2026 Friendly City Classic Woodstock on Jan. 30 and 31. All five Oxford senior boys' teams are in the draw in pools, including teams from Windsor, Waterloo, Mitchell and Georgetown.

Competition will tip off at 11:30 a.m. at Woodstock St. Mary's with additional pools joining at 1 p.m. at College Avenue and Woodstock CI, and at 2:30 p.m. at Huron Park.

The top squads from eight three-team pools advance to championship quarterfinals, second-place teams to a consolation round and third-place finishers to a friendly. The consolation final is scheduled for 4 p.m. Saturday at College Avenue with the championship game set to tip off simultaneously at St. Mary's.

TVRA SOUTHEAST JUNIOR BOYS BASKETBALL

MONDAY, JAN. 19

COLLEGE AVENUE	46
AYLMER EAST ELGIN	26
ST. THOMAS PARKSIDE	48
INGERSOLL DCI	28
ST. MARY'S	59
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	39
ST. THOMAS ST. JOE'S	65
WCI	45

TUESDAY, JAN. 13

WOODSTOCK COLLEGE AVENUE	59
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	43
ST. MARY'S	78
WCI	56

TVRA SOUTHEAST SENIOR BOYS BASKETBALL

MONDAY, JAN. 19

ST. THOMAS ST. JOE'S	60
WOODSTOCK CI	41
COLLEGE AVENUE	55
EAST ELGIN	35
HURON PARK	56
ST. MARY'S	50

TUESDAY, JAN. 13

WCI	79
ST. MARY'S	59
HURON PARK	68
COLLEGE AVENUE	64
INGERSOLL DCI	66
ST. THOMAS ARTHUR VOADEN	46

Blue Bombers boys hockey team hoping for extended playoff run

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

The Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers 7-0 shutout of the Woodstock Huron Park Huskies may have been one of the feistier Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast boys hockey games of the regular season.

But that was quickly forgotten amongst at least two of the former combatants.

“See ya,” said Huskie Drew Roth as he passed Blue Bomber Kellen Whetstone in the hallway outside the IDCI dressing room.

“See ya, boss,” Whetstone responded to the retreating back of a player, who, short minutes earlier, had been wearing a different coloured uniform during a fierce on-ice rivalry. Outside of high school hockey, the two are teammates on the Tavistock Junior Braves U18 team, the latter explained, adding an element of bragging rights to a TVRA outing that both had left on the ice, ready to lace up their skates as comrades again.

“That’s hockey,” shrugged Whetstone, who had contributed a goal and an assist to the lopsided outcome.

“It was nice to get on the scoresheet a bunch.”

IDCI’s Jeremy Stiles opened scoring just over five minutes into the first (15-minute) period, firing the puck home from the slot on assists to Ryan Gregg and Jack Stead. Whetstone upped the advantage to two roughly midway through the frame, banking the puck home off the post on a two-on-one set-up from Kaelyn Howard and Ethan Kish. Stiles

went five-hole for his second of the period and season, officially unassisted with 6:35 to play in the first.

“Nice to score finally,” he said, enjoying both the game’s tone and outcome. “I like it better,” Stiles added. “And always take a win.”

Stead (from Gregg and Nathan Muller) and Kish (Kolten Winkworth) added second-period goals. Tyler Fleming, unassisted, and Josh Robles (Kish) rounded IDCI scoring in the third.

“Hard-fought game, the boys are looking forward to the next one,” said Huron Park captain Cohen White, giving credit to the Blue Bombers for outplaying them on the day. “We didn’t quit, we just played the game to the end.”

“The boys were excited for this one,” added Huskies coach Cam Mordue. “They were looking for a different outcome, but it was fun, it was fun.”

IDCI goalie Riley Vyse kept the sheet clean for the Blue Bombers.

“Not too many shots,” he said. “(But) a shutout is a shutout.”

Vyse was also between the pipes for the Bombers’ 4-3 loss to the TVRA Southeast leading and undefeated 6-0 Tillsonburg Gemini the week before.

“Right there with them,” said Whetstone. “I think that proves how far we’ve come this season and how far we’re hoping to go.”

The Bombers currently sport a 3-2 won-lost record, tied for fourth place with the Woodstock St. Mary’s Warriors. Lord Dorchester, having played an extra game on both, is a point ahead with



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Huron Park goalie Kayden Eyre tries to get across his crease in time to deny a tip during an IDCI power play.

Parkside in second at 5-1.

“We’re just trying our hardest to make the playoffs,” said Vyse. “I think we could have a good shot at it this year.”

A lot of team members are in Grade 12, added Whetstone, hoping to finish their high school careers strong. Additionally,

it’s coach Chris Adkins’ final season.

“We want to leave him something to remember,” Whetstone concluded, pointing out Adkins has contributed ‘endless hours to the Blue Bombers program, with multiple teams.’

“He deserves a big one.”



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Ingersoll Blue Bomber Ethan Kish (right) gets a shot off against the defensive attention of Huron Park’s Kacey MacDonald (left).



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Huron Park’s Cohen White (left) and Ingersoll DCI’s Ethan Kish (right) share an intense battle for the puck.

TVRA SOUTHEAST BOYS HOCKEY	
TUESDAY, JAN. 13	
INGERSOLL DCI	7
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	0
TILLSONBURG	4
ST. MARY’S	1
THURSDAY, JAN. 15	
ST. JOE’S AT INGERSOLL	POST-PONED
WOODSTOCK COLLEGE AVENUE AT AYLMEER EAST ELGIN	POST-PONED
TVRA SOUTHEAST GIRLS HOCKEY	
WEDNESDAY, JAN. 14	
ST. JOE’S	7
ST. MARY’S	0
MONDAY, JAN. 12	
INGERSOLL DCI	7
ST. MARY’S	1

Red Devil junior volleyball girls prevail in five sets over determined Warriors

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

Woodstock CI Red Devils volleyball coach Jeff Melanson does not love calling time-outs, preferring to let his players battle through challenges.

“Desperate times, desperate measures,” he managed to smile after calling a potentially unprecedented four through a hard-fought 25-21, 18-25, 25-23, 23-25, 15-4 Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast junior girls volleyball win over Woodstock St. Mary’s Warriors on Jan. 13. “Couple of sets, two per set - that’s enough to stress me out.”

The match proved stressful for both coaches, unfolding as a seesaw battle in which the pivotal third and fourth sets were decided by a total of four points.

Having split the first two, Melanson called his second time out of the third with St. Mary’s leading 22-20. The momentum-breaking tactic worked, the Red Devils tying the game at 22 and again at 23 as the Warriors surrendered a 23-22 advantage on an errant serve. In a quick, almost anti-climactic finish after a huge buildup, WCI locked up a 25-23 win on a Berlyn Ingram ace and a Warriors kill attempt which sailed out of bounds.

St. Mary’s rebounded in the fourth set, taking an early 5-0 lead, translating it into a 9-3 advantage that caused Melanson to signal for time out number three. The Red Devils responded, an Ingram centre rejection kicking off a corresponding 9-3 run, squaring accounts at 12. The game was still tied at 17, with St. Mary’s middle Jewel Mensah instigating Melanson’s second time out of the

set with a service ace, giving her team a 20-18 advantage.

