

# STRATFORD **TIMES**

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## Nater wins fourth consecutive term as opposition MP for Perth-Wellington

GALEN SIMMONS

*Regional Editor*

With 221 of 222 polls reporting by Tuesday morning, Conservative incumbent John Nater has been elected member of parliament for Perth-Wellington and will serve his fourth consecutive term as a member of the opposition party.

With a more than 70 percent voter turnout in the riding – 63,683 of 90,016 registered electors – Nater received 33,850 votes or roughly 53 per cent. Liberal candidate David Mackey trailed with 25,892 votes or nearly 41 per cent of the total turnout, and the NDP's Kevin Kruchkywich had 2,875 votes or 4.5 per cent of the vote by Tuesday morning. People's Party of Canada candidate Wayne Baker rounded out the pack with 1,066 votes or 1.7 per cent of the vote by Tuesday morning.

"It is my great honour and with great humility that I thank the people of Perth-Wellington for re-electing me to serve as your member of parliament and voice in Ottawa," Nater said after national news outlets called his victory in the riding. "It is a responsibility that I do not take lightly and one that I will cherish for as long as I have the honour of serving in this office."

Nater was introduced by his young daughter, Ainsley, before an enthusiastic crowd of campaign volunteers and supporters at his election-night party at the Mitchell Golf and Country Club in West Perth. He thanked his campaign team for their time and effort

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Hudson Kelly and Violet Bernier duck underfoot to collect a few chocolate eggs at the annual easter egg hunt hosted by CJCS/2Day FM on April 19. That morning at Upper Queen's Park, 10,000 chocolate eggs provided by Rhéo Thompson Candies were scattered and collected by hopeful hunters. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

## Council unanimously rejects strong mayor powers, but they are coming to Stratford anyway

CONNOR LUCZKA

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

Undemocratic, upsetting, offensive, broken, and scary were just some of the words Stratford city council used to describe the strong mayor powers bestowed on Mayor Martin Ritsma on May 1.

The powers, which grant heads of council with executive authority in certain scenarios, were topic of discussion at the April 28 council meeting, after Coun. Mark Hunter had earlier requested a report from staff on what

the endowment means for the city.

As clerk Tatiana Dafoe shared in a fulsome presentation, the powers include the ability to appoint a municipality's chief administrative officer (CAO), hire certain municipal department heads and reorganize departments, create committees of council, propose a municipal budget, propose certain bylaws the mayor says advances a provincial priority, veto certain bylaws the mayor says could interfere with a provincial priority, and bring forward matters

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# Council unanimously rejects strong mayor powers, but they are coming to Stratford anyway

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CONTINUED FROM FRONT

for discussion by council if the mayor says they could advance a provincial priority.

After her presentation, Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach had strong words for these powers.

"It is undemocratic," she said. "And it's upsetting, because there's nothing that can be done ... except for letting our voices be heard that we're not happy with it."

Hunter called the powers "kind of offensive" and stated a list of options for council and the city, including to potentially sue the province over infringing on the municipality's rights, though said that from his research nowhere in the written portions of Canada's constitution are local governments even mentioned, effectively meaning that municipalities indeed are only creatures of the province.

Instead, Hunter moved a motion to ask the province to take Stratford off of the list of municipalities with the powers, which was unanimously supported.

Coun. Larry McCabe said that he was especially concerned with the powers given the rise of authoritarianism in the south.

"Our country and its democratic institutions should be safeguarding these democratic principles that provide accountability to the public and not undermine them," McCabe said. "I think it will come as a

surprise to many people out there that there is not a democratic right on the municipal level to be represented, and that should concern people if they weren't concerned about it now — that this apparent right is now no longer going to be utilized in the municipal level."

Much of the conversation surrounded the realpolitik reality of the powers — that if council has such strong and public opposition to the province's measure, its prospects might be negatively impacted when one-time provincial grants, which have become a lifeline for crucial capital projects, come to be dolled out.

But that in itself was cause for concern.

"The whole system that we have is so broken," Burbach exasperated. "Why aren't we getting consistent funding from the federal level and from the provincial level for housing? It shouldn't be a competition to pit municipalities against each other. It's just — it's crazy — and the strong mayor powers (are) going to lead us down that road of pitting municipalities against each other when we should be working together. All of a sudden, we're competition for each other."

"I don't want to give up on (Canadian values) just for a few bucks," Hunter agreed.

With the political side in mind, Ritsma was cautious when speaking of the powers that evening, though did indicate that they were never something he asked for and was

hesitant to use them.

"Some of the 'what-ifs' and 'don't-knows' frighten me," Ritsma said, saying that the concept of the powers is new and alien to reality in Canada, likening them to the idea of a fentanyl border czar.

As stated by Dafoe and Ritsma, despite council's strong opposition to the powers (and Ritsma's hesitancy), the powers are coming to the mayor's chair regardless. He assured council that what he does once given the powers will be indicative of his feelings. He will continue to be one member of council and will keep collaboration rather than sole authority as his priority.

Ritsma and Hunter both shared that they spoke with Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae on the powers, with the latter saying that "reading between the lines" of Rae's correspondence, the province won't be retracting the powers anytime soon.

Coun. Cody Sebben subsequently moved a motion to direct the mayor to delegate what strong mayor powers may be delegated back to council, such as hiring a new CAO and other department heads. That motion passed unanimously.

Ritsma ended the conversation that night by thanking council for the thorough discussion and saying his response will be coming at a future date, once he "does his homework" and prepares his thoughts.

Though, with his new powers, he could ignore council's request, as Coun. Bonnie Henderson contemplated after the vote.

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# Nater wins fourth consecutive term as opposition MP for Perth-Wellington

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

visiting residents door-to-door and making countless phone calls asking for their support.

"Obviously, I'm honoured and humbled to be elected. It's a great honour to continue to serve the people of Perth-Wellington. It looks like my vote total went up a little bit, so hopefully that's a reflection of my service to the community and my hard work that I've tried to do for all the people across Perth-Wellington," Nater said.

While Nater claimed another decisive victory in the traditionally blue riding of Perth-Wellington, across the country, the election results were a little more mixed as the Liberals held on with another minority government. Speaking with reporters after his victory speech, Nater underscored the importance of Canadians coming together now that the election is over in defending our country and our economy from existential threats south of the border.

"I think, if anything, we've seen the last few months Canadians more united than we've ever seen in our history. We've seen a lot more Canadian flags throughout our communities, flags waving, proud to be Canadian, so I think we need more of that. We need to promote

our country, promote our history, promote our economy, promote all things Canadian," Nater said.

"I think if anything positive comes out of this, it's a real effort now by Canadians to celebrate Canada, to shop local, to shop Canadian. You see people, literally, looking at products and seeing where they're coming from. That would have never happened if we hadn't had this existential crisis."

With the Liberals holding onto a minority government, the balance of power now rests with the Bloc Quebecois which, as of Tuesday morning, had 23 seats in parliament compared to the NDP's eight seats. Nater, who now has three terms as a member of the opposition party, said he plans to continue working across party lines to serve Perth-Wellington residents as best he can.

"It's working with each other, building those bridges, having those personal connections," Nater said. "I've had the great honour of working with all political parties building strong relationships. I always say folks should watch less of Question Period than other parts of the day (on Parliament Hill) because there are other meaningful ways (that we work together) than in 45 minutes of Question Period."



Flanked by his family, John Nater thanks his campaign volunteers and supporters for helping him win his fourth straight term as Perth-Wellington's member of parliament at the Mitchell Golf and Country Club April 28.

(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

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# Editorial

## The joy of participating in our democracy

GALEN SIMMONS

*Regional Editor*

Though the phrase, “The most important election in our history,” seems to get thrown around every election cycle, there may actually be some real weight behind those words this time around.

As I write this, we inch closer to the federal election on April 28 and Canadians everywhere understand the issues at play, from the need to take meaningful action on the housing and climate crises before those situations get much, much worse, to the need to defend our national sovereignty, economy and democracy from American and authoritarian encroachment at all costs.

Last Friday, an estimated two million people voted for the future of this country on the first day of advance voting, and I’m happy to say I was one of them. After a nice breakfast out, Julia and I hopped in the car and headed over to the Rotary Complex in Stratford with the notion that if we voted early, we could beat the lines on election day. Julia is still using a wheelchair to get around after breaking her leg in January, so long lines and crowds can be somewhat challenging.

As we pulled up and noticed the line of people extending

outside the building’s front entrance and into the drop-off area, I thought, “Jeez, I guess everyone had the same idea.”

After dropping Julia off in her wheelchair, parking the car and running back to line up, I soon realized convenience really wasn’t at the top of everyone’s minds that morning.

I heard countless grumbings from people who had waited in line for over an hour without any sign they were getting closer to their polling booths. I saw tired Elections Canada volunteers rushing from one line to another, answering people’s questions and ushering people into the community hall to stand at the end of yet another line. I also saw young children and teenagers waiting as their parents stood in line to vote.

In any other situation, tensions would be running high, people would be leaving en masse and someone would be screaming for a manager.

But that didn’t happen on Friday.

Instead, Julia and I had the absolute pleasure of engaging in friendly conversation with a couple we didn’t know who live just around the corner from us. They, too, had moved recently, so we had a really nice conversation about moving and setting up a new home here in Stratford.

And from what I could tell, those around us were also en-

joying pleasant conversations with friends and neighbours in between complaints about how long they had been waiting. There was no shouting, there were no angry looks from those in line ahead of us when we were ushered in before them and I didn’t notice anyone who opted to leave before they had the chance to vote – though, there were a few people who left to vote at another polling station in town that had opened up to handle the massive turnout.

What Julia and I were part of on Friday was a community of friends and neighbours coming together to vote our consciences and secure what each of us sees as the brightest possible future for our riding, our province and our country.

To me, that in itself was a sign that Canadians in Stratford, and from coast to coast, are invested in the outcome of this election and are willing to endure minor inconveniences to ensure their active participation in our democratic process.

Regardless of who we vote for, it is abundantly clear we all care deeply about the future of our country. After this election is over and one party is declared the winner, I hope we all remember that and do our best to continue engaging in our democracy, whether that’s ensuring the new government keeps its promises or holding it accountable for its actions.

## My inner Mean Girl took me away from a job I loved

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

*Times Reporter*

When I was little, all I wanted to do was be a writer. I was an avid reader, which led me to believe that I could someday write stories like E. B. White, J.K. Rowling, or V.C. Andrews. I would submit poems to Chicken Soup for the Soul and write books for school, which would lead me to win trips to meet children’s book authors in the city. My Grade 4 speech landed me in the top competition in Ontario, and I read it in front of hundreds of people.

Once I graduated from high school, I didn’t know much about university or college, and instead of feeling like I could pursue my dream of becoming a writer, I went into nursing – a career that could land me guaranteed jobs and a fulfilling

career that people would point out as a great choice, and something I could rely on in the long run.

Although nursing was definitely all of the above, I felt a need to continue to write, and right after college, I sought out any course or classes I could find related to writing. I took creative writing classes and journalism courses. I would sign up for writers’ events at local libraries and colleges, and I’ve probably started and not finished at least one hundred novels and short stories.

Once I finally gave in and pursued my dream of being a writer (thanks to burnout in health care during the pandemic), I would write for next to nothing for news websites and platforms like Healthnews.com, Alive magazine, and The Everygirl. The pay wasn’t always great, but I knew the grind would pay off eventually.

After freelancing for a year and seeing the need for better local journalism in my town, I reached out to the Stratford Times. That’s when I met publisher Stewart Grant. We clicked right away, and before long, I was writing stories that mattered, making connections, and truly finding my place in the world of local media.

I had finally made it. I was a real writer who loved what I was doing.

More newspapers started launching under the same media group, and our small team grew. I couldn’t believe how far I’d come. Readers would stop me and say how much they loved the direction the paper was heading. I got compliments on my

style and was able to highlight stories that brought in a whole new audience.

And then it happened...

My inner Mean Girl showed up and started throwing daggers at everything I had achieved.

She told me my certificate was a joke – it wasn’t a “real” degree. She said I wasn’t a real writer, and someone would eventually find out. She would tell me people thought I was annoying. She said my stories were boring, and no one really cared.

So, what did I do?

I wish I could tell you I told her to shove it. But I didn’t. I quit a career I always wanted.

I quit the job I worked so hard to get; I quit the first career I actually loved; I quit on the best boss I ever had; I quit on the team that counted on me; And I regretted it immediately.

Too embarrassed to admit the truth, I dragged my feet back to nursing and tried to love it again. I told myself it would be fine – that I could fall back in love with it. But I couldn’t.

Almost a year passed, and all I did was wish I had never left.

Thankfully, when I was finally honest with myself and Stewart, Grant Haven Media welcomed me back with open arms. And now, I’m back doing what I love: writing for the Stratford Times.

Got advice for dealing with an inner Mean Girl? I’m all ears. Reach out at [amandajnewriter@gmail.com](mailto:amandajnewriter@gmail.com), or find me on social media platforms [@amandajnewriter](https://www.instagram.com/amandajnewriter).



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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated



# St. Michael students take part in nationwide mock election

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

As Canadians prepared to head to the polls on April 28, 900,000 elementary, intermediate and high school students cast their ballots through Student Vote Canada, a national parallel election program aimed at bringing democracy to life in classrooms from coast to coast.

The initiative involved 5,000 schools across the country. The mock election mirrored the real election process, complete with returning officers, ballot boxes and voter lists. The goal was to familiarize students with the democratic process and encourage their interest and participation.

Among the participating schools was St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, where all students took part in the mock election spearheaded by teacher Mark Boersen and his Grade 11 law class.

The Grade 11 students set up tables and organized the voting in the library's seminar room, with students from Grades 9 to 12 casting their ballots for the political leader they most closely aligned with.

Boersen said the Student Vote Canada program gives young Canadians the opportunity to engage with the democratic process and learn about elections first-hand, providing an educational experience that helps build informed future voters.

"We want students to be involved in the democratic process. That's what this is all about. We wanted to make it as real as possible so that students can get used



Mr. Boersen and his Grade 11 law class held a successful mock election on April 28, mirroring the 2025 federal election on the same day.

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

to the process," he said. "This is a good opportunity to show youth involvement in democracy and highlight the importance of civic education."

Teachers were encouraged to have students log in to Vote Compass – Youth Edition, an online platform that helps users determine which political party aligns with their core values and goals. Students answered a series of questions about key issues facing the country, giving them direction on which leader or party best represents their views.

Emmy Leis, one of Boersen's Grade 11

students who helped set up the election, said the Vote Compass tool was an important resource.

"The website asks you certain questions about how you personally feel about issues going on in the world or in our country. It helps to align you with what political groups have the same values," she said. "This process has been really helpful for me because it's hard to know where you sit."

Julian Walsh, another Grade 11 student who acted as an information officer for the mock election, said it took about a month

to prepare for the election and he hopes this process will increase voter turnout once students reach voting age.

"Voter turnout for young voters in Canada isn't as high as it should be," Walsh said. "I think by doing this, it gives people some experience so they're not just going in for the first time when they vote for real. It will also lessen the anxiety about voting in real elections later on."

In the end, students from across Canada elected a Conservative Party minority government, with the Liberal Party forming the official opposition.

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# Library sees 10% rise in usage in 2024 compared to 2023

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Public Library (SPL) saw steady growth and huge usage in 2024, according to CEO Krista Robinson, but there is more to do as 2025 moves along.

"Just when we thought we couldn't get any busier – we did!" said Robinson in a media release. "Stratford Public Library offered more services and programs in 2024 than ever before, and our community responded with record-breaking engagement."

According to the recently released annual report, there were over 143,000 in-person library visits, with over 475,000 visits to the library website, in 2024. Nearly 500,000 items were borrowed and library membership reached its highest levels in decades.

