

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Woodstock approves 2026 Reserve Fund Budget

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Woodstock City Council has approved the 2026 Revenue Fund, or Operating Budget.

The final spending figure is \$88,140,039, a 6.99 per cent increase over 2025, and translates into a residential property tax rate increase of 4.11 per cent. The average home in Woodstock with an assessed value of \$271,125 will see an increase of \$132.86 for the city portion of their property taxes.

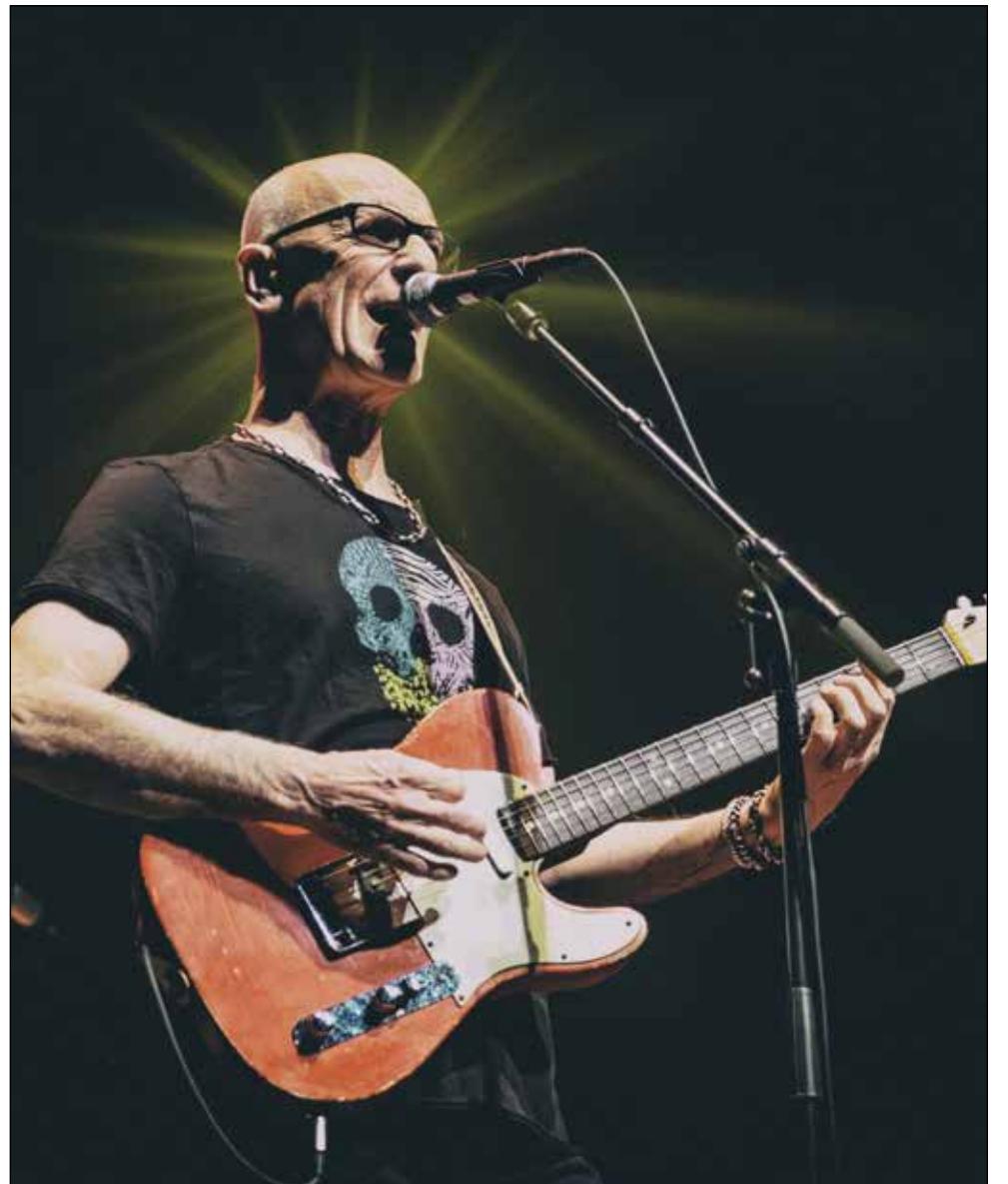
“As a council, we know many households are feeling the impact of rising

costs, and that makes our responsibility to manage the city’s budget wisely more important than ever. This budget reflects a careful balance, being mindful of the financial pressures facing our community while ensuring we can continue to deliver the services, programs and facilities that matter most to residents,” said Mayor Jerry Acchione.