The timeout stalled the Warriors drive but would not deny it as St. Mary’s locked up a 25-23 victory. Emma Bertoia pounded two service winners for a 24-22 lead, and following a WCI tip which found a hole in the defence, an errant Red Devils kill attempt sealed the two-point deal.

The Warriors had played the Red Devils three times heading into the match, said coach Ethan Teague, winning one of the three.

“They have been our strongest competition and we’ve been working hard to make sure that we challenge them on the court.”

Teague was pleased to see his Warriors match the Red Devils on-court energy throughout a very close and competitive match.

“I couldn’t be happier with the team and I look forward to maintaining that energy as we head into the playoffs.”

In the fifth and deciding set, WCI’s comparative experience over a young Grade 9-heavy St. Mary’s squad highly competitive this year with a bright future, may have shown through. After a close opening, the set got away on a Warriors unit which was not as consistent on service reception and first pass as it had been through the first four.

WCI took a 4-3 lead on a point set up by a one-armed dig by Red Devils captain Hope McMichael, upping the gap to two on an errant Warriors set. A lengthy first pass too close to the net led to an Ingram rejection and a 6-3 lead. The Warriors’ Abby Dixon made a great defensive dig on the next play, but the rally continued, closing with a WCI kill and



St. Mary’s Warrior Mikayla Sezewright stretches to pass up a WCI shot. (JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

7-3 lead upped to 8-3 on another Ingram denial at the net.

The teams’ changing sides at eight provided a natural momentum break for the Warriors. St. Mary’s Emma Bishop-Davis, returning to action after injuring her right arm crashing into the referee’s stand while chasing a loose ball, took advantage with a weak-side kill that broke off the Red Devils run.

“It hurt so bad!” said Bishop-Davis, referring to her arm, not the game itself. While preferring a different outcome, she called the match the most competitive she had ever played, an enjoyable building block in the season.

“This was such a good game; whether we won or lost, we still improved.”

WCI would regain its momentum, reeling off seven consecutive points, including a Claire Gyimesi-directed set, Bella Melanson tip, two Alison Van Der Wyngaard service winners, and an Ingram middle rejection and game-closing centre kill.

“I was scared,” admitted the WCI middle hitter, agreeing a tough game against a quality opponent is better than a blow-out, but does come with its share of uncertainty. “This was definitely a challenge, but I’m glad our players worked through it,” Ingram continued. “We learned how to play together at the end and didn’t give up.”

“They’re good,” credited Van Der Wyngaard. “You want to play good teams and make yourself better.

“It shows us what we need to do to win,” she added. “I know our team has it in us, but we have to push. It’s not going to be given to us.”

A regular-season victory carrying playoff intensity gave the undefeated

Red Devils the inside track to first place in the TVRA Southeast, a game up on Ingersoll DCI with one loss, and two on the Warriors. The regular season concludes with the Red Devils travelling to St. Thomas St. Joe’s on Feb. 3. Play-in matches are scheduled for Feb. 10, playoff quarterfinals that Thursday and semis and finals for Feb. 18.

“It’s all quality ball at this point, right?” coach Melanson concluded.



WCI Red Devil senior girls volleyball player Lily Melanson (left) tracks down a St. Mary’s shot, watched closely by teammate Lila Oliveira. The senior Red Devils earned a 25-14, 25-19, 25-15 match victory to push their TVRA Southeast regular season record to 6-1.

TVRA SOUTHEAST JUNIOR GIRLS VOLLEYBALL	
MONDAY, JAN. 19	
ST. MARY’S	25, 20, 25, 25
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	21, 25, 16, 14
ST. THOMAS PARKSIDE	25, 25, 25, 25
INGERSOLL DCI	16, 18, 27, 19
TUESDAY, JAN. 13	
WOODSTOCK CI	25, 18, 25, 23, 15
ST. MARY’S	21, 25, 23, 25, 4
WOODSTOCK COLLEGE AVENUE	18, 25, 25, 23, 15
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	25, 21, 23, 25, 8

TVRA SOUTHEAST SENIOR GIRLS VOLLEYBALL	
MONDAY, JAN. 19	
ST. MARY’S	23, 17, 25, 25, 15
HURON PARK	25, 25, 22, 21, 12
ST. THOMAS PARKSIDE	25, 25, 25
INGERSOLL DCI	14, 15, 16
TUESDAY, JAN. 13	
WOODSTOCK COLLEGE AVENUE	25, 25, 25
WOODSTOCK HURON PARK	10, 16, 14
WOODSTOCK CI	25, 25, 25
ST. MARY’S	14, 19, 15

TVRA Southeast girls curling playoff relationship status - complicated

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

Thames Valley Regional Athletics Association (TVRA) Southeast girls curling standings epitomize the social media relationship status 'Complicated.'

With one game remaining following exams, all seven teams remain in play for the postseason. With a victory in the final regular season game against St. Thomas Parkside Stampede, the Woodstock Huron Park Huskies, 8-7 winners over St. Thomas Central Elgin on Jan. 13, would move ahead of a three-way logjam including Woodstock St. Mary's, St. Thomas Central Elgin and St. Joe's for the fourth and final playoff position. If the Stampede prevail, they will move into a tie for first with the Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers, the Huskies would be eliminated, and the remaining three would have to decide which team joins those two and Tillsonburg Glendale in the first round of the playoffs. If the Huskies tie the Stampede, they will earn two points and pull into a four-way tie for fourth, setting up an even more complicated scenario.

"It's literally like (NFL) wild card weekend for girls curling," laughed Blue Bombers coach Elaine Di Stefano.

IDCI currently stands in first at 5-1-0 and, regardless of the tie-breaking procedure, will finish in first or second and open playoffs against Parkside in the one versus two game. The winner advances to the TVRA Southeast final, and the loser plays the winner of the three versus four game for the second final berth. Playoffs are set for Feb. 11, 18 and 25, with the top team qualifying for Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletic Association (WOSSAA) playdowns, and a run at a potential berth in the provincial final.

The Bombers' lone loss on the TVRA regular season came at the hands of the Stampede, albeit with a short-handed squad due to illness.

The St. Mary's Warriors girls team is pleased to have a chance for the post-sea-

son, said coach Richard Murphy.

"It did create that excitement," he said of the realization their season might not be over despite a 5-2 loss to St. Thomas St. Joe's Rams in their final TVRA Southeast outing. "We do have an opportunity."

IDCI's boys curling team will also open the playoffs in the one-versus-two game. The Blue Bombers finished tied in points with the Woodstock CI Red Devils, the latter earning top spot with one additional point for (61 versus 60) on the season.

The goal for both teams was to make the playoffs, said Di Stefano.

"Finishing top two was the ideal scenario. And then, we just need everyone to stay healthy. If we can stay healthy and have our experienced people on the ice, that's our best shot."

Predicting post-season outcomes based on past performance can be tricky, said Di Stefano, given her own team's illness against Parkside, or the fact a six or eight-point differential in a game can come down to one or two big ends.

"You missed that one shot and gave up four."