Monthly card usage was up 10 per cent over 2023, circulation was up two per cent, visitors through the doors was up seven per cent, and program attendance was up nine per cent.

About 25,096 people attended 903 diverse programs

SPL offered, from Garden Tai Chi and Glow-in-the-Dark Karaoke to Swiftie Parties and After-Hours Trivia Nights – including the 1,163 children who joined SPL's TD Summer Reading Club.

The library collection continued to expand beyond books. With support from a New Horizons grant, the library launched brain health kits, exercise-at-home kits, and launchpads to help older adults keep active. Through various partnerships, a number of locally focused content was also made available to residents, such as "welcome to Stratford" kits for new residents and new passes to the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame in St. Marys and Stratford Warriors home games.

Three staff members received provincial recognition, including the Leadership in Adult Readers' Advisory Award and two Technical Services Awards.

With all the positive growth last year, Robinson said that she is hopeful that more residents become active library users – and that the library's well-documented space needs are met.

For a population of Stratford's size, the library's St. Andrew Street location is undersized by about 70 per cent according to a space-needs study conducted in 2023. It is 12,472 square feet and should be 20,000 square feet bigger if it is to adequately serve its population.

Normally, according to a 2024 delegation by representatives from Ontario Library Services, a new library would be a decade-long project; however, just recently a new opportunity presented itself at the Grand Trunk site, which is set for renewal in a keystone project the City of Stratford, University of Waterloo, and YMCA of Three

Rivers officially undertook in 2023.

After a delegation to the city's ad hoc committee, the library has informally been included in discussions of a community hub in the old shops downtown, though no agreement has officially been made.

"My biggest hope for this year is that we finally get a clear decision on the Grand Trunk site," Robinson said. "... The Library Board – and I think many residents would agree – we really need clarity soon about whether the library will be included in this project. Our space challenges are pressing and they're not going away. If we won't be part of the Grand Trunk development, we need to pivot quickly and develop alternative plans to address our space needs. The community deserves a timeline either way so we can move forward with solving these longstanding issues."

With a \$6.64 return on investment for every municipal dollar, and a total economic impact of \$19.3 million, Robinson said that their research shows that each resident receives about \$560 worth of value from their services annually, while it costs about \$87.

All the more reason why further investment is the smart choice, Robinson argued.

"People want to see their tax dollars creating tangible benefits for the community, and investing in a library – a service that's freely accessible to absolutely everyone – is one of the best ways to do that," Robinson said. "This isn't just about books; it's about investing in a space where our whole community can connect, learn, and grow together."

To explore the full 2024 report, visit [https://splibrary.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/spl2024annualreport\\_1.pdf](https://splibrary.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/spl2024annualreport_1.pdf).



## City's HR department is going through a transition, but is tight-lipped on what that transition is

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The City of Stratford will be using a third-party to facilitate its human resources (HR) needs for the next few months, as the department goes through what staff are calling a "transition."

At the April 28 meeting, council approved a contract with Ward & Uptigrove Human Resources Solutions to provide immediate- and short-term services for the city. According to a staff report included in the agenda, the department has seen "several administrative changes" that have "necessitated a comprehensive re-evaluation."

The report was scant on details of what those changes were, but did reveal that Kim McElroy, director of social services, has taken over as acting HR director.

When asked to clarify what the administrative changes were, what the HR department looks like now, and how long these changes have been the reality for the city, interim Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Adam Betteridge told the Times that staff were unable to comment on internal staffing matters to protect employee privacy.

"But the focus now is on maintaining stability and preparing for a long-term structure," Betteridge said in emailed correspondence.

As noted in the report, the contracted services will cost the city \$60,710 and HST, which includes any travel fees. It is thought to be a cost-efficient, flexible, and rapid response rather than "hiring full-time staff." Its estimated value also falls below the \$60,000 consultant threshold, allowing for staff to contract the services directly rather than issuing a request for proposal (RFP).

"The leadership team acknowledges there are limitations of this approach and are not proposing this as a permanent solution," the report reads. "This is intended as an interim solution to bridge the next several months after which time the next steps can be more clearly articulated, ideally with the input of the permanent CAO."

Just prior to approving the motion, Coun. Cody Sebben noted his frustration with the circumstances and the process, though still voted in favour of the motion.

"I personally have concerns about the authority delegated to the CAO to remove an entire department, notwithstanding prior council direction to increase the department," Sebben said.

When asked to clarify his comments after the meeting, Sebben said that he opposes changes council made last year that gave the CAO the power to make high-level departmental decisions. He did not further comment on his claim that the CAO removed the entire department.



# April 28 marks National Day of Mourning across Canada

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

*Times Reporter*

April 28 is the National Day of Mourning across Canada, a time to remember and honour those who have lost their lives or been injured due to a workplace tragedy. The day also sheds light on the importance of improving health and safety in the workplace to prevent further injuries, illnesses and deaths.

In Stratford, friends, family and those affected by workplace injuries, along with members of the Stratford Fire Department, Stratford Police Service and several City of Stratford staff, gathered at Upper Queen's Park to pay their respects.

Among those in attendance was Stratford Police Chief Greg Skinner, who spoke to attendees about the need for continuous prevention measures.

"All work is dangerous and anything can happen, no matter what job we're doing, and it's important for us as leaders of organizations to try to mitigate the risks associated with working on a daily basis and make sure that our people go home safe to their families every night," Skinner said.

He noted that police currently have six staff members off work due to post-traumatic stress injuries.

"I've been a cop for 37 years, and I've had friends die in the line of duty from traffic collisions, from homicides and from suicide. PTSD or occupational stress injuries have a huge impact on frontline service workers," he said.

"We're actively working on improving our workplaces and working conditions to ensure that there are supports in place when people are exposed to traumatic events. We want our staff to know they have our support and that we want them back in the workplace doing the work they so diligently work toward as a career."

Stratford Fire Chief and Director of Emergency Services



**Elizabeth Carruthers lays flowers at the National Day of Mourning memorial at Upper Queen's Park on April 28. With her is her partner, Ron Calder, who told the Times they were attending in honour of a dear friend who died two weeks ago from skin cancer linked to workplace exposure as a flat-roofer. Calder, a member of Wounded Warriors Canada, said he comes to pay respects each year in memory of friends and family members who have been affected by workplace tragedies.**

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Neil Anderson also addressed the gathering, speaking about the importance of talking openly about mental health in the workplace.

"It can be difficult for people to seek help, and that's what we're trying to get rid of – the stigma that mental health and mental illness are something to be kept a secret. I want to encourage everyone to speak about mental health," Anderson said.

According to the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC), there were 1,057 workplace

fatalities recorded across Canada in 2023. Among these deaths were 29 young workers aged 15 to 24.

The report also recorded 274,022 accepted claims for lost time due to work-related injury or disease, including 32,861 from workers aged 15 to 24. The AWCBC notes these statistics only reflect reported and accepted claims, meaning the true number of workers impacted is likely higher.

The National Day of Mourning also highlights the lasting impact of workplace tragedies on families, friends and co-workers, whose lives are forever changed.

## Mackey, Kruchkywich reflect on campaign after election loss

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

*Times Reporter*

David Mackey, Liberal Party candidate and Kevin Kruchkywich, New Democratic Party candidate for Perth-Wellington, lost this week's federal election but both are proud of their team's work.

"I believe we ran a very successful campaign in Perth-Wellington. We started only five weeks ago, and the goal was to build a stronger community in Perth-Wellington. My campaign and my team have done well, and I feel good that we did our best," Mackey said at his election night party at Pazzo's in Stratford on April 28.

As news broke that the Liberal Party would form a minority government, Mackey congratulated Carney and called his leadership "critical" in the global environment that Canada finds itself in.

Additionally, Mackey took a moment to congratulate his opponent, John Nater, on his re-election.

"John's service to Perth-Wellington has been validated with another mandate by the voters of Perth-Wellington, and that deserves congratulations. It deserves support from me as a resident of Perth-Wellington. I wish him well and future success representing Perth-Wellington's residents."

Though the loss was tough, Mackey remains hopeful about the riding's Liberal future.

"Voters have superpowers," said Mackey. "... I can certainly understand that many of the people who did vote for me may be disappointed, but I think they should be happy with the process itself, which I'm very dedicated to. One of the things I'm trying to do is bring in the understanding of what democracy is, and how a single vote fits in with the larger community. So, to my Liberal supporters and my Liberal team, I'm very, very grateful. I will say for the

Liberal voters, we've got momentum."

As for whether he'll run again, Mackey said he's considering it.

"I feel I achieved the objectives I wanted. I'm certainly interested in running again. I've got some work to do to build out relationships across the area. Hopefully, we can take the momentum that we've started in this election and bring it into the next election, but for now, I'm going to sleep on it."

Kruchkywich noted the election loss was a hard hit, but he is optimistic about the power they still hold in parliament.

"While it was indeed tough to see the NDP lose some ground in this election, we still have the opportunity to push for real change. We hold the balance of power once again, and New Democrats continue to fight for what is best for Canadians.

"I hope that the residents of Perth-Wellington begin to see some real effort from their government to tackle affordability," Kruchkywich went on to say. "Not just slogans, but true, concrete actions. I also hope to see the people in our riding stay involved and hold their government and MP to account. It's a two-way street, and we owe it to our country and each other to demand the change we want."

As of Tuesday morning, with 221 of 222 polls in Perth-Wellington reporting, Mackey had 25,892 or nearly 41 per cent of the vote in the riding compared with Nater's 33,850 vote, representing just over 53 per cent of the 63,683 votes counted at that point.

Kruchkywich trailed with 2,875 votes, 4.5 per cent of the vote, and Wayne Baker of the People's Party of Canada rounded out the results with 1,066 votes, 1.7 per cent of the vote.

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# STRATFORD

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# Perth County council members received more than \$231,000 in pay and expense reimbursement last year

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The members of Perth County council received a combined \$231,096 in pay and expense reimbursement over the course of 2024, a report published on the county's website indicates.

According to the county's 2024 statement of remuneration and expenses for council members, Rhonda Ehgoetz, who served as warden until the annual warden's election in December 2024, earned the highest pay among county council members at \$46,643.57 inclusive of CPP contributions and Employer Health Tax (EHT). Ehgoetz was also reimbursed \$2,531.85 for travel-and-mileage expenses, and \$1,114.82 for professional development, adding up to a grand total of \$50,290.24 in 2024.

Doug Kellum, who served as the coun-

ty's deputy warden last year until he was elected warden at the beginning of December, had the second-highest pay at \$24,869.92 inclusive of CPP and EHT. Kellum also logged \$1,610.31 in travel-and-mileage expenses for a grand total \$26,480.23 paid to him by the county.

At the other end of the council pay scale, Perth South representative Bob Wilhelm received just \$3,718.21 in pay inclusive of CPP and EHT. Wilhelm also logged \$192.43 in travel-and-mileage expenses for a total of \$3,910.64 last year. Wilhelm's relatively low pay and expense reimbursement from last year was because he stepped in to fill one of Perth South's county council seats after the township's mayor and past Perth County warden Jim Aitcheson took a leave of absence from his civic responsibilities before he died on Nov. 22, 2024.

Aitcheson, who took a leave of absence

from his duties as a Perth County councillor in October 2024, was paid \$13,476.27 inclusive of CPP and EHT last year, and received \$129.69 in reimbursement for travel-and-mileage expenses for a total of \$13,606.16 last year.

While councillors Hugh McDermid and Jerry Smith, both representatives of Perth East on county council, did not find themselves at the top of the county's councillor-pay list – they were paid \$17,766.56 and \$17,025.72 respectively for their work on council last year – they were at the top of the list for reimbursement of travel expenses with McDermid claiming \$2,663.41 and Smith claiming \$2,546.79 in 2024. McDermid and Smith also claimed \$880.22 and \$610.56 respectively in professional-development expenses for totals of \$21,310.19 and \$20,183.07 paid to them by the county last year.

Coun. Todd Kasenberg, one of North

Perth's representatives on county council, was the highest-paid Perth County councillor last year, behind only Kellum and Ehgoetz. Kasenberg earned \$18,242.40 inclusive of CPP and EHT, and he claimed \$1,074.45 in travel-and-mileage expenses for a total of \$19,316.85.

In total, Perth County paid the 11 members of county council who actively served last year \$210,839.11 including CPP and EHT. The county also paid out a total of \$16,536.45 in travel-and-mileage expenses across all 11 members of council, and \$3,720.42 in professional-development expenses to McDermid, Smith, Ehgoetz and Perth South representative Coun. Sue Orr, who claimed \$1,114.82 in professional-development expenses last year.

The county also paid a total of \$5,814.80 across the six members of the Perth County accessibility advisory committee last year.



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## Jake's Bowling Social a thank you to Ronald McDonald House Charities

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A bowling social in late May will help raise funds to keep families close together as their children recover in hospital.

Jake Sippel, a 17-year-old, will host Jake's Bowling Social on May 25 at Stratford's Mike's Bowling Lanes. The event will raise money for Ronald McDonald House of Southwestern Ontario, which supported Sippel and his family during his two-week stay at the London Children's Hospital as he recovered from second-degree burns on 40 per cent of his body.

"At the time, I was just three-years-old and so I was really scared of being on my own. Luckily, the Ronald McDonald House stepped up and let my family stay there so I wasn't afraid of being on my own," Sippel said. "As I got older, I realized that having them there really did mean a lot to me and it was all thanks to the Ronald McDonald House, so I wanted to do something to give back."

Sippel ran five bowling socials, but not consecutively due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. He also partnered with Mazda for an item donation drive just before Christmas where his Mazda CX-90 was filled with toys for the kids and hygiene products for the parents staying at the Ronald McDonald House of Southwestern Ontario.

After collecting the funds for the Ronald McDonald House, Sippel will bring the money over to the organization and touch base with the staff. He said the organization plans to make some upgrades to house more families. The Ronald Mc-

Donald House Charity of Southwestern Ontario website indicated that two out of three Canadians live in a city without a specialized children's hospital.

Knowing how the Ronald McDonald House made his stay more comfortable, Sippel wants children in the hospital to have the same sense of comfort and security.

"For me, it meant a lot and I know that other kids would be scared as well being on their own in a big hospital while recovering from injury and I want kids to feel comfortable as I was at my time at the hospital thanks to the Ronald McDonald House," he said.

Anyone looking to participate in Jake's Bowling Social can either send a text to 226-880-1881 or email to jakesippel33@icloud.com by May 20.



(JAKE SIPPEL PHOTO)



# L'Arche Stratford invites community members to join the team.

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Being a corporate member at L'Arche means helping spread joy to all in the community.

"We're always looking for new community members to become involved in L'Arche. Our intent is to grow in the near future with the construction of our new building on 426 Britannia St. and develop our support services," said Wendy Gray, fundraising leader at L'Arche Stratford. "Having more corporate members will help fill out this process, it gets more people involved in the community."

"One of things that's really done well is making sure the core members are a part of the greater Huron-Perth community," said Gray. "They are supported to go to work, volunteer and participate in community events and activities and this is all done in a loving and caring environment."

To be a corporate member, applicants are required to possess the following criteria to apply. For one year, all applicants play a role of active support and commitment within the organization and attend volunteering opportunities around the community. They must share a friendship with one or more of the established L'Arche members and donate to the community.

Gray, who has been involved in L'Arche for 13 months, finds the organization to be an overwhelming place



L'Arche members are always willing to serve the community with smiles and positivity.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

of joy, where people can celebrate each other and their unique gifts which adds to enjoyment of everyone's company.