“At the same time, we’re planning ahead and laying the groundwork for the major projects our growing city will need in the years to come.”

Council considered several budget motions from members, rejecting only one brought forward by Coun. Bernia Martin.

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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

KIM MITCHELL TO ROCK WOODSTOCK'S ANNIVERSARY
 Canadian rock legend Kim Mitchell has been announced as the headline act for the City of Woodstock’s 125th anniversary celebration on July 1. Story on Page 6.

Ingersoll company lands Canadian military contract

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

A pair of Canada’s top military officials were in Ingersoll last week for a major funding announcement at a weapons maker. Secretary of State Stephen Fuhr and Minister of Defence David McGuinty announced the awarding of a Defence Investment Agency contract to IMT Precision.

The government will provide up to \$305.4 million in financial assistance to

the company to establish a new manufacturing facility capable of producing empty metal shells for 155mm artillery projectiles. The government said the investment will increase Canada’s sovereign ammunition production capacity, reducing dependency on foreign suppliers. It will also act as a vital backup to North American supply capabilities, strengthening Canada’s position within NATO.

The new facility is expected to create at least 75 full time, high value jobs and up to 400 jobs at full production.

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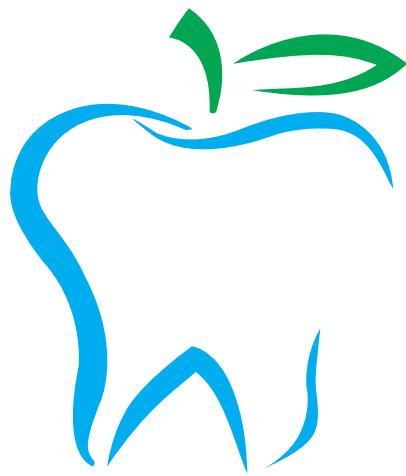


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IMT to supply artillery shells as government eyes idle CAMI plant

CONTINUED FROM FRONT



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

Canada's Minister of Defence, David McGuinty, and Secretary of State, Stephen Fuhr, are seen at a funding announcement in Kitchener last week. Ingersoll's IMT Precision was the site of another event the day before where the company received over \$300 million to build a new facility to manufacture artillery shells.

"The ability to produce our own ammunition is not optional. It's essential," said McGuinty. "The move will protect the country from global supply disruptions, supply the armed forces with what it needs, and create jobs in communities like Ingersoll," he added.

While the majority of the funding will go towards a new operation, McGuinty explained IMT will have some say going forward.

"We're going to leave it to the company. We've been in discussions and negotiations now for some time. We're going to leave it to the smart people who run IMT and the folks on the floor to decide how they want to maneuver, but they have timelines, they have deadlines, and they have growth plans."

The local planning process is already underway and the government is hopeful production will begin within two years.

"I think they're going to be moving quite quickly. We need this yesterday. We have an ammunition shortage and we need more domestic capacities. There have also been some challenges with acquiring the ammunition that they're building because of restrictions on China, restrictions on other suppliers from whom we don't buy without the same values. This is very much about lifting up our own internal capacity and preparing IMT to conquer global markets," he explained.

Over 1,000 jobs were lost when CAMI recently shuttered its production of EV delivery vans recently, something McGuinty said his government is very aware of.

"It turns out that folks who have been working in car plant or car part settings tend to be very well trained, very, very capable, and easily brought into opera-

tions like this. That's exactly a source of labour and expertise that we're encouraging the companies to utilize. They're looking at that pool to pull people into their operations as they expand."

Over 1,000 jobs were lost when CAMI recently shuttered its production of EV delivery vans, something McGuinty said his government is well aware of. The Echo asked if the government was considering repurposing the massive plant for defence purposes.

"It's under consideration. I can't go much further than that because it's early days. We're trying to be very fleet-footed and quick here now. We are as fleet-footed now as we perhaps have ever been."

Along with increasing capacity for the Canadian military, the government is looking to have domestic producers enter the export market. McGuinty said the strategy is gaining momentum.

"What can they sell abroad? How many other contracts can they obtain while actually giving us what we need in Canada and building up our capacity? That's the big goal here and it seems to be working. Companies are aligning with us. There's a huge excitement. People are flocking to the opportunities. And the good news, too, is the money's following."