The boys will have their hands full opening against WCI, for example, she said, a Red Devils squad skipped by Alexis Schaeffer, an experienced curler who executes well and calls a good game.

"We don't have room for error against WCI," she said, a statement applicable to any of the teams in the top four, games she expects to play out like a chess match of move and countermove. "It's who's reading the ice, who's hitting the shots and calling the right strategy."

Red Devils coach Scott McIntosh concurred. While pointing out WCI's boys team has either tied or beaten all of the teams in the top four, the Red Devils tied Ingersoll and benefited from what he felt was not the Warriors' best outing through a 7-2 win on Jan. 13 at the Woodstock Curling Centre.

"I would not underestimate any team in the playoffs."

It will be a matter of who plays well on



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

St. Mary's Warrior Lucas Lowes keeps his eye on the broom while releasing a stone to the care of sweepers Killean Coghlan (left) and Jack Verberne (right).



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

St. Mary's skip Sebastian Lagos (right) joins vice Killean Coghlan (left) and Jack Verberne (centre) in sweeping a Lucas Lowes rock toward the house.

the day, what the ice is like, who can read it more quickly, adjust and make their shots as a result, predicted McIntosh.

"It will be a challenge."

Entering playoffs in fourth place following a post-season-clinching win over St. Thomas St. Joe's in their final outing, War-

riors coach Murphy believes every team in that four-member group has the opportunity to advance to WOSSAA. His pre-game advice to his four curlers will be stick to their gameplan and remain focused.

"I look forward to the opportunity to let them show what they are made of."



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock CI vice Mikhail Petrukhov (right) sneaks a peek at the house while sweeping a rock forward.

TVRA SOUTHEAST GIRLS CURLING	
WEDNESDAY, JAN. 14	
INGERSOLL DCI	11
HURON PARK	2
ST. JOE'S	5
ST. MARY'S	2
TUESDAY, JAN. 13	
HURON PARK	8
ST. THOMAS CENTRAL ELGIN	7

TVRA SOUTHEAST BOYS CURLING	
WEDNESDAY, JAN. 14	
WOODSTOCK ST. MARY'S	7
ST. THOMAS ST. JOE'S	3
INGERSOLL DCI	9
AYLMER EAST ELGIN	1
TUESDAY, JAN. 13	
WOODSTOCK CI	7
ST. MARY'S	2

Robbie Burns celebrated in Ingersoll

The Ingersoll Pipe Band hosted a well-attended Burns Night program on Saturday, January 24, at the IPB Armoury, drawing residents and visitors for an evening dedicated to the legacy of Robert Burns. The event featured a full lineup of musical and cultural performances.

Returning favourites The Paddy Stones - Dan and Rick from Tillsonburg - delivered a polished, engaging set that showcased their signature Celtic sound. Their performance once again proved to be a strong anchor for the evening's entertainment. It also included a series of dance

performances by students at the Sim School of Highland Dance, whose precision and traditional choreography added depth to the cultural celebration. A mini band of Ingersoll Pipe Band pipers and drummers provided the unmistakable sound of Scotland, offering both opening and closing selections that framed the event with tradition and ceremony.

This year's Burns Night continued the community's commitment to celebrating Scottish culture and recognizing the enduring influence of Robert Burns through music, dance, and fellowship.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



A full house of celebrants brought energy and excitement to the hall.



The evening commenced with the ceremonial piping in of the haggis, a highlight for all in attendance.



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Family receives outpouring of financial support amid daughter's cancer battle, including from Woodstock Wildcats

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

The family of a young hockey player facing cancer is grateful for the support from the Woodstock Wildcats girls hockey association. During the recent Wildcats Rep Tourna-



(CHRIS EDMISTON PHOTO)

Delaney Edmiston, a 13-year-old London Devilettes player, is facing a rare form of childhood cancer. The Woodstock Wildcats Girls Hockey Association raised \$3,200 in fundraising to support the family.

ment, the association sold mugs and glasses as a fundraiser for 13-year-old Delaney Edmiston, a U15 London Devilettes hockey player facing a rare childhood cancer known as Ewing Sarcoma. \$3,200 was raised from the drinkware sales, cash donations, and online auction sales for PWHL tickets.

"Hockey is built on teamwork, loyalty, and looking out for one another. Supporting a fellow young hockey player during a time like this, is not only about helping financially and supporting the player's emotional resilience but shows our own players that these values extend far beyond the rink," said Sarah Morrison, association president. "We hope that by reaching out and offering our support, it is a reminder to a fellow hockey family that they are not in this fight alone."

Delaney's father Chris Edmiston said the family had some friends playing in the tournament and had heard bits about the fundraiser but got the full confirmation from Morrison after the tournament ended.

"It was a little overwhelming to have complete strangers doing that for us, but it's definitely a great feeling to know that people out there are supporting her. Even if they don't know her or know us, I think see a little bit of Delaney in their own kids and wanted to help."

Calling his daughter "a tough cookie," he added Delaney just finished her third round of chemotherapy last week.

"She has good days and bad days but more



(CHRIS EDMISTON PHOTO)

Delaney Edmiston (centre), 13-years-old, with her 11-year-old brother Cohen (left) and 16-year-old sister Hayden (right).

good days for sure. I wasn't sure how it was going to go, so I'm happy she's tolerating everything really well."

After completing six rounds of chemotherapy, the Edmiston family will have to fly out to Florida for Delaney to access proton therapy, a specialized radiation that's different from radiation available in Canada.

In addition to the Woodstock Wildcats' fundraising, support poured in through a GoFundMe campaign for Delaney and her family. As of Jan. 27, more than \$91,000 has been raised – far surpassing the \$15,000 goal.

"When we started the GoFundMe, I was

expecting we might come close to the original target of the campaign. It just took off and really blew our minds with how our local community, friends, and family supported us spiritually and emotionally and just being there for us and to have complete strangers like the Wildcats did has been unbelievable," Chris said. "I can't thank these people enough and they'll never know how much it has meant to us to have the support and have people rallying behind her through this battle."

Donations via GoFundMe can be made online by visiting <https://www.gofundme.com/help-delaney-fight-ewing-sarcoma>.

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Ontario 

Ingersoll “Potter’s Field Project” Honoured with Provincial Heritage Award

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

The Ingersoll Unmarked Grave “Potter’s Field Project” has been awarded the Russell K. Cooper Award by the Ontario Historical Society (OHS), recognizing the project’s outstanding contribution to the preservation and interpretation of local history.

The three-year initiative was a collaborative effort involving countless contributors, including the Ingersoll Rural Cemetery Board, the Town of Ingersoll, the Township of Zorra, and the Oxford County Library, among others.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to speak with project team members Dr. Cody Groat, Debbie Johnston, and Isaac Bender about the work behind the recognition. Groat and Johnston are both Ingersoll locals, while Bender hails from the neighbouring community of Woodstock.

“It all started in my role at Western University as a professor of History and Indigenous Studies,” began Groat, head of the Potter’s Field Project. He explained Western offers summer research internships and, in 2022, two student volunteers, Rebecca Small and Emily Kirk, were hired to assist with the initial work.