Accepted corporate members will have opportunities to volunteer for special events hosted by the organization

such as the annual golf tournament and develop relationships which attributes to L'Arche overalls most rewarding experience

Gray says that the annual general meeting (AGM) gives members a time

to reflect on the year's activities. An analysis is done on all events, successes, challenges, along with a transparent view within financial operations.

"Since 2021 the Ontario government has introduced a new class of membership for non-profits. This legislation commonly referred to as ONCA (Ontario Non-profit Corporation Act) required all non-profits including L'Arche Stratford to adjust their bylaws and create a membership category for voting members of the corporation. L'Arche Stratford is in the process of implementing this requirement before our next AGM in August," said George Jansen, secretary of the board of directors at L'Arche.

"We have worked and will continue to work to make this an inclusive process. We recognize that not all individuals will choose this level of membership but still wish to be involved in L'Arche Stratford. We remain grateful to all that take part in this important journey with us and welcome your ongoing contributions as part of our community."

With the upcoming AGM in August and the continued extension plans, L'Arche is eager to welcome new voices and helping hands into its vibrant community. Becoming a corporate member is more than a title, it's about fostering, building meaningful relationships and contributing to a mission that's built on compassion and community spirit.

The deadline to apply to become a L'Arche corporate member ends May 2.



Jacob Borgdorff, a health-care professional at Stratford General Hospital, enjoys a Tim Hortons Smile Cookie in support of their annual Smile Cookie Campaign. From April 28 to May 4, pick up a Smile Cookie from any Stratford Tim Hortons. Proceeds support the Stratford General Hospital Foundation and its new cancer and medical care clinic. (KRISTEN PARKER PHOTO)

## Optimist Club of Downie Inc.

### OPTI-CASH CALENDAR DRAW

April 20 Steve Benner, Milverton	\$50.00
April 21 Brian Gregory, Lakeside	\$50.00
April 22 Pierrette Grondin, Wellington	\$50.00
April 23 Bernice Hunter, St. Marys	\$50.00
April 24 Peter Gevaert, Stratford	\$50.00
April 25 Rheo Thompson, Stratford	\$50.00
April 26 Andrea Van Dam, St. Pauls	\$200.00
Sun. April 27 Ben Fallowfield, Hickson	\$50.00
April 28 Simon Duncan, St. Marys	\$50.00
April 29 Don Kinsman, Stratford	\$50.00
April 30 Leo Stock, St. Paul's	\$50.00
May 01 Lisa Fewster, St. Marys	\$50.00
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# A brighter future discussed at this year's Future of Homecare symposium

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The possibilities for a brighter future in in-home care for seniors were front and centre at the recent Discover the Future of Homecare symposium, hosted by Healthnext. The event brought together seniors, home care professionals, and experts from across Canada to discuss the evolving landscape of home care.

"We aren't here to talk about what home care in Ontario is; we're here to talk about what home care in Ontario could be," said Paul Brown, sole proprietor of Healthnext and advocate for home care and supportive housing.

Brown noted that the 1964 Hall Commission recommended expanding Canada's health-care system to include services such as home care. However, when the Medical Care Act was enacted in 1966, it primarily covered hospital and physician services. Home care was not included as an insured service under the Canada Health Act, and provinces were not mandated to provide it.

Similarly, the 2003 First Ministers' Accord on Health Care Renewal acknowledged home care as a priority area, but the extent of implementation has varied across provinces, and comprehensive inclusion under the Canada Health Act has not oc-

curred.

To shed light on future possibilities for home care in Ontario, Brown referenced a 2024 book, *Health for All: A Doctor's Prescription for a Healthier Canada*, written by Dr. Jane Philpott. In it, she proposes a Canada Primary Care Act that would ensure every Canadian has access to a primary care team within 30 minutes of their home or workplace. These teams would include physicians, nurse practitioners, mental health workers, palliative care specialists and community paramedics – a model intended to help seniors remain at home longer.

Dr. Jean Hewitt, who led a women's proposal regarding Ontario's long-term care facilities, also spoke at the symposium. Representatives from DIALOG presented ideas for holistic urban planning solutions that benefit the environment and residents of all ages by integrating long-term living spaces into cities.

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma addressed the importance of developing multi-generational housing, once again pointing to the potential of the Grand Trunk site and the University of Waterloo Stratford campus as hubs for diverse residents – from students to seniors.

Ritsma stressed the need for advocacy and partnerships with both levels of gov-

ernment, as well as developers, to make such projects a reality.

"We know we have to prod and push the federal and provincial governments. They need to be at the table, because we can't put these costs on our municipal tax levy," Ritsma said. "The thing we have to keep in mind is our partnerships with developers. They will be at the table, provided we give them opportunities, whether it's through tax incentives or land that we have available."

Catherine Burns, who chaired the Waterloo Health Initiatives Task Force and helped develop strategies aligned with Waterloo's 2025 strategic plan, spoke about the high cost of health care in Canada. Nearly 13 per cent of the country's GDP is spent on health care, she noted, with 26 per cent of that going to hospitals and physicians.

Burns also highlighted the country's aging population: "More than seven million Canadians are aged 65 or older, representing over 20 per cent of the population." She emphasized the growing workforce shortages, saying Ontario alone will need more than 33,000 nurses and over 55,000 personal support workers by 2032.

To improve care delivery and support aging in place, Burns proposed innovative models such as naturally occurring retire-

ment communities (NORCs) and expanded use of e-health technologies.

Gabrielle Gallant, director of policy at the National Institute on Ageing (NIA), spoke about the institute's annual aging in Canada survey. Polling 6,000 older adults, the survey found that 25 per cent of Canadians will be over 65 by 2030, and 25 per cent of older adults have less than \$5,000 saved for retirement.

The survey underscores the urgent need for improved home care services, with 83 per cent of respondents expressing a desire to age at home. Gallant stressed the importance of addressing demographic changes, boosting health-care capacity, and modernizing retirement programs to better support older adults.

John Hirdes, a University of Waterloo professor and Member of the Order of Canada, discussed the progress and challenges within Canada's health-care system. He emphasized the need for policy adjustments in light of population aging and the COVID-19 pandemic's ongoing impact on health-care workers.

Still, Hirdes acknowledged progress – including fewer premature placements of older adults in long-term care and shorter hospital stays.

To learn more about Healthnext, visit [www.healthnext.ca](http://www.healthnext.ca)

## SuperAgers show us it's never too late to learn new tricks

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Last week, Dr. Angela Roberts spoke to members of the Stratford chapter of the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) about SuperAgers – a phenomenon in which some individuals maintain exceptional memory and cognitive function well into their 80s and beyond.

In her presentation, Roberts discussed the science behind SuperAgers, examining the factors that contribute to cognitive resilience and longevity. She also shared research-backed lifestyle strategies that promote brain health, reduce dementia risk and foster lifelong cognitive vitality.

Roberts is a leading researcher in aging and brain health at Western University. She specializes in cognitive resilience, Parkinson's disease and dementia interventions, and holds joint appointments in the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders and the department of computer science.

After years of studying brain health, Roberts and her team began to recognize the importance of studying truly healthy brains – thanks in large part to Miss Edith, a remarkable 110-year-old who still makes

strawberry jam every week.

"Edith was the person who really started teaching us why this research programme was important," said Roberts.

Initially brought in as a control subject for her partner's study, Edith astonished researchers with memory test scores closer to a 30-year-old's – despite being in her 70s at the time. Even more remarkably, her brain scans showed no signs of ageing.

"Her brain had not aged at all," said Roberts.

This discovery prompted a re-examination of past research methods. Over time, the team found that many of their so-called "healthy" control subjects were actually in the earliest stages of neurological diseases.

"Ten years after we had seen them, 70 per cent of the control group had developed some of the same conditions they were intended to be controls for," Roberts said.

Edith's exceptional case helped shift the team's focus to understanding what true cognitive resilience looks like – and what we might learn from those who age with their brains intact.

Roberts explained that her research team is now studying SuperAgers to see

how their habits might help others maintain healthy, active minds well into and past their 80s. One critical factor is education and support from an early age.

"Dementia prevention now begins in childhood," she said. She said that the team was able to offset a relative risk ratio of five per cent for dementia by starting childhood obesity management programs, activity programs and high-quality education.

As people age, brain cells naturally die and can release toxins that damage neighbouring cells, increasing the risk of conditions like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. However, Roberts emphasized that the brain is also capable of fighting back.

"A healthy brain is able to compensate and create new pathways," she said. So-called SuperAgers show few signs of decline, proving that "our brain very much can learn new tricks."

With a proper lifestyle – good sleep, nutrition, exercise and positive social and emotional influences – the brain can thrive well into old age.

Sleep, in particular, plays a crucial role in becoming a SuperAger. Roberts noted that these individuals are "rigid about their sleep schedules," often maintaining

strict routines throughout their lives.

"Maybe this is why there are so many healthy centenarian teachers in the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan," she joked. "These people are incredibly rigid in all aspects of their lives."

"We're starting to understand it's not the total amount of behaviour that is starting to separate these two groups, but the routine and regularity of their habits."

Roberts encouraged attendees to take sleep seriously.

"If you are not getting good sleep, talk to your doctor and find a way to get good sleep," she said. "Sleep is incredibly important for purging out toxins and helping to create more robust and efficient pathways in the brain. It's not just something that helps us function better day in and day out – your body and brain actually need that sleep to maintain a healthy state."

She closed her talk by highlighting the importance of connection.

"It's what each of you is doing in this room right now – coming together, having friendships, spending time with each other, building support networks, being there for one another," she said. "Perhaps that depth is where the cognitive benefit comes from."

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# Local Flavour

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## Bijou continues its legacy at Braai House after devastating fire

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

What was once lost is now an example of dedication, perseverance and a community coming together.

Bijou owners Mark and Linda Simone were devastated after losing the place that they called home last October after the original Wellington Street Bijou restaurant was gutted from an overnight electrical fire. Afterwards, the Stratford culinary gem that stood for nearly 25 years faced an uncertain future.

For the remainder of 2024, the Bijou team were finding their footing and searched for a path that would ensure the

bistro's revival.

"We didn't know what we were going to do as everything was being assessed on the extent of the damage," said Mark. "As we got into the new year and closer to February it was clear that there were still many issues that required handling, and it became prominent that we were going to have to do something different."

After reaching out to the Simones, Anthony Jordaan, owner of the Braai house, offered the opportunity to relocate the Bijou within the downstairs of his current restaurant premises.

"We started discussing whether it makes sense to put two restaurants in one building," said Mark. "That's when it really

started to trigger that this could be a possibility and after many discussions, we concluded that this could be the continuation of the Bijou legacy."

With 90 per cent of its original staff coming back, the new Bijou will share residence with the Braai House on the lower level at 34 Brunswick Street. The new space will feature a 44-seat weather optimized outdoor patio, a 14-occupant bar, along with an interior dining room housing up to 46 guests.

Mark suspects that guests will be amazed when they walk through the door on its launch day on May 6. The approachable modern look will continue its farm to table food service that guests can enjoy

from a spacious dining room.

"We're hoping people are going to be walking with a big smile and they're happy that we're still here and that they are in a restaurant that provides a tremendous experience. The restaurant is designed to give people space and comfort."

Starting in June, Bijou will offer wine tasting that will run until October, along with culinary tours heading to locations such as Montreal and Argentina.

The team at Bijou were overwhelmed by the thousands of people that pledged their support after the loss of the original location. Mark says that the staff were grateful and optimistic of a new fulfilling future for the Bijou.



Peter Williams, Mark Simone, Linda Simone, and Warren Stableford pose in front of its new location ahead of a grand reopening.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)



## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What year was Pierre Poilievre first elected as a member of Parliament?
2. Name the 5 NHL teams whose names do not end with the letter "s"?
3. On May 1, 1930, which planet was discovered?
4. What is the birthstone for May?
5. On the first Saturday of May, what popular racing event takes place?
6. What country has the highest rate of gambling?
7. What year was Pac Man invented?
8. On May 2nd, 2011, U.S Special Forces took down the leader of al-Qaeda known as who?
9. Who founded Mother's Day?
10. Which flower is associated with the Greek goddess Aphrodite?

This week's answers are found on pg. 34

## Shelf Help

BRITTANY MEADOWS

Stratford Public Library

*No Fault: A Memoir of Romance and Divorce*  
By Haley Mlotek  
@SPL 306.893092 Mlot

Divorce has always been a part of Haley Mlotek's life. As a tween, her first job was assisting her mother in her work as a divorce mediator. Mlotek's grandparents were divorced, and her parents, too, later divorced. And then, at the age of 29, after 13 years together and 11 months married, Mlotek and her high school sweetheart also decided to end their marriage.

Staring into an unknown future, Mlotek began a historical and cultural dive into marriage and divorce in the United States and the broader Western world. After decades of progress in gender equality and divorce rights, she asks why the institution of marriage still holds such tre-

mendous power. From one of the first legal divorces granted to a woman in Rouen, France in December of 1782, to the first marriage counseling clinics of the 1930s, to New York being the last state to adopt no-fault divorce legislation in 2010, readers follow Mlotek as she tries to make sense of our cultural obsession with and the social capital granted to unions recognized by the state.

Perhaps most striking, though, is the prose Mlotek writes about her own relationship and divorce. Between the cultural explorations of divorce literature, film, and history, readers will await more beautiful and heart-wrenching details of her experience, such as: "I didn't know it yet but when he finally became a person I told no stories to at all I would think I had nothing left to say." Honest and wry, *No Fault* is a cathartic read for anyone whose life has been touched by divorce, and those who have felt the anguish, freedom, or peace on the other side of it.





# FIO Automotive inspires next generation of environmental stewards



FIO Automotive Canada Corporation staff and families are ready to clean up the T.J. Dolan Nature Trail during the company's 19th annual Earth Day event (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO) on April 26.



Claire Anderson, 7, having some fun on the trail for the clean up. By encouraging employees to bring their children, FIO aims to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards. (JON ANDERSON PHOTO)



Devan Darnbrough, Tara Darnbrough, Evaritt Darnbrough, Alan Darnbrough and Crystal Varley bag up what they found. (FIO AUTOMOTIVE CANADA CORPORATION PHOTO)



Zaneta Meyer, Chris Meyer and their children, Devon, 13, and Raiah, 11, take part in the cleanup. Afterwards, participants gathered at the company's headquarters for a pizza lunch and a fun award ceremony, celebrating their collective efforts and community spirit. (FIO AUTOMOTIVE CANADA CORPORATION PHOTO)

## Earth Day Street Party



Sisters Violet Sharkey-Smith, 2, and Millie Sharkey-Smith, 5, enjoy crafts and activities at the Climate Momentum Street Party last weekend.



Attendees took part in earth-friendly activities during the Earth Day Street Party last weekend. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTOS)



# Cash Mobs bring big boost to Stratford's local businesses

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Last month, Fresh Idea Collective, a business run by Kerry Ramsay that supports women entrepreneurs, hosted its first-ever cash mob to boost revenue and highlight local businesses in and around Stratford.

A cash mob is an organized community event where people are encouraged to spend a minimum amount of money -- \$20 or more in this case -- at a specific local business on one particular day.

"The purpose of a cash mob is to make a big impact on a single business in a single day," said Ramsay.

Initially, social media followers nominated their favourite local businesses, with shoppers putting forward more than 70 names. Once the votes were tallied, the online community of women entrepreneurs selected Daisies & Doilies as the winner. Runners-up were The Peach Basket & Co. and Got It Made.

The first event was held last month, when shoppers stopped in at Daisies & Doilies to make minimum purchases of \$20 or more. This month, shoppers visited The Peach Basket & Co.'s new location at 315 Front St. to buy gifts and trinkets while supporting the local community.

Co-owners of The Peach Basket & Co., mother-daughter duo Dina Fine and Hayley Fine Diehl, said support like this makes a world of difference to local artisans.