Secretary of State Fuhr said the government's goal is to spend 70 per cent of the defence budget in Canada.

"We want to energize Canadian industry as best we can to stimulate our own economy. Obviously, we have been very reliant on our neighbour to the south for years. We will still work with that neighbour, but we need to be much more resilient and less reliant than we were in the past."

He added the government's goal is to create 125,000 new jobs over the next 10 years in the defence and security space.

Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie said the announcement was great news for a local business.

"I want to extend a heartfelt congratulations to the team at IMT Precision on this astounding federal funding. IMT has been a trusted and respected employer in our community for more than 100 years. They are a significant contributor to our local economy, and we are thrilled to see their commitment to innovation recognized on a national stage."

The town's director of economic development also weighed in.

"We have seen firsthand what IMT Precision is capable of during our close collaboration on their recent facility expansion," said Curtis Tighe.

"Our teams worked seamlessly together to support their growth, and this new federal investment is a testament to the strength of their team. We are excited to continue this great relationship and look forward to the possibility of working with IMT again in the future."

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Conservatives Call on feds to pass Khanna's Jail Not Bail Act

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Arpan Khanna is pleading with the Liberal government to move forward on his Private Member's Bill.

Khanna, the Conservative MP for Oxford and Larry Brock, Shadow Minister for Justice and Attorney General of Canada, are calling on the Liberal government to urgently support and pass Bill C-242, the Jail Not Bail Act, as it returns for further debate and second reading this week.

"After nearly a decade of failed Liberal criminal justice policies, Canadians are facing a growing wave of violent crime, including a sharp and deeply concerning rise in extortion," said Khanna.

He added extortion has increased by 330 percent in the country since 2015, with communities across Canada experiencing threats, violence, and intimidation tied to organized criminal activity.

"Small businesses, families, and community leaders are being targeted repeatedly by offenders who are released back into the community under the current bail regime," he added.

Khanna rose in the House of Commons on Monday and said Parliamentarians are entrusted with the duty to do what is right, not what is easy.

"What is right is to build a criminal justice system that protects Canadians and the most vulnerable, listens to the stories of victims, and recognizes the profound impact that every life lost, every life shattered."

He added there is a name and a face behind every crime statistic, as well as a family that will never be the same.

"I met with those families. Parents will never see their child again. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents and communities are divided into before and after because a repeat violent offender was released over and over again."

Khanna said serious action needs to be taken so no more families need to suffer at the hands of repeat offenders.

"Our victims are the ones who feel they are living on



(HOUSE OF COMMONS VIDEO SCREENSHOT)

Oxford Conservative Arpan Khanna is hoping his Private Member's Bill will pass second reading in the House of Commons.

house arrest. They look over their shoulders and change their routines. All while criminals walk in and out of jail. The victims who had their lives changed are facing a life sentence, not the criminals."

The Conservatives claim Bill C-242 is about restoring balance in the criminal justice system to protect the victims, not the offenders. Khanna added he and his colleagues held dozens of town halls across Canada, talking to families, victims and law enforcement.

"We have had tens of thousands of signatures on petitions, and the message we hear is very clear, Mr. Speaker. Canadians are terrified and fed up. They have anxiety and they are hurting. But despite that pain, they hope we can make the right call in this chamber to put forward solid policy ideas to restore safe streets in our country."

The bill outlines a dozen proposed changes to the justice system that the party says will prioritize public safety and put victims' rights first.

"Canadians are living with the consequences of a justice system that too often puts the rights of repeat violent offenders ahead of the safety of law-abiding citizens," said Brock. "The Liberal government has had years to act, yet violent crime continues to rise while offenders cycle in and out of the system. Enough is enough."

The Conservatives say Bill C-242 would restore public confidence in the justice system by ensuring that individuals accused of serious, repeat, and violent offences face stricter bail conditions and are not routinely released back into communities to reoffend.

"Communities across this country are dealing with the real and immediate impacts of catch-and-release justice," said Khanna. "The Jail Not Bail Act is a common-sense response that prioritizes victims, restores accountability, and ensures that dangerous individuals are kept behind bars."

Conservatives have repeatedly called on the government to repeal Bills C-5 and C-75, which weakened sentencing laws and entrenched the "principle of restraint" that prioritizes release over public safety. Despite these calls, the government has failed to take meaningful action.