“We engaged in archival research using the Ingersoll Rural Cemetery records,” Groat said. “Potter’s Field is a large, unmarked section of the cemetery, and we knew it was used for community members, mostly those of lower socio-economic status who were experiencing poverty.”

He explained the project began with a simple question: “How many people are here, and what are their names?” From there, the research quickly grew into something much larger than a single summer internship.

Johnston, who has served as chair of the cemetery board since 2022, said she was “on board with Cody from the very beginning.”

She fondly recalled visiting the Ingersoll Rural Cemetery as a child with her grandmother, who would often point out Potter’s Field. “I always knew it existed,” Johnston said. “Even though there was little to no indication aside from a few stones piled up, that anyone was ever buried there.”

In 2023, Bender was a graduate student at Western University in the Department of Anthropology. He learned about the project through his supervisor, Lisa Hodgetts.

“Large, unmarked graves, unknown positions, there were a lot of unknowns that we had to assess and see what we could learn,” Bender explained.

With the consent of the Town of Ingersoll, Bender and his team joined the project to conduct archaeological work, surveying the area and identifying burial locations within Potter’s Field using entirely non-invasive methods.

The team emphasized the importance of dispelling misconceptions about unmarked grave research. “I think what was quite exciting through Isaac’s contribution is that people could speak with him directly and ask questions,” Groat noted. “It helped show that the work is non-invasive and really does not harm the dignity of anyone buried there.”

The project culminated in a public ceremony held on June 7, 2025, at 2 p.m. at the Ingersoll Rural Cemetery, where a monument was unveiled to honour nearly 400 individuals buried in unmarked graves. The burials represent a diverse group of men, women, and children from the Ingersoll area who, due to financial hardship or circumstance, were unable to afford a marked grave.



(OHS PHOTO)

Potter’s Field Project wins OHC Russell K Cooper Award on December 6th. Left to right, Co-Chair of OHC Awards Committee Hans Bathijia, Potter’s Field Team Dr. Cody Groat, Debbie Johnston, and Isaac Bender.

“As much as this is an Ingersoll and Zorra Township project, it really spoke to a lot of much bigger national stories,” added Groat.

While deeply rooted in these areas, the project resonated far beyond municipal boundaries. The unveiling drew attendees from across the region and beyond.

“We had some family members come from Chicago in the U.S.,” Groat explained. “We also had a woman named Robin Moore who came and spoke on behalf of the families buried in Potter’s

Field.”

The team also expressed their gratitude to the Town of Ingersoll and the Township of Zorra, who together contributed \$25,000 toward the monument.

The Russell K. Cooper Award highlights the significance of community-led heritage initiatives and their role in preserving overlooked histories. For those behind the Potter’s Field Project, the recognition serves as a meaningful reminder that remembering those once forgotten is an essential part of honouring a community’s past.



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Potter’s Field Monument in Ingersoll Rural Cemetery, to honour nearly 400 unmarked graves.



(DEBBIE JOHNSTON PHOTO)

Ancestors Joey Hollingsworth and his cousin attending the Potter’s Field monument’s unveiling on June 7th, 2025.

SOUTH-WESTERN ONTARIO OUTDOORS

What's going on with Great Lakes water levels?

JEFF HELSDON

Echo Contributor

What happened to all the water?

That's the big question from anyone who spends much time on the Great Lakes, including boaters, anglers, waterfowl hunters, and kayakers. In short, the Great Lakes have fallen dramatically from record high levels only six years ago.

Lake levels are a combination of local precipitation and water coming from other lakes. In the case of Lake Erie, this means water feeds it from Lakes Superior, Huron, and Michigan. Looking in more detail, Erie's water levels are determined 21 per cent by local precipitation and runoff, and 79 per cent from water fed from the upper lakes. Moving to Lake Ontario, these numbers slide to 15 per cent and 85 per cent, respectively. This means the levels of the lower lakes are influenced by those of the upper lakes.

Frank Seglenieks, a water resources engineer with the National Hydrological Service, reported all five of the Great Lakes are below average when he was interviewed in November. He noted that the upper lakes, Superior and Huron-Michigan, are much lower than Lakes Erie and Ontario. Seglenieks explained that a drought encompassing the American Midwest was hitting the western Great Lakes.

The current levels are the lowest since 2013, and are nothing out of the ordinary.

"When you look back at the history, going back 100 years, it's been lower," he said. "It's not like they are historically low or anything."

Since Seglenieks said that, lake levels continued to decline in December. Predictions, based on ranges that cover extremely wet and extremely dry years, show Lake Huron staying below average across all scenarios. With Lake Erie, extremely wet conditions could raise the lake slightly above the long-term average, but most scenarios for the next few months keep Erie below average.

At Long Point, the lower water is clearly visible. Water levels on the sea walls in the marinas tell a tale of where the water is and has been, and are three feet below the high-water marks from a few years ago. At the Long Point Waterfowl Unit, staff told hunters they would need a mud motor to access many blinds due to low water.

Angie Woodward of Marina Shores said she has never seen the levels this low. This is something marina owners need to keep an eye on as erosion increases when the water levels are low and closer to the bot-

tom of the sea wall.

Although the numbers show the level was lower in the last 20 years, Woodward said that could have happened for a short time, but not for such a long period.

Glen Rohrer of Tillsonburg, who owns Coletta Bay Guides and has hunted Long Point Bay since 1989, also hasn't seen levels this low. He hunts several different places on Long Point Bay and said he couldn't reach two or three of his spots this fall.

"Back in the mid to early 1990s, the water was low, but not as low as it is right now," he said, saying his log showed the low water in the 1990s lasted a couple of years.

Seglenieks said siltation or wind could be impacting shallow bays such as Long Point, beyond the broader lake levels.

With water levels dropping quickly through the fall in many years, many swear there is some control over Lake Erie's water levels, but this is not the case.

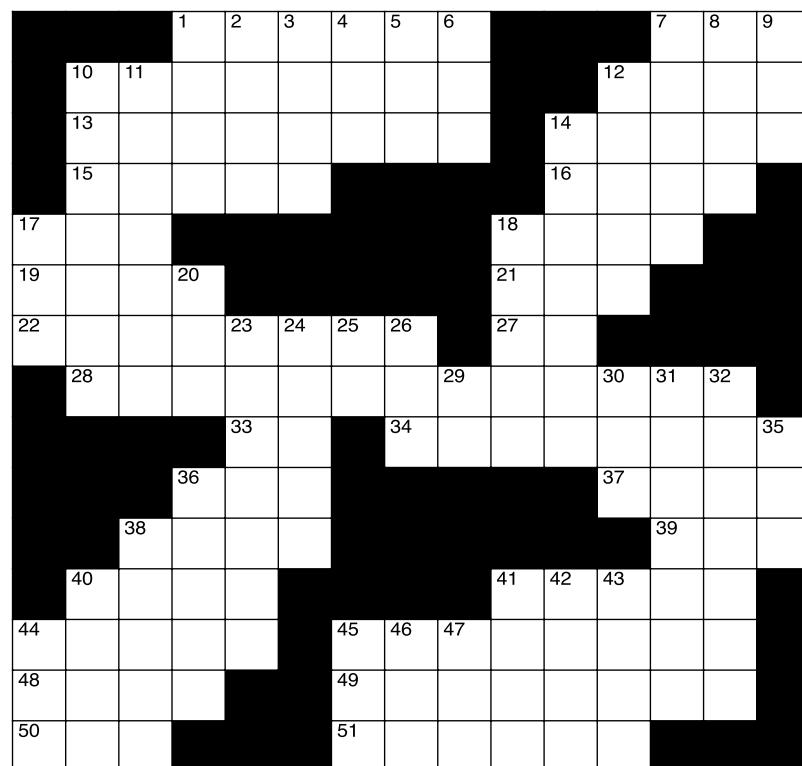
"There is no control of the majority of the flow out of Lake Erie, most of it goes over Niagara Falls," Seglenieks said, adding the Welland Canal is emptied each year after Jan. 1 for maintenance. "This has a negligible impact on the water levels of Lake Erie. There is also some flow of the Niagara River that is diverted to be used in hydroelectric plants, but this water is released back to the river a few hours later. So, the overall daily outflow from Lake Erie is not affected by this diversion."