"The cash mob really helps put money

back into the community because the vendors here in the market are all local artisans," said Fine Diehl. "About 50 per cent of what is in store is made by local artists and 50 per cent we create."

"When you shop with us, you also support over 40 other families," added Fine.

The shop offers artisan goods including beeswax candles, baby and toddler items, jewellery, candles and much more, all created by local artists and business owners.

Fine also noted that shopping locally can sometimes feel daunting due to the costs associated with handmade products, but The Peach Basket & Co. aims to show that local shopping can be affordable.

"Sometimes people think that because artisan markets offer handmade goods, they are automatically expensive," said Fine. "We're trying to smash that idea and show people that it doesn't have to be the case."

"We believe in having quality products at an affordable price," continued Fine Diehl. "We have products that start at \$5. You can come in and get a beautiful gift for \$10."

Because of the success of the March through May cash mob events, Fresh Idea Collective plans to run more cash mobs in the fall to support local businesses through the shoulder season.

The May cash mob will be held at Got It Made in downtown Stratford.

For more information or updates, follow Fresh Idea Collective on Instagram @freshideacollective or visit [www.freshideacollective.com](http://www.freshideacollective.com).



The Peach Basket & Co. co-owners, mother-daughter duo Hayley Fine Diehl and Dina Fine, are the April Cash Mob winners. They say supporting local artisans makes all the difference. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

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# TEENS VOLUNTEERS VOLUNTEERS KE MAKE MAKE VES WAVES WAVES

## NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK 2025



## Volunteer Bénévoles Canada

# APRIL 27 - MAY 3

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## Micro-volunteering matters at United Way Perth-Huron

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Across Ontario, nonprofit organizations are experiencing a notable decrease in volunteer participation. Statistics Canada data shows that 65 per cent of organizations nationwide face volunteer shortages.

According to the data, health concerns, shifting priorities, and increased financial pressures post-COVID-19 pandemic are leading individuals to seek additional employment or reduce unpaid commitments, all contributing to the decline in volunteering.

Although the landscape has changed, United Way Perth-Huron continues to thrive thanks to the support of more than 600 active volunteers. Of those, around 500 are considered micro-volunteers – people who give limited amounts of time to the organization, but still make a big impact.

Recognizing this shift, Ryan Erb, executive director of the local United Way, says the organization values every minute of donated time.

“We talk a lot about living wage at United Way. We know that many people in our community – about half – are living on a living wage, and that’s difficult,” Erb said. “We know that people pick up a second job, run kids around or just try to survive. I understand that, but even a short amount of time, I think, makes the world a better



United Way celebrated its volunteers at the 2025 Spirit of Community Celebration. Pictured left to right: Robert Stanton, Eva Sippel, Gerry Bell, Trevor Bazinet, April Selkirk, Randy Carroll, and Cindi Jones.

(KRIS VON KLEIST PHOTO)

place – and it certainly helps the organizations and the volunteers themselves.”

Erb said micro-volunteering can take many forms. Whether someone volun-

teers for a few hours at a single event, helps run a workplace campaign, or raises awareness on behalf of the organization, every effort counts.

“One of the most significant events we operate is Coldest Night of the Year. And to pull that event off, we rely on many volunteers,” he said. “We need people to help with setup, direct traffic, register participants as they arrive, and ensure everyone stays safe. Every single one of those people is incredibly important.”

While getting involved with a not-for-profit may feel overwhelming at first, Erb encourages people to start by reaching out to a local organization to find the right fit.

“I think most people, when they get to that point in their life where they have a bit more freedom or flexibility, are asking, ‘How can I contribute to my community? How can I make this a better place?’ Maybe they haven’t thought of volunteering because they don’t have 10 hours a week – but you don’t need 10 hours. Even one hour at an event can make all the difference.”

He continued, “We’re all striving to be better people. I hope we’re all striving for a better community. If you can give an hour, that’s great. It’s amazing that you’re able to do that.”

In closing, Erb expressed gratitude for the more than 600 volunteers who make the work of United Way possible.

“Volunteers really are the heart of the organization,” he said. “You don’t have a successful organization without all kinds of people giving all kinds of time. For not-for-profits especially, volunteers are definitely the life of the organization.”

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# TEENS VOLUNTEERS VOLUNTEERS KE MAKE MAKE VES WAVES WAVES

## NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK 2025



## Volunteer Bénévoles Canada

# APRIL 27 - MAY 3

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## Strategies to find the right volunteer opportunity

Volunteering is one way to give back to the community, and also for people to give back to themselves. Individuals can reap many benefits from volunteering, including improving self-esteem and building professional relationships. With so much to be said for volunteering, people may wonder how to find the best places to volunteer their time and skills. Finding the right match takes a little bit of effort, and these strategies can further such attempts.

- Focus on your passions. A great place to begin when considering volunteering is to identify causes you are passionate about. Consider your hobbies, social issues that matter to you and your own professional experience. This process can help narrow down some volunteering options.

- Identify your skills and what you have to offer. Non-profit groups often seek people who can help them in specific areas. Skills like fundraising, public relations, marketing, or event planning are highly valuable within the nonprofit community.

- Try a short-term project. When testing the volunteering waters, it might be best to start small. You can take on



a short-term project or commit to a few hours per week. If an opportunity does not seem like the right fit, you can move on to something new relatively easily.

- Determine your availability. Figure out how much time you can realistically commit to an organization. A group that requires daily effort might not be the right fit if you only have a few hours a week to spare.

- Use a volunteer matching service. Resources like VolunteerMatch or All for Good can help you find organizations that align with your interests.

- Seek recommendations from individuals you trust. Talk to friends, colleagues, neighbours, or family to ask if they can offer insight about volunteer organizations based on their own experiences.

- Think about your reasons for volunteering. Ponder why you want to get involved in charity work. Some people want to network while others want to gain new experiences. For others, volunteering is a means to getting involved with a charity that supports an effort near to their hearts. Knowing why you want to volunteer can help you narrow down the opportunities.

While volunteering is a meaningful experience for those involved, it can take time and effort before those who want to give back find the right opportunity to do so.

## Did you know?

Volunteers typically offer their time and services in an effort to help others, but researchers believe volunteering has a profound effect on individuals who lend a hand, particularly when those pitching in are children and teenagers. A 2023 study published in the journal JAMA Network Open found that volunteering is associated with improved overall health and wellness among children and adolescents. Researchers behind the study found that children who volunteered were 34 per cent more likely to be in excellent or very good health compared to peers who did not volunteer. In addition, 66 per cent of child and adolescent volunteers were more likely to be seen as "flourishing" and 35 per cent were less likely to

develop behavioral problems compared to their peers who did not volunteer. These findings are nothing to scoff at, as mental health issues continue to affect young people at rates that many find alarming. For example, recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates nearly one in three girl high school students considered suicide in 2021. Though additional research into a potential link between volunteering and improved mental health among modern adolescents is necessary, it's worth noting that studies have long since determined that volunteering is good for volunteers' mental health, with volunteers often reporting greater life satisfaction than individuals who do not volunteer.

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# Thank You, Volunteers.

## Stratford is better because of you.



# Stratford House of Blessing looking for volunteers painting bowls for Empty Bowls fundraiser

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Whether you are an experienced painter or new to the craft, Stratford House of Blessing wants the community to come together and paint to support those in need.

The House of Blessing is looking for volunteers to stop in the food bank on 423 Erie St. and paint the bowls crafted for the Empty Bowls event on Oct. 24. The Empty Bowls fundraising event will be held at the Rotary Complex as attendees pick out handmade bowls and sample food from local restaurants and participate in the silent auction.

Aaron Balzer, resource coordinator, said that the House of Blessing saw a strong turnout so far for volunteer painters. Many

of them painted bowls for the organization in previous years and came back this year to help out once more.

"Some of them come into the House of Blessing on a regular basis. A few of them take bowls home with them, so it's been great to have a lot of those people on board again," Balzer said.

Along with returning painters, new volunteers are stopping by the Stratford House of Blessing to paint the bowls, including Your Neighbourhood Credit Union staff and groups of friends.

"There's a group of ladies who live in the same apartment building who come in a couple of times and are coming in again next week and we've even had some corporate groups," Balzer said.

There's still hundreds more bowls to

paint until at least September, or until there are no more bowls to paint.

Stratford House of Blessing focuses on bringing the community together, whether it's through residents feeding other residents in need through donations for the food bank or coming together for events such as Empty Bowls and for gatherings leading up to it.

"Community is at the heart of what we do. The Empty Bowls event is all about community," Balzer said. "It's about bringing together artists and restaurants and community members for this event to raise money for the food bank so it's natural that the community is involved in also helping us get ready for this event."

Balzer added that other Empty Bowls events will just have potters make the

bowls, but the House of Blessing likes to offer the painted bowls for their event.

"We really like the painted bowls. The unique art, the different artists different people bring, the different styles. It's really fun for people to pick out their bowl - a bowl that they really like. A bowl that speaks to them as it were," he said. "That's fun to get a variety and many different people and different artists to paint as possible."

House of Blessing is running painting sessions from Monday to Thursday between 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. To book your time slot, send an email to [volunteer@shob.ca](mailto:volunteer@shob.ca). Additional times for evenings and weekends will be announced via House of Blessing's social media pages.

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# Stratford committee starts work on city's invasive species management plan

GALEN SIMMONS AND CRAIG MERKLEY

*Times Correspondents*

Stratford's energy and environment committee took its first steps of the 2025 season in implementing the city's new invasive species management plan with a recent weed-pull event.

The plan calls for the removal of certain species of vegetation that have been identified as a threat to the native plants in the city. Though the focus of invasive-species removal has been in the T.J. Dolan Natural Area, the group of community volunteers recently targeted a different plant.

"Multiflora rose is a plant that originated from the far east, introduced here back in the mid 1800s, possibly earlier, for use as a rose rootstock, but also as living fences for farms, along rail lines and highway medians as a crash barrier and to reduce headlight glare," said committee member and retired Upper Thames River Conservation Authority conservation services specialist Craig Merkley. "The plant is capable of aggressive growth, often climbing over and outcompeting native plants and trees for light and nutrients."

"A single plant can form dense, thorny

thickets within a few years of introduction. This becomes a real problem when it is located next to some of our trail systems in Stratford, such as along the old rail trail behind the River Gardens Retirement Residence."

The 12 volunteers who participated in the weed-pull April 21 snipped, pulled and uprooted plants, piling the debris on the far side of the walking path to be picked up by city staff. A weed wrench was used to pull the stubborn root wads from the ground.

In the end, about 50 metres of the walkway was cleared of multiflora rose. Over the course of the season, the committee plans to host more events like this, targeting specific invasive plants like Japanese knotweed, garlic mustard, periwinkle and buckthorn, to name a few.

Anyone interested in helping can contact any energy and environment committee member, email [anitamjacobsen@hotmail.com](mailto:anitamjacobsen@hotmail.com), or stop and speak with anyone working on this project.

A second weed-pull event, this one targeting mustard garlic in the T.J. Dolan Natural Area, has been planned for May 4 beginning at 9:30 a.m.



Approximately a dozen volunteers with Stratford's energy and environment committee participated in a weed-pull event April 21 behind River Gardens Retirement Residence, part of the city's new invasive species management plan. (CRAIG MERKLEY PHOTO)

# Energy and environment committee installs signs to protect T.J. Dolan Natural Area

GALEN SIMMONS AND CRAIG MERKLEY

*Times Correspondents*

The City of Stratford and its energy and environment committee recently installed signs along the walking trails in the T.J. Dolan Natural Area aimed at protecting natural-restoration areas from foot and cycling traffic.

In a recent post to its Facebook page, the city informed the public of the new signs asking trail users to stay on the established trails to help preserve the surrounding environment and reduce the impact on fragile vegetation and wildlife.

"The City of Stratford is lucky to have a 20-acre natural area along the Avon River," said energy and environment committee member of retired Upper Thames River Conservation Authority conservation services specialist Craig Merkley. "The T.J. Dolan is a gem, but as with anything special, it needs help to stay that way. It is wonderful that residents can get out and experience nature, but it can be a double-edged sword. Human pressure often means nature loses unless people are conscientious about their potential



Stratford energy and environment committee members Craig Merkley and John Enright install the first in a series of signs intended to raise awareness to protect the T.J. Dolan Natural Area's ecological health by reducing the negative impacts of side trails. (CRAIG MERKLEY PHOTO)

impact."

The T.J. Dolan Natural Area is accessible by way of a series of well-marked, woodchipped walking paths. To the ecological detriment of the T.J. Dolan, Merkley said the cutting of side trails has become an issue. Over time, these new side trails become entrenched in the landscape, disturbing wildlife, trampling the plants, compacting soil and becoming a foothold for invasive plants, ruining the habitat that makes the area special.

In other municipalities, drastic steps had to be taken to reverse this damage; trails have been closed to allow nature to recover.

The city's energy and environment committee decided to take proactive action by designing small trail signs to help raise awareness and encourage the public to stay on the main trail system. Signs will be installed in locations where side trails are being created.

"The signs are not meant to be permanent," Merkley said. "The hope is trail users will think about what they can do to protect the ecological health of this special area."

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## Early season ace



Stratford Municipal Golf Course's 2025 season started with a bang when Mark Mohr holed out for an ace at #7 on April 23. Mohr used a 7-iron to record his first career hole-in-one. With his game already in mid-season form, he is eager to take his talents to Scotland for a golf trip later this year.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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## Fighting Irish win western final over Strathroy Jets

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

*Times Contributor*

The Ontario Super Hockey League (OSHL) western final went the distance, but the Stratford Bentley's Fighting Irish is back on the top with a gutsy 4-2 win over the Strathroy Jets on April 26.

The Jets got off to a solid start in the winner-take-all contest, scoring back-to-back goals from Jamie MacQueen and Kobe Ferreira in the first period. Stratford got one back before the end of the period on a goal from Christian Pollilo. The Irish tied the game on a goal from Jaden Peca with over seven minutes left in the middle frame.

The hard-fought, tightly-contested finale to the OSHL season reached its fitting conclusion in the final twenty minutes. Peca's second marker of the game on the powerplay put the Irish ahead, and Justin Murray sealed the championship for the Fighting Irish with 25 seconds left, putting the home crowd and bench in a frenzy.

Head coach Marco Alexander was very proud with the team's resilience throughout the season and performance in game seven.

"I think we're just in disbelief the amount of work that we put into this. Jeff Barry, Dave Bevin, I mean, I can go on with names ... I cannot believe what we've accomplished to come here in December and this be the outcome," Alexander said. "It's just – it's a surreal moment, unbelievable."

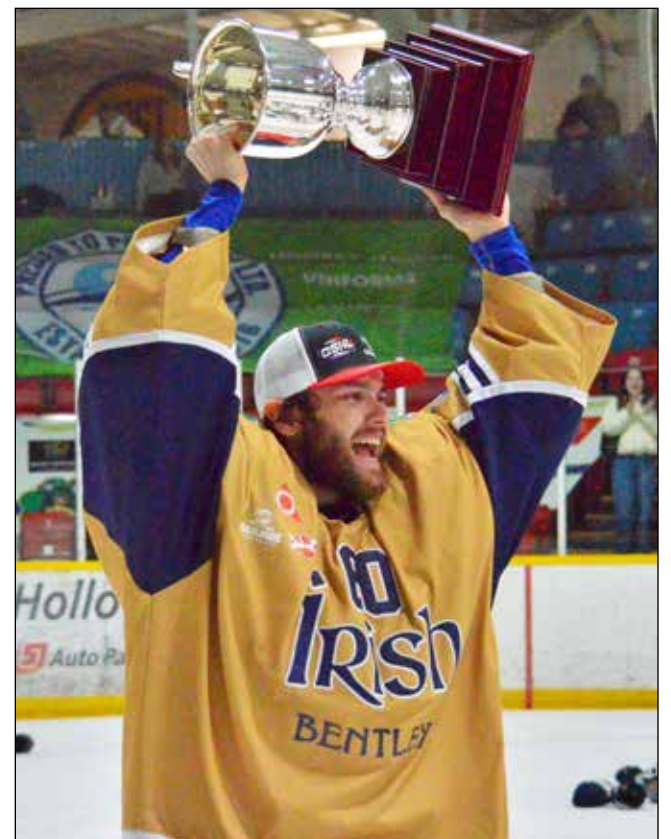
Stratford's path to the championship was a tough one, and Alexander acknowledged this championship victory by overcoming adversity and understanding how far the franchise, and the city, has come.