"With extortion and violent crime at alarming rates, Canadians cannot afford further delay," added Khanna. "This is an opportunity for all parties to come together, put public safety first, and deliver real results for Canadians."

A vote on the bill was scheduled to be held on Wednesday after the Echo's deadline.

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

4.11 per cent tax hike for property owners

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The motion sought to allocate \$300,000 from the 2025 operating surplus to replace debt financing for the Reeves Community Complex roof repair project.

“We taxed people, we didn’t spend it all last year, so we had that surplus. While this isn’t the normal way we would use (it), this is an opportunity to reduce the levy by .36 of a per cent.”

She added it would also save the city on the cost of interest and principal payments once the project is completed.

“To me, it is a responsible use of the operating surplus to save money today and save money down the road.”

Coun. Deb Tait explained using the surplus in this manner is not fiscally responsible and will end up costing the city twice as much money next year. She asked for the city CAO’s thoughts on the motion.

“Avoiding debt in the 2026 budget by applying the surplus...all that does is simply delay by nine months that debt coming back to council for approval in the 2027 program,” explained David Creery.

“We raise the money; we spend the money. We don’t put it into reserve accounts and let it sit. When we go to the taxpayer for these capital dollars, we are putting those capital dollars back into our assets. They don’t sit waiting for an opportunity to use them.”

He added Martin’s motion, if approved, would not reduce the 2026 tax levy since council did not move a motion to raise the \$300,000.

“There are no immediate savings because that motion did not come forward.”

Tait said the next council, taking office after October’s election, would face a financial bind if the motion passes.

“They’re going to have to double because we didn’t do what we should do. I will not support that motion.”

Acchione said at first glance he was open to the idea but had some concerns looking ahead to future budgets.

“I have some serious concerns and some hesitancy. I have no intention of pulling away our operating surplus, knowing what’s coming forward.”

Martin’s motion was defeated by a 6-1 vote.

The approved budget includes contributions towards a new Culture Master Plan reserve and a new Community Complex Reserve to set aside funds as a strategy to support the development of a new recreation facility, along with a fundraising and sponsorship strategy for the proposed North Woodstock Community Complex development.

“Six new full time positions with the city will also be created, and part time hours and contracted services will be converted into the equivalent of 8 full time staff to support growth and strengthen community service delivery,” said a city press release.

Staff first presented the proposed budget to council during its regular meeting on February 19. Staff provided additional details, and council had the opportunity to ask questions during special budget meetings held on Feb. 24 and 26.

More budget information is available at www.cityofwoodstock.ca/budget.



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Kim Mitchell to headline Canada Day celebration for Woodstock's 125th anniversary

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Canadian rock icon Kim Mitchell will be headlining Canada Day in Woodstock as the City celebrates its 125th anniversary on Wednesday, July 1, at Southside Park.

Known for classic rock anthems including Go For Soda, Rock N Roll Duty and Patio Lanterns, Mitchell has sold more than 1.5 million records in Canada and earned 17 Juno award nominations. The acclaimed singer, songwriter and guitarist was also inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame in 2021.

"We are thrilled to welcome such a legendary Canadian artist to Woodstock to help celebrate the City's 125th anniversary. This year's Canada Day will be our most significant yet, as we mark this major milestone for our community," said Kristen Brodhagen, Manager of Special Events.

She added bringing in Mitchell, the former frontman for the band Max Webster, was an easy choice.

"When you think of Canadian music, one of the first people that comes to mind is Kim Mitchell. We are thankful to have him join us in what is already a staple event in our community. I think this will really enhance the celebration and be a great way to recognize our 125th anniversary."

The free event will take place from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. with live music from Northern Strum (an acoustic duo featuring Canadian rock veterans Carl Dixon and Sean Kelly), Always on Friday, Canadiana Band, Geoff Masse Band, The Joel Dupuis Trio and others.

The Canadian Kids Zone will feature

fun family activities, including a photo-booth, petting zoo, inflatables and more. There will also be limited-edition Woodstock 125 merch for sale, along with food and marketplace vendors, a beverage garden, and free Canada Day-themed cookies.

Mitchell will take the main stage at 8 p.m., followed by a spectacular fireworks show to close out the evening.

Residents and local businesses can get involved in the festivities by becoming a volunteer, sponsor or vendor. Visit www.cityofwoodstock.ca/canaday for details and to apply.