Having written stories about water levels for more than two decades, I can recall the days of lower water levels as well. In the last low-water spell, Lake Erie fared better, and Lake Huron-Michigan (the lakes have the same level as they are joined in the Straits of Mackinac) was the lowest. Looking back in my files, I wrote this in 2015, "Levels in Lake Huron and Michigan have been below average since December 1998. The level was low enough that docks were left high and dry, wetlands dried up, and cottagers were clamoring for an investigation into what caused the levels to dive. The lowest point was in January 2013, when the level was 73 centimeters below average."

I also recall cottager's associations on Lake Huron were calling for measures to slow the water in the St. Clair River, with the hope it would bring the water levels back up. That changed less than five years later as record highs were seen.

What the near future holds is uncertain, but water levels will rise as part of an endless cycle.

CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Where entertainers perform | 34. American national park |
| 7. Miller beer variety | 36. One point south of due east |
| 10. Ageless | 37. Assist in a crime |
| 12. River in SE Europe | 38. Greek mythological personification of Earth |
| 13. Able to be repaired | 39. A major division of geological time |
| 14. Type of wrap | 40. German courtesy title |
| 15. Atomic #54 | 41. English family dating back to Norman times |
| 16. Type of tent | 44. Discounts |
| 17. U.S. Treasury position | 45. South American nation |
| 18. Opposed to | 48. Former Milwaukee Buck Michael |
| 19. Protective covering | 49. Hostile |
| 21. Bridge building degree | 50. Passports and drivers licenses are two |
| 22. Clouding of the lens | 51. Discourages from doing |
| 27. Priestess of Hera loved by Zeus | |
| 28. Unacceptable | |
| 33. Mr. T's "The A-Team" character | |

CLUES DOWN

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Supreme god of ancient Egyptians | 23. Criminals who steal |
| 2. Nevada city | 24. Genus of leaf-footed bug |
| 3. Energy, style and enthusiasm | 25. Music product |
| 4. Bird's beak | 26. "Talk to you" |
| 5. Language | 29. Santa says it three times |
| 6. Midway between south and southeast | 30. Doctors' group |
| 7. Punjab village | 31. African nation |
| 8. Small biting flies | 32. Ageless |
| 9. Sportscaster Patrick | 35. When you hope to get somewhere |
| 10. A way to get around | 36. Worn |
| 11. Repeat | 38. Deprives of vigor |
| 12. A way to cook with fat | 40. Used to have (Scottish) |
| 14. Temporary loss of consciousness | 41. Where you live |
| 17. Reciprocal of a sine | 42. Muslim ruler title |
| 18. Fir tree genus | 43. Basics |
| 20. "Transformers" director Michael | 44. Type of drug (abbr.) |
| | 45. Spanish soldier |
| | 46. It precedes two |
| | 47. Illuminated |

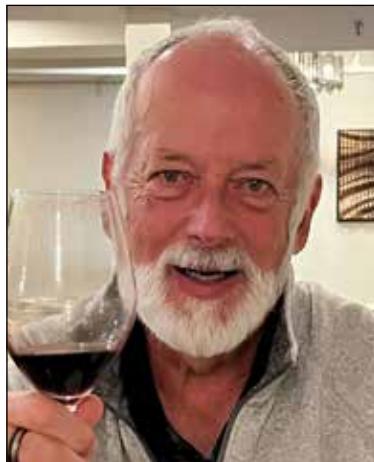
Answers found on page 31.

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO!

TRAVEL

My first and last trip to the Dominican Republic



PAUL KNOWLES

Echo Contributor

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

I went with plan C, golf, while staying at an all-inclusive. A buddy of mine who has previously spent cold months in Florida was looking for another option, and we decided to spend eight days at the Meliá Caribe Beach resort in Punta Cana; our package there (and yes, I paid full freight, unusual for a travel writer!) including half-price golf at the nearby, 27-hole, Cocotal Golf course.

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

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

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

The final day of play was a Saturday, and it was busier, so we actually skipped by a couple of lined-up holes, and then added make-up holes on the third nine, so we got in an 18-hole layout of our own devising.

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

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

Start with my room. All of the



The Cocotal course was beautiful and generally in good shape.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

drawers on the dresser were broken in some way; one would never close properly. I personally fixed the perpetually running toilet, and tightened the toilet seat. My one bar of shower soap was not replaced once in eight days. The air conditioning roared like a 747 on take-off. There were two straight-backed chairs in the room, and instead of a couch, a single day-bed... so, nowhere actually comfortable to sit. My safe didn’t work until a staffer came to fix it.

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

We discovered that you could get certain services – like a golf-cart

ride to your room – but only if you asked. No one had told us to ask.

The only bar or lounge where you could get a drink after dinner, on this gigantic resort, was the lobby bar, where loud, disco-style music was a mainstay.

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

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

I know not everyone would agree. I have talked to a number of friends since returning, and they have been surprised by my stories. They love the Dominican Republic, and would

return there in a moment. We also met a lot of Canadians there who had made the trip to the DR many times, and are big fans.

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

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

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



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

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



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

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

When Knights Roamed Our Streets

SCOTT GILLIES

Echo Contributor

They do walk among us, or at least they were more common some one hundred years ago. Knights of the realm. And while the majority of them are or were of British stock, there were and are a few locally grown Canadian knights. Some have even visited Oxford County.

John Stephen Willison was born in 1856 in Huron County in a little hamlet known as Hills Green between the communities of Hensall and St. Joseph. Son of the local blacksmith, young Willison grew up to appreciate the power of the written word; perhaps beginning with Longfellow's poem "The Village Blacksmith": Under a spreading chestnut-tree/ The village smithy stands; / The smith, a mighty man is he, / With large and sinewy hands, / And the muscles of his brawny arms/ Are strong as iron bands."