The last four games of the series proved Stratford's resilience and the no-quit mentality.

In game four at Strathroy, Stratford pulled away with two goals in the third period to beat the Jets 5-3, giving the Fighting Irish the golden opportunity to win the championship on home ice. A short-handed goal from Matt Henderson early in the first period opened the scoring for the Irish. The Jets responded with a goal from Brandon Buck, but the Irish struck back on the late-period goal from Cameron Stokes and gave the visitors the lead after twenty minutes. The goal by Graham Brulotte put the Irish ahead by a pair early in the middle frame, but the Jets stormed back with a pair of their own from Cameron Amos. But the Irish retook the lead for good as Brulotte tallied his second of the contest on the powerplay, and Cole Thiessen iced the game-four victory over a minute later.

In game five, the Fighting Irish looked to clinch their second league championship in three seasons at the William Allman Memorial Arena on April 19. The home side got off to a strong start before Zach Magwood scored his 16th of the playoffs to put the Irish in front after twenty minutes of play.

But a four-goal outburst by the Jets in a controversial, penalty-filled second period proved to be the undoing for



Winning goalie Zach Weir hoists the Ontario Super Hockey League's cup over his head in triumph. The Fighting Irish won the western final on April 26 in game seven.

(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

the Fighting Irish. Goals by Patrick McNeill and Carl Stapleton within 24 seconds ignited Strathroy. Magwood's second goal tied the game, but second back-to-back goals from Dalton Jay and Kobe Ferreira (both controversially no-called offside) scored for the Jets to a two-goal lead midway through the period.

With 8:46 remaining in the period, both sides engaged in a major scrap that resulted in 15 penalties and multiple game ejections. A powerplay goal by Jaden Peca gave the fans hope early in the third period. But The Jets restored their two-goal lead in another controversial offside no-call, this time from Justin McIntyre. Graham Brulotte's 14th goal of the playoffs put the Irish within a goal with over nine minutes left, but the Jets secured the win and forced the series back to Strathroy.

In game six on April 25, the Jets came back from an early first period deficit to beat the Irish 3-2 and forced game seven back in the Allman Arena. The Fighting Irish got off to a solid start, with Cole Thiessen opening the scoring with his eighth of the playoffs. Stratford added a powerplay goal from Jaden Peca to make it 2-0 for the visitors. But the Jets got on the board before the end of the opening frame by Cameron Amos. Second-period goals from Chris Rocco and Carl Stapleton put Strathroy in the lead for forty minutes. Despite the best efforts from the Fighting Irish, the Jets held on for the series-tying victory.



# U18 AA Aces claim silver at provincial championships

SPENCER SEYMOUR

*Times Regional Reporter*

The Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Stratford Aces ended their strong season with a silver medal at the OWHHA Provincial Championships held April 10-13 in Mississauga and Etobicoke.

Head coach Sean Cameron said “history and passion” played big roles in the team’s strong performance at the all-Ontario final tournament.

“We had a very strong returning core of 2007-born girls that, in my opinion, set the standard in Stratford for what a competitive AA team should be,” Cameron told the Times. “With the mix of 2008s and 2009s we were fortunate enough to add to that, the team really gelled. The culture that was built and the positive attitudes these girls had were really impressive. Everyone was so team-focused, and their teammates were so important to each of them.”

One year ago, in the provincial championship, the Aces finished the round-robin with two wins, one tie, and no losses, before falling to the Toronto Leaside Wildcats. Serendipitously, Stratford not only posted the exact same record 2-0-1 record in this year’s round-robin, but also met the very same Toronto

Leaside team in the quarter-final.

According to coach Cameron, the flashback to the year before and the heartbreaking defeat wasn’t lost on the team’s returning players.

“It felt like a gold medal game,” Cameron stated. “There was some history there, and whenever you lose to a team in a game that important, especially when you’re pegged to go far, you don’t forget it. I think it was such a motivating game for the girls, especially the 2007-born players who played them last year. Our leaders stepped up. It was a dream scenario, just taking the same path to play the same team as a year ago. History repeats itself if you let it, but thankfully, we did not let that happen.”

This time around, the Aces left with a 1-0 win over the Wildcats, with goaltender Sloan Cameron earning the shutout in between the pipes. Victoria Campbell scored the only goal of the contest.

The win put Stratford into a semi-final clash against the London Devillettes, and once again, the Aces came away with a 1-0 shutout victory. This time, Callie Aldridge backstopped Stratford in goal, not giving up a goal, while Abigail Van Bakel ripped home the game-winning goal.

Cameron called the semi-final



The Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Stratford Aces captured the silver medal at the OWHHA Provincial Championships held in Mississauga and Etobicoke on April 10-13. Pictured from left to right are Kiara McGregor, Charlee Gethke, Rylee Nethercott, Victoria Campbell, Abigail Van Bakel, Emma Gray, Charlotte Richardson, Maeve Turner, Sloan Cameron, Callie Aldridge, Ella Boersma, Kylin Wilson, Megan Graham, Hannah Dalton, Leah McPhee, Julia Papalia, and Jaden Greenlee. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

over London a victory built on determination.

“Our girls just weren’t going to lose. They decided they were going to get to that final no matter what. They knew they had to get through London, and that wouldn’t be easy. London is fast, skilled, and aggressive, and we got into penalty trouble. Thankfully, our goaltending stayed great, and eventually, Abigail (Van Bakel) did her patented move coming down the right side of the ice and sniping one far side.”

The Aces narrowly fell in the gold medal game against the North York Storm, with Stratford falling

by a score of 2-1. Despite not getting the desired result, Cameron said he had very few issues with how his team performed in the championship final.

“We came so close,” said Cameron. “I think I’ve replayed that game against North York 100 times in my head, and I don’t think I would change anything in terms of how we competed. Obviously, we would have liked to put a couple more pucks in the net, but it wasn’t for a lack of trying. They are an elite group of athletes.”

When reflecting on the season, Cameron praised the team for their

competitive spirit and focus.

“When 17 girls come together and decide that they have the talents, they have the skill, and they know how to win, that is all part of it. The other part is taking that knowledge and ability and putting it on the ice, and they knew how to do that. They expected the best from themselves and their teammates, and they created a winning culture. Champions, in my opinion, are not made after they win the game. Champions are made throughout the season, and their confidence continued to grow as they kept proving it to themselves.”

# MV



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# Eight Stratford youth headed to Germany for Dragon Boat World Championships

KRISTEN PARKER

*Times Correspondent*

Eight junior dragon boaters from the Stratford team are headed to Germany this July to represent Team Canada at the Dragon Boat World Championships. The event will take place July 16-20 in Brandenburg an der Havel, Germany. The paddlers will be away for two weeks with one week dedicated to training and one week for competition.

The paddlers began training after the last championships in 2023. After the last world championships in 2023, Ken Gene, head coach of the Stratford Dragon Boat teams, said the team went “right to the gym” once their on-water season wrapped up. Since then, the paddlers have been training both on the water and on land. They spend hours practicing technique on the Avon River, and Gene also has them working hard in the gym, using paddling machines to perfect their form and build strength. The combination of water sessions and dryland

training has helped the Stratford paddlers sharpen their skills and meet the high standards required for Team Canada.

The Stratford paddlers attending are Alexandra Stephens, Avery DeWitt, Daniel Bean, Daniel McArthur, Devin Keane, Everitt Weaver, Grace vanZandwijk, and Laynee McIlwain. All eight Stratford youth who tried out made the national team, which includes about 100 paddlers in total. Two of the athletes are on the under-16 team, and six are on the under-18 team.

This is the largest group of Stratford paddlers to make Team Canada. In 2015, six juniors from Stratford were selected. This will be Alexandra Stephens’ second time competing with Team Canada. She was part of the team in 2023 when the world championships was in Thailand.

The group attended a testing camp in Pickering in October, where they impressed the national team coaches with their strength through a series of activities including paddling, sit-ups, and push-ups.

The group will travel to Quebec in May for a training camp with the rest of the Team Canada paddlers before going to Germany.

During the championships, they will compete in a variety of distances, including 200 metres, 500 metres, 1,000 metres, and 2,000 metres.

Avery DeWitt said, “Being invited means that all of the work and training I did for the past year had paid off,” adding that she’s most excited “about racing against the world.”

Gene said he is proud of the paddlers and all they have accomplished.

“These paddlers have done training, and they work hard, so they will reap the benefits at the world championship,” Gene said. He emphasized that the team’s strong technique has been a major focus during their training, ensuring it matches the national standard.

In addition to preparing for the world championships, the paddlers have a busy season ahead of them with regular practices multiple times a week and their local season races.



Stratford paddlers Daniel Bean, Daniel McArthur, Laynee McIlwain, Everitt Weaver, Alexandra Stephens, Coach Ken Gene, and Grace vanZandwijk pose during a training session. Avery DeWitt and Devin Keane were missing from the photo. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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# Team Hyatt reflects on another season of curling at SDSS

GARY WEST

*Times Correspondent*

High school curling is over for another year, but the curling team from Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) known as “Team Hyatt” is already looking forward to another winning year for next season.

The team, consisting of Addison Hyatt, Deanna Halls, Brooklyn Hyatt, and Hailey Peters, put out a wrap-up recently to keep everyone in the area informed of their year just completed.

In July they gathered as a team to figure out the direction that they wanted to head for the 2024/2025 season. After a successful season the previous school year, they wanted to do more competitive curling, as well as to try to make it back to OFSSA for a second year. This is when Team Hyatt was formed.

Brian Anderson and Shane Restall from SDSS were asked again to coach and they agreed to come back for another season.

As a U-18 team, they attended two bonspiels early in the fall. Although they didn't win many games, it gave them a starting point for the season and confirmed that they were going to enjoy being a team while working together



**Team Hyatt, consisting of Addison Hyatt, Deanna Halls, Brooklyn Hyatt, and Hailey Peters, reflects on a curling season filled with growth this year.** (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

to improve their skills. At the same time the team joined the Tuesday night competitive league at the Stratford Country Club and kept improving as a team, and they feel, if the season was to start over now, they would be more competitive in the league, even though the games were still very late at night.

Their high school season was also a highlight as they went 15-0 against other girls teams and they made their way through the divisions at

this level and, in the end, made it back to the OFSAA for a second year in a row.

The other roles the team took on was at the Stratford Country Club, to assist with the coaching and teaching of “Little Rocks” Thursday evenings.

They felt it was so much fun being able to share their passion with the sport with new curlers and being able to see their development over the season as well. They hope to see many of these young curlers return next year and

would love to see the program grow in years to come.

Team Hyatt members said that now that the season has wrapped up, they wanted to say a huge thank you to their sponsors for helping them pursue their exciting sport at a very competitive level.

They also thanked staff, the icemakers, and members of the Stratford Country Club.

There were times throughout the year that the team and their families felt like the club was their second home.

They also wanted to say “a big thank you to the coaches for the guidance and challenges that you gave us throughout the year.” They would be amiss if they didn't mention their fill-in coach “Pauly Pocket.”

Most importantly, they thanked their families for the love, support, and time, they gave them.

Plans are already underway for next season with some of the team heading for the Trillium Curling Camp at the K-W Granite Club in August.

They are asking any company interested in becoming one of their sponsors for the next year to contact them at [teamhyattcurling@gmail.com](mailto:teamhyattcurling@gmail.com).

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# U18 Warriors take OHF title in dramatic fashion

LEE GRIFFI

*Times Correspondent*

Nathan Siebert's goal in the third overtime period gave the Stratford U18 Warriors hockey team their first Ontario Hockey Federation championship since 2016.

In the gold medal game on April 20 in New Hamburg, Siebert went coast to coast and slid a low shot from just in front of the icing line into the net at the 5:40 mark, giving Stratford a 3-2 win over St. Thomas and setting off an on-ice celebration.

"I was just trying to put the puck on the net and it just squeaked in five-hole. Oh my God, I'm speechless," said an emotional Siebert following the game.

The Stars led 1-0 in the second before Blake Hodgson tied it up on a feed from Colin Shultz. The Warriors took a 2-1 lead in the third period on Hudson Gordon's goal, but St. Thomas forced overtime with

a goal midway through the final frame.

The Warriors were in danger of winding up last in the round-robin portion of the event after losing twice on Friday, 5-4 to St. Thomas and 4-1 to host New Hamburg. They rallied back on Saturday with wins over Hearst and Porcupine by scores of 3-0 and 4-1, respectively.

Stratford took on Porcupine in one of Sunday morning's semi-final matchups and earned a 4-0 victory. Jordan Keane led the attack with a pair of goals while Cayden Bourassa and Colin Schultz added single markers for the Warriors. Colton Thomson earned the shutout.

Stratford represented Alliance Hockey while St. Thomas was the Ontario Minor Hockey Association champion. Hearst and Porcupine were the top two teams in the Northern Ontario Hockey Association and New Hamburg earned a berth as the host team.

Nathan Siebert squeaked the puck in to win the U18 Warriors its first Ontario Hockey Federation championship win since 2016.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



## Send in your sports reports

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

Game reports should be kept to a

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

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



Stratford Branch 008

### COMING EVENTS

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
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| May 14  | Ladies' Auxiliary Meatloaf Luncheon, \$16 per person, \$2.00 delivery charge, take out 11:30 a.m. -12:00 p.m., Dine in 12:00 p.m.   |
| May 25  | Spring Tea, 2-4 p.m., enjoy Dainties, finger sandwiches and Tea, open to all \$20 Adults, \$10 children 5-12 years old, under 5 free Call Dave 519-703-6544 or Anne 519-301-0914 for reservations |
| June 8  | Rib 'n Kraut Dinner, \$25 per plate, Take-out 4:30 p.m., Dine-in 5:00 p.m. Call Frank 519-271-9669, Pearl 519-273-0457 or Legion 519-271-0450 RESERVATION ONLY                                    |
| June 11 | Ladies' Auxilliary Luncheon, \$16 per person, \$2.00 delivery charge, take out 11:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Dine in 12:00 p.m. Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389   |

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# St. Mike's production of *Mamma Mia!* all about family

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Get ready to sing and dance along to your favourite ABBA songs this spring.

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School will present *Mamma Mia!* at their Eckert Hall on May 9, 12, 13, 15, and 16 at 6:30 p.m. The musical centres on families of all kinds, including mother and daughter Donna and Sophie, with ABBA's hit songs such as "Dancing Queen" and "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man after Midnight)" and, of course, "Mamma Mia!"

"This show has a role that fits perfectly for everyone and its cast so it's been really awesome to watch everybody mesh with what they're especially talented at for sure," said fifth year student Sarah Damen, who will portray Donna.

Tina Robinson, director, said the senior students pitched *Mamma Mia!* and it was picked for their senior show to present the National Theatre School Drama Festival in Gravenhurst.