At the age of 15 John left home to pursue a career as a teaching assistant, and then in journalism. He found work in 1881 with "The London Advertiser", one of the leading newspapers in southwestern Ontario. Two years later he moved to Toronto to write for "The Globe". He proved to be so adept at covering the provincial legislature that he was promoted to cover the activities of the House of Commons in Ottawa. It was here that he met and became close with the young up-and-coming Liberal Wilfrid Laurier. They shared a common love of politics and literature. Willison, in his capacity with the press, enabled Laurier to win the nomination for party leadership in the 1890s and ultimately the Prime Minister's Office in 1896. In that same year, due to American tariffs, Willison urged Laurier to rebuild imperial trade relations with other parts of the British Empire. This, combined with Laurier's outstanding performance

during Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee heightened Canada's profile on the world stage.

In a foreshadowing statement of future politics urged by Canadian radicals, Willison was quoted as saying, "Reforms are for Oppositions. It is the business of governments to stay in office."

In 1902, Canadian financier Joseph Flavelle, who was a part owner of the Ingersoll Pork Packaging company, convinced Willison to shift loyalties to a new newspaper called the Toronto "Evening News". This partnership lasted until the early days of the First World War. When that relationship dissolved, Willison was offered a high-profile position as correspondent with the London "Times".

A proposed reciprocal trade agreement with the United States in 1911 in which Willison predicted would "commercially annex the Canadian West to the United States" led to an election that brought Robert Borden to power. Willison had written his campaign manifesto. Two years later the Huron County boy was knighted.

John Stephen Willison was made a Knight Bachelor on January 1, 1913, along with fellow Canadians the Honourable Auguste Angers, a senator and judge and Frederick Williams-Taylor, general manager of the Bank of Montreal. Other internationally notable knights included businessmen, politicians, scholars and leading thinkers of the time like Francis Darwin, third son of famed scientist Charles Darwin.

In 1916 when the outcome of the war was in question, and the need for additional troops led to the debate over conscription and the formation of a union government. Willison was one of the driving forces in the governmental backrooms making this a reality. He acted as chief publicity coordinator which resulted in a landslide victory for Borden and the union government.



Sir John Willison. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

In 1918 he was made head of the Ontario Housing Commission charged with building new homes for returning soldiers and then he was appointed to the federal committee in charge of reconstruction efforts nationwide.

In February of 1919, Sir John made a trip to Ingersoll and gave a speech to the members of the Canadian Club assembled at the Ingersoll Inn. As Chairman of the National Reconstruction Commission, he spoke to a sold-out crowd on the necessity to shift from armament production and wartime efforts to refocussing on industrial development, the expansion of our min-

eral resources and the importance of assisting the returned soldiers. After 51 months of war, he urged Canadians to work together. "Patience, sympathy and cooperation were the watchwords" to direct and guide Canadians as we entered the post-war era.

As he pointed out, the problem of reconstruction was just as challenging as any we had faced during the Great War. The Canadian economy was facing monumental challenges. Some of the solutions he posited were as follows: good relations between provinces, good relations between agriculture and industry, and good relations between employer and employees. He urged that every factory should be working at fulltime capacity in order to come to grips with the needs of the 500,000 men and women and their dependent families who were facing financial and emotional challenges due to the cessation of war. To deal with this, the federal government was looking to spend \$60 million on government railways, another \$20 million on public works, \$60 million on shipbuilding, and between one and two hundred million on demobilization costs and a further \$40 million in soldiers' pensions.

At the conclusion of his remarks, Willison reiterated the vital importance of all Canadians working together and urging employers to treat their employees like family – with sympathy, patience and understanding.

Why was this speech given in Ingersoll? Most likely in appreciation for the fundraising efforts of the local citizens. In that year, they raised over \$1,000,000.00 for the Canadian Victory Loan campaign – the most of any other community of similar size in Canada. While in Ingersoll, Sir Willison was the guest of the local Victory Loan campaign chair, Cyrus H. Sumner and his wife Alice at their 285 Oxford Street home.

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COMING EVENTS

JANUARY

JANUARY 30 / EVERY OTHER FRIDAY | 1 - 4 PM IN 2026 IT'S YOUR FIX!

INGERSOLL COUNTRY MUSIC JAMBOREE Masonic Hall - 190 Thames St. S., Ingersoll

Join us, walk ins welcome. Qualifications - love 50-70's country music. Perform, listen, dance & enjoy! January 30, February 13 & 27, March 6 & 20, April 10 & 17, May 1, 15 & 29, June 5 & 19.

JANUARY 31 | 12:30 PM

CURLING DAY IN CANADA - OPEN HOUSE Ingersoll District Curling Club, 36 Chisholm Drive, Ingersoll

Jitney play starts at 1 p.m. & 3:45 p.m., Canada's Big Shootout starts at 2:30 p.m., Bar open at 1 p.m., Kitchen open at 2 p.m., Silent auction tables open at 5:30 p.m., Live auction at 7 p.m., and Scotties 1 vs 2 Page Playoff Game on TV at 6:30 p.m. Visit ingersollcurlingclub.com

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 2 | 7:30 - 9 AM

CHILLY CHARLIE'S PROGNOSTICATION & PANCAKE BREAKFAST

South Gate Centre - 191 Old Wellington St. S.,
Woodstock, ON

Come see Woodstock's resident groundhog predict the weather forecast. Free community event. Breakfast: Adults \$6, Kids under 12 \$3

FLAG RAISINGS FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2026

Join us this February to celebrate Black History Month in Oxford County. Commemorate the history of our Black communities and learn how diverse the community has grown. Pan-African Flag raisings and receptions including local historical displays by the Oxford County Archives and various museums and spoken word presentation by Duane Kumala-Thomas will be held in the following

Crispy's FISH & CHIPS

Haddock Bites Lunch Combo

2 Mini Haddock Fish with Chips +
Can Pop / Tea / Coffee

\$11.99 + tax

12:00 PM - 3:00 PM | Mon-Fri

Dine-in & Take-out Only • Limited Time
194 Springbank Ave N, Woodstock

communities throughout the month:

FEBRUARY 3 | 10 AM

INGERSOLL

Dewan Park, 90 Thames Street South

Reception to follow at the Ingersoll Public Library (130 Oxford Street).

FEBRUARY 10 | 10 AM

WOODSTOCK

Oxford County Administration Building, 21 Reeve Street

And following at the City of Woodstock flagpole in Museum Square

Reception afterwards at the Woodstock Museum (466 Dundas Street).

Everyone is welcome. For more information visit instagram: [@oxfordroots](https://www.instagram.com/oxfordroots) or <http://revelateddotme.wixstudio.com/oxfordroots>

FEBRUARY 7 / 1ST SAT. OF MONTH | 9 AM - 12 PM

REPAIR CAFÉ - TOSS IT? NO WAY!

St. John's Church 685860 Oxford Highway 2,
Eastwood, ON N4S 7V9

St. John's, Eastwood, now affiliated with Repair Café International (look for us at repaircafe.org). Repairs made to clothing, linens, household items, toys, musical instruments etc. Save money, learn how to make your own repairs. Volunteers welcome. Payment by donation.

FEBRUARY 9 / 7 PM

THE CARNEGIE LIBRARIES OF OXFORD COUNTY

Oxford Branch of Ontario Ancestors - Virtual Meeting

Presented by Dr. Matthew Griffis. In this presentation, Dr. Matthew Griffis, one of Oxford County Library's local history specialists, will discuss the origins of the Carnegie library building program, its progress in Canada, and details about the five Carnegie libraries that opened in Oxford County between 1909 and 1917. The presentation includes dozens of historical images from his own collection. To register visit our webpage at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca> and click on the link, you will be sent a new link to join the meeting. This meeting is free and open to everyone.

FEBRUARY 17 / 5 - 7 PM

PANCAKE DAY (SHROVE TUESDAY)

Old St Paul's Church,
723 Dundas St Woodstock, ON

Old St Paul's Church is flippin' out again with Woodstock's best pancakes. Supper includes pancakes and syrup, sausages, fruit salad and beverages. All are welcome. Free will offering. (Give only what you can.)

FEBRUARY 18 / 3RD WED. OF MONTH

COLOURING THROUGH GRIEF

Caring Hearts Support Network: St. David's
United Church, 190 Springbank Ave., Woodstock
ON

One time fee of \$15. Registration is required.

Call 519-536-3370. Check out website

www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

FEBRUARY 18 / 3RD WED. OF MONTH | 6:30 - 8:30 PM

PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

21 Wellington St., Woodstock
(Virtual options available)

PCMH is a peer support program providing support

to parents and caregivers across Ontario with lived experience raising children and youth with mental health challenges. For more information, please visit family.cmho.org or oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca. We are also on Facebook: Parents for Children's Mental Health ~ Oxford County

FEBRUARY 21 | 9 AM

MEN'S BREAKFAST

Huron Park Baptist Church - 199 Berwick St,
Woodstock, ON

FEBRUARY 24 | 10 AM - 12 PM

MONTHLY VON BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Ingersoll Pharmasave, 19 King St. E., Ingersoll

Last Tuesday of every Month.

FEBRUARY 25 / 4TH WED. OF MONTH | 1 - 2:30 PM

GRIEF SUPPORT FOR MAID RELATED LOSS

Thamesford Library, 165 Dundas St., Thamesford

This monthly in-person grief support group for loss related to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) offers a compassionate, safe space to explore this unique loss. The group is free of charge and pre-registration is requested. To register or inquire about an evening group, contact 519-866-3016 or email faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca.

FEBRUARY 25 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2026 SPEAKER SERIES: HOW DO I LOVE THEE - VALENTINES THROUGH TIME

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave.,
Woodstock

Special Guest Speaker – Scott Gillies, Chair OxHS – Bring your sweetheart and come curl up in the big comfy chairs at Chartwell Oxford Gardens and listen to the history of Valentines Day. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

FEBRUARY 26 / 5:30 - 7:30 PM

OLIVER STEPHENS PUBLIC SCHOOL INVITES YOU TO... FLAVOURS OF THE WORLD PLAYGROUND FUNDRAISING DINNER

College Avenue Secondary School -
700 College Ave., Woodstock

\$25/ticket - Door price entry with purchase. CASH ONLY.

Tickets available for purchase at:

The Pub at Norwich Ave - 305 Norwich Ave.

Friendly City Tire - 344 Norwich Ave.

Romance Jewellers - 514 Dundas Street

Woodstock Tire & Towing - 701 Norwich Ave

Contact the school for more information (519) 539-2068.

Raffle prizes and many food options! In support of our playground fundraising.

FEBRUARY 26 | 12 PM

YOUNG AT HEART LUNCHEON

Huron Park Baptist Church - 199 Berwick St,
Woodstock, ON

MARCH

MARCH 21 | 9:30 AM - 4 PM

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

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

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

Contact: dhfe@silomail.com

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

COMING EVENTS

MARCH 25 | 6:30 PM

**OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
WINTER 2026 SPEAKER SERIES: LITTLE
ENGINES CAN DO BIG THINGS**

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave.
Woodstock

Special Guest Speaker - Colin Currie, Director OxHS – join Colin as he takes us through Oxford County's rich railroad history and historical infrastructure that helped shape and connect cities like Woodstock and Ingersoll (CN/CP) and towns like Tillsonburg, Hickson and Beachville (CASO/GWR), now featuring numerous surviving heritage train stations and active train-watching spots. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

ONGOING CLASSES, CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS

EVERY FRIDAY | 1 PM

TILLSONBURG DUPLICATE BRIDGE CLUB

Tillsonburg Senior Centre, 45 Hardy Ave, Tillsonburg

Don't have a partner? Come anyway and we will match you up with someone. For more information, visit their Facebook page: [TburgBridge](https://www.facebook.com/TburgBridge).

2ND TUES. OF MONTH (SEPT. TO MAY) | 2 - 4 PM

4TH TUES. OF MONTH (SEPT. TO MAY) | 7 - 9 PM

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY

Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street,
Woodstock Ontario N4S 1C7

If you have never belonged to a stamp club, now's the time. Meet new friends, grow your knowledge and collection. Contact: Don Eaton dhfe@silomail.com. Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

VON OXFORD GRIEF CARE:

FREE MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

Register at: oxford.griefsupport@von.ca or 519-539-1231
Ext 6299 or 6296

TILLSONBURG

WHEN: 2nd Tuesday of every month

WHERE: VON Oxford Office 24 Brock St. W., Tillsonburg

TIME: 6:30PM-8:00PM

INGERSOLL

WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month

WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll

TIME: 10:30AM - 12:00Noon

WOODSTOCK

WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month

WHERE: Sakura House Hospice 715180 Oxford Rd.4,
Woodstock

TIME: 10:30AM-12:00 Noon

THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF OXFORD COUNTY

The Optimists bring out the best in Youth, Community, and Themselves. If anyone is interested in coming out to meet us and learn more about us please email brenda7621@outlook.com

THE LIONS CLUB OF WOODSTOCK

The Lions Club of Woodstock has been serving the community and Oxford County with kindness and generosity since 1931. The Lions always place the needs of neighbours and communities first. Through the dedication and hard work of our volunteer members, we are serving those in need together. If you are interested in becoming a member or

simply wish to learn more by attending one of our monthly meetings, please email Steve Iorio at steveiorio4@gmail.com for more information.

**OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO
ANCESTORS**

Are you looking to start a summer pastime? Are you interested in your family history? Oxford Branch has an extensive collection of family history and genealogical resources that can help you.

**Come visit our Resource Centre at 82 Light Street,
Courthouse Square, Woodstock. We are open
Tuesdays to Thursdays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm**

Volunteers are ready to help you get started or help you research for missing information. You can also connect with us on the web at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting genealogical research in Oxford County. Hope to see you through the summer!

**FREEZER MEALS PROVIDED BY ST. PAUL'S
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

We know life is busy for many families today, and it can be so nice to have things in the freezer to allow us to eat well, and quickly. St. Paul's Church in Ingersoll has been busy making different items you can simply pull out of the freezer! We have frozen ham & pea soup, cabbage rolls and cabbage roll casseroles, as well as individual turkey pies. We also have some lovely frozen apple and blueberry fruit pies ready for your oven! We'd love to make life easier for you this winter. For more details on what we have, and the prices, please call our church office at 519-485-3390 or by email: stpauls@execulink.com.