"They've been asking for it for quite some time, but their pitch was really good because their concept was family and what does family mean and that the community is the family and so we really liked that and I said, 'Well, how would you show that,' so they gave us some ideas," Robinson said.

The students must figure out the theme of the play they chose. In the case of



(Left to right) Madelyn Wigan, Sarah Damen, and Katie Goforth will shine as pop trio Donna and the Dynamos for the St. Michael Catholic Secondary School production of *Mamma Mia!* on May 9, 12, 15 and 16. (EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

*Mamma Mia!*, it's about how family can appear in different types of relationships in addition to biological.

"The message of the show that Ms. (Robinson) gave to us was that fami-

ly comes in all forms and it doesn't just have to be through blood," said Madelyn Wigan, a Grade 12 student who portrays Tanya. "It can be through friendship, love – if that's platonic or romantic – and that

can come in any shape or form, and that's what we really wanted to portray as well that love is a beautiful thing and we want to be able to show that."

Previously, St. Mike's put on musicals such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Footloose*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. The gravity of the upcoming *Mamma Mia!* production is the largest in years.

"This would be our biggest show since pre-Covid, so we're very excited about it. We're excited about the audience reaction for sure because it's going to be a lot of fun," Theresa Mahood, assistant director, said.

Mahood added that the students have been gearing up for the production, working with vocal coaches in groups since September 2024.

The musical also promises lots of interactivity with the audience as cast members go into the aisles and encourage guests to sing and dance along to fun pop music.

"If you're looking to have a wonderful time with lots of singing and dancing, you're welcome to come join us, get up off of your seat and sing some ABBA and *Mamma Mia!*," said Grade 12 student Katie Goforth, who will perform as Rosie.

Tickets are \$20 and can either be purchased at the school's box office on 240 Oakdale Ave. after 3 p.m. or by sending an email to [trobenson@huronperthcatholic.ca](mailto:trobenson@huronperthcatholic.ca).

## Stratford Film Festival presents special screenings of the documentary *The Cowboy and The Queen*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A fitting film for Victoria Day weekend is the wonderful documentary of *The Cowboy and The Queen*, presented by the Stratford Film Festival (SFF). Two screenings will be held on May 17 in the City Hall Auditorium at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.

The film by Emmy Award winner and Academy Award Nominee Andrea Nevins is the story of the touching friendship that developed between California cowboy Monty Roberts and the Queen of England, Elizabeth II.

"I loved this film so much and instantly knew I wanted to program it on the Victoria Day weekend in homage to the late Queen Elizabeth II," says SFF director Megan Smith-Harris. "The queen was a constant and enduring figure in all our lives. Seeing her come alive again in this film was both poignant and surprisingly comforting."

The queen and Roberts bonded over their love of animals and their understanding of the nature and will of horses especially. Roberts' method of training horses was quite controversial. While more traditional methods were brutal and cruel, his was kind, calm, and confident. He was able to take an untrained horse and put a saddle and man on the horse within 20 minutes. Meanwhile, the more traditional methods would take up to six weeks where they brutalized the animal into submission,



The documentary film, *The Cowboy and the Queen*, provides a lovely opportunity to spend a little time with Queen Elizabeth II as filmmaker Andrea Nevins explores the extraordinary friendship with California cowboy Monty Roberts. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

breaking their spirit.

"This story might have been buried were it not for the efforts of filmmaker Andrea Nevins," adds Smith-Harris. "The evolution of Queen Elizabeth's unexpected friendship with Monty Roberts led to meaningful change in the international world of horse training – change that I hope continues to spread."

He became known as the horse whisperer and was invited by the queen to go to England and demonstrate his technique on

her stable of horses. She brought out bigger and bigger horses for him to tame and he did it to each horse he was challenged with. She was convinced he was the real deal and sponsored him to travel across the U.K. to demonstrate his technique as a more humane approach.

The question-and-answer period following the 4 p.m. screening and preceding the 7 p.m. screening will feature trainer Mallory Phillips and her miniature therapy horse, Angus from Out of the Ashes

Animal Rescue. Phillips will also be accompanied by fellow volunteer Vanessa Castaneda.

"We wanted to find a way to tangibly bring home the film's message about leading with kindness and the powerful impact equine therapy can have on people's lives," says Smith-Harris. "We're thrilled to have trainer Mallory Phillips and her miniature therapy horse, Angus join us for a Q-and-A – and yes, there will be opportunities to meet wee Angus up close and personal."

Angus has been with Phillips since he was three-months-old. He is now eight-years-old. Her method of training has employed patience, kindness and food for persuasion. Angus is a clever miniature horse that has been able to learn some tricks to demonstrate to film goers. For those that wish to get up close and learn more about him, he will be in the Market Square with Phillips and Cataneda between 6:15 p.m. and 6:45 p.m., in addition to participating in the two Q-and-As.

Out of the Ashes is a volunteer run large animal rescue and a registered charity located in Sebringville. It provides a forever home for over 90 rescued animals, including horses, cattle, water buffalo, goats, sheep, pigs, and llamas.

For more information about SFF and to buy tickets to a screening on May 17, visit [stratfordfilmfestival.com/projects-8](http://stratfordfilmfestival.com/projects-8). Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for students. It is recommended the audience is 11+ due to some footage of cruelty to horses.



# Stratford Symphony Orchestra sails to conclude its 20th season with HMS Mother's Day

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Guests will be treated to the Stratford Symphony Orchestra (SSO)'s season finale with laughter, powerful music and a celebration of all mothers.

The HMS Mother's Day concert is set to take voyage on May 10 at 7:30 p.m. at Avondale United Church. The concert will celebrate the history of SSO by featuring industry hallmarks such as Berthold Carrière and Barbara Young Steed. Instrumental pieces from the repertoire of Gilbert and Sullivan will exceed some of the event's more notable highlights.

"With concluding our 20th season, we are celebrating our past and looking towards our future," said William Rowson, music director at SSO. "Berthold Carrière and Barbara Young Steed were two individuals that were instrumental in shaping that Stratford Symphony into what it is today, and it wouldn't have been the same without them, the second half of the show is a tribute to all mothers."

Rowson said the chorus is made up of Stratford volunteers and due to the ambitious design of the program, the event will require talented vocal performers to match the delicacy of the music. He adds that the tracks will represent some of the most beautiful music that's ever been written.



Stratford Symphony Orchestra will celebrate the end of the season with laughs, legacy and honoring mothers on May 10 at the Avondale United Church. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The guest vocalists featured are Joshua Clemenger, tenor, Barbara Dunn-Prosser, soprano, Reid Spencer, baritone, and Eileen Smith, mezzo-soprano, and will all collaborate with Stratford's local talent.

Audiences will experience iconic melodies from the works of *HMS Pinafore* and *The Mikado* that will all be collaborated with composing pieces from Ralph Vaughan Williams, Edward German and Healy Willan, and Edward Elgar.

"I'm very proud of the team in Stratford, the board of directors and all our

volunteers, administrators. They are just truly making these things happen and we are very blessed. We couldn't do this without them," said Rowson.

"The orchestra has just been raising the bar on itself for every concert and the creativity process has been very smooth with no hiccups. We are about to launch a brand-new season. Everything is going according to what we have planned."

Tickets can be purchased online at [www.stratfordsymphonyorchestra.ca](http://www.stratfordsymphonyorchestra.ca) or by calling 519-271-0990. They will also be first come first serve at the door.



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# HPCDSB hosts skilled trades event for students on the way to high school

GARY WEST & CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Correspondents

The Stratford Rotary Complex was a great location recently to connect local students to skilled trades and apprenticeships.

The RBC arena, now with the ice removed, had various stations set up as Grade 7 and 8 students from various schools in the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) had hands on learning on the various skilled trades – that are needed now and in the future, anywhere in the province.

Mark Flanagan, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) representative for the local board, said that the goal of the event was simple.

“Sparking an interest,” Flanagan said. “These are things they’ve never done. You may have one, two, maybe five, six, say ‘Hey, that was kind of cool.’ They might not pick it up right today, even a few years from now ... or they might take one of these in their schools next year.”

Flanagan said that he would normally organize school specific demonstrations for students and would travel the breadth of the HPCDSB to reach all of them, which was a time-intensive and inefficient way of doing things.

By bringing all of the resources to one central place and inviting every school there from April 22-25, the organizing team was able to give more intensive



Milarka Alvero operates an excavator at the RBC Arena in the Stratford Rotary Complex on April 23 as part of the skilled trades event the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board put on that week – after OYAP representative Mark Flanagan gave her a quick crash course in its operation. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

hands-on experiences – giving students are better idea of what skilled trades mean.

There were 10 skilled trades stations which included an agricultural station, welding, plumbing, manufacturing, GRIT surveying, tire changing, a carpentry station, and a mobile truck unit from Skills Ontario that housed various hands-on simulators.

That truck had a welding station simula-

tor, along with a vertical automotive paint simulator, and a simulator where you took control of a machine that imitated an operator running a high hoe or backhoe.

All the stations were interactive with teachers helping the students with various skills they might need in that particular area of the tech trades.

Hayley MacKay was operating the Skills Ontario truck that week. She stated that

Skills Ontario is a nonprofit organization that promotes skilled trades and helps bridge the gap and relay the message that skilled trades are a first-choice career option that can be rewarding and financially stable.

She oversees four mobile units that travel across Ontario to various schools and events, promoting the trades through interactive activities.

She said all the interactive activities at the various stations are for students and adults to try, in order to make plans for their future employment.

According to Skills Ontario, the province is entering a major natural resource and construction era that will require thousands of skilled trade workers – so, accordingly, now is the time to start training those future workers.

OYAP allows a co-op student to begin to learn a skilled trade while completing the requirements for a high school diploma.

A co-op student may be signed as an apprentice with an employer, at the time of his or her placement. Students graduate with a diploma, skills in a trade, experience in the workplace, and a head start in a skilled profession.

By 2026 one in five new jobs will be in the skilled trades and almost 100,000 jobs need to be filled in the construction area alone.

For more information, visit [skillsontario.com](http://skillsontario.com).

## Children and technology: A five-alarm fire

LOREENA MCKENNITT

Freelance Columnist

Now that the school year is winding down and children and youth are more visible in the lengthening spring days, there will be many of us reminiscing about our own childhoods and being sent outside to play, instructed only to come home when the streetlights came on. We’d ride our bikes, hike the railway tracks, play hide and seek, hang out on the swings, or learn to skip on the school grounds.

After watching the Netflix series, *Adolescence*, one wonders if we even belong to the same species as our children today.

This four-part series follows a cherub-faced 13-year-old boy accused of murdering a female classmate and explores the conditions which lead to this incident and how it affected his family and peers. Part three reveals one of the significant contributing factors was the radicalization of young men in the “manosphere” via a secretive system of communication on the internet and through forums promoted by social-media influencers like Andrew Tate. It involves young girls taking

compromising pictures of themselves and sending them to male acquaintances, not unlike the ones I learned about in Stratford quite recently.

*Adolescence* is gut-wrenching to watch and will have every parent shocked into asking, “Do I really know what my children are doing and watching?”

As someone who has followed the subject of children, technology and its unintended consequences for more than 12 years, I can safely say there is a list of threats which run a full page long – what McMaster University professor and cultural critic Henry Giroux calls a “carpet bombing” of our youth.

This list includes attention and addiction disorders of gaming and hard porn, bullying, suicide and sextortion. It can lead to radicalization, human trafficking by predators, loneliness, mental-health issues, substance abuse and more.

Simply put, there is a five-alarm fire in our children’s lives and so many of us either don’t know about it or aren’t sure what to do about it if we are aware.

One of the most striking features of this emergency is that most other industries are

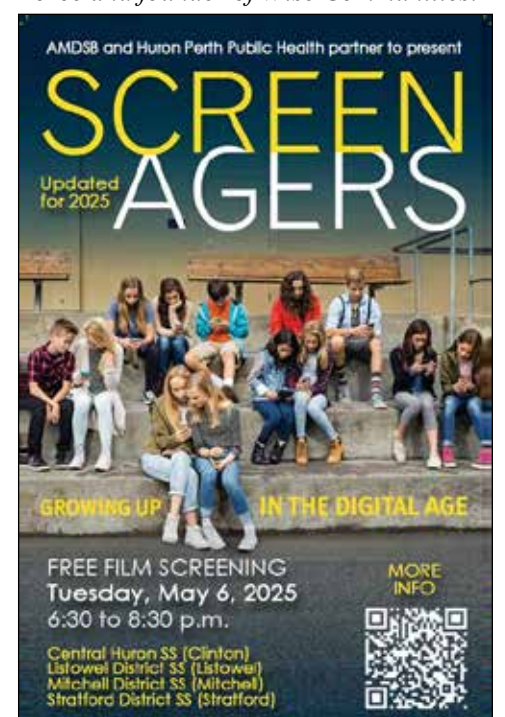
obliged to adhere to strict regulations tied to research and testing before their products can be unleashed on society. Think drugs or food. And yet, most American and foreign-owned social-media platforms have never been required to apply this same due diligence in the name of safety. Platforms like Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok, in their unregulated state, have been free to cause carnage across the planet and do great harm to our defenceless children.

It is with this in mind that we welcome such initiatives as the AMDSB’s free in-person screenings on May 6 of the award-winning documentary, *Screenagers: Growing Up in the Digital Age*. The film is a family-friendly exploration of this subject and every parent, grandparent and youth should book the night off and watch it.

Maybe, just maybe, we can join the growing movement of families, school boards, provinces, states and countries who are finally bringing these companies to heel. Every one of our children is depending on us.

Loreena McKennitt is an international,

multi-platinum recording artist, a member of The Order of Canada, the former Honorary Colonel of the Royal Canadian Air Force and founder of Wise Communities.



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# Stratford Arts and Lectures brings literary stars to The Bruce Hotel this spring

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Inspired by San Francisco's City Arts and Lectures series, Rina Barone is bringing her own visionary take on cultural programming to Stratford with her latest initiative, Stratford Arts and Lectures. Designed to spark conversation and community through literature, the program aims to connect readers with popular authors, critics and thought leaders in intimate and thought-provoking settings.

Stratford Arts and Lectures offers curated, year-round events hosted by Barone, who brings a wealth of experience in television, journalism and publishing to her role as founder and moderator. Through live conversations and carefully tailored events, audiences are invited to explore ideas, creativity and the stories that shape our lives.

The inaugural event will feature Nita Prose, the New York Times bestselling author of *The Maid*, *The Mystery Guest* and *The Mistletoe Mystery*. Prose will appear at The Bruce Hotel on May 6, from 4-6 p.m., for a special afternoon tea event titled "Spilling the Tea," where she'll discuss her latest novel, *The Maid's Secret*.

"I've curated and crafted these events very carefully," said Barone. "For me, it's about finding the best fit for each author – the right venue, the right audience, and the right style of event. The Bruce Hotel is perfect for Nita Prose, especially since her protagonist's grandmother loved tea. Our 'Spilling the Tea' event just feels right."

The second event in the series will also be held at The Bruce Hotel on June 10, from 4-6 p.m., and will feature Martha Hall Kelly, author of *Lilac Girls*, *Lost Roses*, *Sunflower Sisters* and *The Golden Doves*. Hall Kelly will discuss her newest novel, *The Martha's Vineyard Beach* and

*Book Club*, which was inspired by her own family's ties to the Massachusetts island.

Although the initial events are focused on literature, Barone envisions a broader scope. Future events may feature scientists, public thinkers and artists. "It's not just about books – it's about ideas," she said. "I want Stratford Arts and Lectures to grow organically, and for people to feel like these conversations mean something to them."

She's also thinking about accessibility and inclusivity. Barone plans to partner with local businesses to introduce free or low-cost events and is committed to supporting schools and literacy initiatives. "It's important to me that everyone can take part in these experiences," she said. "I want to encourage kids to read more and have access to books."