BEACHVILLE LEGION EVENTS: 434852 ZorraLine, Beachville

**WEDNESDAYS | 7 - 8 PM
CHAIR YOGA**

**THURSDAYS | 7 - 8 PM
LINE DANCING**

**THURSDAYS | 7 PM
EUCHRE**

**THURSDAYS | 8:15 - 9:15 PM
INTRO TO BALL ROOM DANCING**
No partner required.

**FRIDAYS | 8 PM
DARTS**

**SATURDAYS | 1 - 4 PM
THAMES VALLEY BLUEGRASS AND OLD
TIME COUNTRY PICKERS**
Open Mic(acoustic only). Come enjoy the music.

**JANUARY 30 / FEBRUARY 13 | DOORS OPEN 6 PM
WOODSTOCK KITTEN NURSERY AND
RESCUE BINGO**
Bingo starts at 7 p.m.

**JANUARY 31 | 7 - 11 PM
KARAOKE**

**FEBRUARY 4 & 18 | 4:30 - 6 PM
OX ON THE RUN LIBRARY BOOK MOBILE**

**FEBRUARY 13 | 5:30 PM
LASAGNA DINNER**

**FEBRUARY 14 | 7-11 PM
LOVE AT FIRST GRAPE VINE LINE DANCING
NIGHT**

\$15 Lessons and Open Dance 7-10 pm. Open Dance 10-11 pm.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 55 EVENTS: 642 Dundas St, Woodstock, ON

**THURSDAYS | 1:30 PM
SHUFFLEBOARD**

**MONDAY EVENINGS
CADETS**

**TUESDAY - FRIDAY EVENINGS
DART LEAGUE**

**JANUARY 31 | 7 - 11 PM
EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - FLASHBACK**

**JANUARY 31 | 4:30 - 6 PM
WING NIGHT**

One price for wings plus w/Fries a different price Pre-Order and pay by January 23rd no later. So please contact Office or Canteen for more information.

**FEBRUARY 3 | 7 PM
GENERAL MEETING**

Remember to attend the meeting as we are having a special guest attending that evening.

**FEBRUARY 5 | 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM
SOUP N SANDWICH**

**FEBRUARY 6
OFFICE IS CLOSED**

**FEBRUARY 7 | 3 PM
MEAT DRAW**

**FEBRUARY 7 | 7 - 11 PM
EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - BACK-TO-
BACK**

**FEBRUARY 10 | 7:30 PM
EXECUTIVE MEETING**

**FEBRUARY 14 | 7 - 11 PM
EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - FLASHBACK**

**FEBRUARY 15 | 5 - 6 PM
ROAST BEEF DINNER**
Sold out. For more information please call 519-537-3112.

**FEBRUARY 21 | 7 - 11 PM
EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - RANDY
THOMAS**

**FEBRUARY 28 | 7 - 11 PM
EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - 2 FOR THE
ROAD**

Visit us online at theecho.ca

Riddles

I'm your home and the third from the Sun. I've got water and life—aren't I the fun one? What am I?

Earth

I'm the planet with the most bling, I've got rings you can't help noticing! What am I?

Saturn

I'm red all over, with dust in the air. Some people think I might have had water to share. What am I?

Mars

I'm closest to the Sun, but I don't get much attention. I'm small and speedy—just thought I'd mention! What am I?

Mercury

I've got rings around me, but I'm not Saturn. I'm tilted sideways, so my days take an odd pattern. What am I?

Uranus

I'm a gas giant and the biggest by far. With a Great Red Spot, I'm the king of the stars! What am I?

Jupiter

I'm the hottest planet, though I'm not closest to the Sun. What am I?

Venus

I have storms that rage for hundreds of years. My winds are the fastest—no competition here! What am I?

Neptune

Sudoku

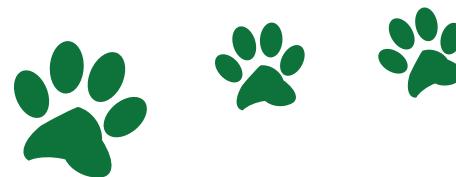
by PeterS 2025

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Solutions on page 31

Simple

Featured Pet



NASH

This is Nash, trying to lick some ice cream off his head.



Nominate your pet to be a Featured Pet by emailing info@theecho.ca

Word Search

JANUARY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

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

- STRANGER THINGS
- VENEZUELA
- MADURO CAPTURED
- ICE IN MINNESOTA
- RENEE GOOD
- IRAN UPRISING
- GREENLAND
- SPAIN TRAIN CRASH
- CANADA CHINA DEAL
- CARNEY WEF SPEECH
- US LEAVES WHO
- ALEX PRETTI
- SNOWSTORMS
- SEATTLE SEAHAWKS
- NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

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Martin's Nursery, 42661 Orangehill Road, Wroxeter (1 concession north of Wroxeter on Belmore Line)

WANTED

Old firearms for \$\$\$, especially Lee Enfield 303's, and older Winchester's, have P.A.L, I am local. Please call 1-867-993-3911 or email thirtypound@hotmail.com

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Taiwan
2. World Economic Forum
3. The tomb of Emperor Qin
4. Chimpanzees
5. 11,700 years ago
6. Pears
7. The Los Angeles Lakers
8. India Pale Ale
9. Rodents
10. Zamboni

SUDOKU

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CROSSWORD

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I	D	S						D	E	T	E	R	S		

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR HOUSE IS

Keep your dollars in Canada to strengthen communities and support local businesses, including your local newspaper.



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Médias d'Info Canada



Contribute to your local community newspaper! Send articles, sports or event recaps, and photos to info@theecho.ca

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If you are interested, contact Heather Dunbar at: heather@granthaven.com

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theecho.ca

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Conquer winter with available All-Wheel Drive.



Conquer Winter

Get your **Seltos** today



Available Heated 2nd-Row Seats



Available Heated Steering Wheel



Available All-Wheel Drive

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*Limited time finance offer provided through Kia Motors Finance on select new 2026 **Seltos** models through participating dealers to qualified retail customers, on approved credit, who take delivery from January 3, 2026 to February 2, 2026. Representative finance example based on a new and previously unregistered 2026 **Seltos**. Selling Price is \$26,095. 4.99% finance APR for 84 months, with a \$0 down payment or equivalent trade-in, equals 84 monthly finance payments of \$473 - which includes: \$2,100 delivery and destination fees; \$100 A/C charge (where applicable); regional fees of up to \$22, \$599 dealer administration fee, lien registration fees (up to \$150, including lien registering agent fee); and all other applicable fees and levies (all of which may vary by region and dealer). Cost of borrowing is \$3,510.88 for a total obligation of \$37,036.80. Excludes licensing, registration, insurance and applicable sales taxes. Dealer may sell for less. Dealer order/trade may be required (but may not be available in all cases). Offer ends February 2, 2026 and is subject to change and extension without notice. While supplies last. See your participating Kia dealer or visit www.kia.ca for details. Information in this advertisement is believed to be accurate at the time of printing. International models and features shown. Kia is a trademark of Kia Corporation. X-Line model shown.