While Stratford's festival season is a major draw for visitors, Barone is focused on creating a year-round cultural offering for residents. "This isn't just about spring or summer events," she said. "I'm developing a monthly series that can evolve and grow over time."

Recently relocated to Stratford with her family, Barone brings an impressive résumé to her latest venture. She has worked as a director, writer and producer in Canadian television, including *Bachelor in Paradise Canada*, *MasterChef Canada* and *Come Dine With Me Canada*. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in creative nonfiction from the University of King's College, a bachelor's degree in journalism from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson), and a postgraduate diploma in television from Humber College.

Barone is also the owner of Curiosity House Books in Creemore, author of the children's book *A Bird Chronicle*, and co-founder of the Dunedin Literary Festival, which has been featured in major Canadian media. She continues to

curate literary events through her bookshop and writes Stories from the Pink House on Substack.

Now, through Stratford Arts and Lectures, she's turning her creative vision into something Stratford can proudly call its own.

For tickets or more information, visit [www.stratfordartsandlectures.com](http://www.stratfordartsandlectures.com).

STRATFORD ARTS & LECTURES

THE MAID'S SECRET  
NITA PROSE

SPILLING THE TEA  
with NITA PROSE  
MAY 6 | 4PM - 6PM

TICKETS \$45  
includes afternoon tea

Join us at the Bruce for a tea and a talk with Nita Prose as she discusses her latest novel, *The Maid's Secret*. Nita is the bestselling author of *The Mystery Guest*, *The Mistletoe Mystery*, and *The Maid*, which has sold more than two million copies worldwide.

THE BRUCE HOTEL  
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## Mayor questioned over breakfast at River Gardens Retirement Residence

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma was invited to a breakfast with the men at the River Gardens Retirement Residence on Romeo Street last week, to talk about Stratford's future – where we are, where we have been, and in what area the city is headed.

The mayor said he is glad to see vacant land within the city being developed, with what he called "fill-in housing."

He knows there are many workers that are employed in factories and businesses in the city and yet live in places like Woodstock and London because there aren't enough housing spaces (rental and otherwise), available in Stratford. He hopes to change that during his term and into the future.

The rental market he says can be a problem with only two per cent of housing earmarked for rent, while builders, he has been in contact with, want to build to sell and not to rent.

With 730 students needing rental housing for University of Waterloo studies, he said the city has to be cognizant of that need, if they want to attract students in the future to that area of the city for their education.

When asked about his inclusion from Premier Doug Ford, pertaining to the strong mayor powers, Ritsma was quick to point out that in some cases governments can run a little on the slow side and said developers will sometimes go elsewhere if development doesn't get moved along fast enough.

In his opinion, he never wants to veto council's decisions and hopes they can always work together in coming up with various solutions in the development world.



The morning men's breakfast club at the River Gardens Retirement Residence, welcoming Mayor Martin Ritsma to speak about happenings in the City of Stratford.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

He pointed to the redevelopment of the Krug furniture site as one that is a positive move for the city in the future, as is the new housing construction presently underway on the city's eastern limits, next to Canadian Tire.

The mayor also said, after being asked, that he still wants development on the Grand Trunk site, for developers to own parts of the land and repurpose the site.

When asked about the old Golden Bamboo Chinese Restaurant dilapidated property on Ontario Street, he said council and staff are dealing with that issue and it

will be taken care of, he assured the audience, by the end of summer.

When asked about his future, Mayor Ritsma said he will be running again for the city's top job, saying he enjoys working with his fellow councillors no matter who they might be.

He stated he is always willing to work for the city's residents, to come up with solutions to keep Stratford a beauty of a tourist destination that many in this country, come here to enjoy.





# SEEKING SUSTAINABILITY

## SDSS Eco Club hopes Earth Week starts “ripple effect” across the community

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS)’s Eco Club proves once again that it doesn’t take a lot of people to do something extraordinary.

“Usually people think that what they do won’t be enough to change the world,” Eco Club member Naz Karazeyeek said. “But if they got out of that thought and actually started doing stuff one by one, we would make a river, a lake basically, drop by drop. It’s more about one person standing up and taking action.”

“When one person does it and they share what they’re doing with people, it just keeps growing,” Rowan Watson agreed. “And then exponentially people will start changing things that they do in their lives and maybe even reaching out to their communities and helping everyone change.”

“The thought that if you start doing something like recycling it’s not going to change anything ... it will,” Rory Auster said. “Because of the ripple effect.”

Outreach and education were front and centre this week as the club, which has about 20-30 environmentally conscious students this year, hosted Earth Week at SDSS from April 21-25.

As Ewan Mann said, the focus of the week was on education. While the climate crisis is one top of mind for many people, chief of all the youth, the members of the club who spoke with the Times said that not every young person is engaged or believes in the crisis.

“The Eco Club is fairly aware, I would say the school at large is fairly unaware,” Mann said.

“(Earth) week is the only time where we



Rowan Watson, Naz Karazeyeek, Rory Auster, and Ewan Mann pose in one of the greenhouses outside of SDSS. The four of them are part of the school’s Eco Club, which organized this year’s Earth Week activities. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

get to make people a little more aware,” Watson added.

A number of guest speakers, like the City of Stratford’s climate change manager Sadaf Ghalib and Climate Momentum’s Bill James-Abra, came to the school to discuss what they do to tackle the climate crisis locally, among other feature events and speakers.

The “Where’s Bruno?” trend was a highlight for Zach Kritzer. The annual event has the school mascot Bruno hiding somewhere in the school and after a photo of him and a question is released over the announcements, students rush to find the

bear – the first person to find him and answer the question gets treats to take back to their class. Like every year, the trend was a huge success with a lot of engagement.

For Watson, having Claire Scott of Claire Upcycled, a locally based eco-fashion streetwear brand, come and talk with students and show them how to make their own shirts was another peak feature of the week.

The week culminated with a trip that Friday to West Five, a sustainable housing development in London that “represents the future of sustainable living, planned

to harmonize modern urban living with environmental stewardship,” according to the development’s website.

Aside from the week, the Eco Club has been hard at work with its extracurricular outreach.

The club continues to operate an urban farm on Smith Street, a project that is aimed to grow food for the school and the many nearby neighbours. Additionally, they are trying to get compost bins that can handle the compostable utensils and plates the school’s culinary program uses.

Early this year, members of the club delegated at city council during the budget process, successfully convincing council to hire a new community energy liaison to assist Stratford citizens to find savings related to green initiatives, like governmental grants.

For all of their continued work, the club was honoured with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority’s inspiration award in February, which recognizes environmental stewardship and activism in the community.

Most excitingly, members of the club will be working with TEDx Stratford to host a student-led speaker series on June 10, with the theme of “shaping the future.”

“We have three speakers and we are going to talk about something that we’re passionate about on that theme,” Naz Karazeyeek said about the plans so far. “Everything from filming, editing – it’s all going to be from our students. So it’s going to be a student project.”

More details on that project are to follow. All of the club members extended “our biggest thank you” to teacher Christine Ritsma for all her help and guidance throughout the school year.

## STRATFORD TIMES

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Toner & Ink Shop  
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Athens Greek Restaurant  
Stratford Legion  
Gino’s Pizza  
Rosso’s  
Buzz Stop  
Union Barber  
Mornington Variety  
Split Rail  
Stratford Rotary Complex  
Agriplex  
No Frills  
Cozyn’s  
Sebringville Esso  
Dave’s Diner - Sebringville  
Stratford-Perth Museum  
Sobey’s

## Pick Up Locations

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

Stratford Chefs School  
HH Delea  
AJ’s Hair  
United Way Perth Huron  
Sinclair Pharmacy  
Blowes Stationery  
Stratford Tourism  
Coffee Culture  
Stratford Public Library  
The Parlour Restaurant & Inn  
Dick’s Barber Shop  
The Livery Yard  
Town Crier Marketing  
North End Pharmacy  
Annie’s Seafood Restaurant



# Local and regional Rotary volunteers pack 504 Aquabox water-filtration kits for people living in disaster zones

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

It is truly amazing to watch as friends and neighbours come together for the benefit of their own community. What's even more amazing is when friends and neighbours come together to support total strangers living in a country more than half a world away.

On April 26, volunteers with the Rotary Club of Stratford were joined by Rotary members from Grand Bend and Barrie, as well as volunteers with Global Medic, in the Jutzi Water Technologies warehouse in Stratford to put together 504 Aquabox water-filtration kits for people living in disaster zones without access to clean water in countries around the world.

"The Aquabox is a simple, two-filter system designed for disaster relief," Rotary Club of Stratford president-elect Dan Kane said at Saturday's Aquabox build.

"In the event of a flood or hurricane, the existing water supply gets taken offline and the Aquabox is there to bridge the gap for the two months, three months that it takes to get the water system back online. You can take river water, creek water, any sort of contaminated water and run it through the system. There (are) two filters on top, it filters down into a bottom reservoir and that will give safe, clean drinking water for a family of six for up to a year."

While the Rotary Club of Stratford was responsible for organizing this particular build event, which included nearly 40 volunteers each working at one of half-a-dozen stations in what resembled a factory assembly line, the Rotary Clubs in Grand Bend and Barrie contributed \$6,000 and \$10,000 respectively for the purchase of the materials needed to build the Aquaboxes. The funds were also used to purchase personal hygiene items like toothbrushes and toothpaste, as well as

solar lights, that were packed inside the Aquabox kits for those families living in disaster zones.

"Unfortunately, as fast we can possibly produce them, we still can't keep up with the need," Kane said. "Rotary kind of has a couple faces. People know Rotary as the Rotary Club of Stratford or the Festival City Rotary Club and they know us for the hospice and they know us for the respite house, but beyond what Rotary does locally, we're an international committee as well. This is one of our international projects, so taking the good we can do here and spreading it around the world."

Once they're built, the kits were stacked on pallets, loaded into a truck and driven to Global Medic's warehouse. Once disaster strikes somewhere in the world, Global Medic will then ship those kits where they're needed most and representatives from the disaster-response organization will oversee their deployment on the

ground.

"We've worked with the Rotary Club in Stratford for quite a number of years now," said Global Medic senior emergency programs manager Jamie Cross. "... When we're in a disaster zone, no matter what it is, whether it's earthquakes or hurricanes or a conflict scenario, the thing we see over and over again is people lose access to drinking water. Getting them access to that is really, really important. We want to try and prevent them from needing health care rather than just focusing on the treatment because if you're treating someone for, say, cholera and then sending them back to their home where they're drinking from the same contaminated water source, you're just going to see them again."

"It's very important still to have those treatment facilities available, but we want to try and prevent as many people from needing them as possible."



Rotary Club of Stratford volunteers prepare the buckets that will serve as a filtered-water reservoir and house the Aquabox kits for shipping during the April 26 Aquabox build at the Jutzi Water Technologies warehouse in Stratford.



Volunteers drill holes in the Aquabox lids where two ceramic water filters will be installed.

(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)

## Local snowmobile club rolled up their sleeves to give blood

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Twelve members of the North Easthope Snowmobile Club known as the "Drifters," drifted into Stratford on April 26 and rolled up their sleeves. They were not revving up their snow machines, but were donating a pint of blood in support of Canadian Blood Services.

The group were at the Stratford Rotary Complex to do their part in giving the "Gift of Life" to someone in need.

The Drifters organization was organized in the early 1970s by three North Easthope snowmobilers, Ron Horst, Ray Roth, and Richard Cook. The enthusiastic snowmobile group has grown in numbers, ever since.

They organize winter get-togethers on their snow machines, at their clubhouse, and in the Ray Roth bush, where the North Easthope Trail runs nearby.

The club maintains the township trail throughout the winter, putting up safety trail signs and keeping the snow trail groomed.

Many in the group were regular blood givers, but there were some that hadn't given before, but said they "will surely be back in the future" to roll up their sleeves again for a very needed cause.

A minimum of 56 days is required between blood donations for men, and 84 days minimum for women. Maureen MacFarlane, community development manager for Canadian Blood Services, welcomed the "boys of winter," and was happy to include them to be partners for life in giving their "gift of life."

If readers would like to become blood donors, the need for blood or platelets is always there, especially with summer travel coming on.

They urge everyone to become a donor by dialing 1-800-2-Donate (366283).



Ron Horst, Andrew Bell, Devon Kipfer, Chris Postma, Matt Neeb, Brad Van Nes, James Neeb, Connor Hachborn, Wayne Gerber, Chad Hachborn, Will Sebben, and Dave Mohr – otherwise known as the North Easthope Drifters – were in Stratford to donate blood.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)



# Biologist warns proposed provincial changes will erode conservation efforts

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For the first time in likely a century, the endangered spiny softshell turtle population increased in 2024 along the Thames River, largely due to the efforts of conservationists like Scott Gillingwater.

Gillingwater, species at risk biologist for the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA), told the Times that last year the Southern Ontario at Risk Reptiles (SOARR) program hatched and released more than 10,000 native turtles into the region. To put that number into context, it's estimated that there are between 2,000 and 2,500 adults in Canada. Although that is a huge amount released locally, Gillingwater clarified that only 0.1 to five per cent will survive to maturity.

The program also located, assessed, and protected dozens of endangered turtles and snakes, built new nesting, basking, foraging, and cover habitats, and installed roadside fencing to reduce reptile mortality, among other conservation efforts.

Gillingwater said that the population has not reached the same level that it was at when he started at the UTRCA 32 years ago and there is much more still to do; however, recent provincial legislative changes has him worried about the prospects of native turtles and all native animals at large.

On April 17, the Province of Ontario introduced the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, legislation that would "cut the red tape and duplicative processes that have held back major infrastructure, mining and resource development projects," according to a news release.

"The days of making proponents wait years for approvals and permits are over," Todd McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, said in that same release. "We can and will build the Ontario of tomorrow in a way that protects the environment and protects jobs."



**An Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) worker holds up a native turtle. Last year, a record-setting 10,000 turtles were released into the wild in an effort to curb dwindling populations in the region – and it paid off. For the first time in over a century, the population is on the rise in the watershed.**

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

While the legislation focuses on energy and mine development, it would also make amendments to the Endangered Species Act (once touted as the "gold standard" of conservation legislation) and eventually would appeal and replace it altogether with the Species Conservation Act. In its proposal, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks said that the Endangered Species Act makes the permit process "slow and complex, causing unnecessary delays and costs for housing, transit, and critical infrastructure."

Chiefly, the new legislation to replace it would give the government the ability to

use its own discretion to add endangered and threatened species to the protected list (and could also remove species from the list) and it would redefine protections and the habitats of animal species.

No longer would the avenues species use to migrate, look for food, and winter be protected under the new act, rather only their den would be protected.

"That makes it very difficult for protection of areas where these animals are traveling to move between summer and winter sites where they're feeding," Gillingwater said. "And also, we are still studying these species to fully understand them, and this habitat will be lost before we can say where these animals are, where these animals need to be in five years, 10 years, 100 years, due to changes in the environment."

... There're so many concerns about how this act is being currently set out.

"We once had the gold standard for species protection in Ontario and that legislation has continuously been amended and weakened and had the teeth taken out of it," Gillingwater went on to say. "... What we need now – under the current state of our affairs, with our world, with our climate – is better species protection. And that goes for not only species at risk, but all of our wildlife and wild spaces in general. And it's quite surprising that in this day and age that we are taking steps back. We are losing decades of progress by weakening these types of legislation."

The Species Conservation Act would also create a new program to support voluntary activities that will assist in conservation and would increase investment into conservation, up to \$20 million a year. As Gillingwater said, he does not believe that is commiserate to the erosion of species protections.

"We need more protection for these species, not less, not weakening of legislation, and we need more funding to do this work," Gillingwater said. "So that amount of funding should have been put forward without reducing protections to species at risk. Sure, additional funding is great, but if you're reducing protections you're going to need far more, tenfold more, than what is being presented."

When asked if he has hope for 2025 and beyond, Gillingwater said he has been working in the region for 32 years, since the mid-90s, and he's seen it all. Throughout that time, he has identified as either an optimistic pessimist or a pessimistic optimist.

"I will say that the pessimism it starting to creep up a little higher than my optimism," Gillingwater said. "I still have hope."

The consultation period for the proposed Species Conservation Act, where residents can submit a comment to the province, ends on May 17. Residents can find more information here: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/025-0380>.



Species at risk biologist Scott Gillingwater takes notes in the field during a recent survey by the Southern Ontario At Risk Reptiles (SOARR) team.

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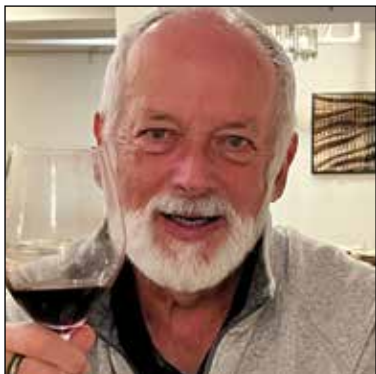
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# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: The Cabot Trail: an iconic Canadian destination



PAUL KNOWLES

*Times Contributor*

We have all seen the reports: Canadian travel to the United States is down, way down. Canadians are choosing to go elsewhere in the world just now, or to stay home.

Well, if you are in the latter category, staying home can open an unending cornucopia of opportunities. This home of ours is gigantic; our home and native land stretches 5,514 kilometres from Cape Spear, Nfld., to the Yukon-Alaska border, and 4,634 kilometres from Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island, Nunavut, to Middle Island in Lake Erie, Ont. Our country covers an unimaginable 9,984,670 square kilometres.

So, given all of this, where to go after we've decided to stay home? My features over the next few months will include several good suggestions, but let's begin with one of my favourites, which we explored last summer, The Cabot Trail on Cape Breton Island.

Let's admit the obvious, The Cabot Trail is a stunningly beautiful drive. It stretches 298 kilometres – which could be navigated in about four non-stop hours, I suppose, but should not be, at any cost. We actually stayed four nights on or near The Cabot Trail.

Please take the time to stop, and



One of hundreds of gorgeous views along The Cabot Trail.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

to stop a lot. Stop at little shops where artisans are working on the spot with their wares on the stores' shelves. Stop again and again to savour the ocean views. Stop to walk the paths and trails that will carry you through forests to waterfalls and lakes, or along beachfronts. There are walks and hikes for every level of activity, from brief, gentle strolls to steep climbs. Many of them are within the boundaries of the terrific Cape Breton Highlands National Park, yet another of Parks Canada's gems. By the way, you can tell when you are within the boundaries of the National Park, because the highways are in superb condition. The moment you cross the border, not so much.

Our first port of call on Cape Breton Island was a few minutes from actual access to the Cabot Trail. We stayed at the Glenora Inn

and Distillery where they produce truly excellent, single-malt whisky – they can't call it Scotch because the Scottish distillers are litigiously protective of the name. Those who know me will know why I loved it, but more about this terrific place in a subsequent column.

Staying close to the trail meant we could begin our exploration early the next morning. We decided to travel clockwise, heading north and eventually east from the west coast of the island to the east. En route, we stopped to explore a craft shop and its neighbour, an ice cream parlour, in Cheticamp. We pulled off, often, to simply take in the incredible ocean views and, of course, capture as many photos as we could.

And we opted to hike two of the dozens of trails in the national park, in both cases avoiding steep climbs, but nonetheless having to

keep a watchful eye on the rock-strewn and tree-root-filled paths. It was definitely worth the effort and we recorded 13,400 steps on this first day on the trail.

Our first stop was at MacIntosh Brook, where a woodland trail took us back to a beautiful waterfall. Then, we explored the trail at Warren Lake, also in the national park. That trail circumnavigates the lake; there were signs cautioning hikers about coyotes, but we saw no large animals, only spotting four toads, three snakes, a white-tailed junco and a spotted sandpiper – at least, that's my best guess as to the identity of those two Nova Scotian birds. It's a very enjoyable walk.

Our next two nights were spent at the quaint Knotty Pines Cottages near Ingonish. The accommodation was fine, but the view from the deck was amazing! Our

first night there was Sunday, so no restaurants open but the Co-op was, and we purchased the raw materials for a wonderful al-fresco dinner on the deck, where we watched the sun set.

And that reminds me, if you have the choice, explore The Cabot Trail on sunny days. That will make all the difference.

During our stay in the Ingonish area, we walked the beautiful beach; there are several great beaches along the trail.

Our final night on Cape Breton was spent in one of the southern-most communities on The Cabot Trail, Baddeck. Baddeck is definitely worth a leisurely visit. I have written previously about the fascinating Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site here, but there is much, much more.

We stayed at the Inverary Resort, a complex of comfortable lodges and cottages that also includes a tiny chapel, dubbed the Conn Smythe Chapel because the curmudgeonly owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs donated the money for its construction. That, too, is another story.

While in Baddeck, we partook in two quintessential Cape Breton experiences – a delicious lobster supper at Baddeck Lobster Suppers and a traditional Cape Breton concert (with an amazing fiddler, of course) at The Baddeck Gathering Ceilidh.

And all of this just scratches the surface of the experiences awaiting you right here at home – albeit a bit of a distance from your living room – on Cape Breton Island.

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



The waterfall on MacIntosh Brook Trail in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park.



Sunset from the deck of our Knotty Pines cottage.



# Web-crawling for caterpillars



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Freelance Columnist

Oh man, I've got babies to feed, and they're all squawking in the nest – gotta find caterpillars! None here, none there, none there either – darn! Where are they?

We have a love affair with some plants – and they're lovely! But I'm afraid the only bugs they attract are the human ones. No butterflies stop by, no moths

lay their eggs, so no caterpillars. Does it matter? As Don Farwell told us at the Climate Conversation, those caterpillars are absolutely crucial for baby birds, even seed-eaters. You've probably heard this, but to raise a nest of chickadees, that momma chickadee has to find 9,000 caterpillars!

If we want to provide homes for butterflies, moths and other pollinators, so they'll keep our gardens healthy for nature, we can switch it up! The pollinators will be happy to visit our gardens and pollinate our food crops too! So how do we switch it up? Choose beautiful plants that the pollinators like, the ones they've lived with for thousands of years.

Looking for plants to rescue you from being a slave to a lawn mower? Start planting sunny side beds with wild gera-

nium, pearly everlasting (brings a beautiful butterfly called the American lady) and the joys of milkweed varieties that are loved by monarchs. For a splash of vibrant purples and fuchsia, try liatris and ironweed –beautiful!

Love hostas? Switch it up! You would really love may apple or Canadian waterleaf – lush and green and native to Ontario! They're great host plants for several varieties of butterflies and moths, and umpteen caterpillars for those baby birds! How about goutweed? Want to switch it up to a plant attractive to pollinators? There are some lovely alternatives! Try pearly everlasting (for that American lady butterfly), Canada anemone, large-leaved aster and Virginia waterleaf – so many beautiful alternatives!

How about that lily of the val-

ley? Switch it up! Wild ginger, foamflower and wild geranium will welcome pollinators. Unfortunately, some of those lovely plants that you might want to switch have really good staying power. Hostas (and periwinkle) are probably the easiest to remove through digging, but goutweed and lily of the valley will cheerfully reproduce from the smallest bit of leftover root. Those plants require special strategies.

Herbicides kill so much else in the garden (birds, insects, soil organisms and other plants) that a better way is to put garden cloth (regretfully usually plastic, but there is a heavy burlap that works) down over the bed, once you've dug up goutweed and lily of the valley. Be sure to cover at least six inches beyond the bed to stop eager shoots from escaping. Leave the cloth

for two to three months. Bingo, that patch is done. Head for the pollinator friendly plants!

A last hint: if you thinking of a special plant, try heading for google. Name the plant, and add "host plant." That's where you'll learn what pollinators will lay their eggs on that plant and that's where the caterpillars come from. Water native plants if necessary for the first summer and then stand back and welcome the butterflies and other pollinators. They're native plants, so they're accustomed to managing with our weather. As well, you'll find a host of resident birds stopping by: wrens (with their beautiful songs), chickadees, nuthatches and more!

Wondering where to go to find those welcoming native plants? There are several nurs-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 32

## COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

### GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday May 5; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "Catch the Spring Migration by Planting a Bird Friendly Garden", Kevin Kavanagh, South Coast Gardens and Consulting  
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

### FOOD TRUCKS

Grace United Church in Tavistock

May 5th: Serial Griller, Born2Eat, and Fo' Cheezy  
Proceeds supporting Home and School Association, for new playground equipment.

### OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, May 6; 7:00 p.m.

93 Morgan St., Stratford

Speaker – Perth County MIH Paramedics - Medical Assistance in the home. Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

### FOOD TRUCKS

at Grace United Church in Tavistock

May 12th: Wild Boar, Frying Dutchman, and El Milagro  
Proceeds supporting TAP - Tavistock Assistance Program

### FOOD TRUCKS

at Grace United Church in Tavistock

May 19th: Crystals Fries, Fo' Cheezy and Ish n chips  
Proceeds supporting Grace United

### SPRING TEA

Sunday, May 25; 2 - 4 p.m.

Stratford Legion, 804 Ontario St B1.

Come, bring your family and friends, and enjoy an afternoon of conversation, fun, door prizes and silent auction. Enjoy tea, finger sandwiches, dainties and more. \$20 for adults, \$10 for children 5-12 yrs. and under 5 yrs. are free. Order your tickets soon! Call Anne 519-301-0914, Dave 519-703-6544 or the Legion 519-271-4540.

### FOOD TRUCKS

at Grace United Church in Tavistock

May 26th: Berlin 95, Serial Griller, Los Rolling Tacos, and Beavertails

Proceeds supporting TAP - Tavistock Assistance Program

### "Y" KNOT QUILT SHOW AND SALE

Sunday, June 1; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Falstaff Family Centre 35 Waterloo St. Stratford

All proceeds will go to support the Stratford Family Y and Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth. Many beautiful new and antique quilts will be for sale and for more information please visit yknotquiltshowandsale.com.

### STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathawy Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford

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

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## TAVISTOCK MEN'S CLUB

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or from Club members

or call 519-655-3573

or email: info@tavistockmensclub.ca

Portion of profits to Tavistock Community Health fundraiser

# STRATFORD TIMES

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

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

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



# Web-crawling for caterpillars

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

eries in southwestern Ontario that carry a wonderful variety of pollinator friendly plants. You can find an updated list on the Canadian Federation of University Women Stratford site (cfuwstratford.ca). Look under the "How We Help" heading for information on where to buy native plants. Work together with nature

to help pollinate gardens and to feed our beautiful birds. Switch it up!

## Updates:

1. Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of 22 April, 2025: 430.5 ppm. Safe level, 350 ppm, passed in 1990 (high readings are increasing rapidly).

2. What is Circularity? Is it A: going in

circles? B: a very funny circus? Or is it C: a way to reduce emissions by creating new ways to re-use, recycle and substitute rather than turn to new resources and waste.

3. Where can you see circularity in action? Don't miss the May 22 Climate Conversation at the Stratford City Hall auditorium. It will feature VicWest, a

Stratford company that strives for circularity. See you there!

*Sheila Clarke is a Stratford advocate for the environment, of our community and of our planet. She is a member of CFUW Stratford, Stratford Climate Momentum, and the Perth County Sustainability Hub.*

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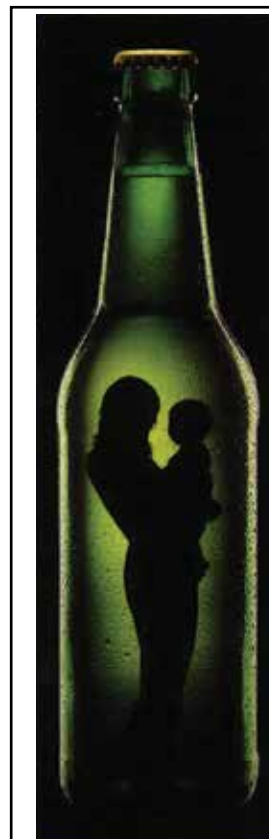
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# Riddles

- Why did the bee get married in the spring?

Because he found his honey!
- Why do birds fly north in the spring?

Because it's faster than walking!
- Why did the worm cross the road in spring?

Because the chicken had the day off.
- Why do people plant light bulbs in the spring?

So they can grow power plants.
- How does spring flirt?

It leaves you smiling and blossoming inside.
- What's spring's favorite pick-up line?

"Are you a daffodil? Because you brighten my day!"
- Why did the gardener plant a seed in the pond?

He wanted a water flower.
- What do you call it when it rains ducks and chickens?

Fowl weather.
- Why did the sun go to school?

To get a little brighter.

What's a plant's favorite drink?

Root beer.

# Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 34



# Pet of the Month



## LARK

Meet Lark! Lark is a charming, cuddly boy with a curious heart and a voice that's always ready for a chat. This sweet feline loves to explore every nook and cranny of his surroundings-whether it's a new room or a cozy blanket fort. When he's not adventuring, he's happiest curled up next to you, purring contentedly. Lark is affectionate, playful, and will never let you forget it's dinner time with his adorable meows. If you're looking for a loving companion who's equal parts cozy and curious, Lark might just be your perfect match. Visit [www.kwsphumane.ca](http://www.kwsphumane.ca) to learn more!



# Word Search

## APRIL NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

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

- Alex Ovechkin
- New tariffs
- Stock volatility
- Hands off protests
- Rory wins Masters
- ICE deportations
- Pope Francis Vancouver attack
- Mark Carney
- Pierre Poilievre
- Liberal minority



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## QUIZ ANSWERS

- 2004
- Minnesota Wild, Tampa Bay Lightning, Utah Hockey Club, Colorado Avalanche, and Seattle Kraken
- Pluto
- Emerald
- The Kentucky Derby
- Australia
- 1980
- Osama bin Laden
- Anna Maria Jarvis
- The rose

## SUDOKU

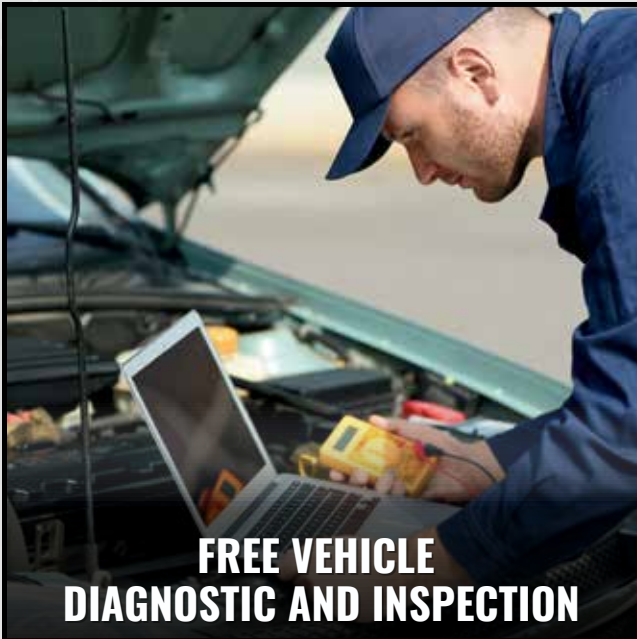
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6	2	9	5	1	8	3	4	7
8	4	5	9	7	3	6	1	2

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