"Events like this one are large-scale, and with that, it takes the community to come together with the stakeholders that make it successful. We are still accepting sponsors, volunteers and vendors in our marketplace, and food vendors. We encourage people to visit our webpage."

The planning committee has been working on the event since December of last year.

Brodhagen added Cowapolooza will be a ramped-up event this year as part of the city's quasiquicentennial celebrations. When pressed to at least provide a hint, she wouldn't tip her hand at the headline act. She did say people won't be disappointed.

"They are a very well-known Canadian band. We have had a lot of incredible headliners over the years and we will continue that in 2026."

The announcement for Cowapolooza's headliner will be made on April 28.

For more information about the City's 125th anniversary and other opportunities to celebrate throughout the year, visit www.woodstock125.ca.

Woodstock Police continue Investigation into suspicious death



(WOODSTOCK POLICE PHOTO)

Woodstock Police are asking for the public's help as they investigate a suspicious death. A 24-year-old unnamed male was found deceased at a Dundas Street residence in the city's west end recently.

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

The Woodstock Police Service is continuing to investigate the death of a 24-year-old male at a residence on Dundas Street in the city's west end.

Details surrounding the death are few, but police released a statement recently. "The circumstances surrounding the death are considered suspicious due to foul play, and investigators remain on scene. At this time, there is no known risk to public safety," said a press release.

"Police are asking for the assistance of the public for any video surveillance or vehicle dash camera footage in the area of Dundas Street, between Vansittart Avenue and Bexley Street, Woodstock, between the dates of Wednesday, March 11, at 12 a.m. and Friday, March 13, at 12:30 a.m."

Any available video can be submitted through the secure link QR code: <https://woodstockpdon.ca.evidence.com/axon/community-request/public/>



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The Woodstock Police Service would like to encourage anyone with information about this investigation to contact the Woodstock Police Service at 519-537-2323 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

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Bingo raises money for BBBS of Oxford

The 20th Annual Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oxford County Trivia Nite wrapped up on March 20 at the Reeves Community Complex, marking two decades of spirited competition, community generosity, and unforgettable moments.

The sold out event brought together teams from across the county, all eager to test their knowledge, support local youth,

and attempt to dethrone the reigning champions, Smarty Pants. More than 400 participants filled the hall, forming teams of six to eight players who came prepared for ten rounds of challenging questions on pop culture, history, sports, science, and classic trivia stumbers.

Guests enjoyed a lively atmosphere complete with snacks, a light late night

lunch, and a cash bar. The popular 50/50 raffle returned, along with the always strategic Lucky Stickers, which teams used to hedge their bets or double down on answers they felt confident about.

The event served as a major fundraiser for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oxford County, supporting mentorship programs that help young people build confidence,

resilience, and meaningful connections. Organizers expressed gratitude for the overwhelming community support and the volunteers who made the night possible.

Plans are already underway for the 21st annual event, with many teams vowing to return and reclaim their shot at the trophy.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



It was a full house, with a sold out crowd packing the event.



Executive and board members Nicole, Liz, Lori, Michael, Erica, and Kristen noted how deeply they appreciated the strong community response throughout the evening.

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Two city residents charged after handgun discharged

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Two people are facing multiple criminal charges following a firearms incident that occurred in Woodstock.

On March 9, at approximately 9 p.m., the Woodstock Police Service responded to a report of a suspected firearm discharge into a residence in the area of Frontenac Crescent. Officers attended the scene and initiated an investigation. A 37-year-old male and a 36-year-old female were arrested and jointly charged with the following offences:

- Discharge a firearm into or at a place in a reckless manner
- Two counts of careless use of a firearm
- Mischief endangering life
- Two counts of possession of a weapon for a dangerous purpose
- Unauthorized possession of a firearm
- Possession of a prohibited or restricted firearm with ammunition



(WOODSTOCK POLICE PHOTO)

Woodstock Police made two arrests after a firearm was discharged in the city recently.

The 37-year-old male is also charged with obstructing a peace officer. Both accused were held for a bail hearing.

“Through the course of the investigation, it was determined that the incident did not involve a targeted shooting and there is no ongoing risk to public safety,” said a WPS news release.

Woodstock Police arrest two following drug trafficking probe



(WOODSTOCK POLICE PHOTO)

Woodstock Police arrested two people and confiscated drugs, cash and weapons in a recent drug bust.

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

A city man and woman are facing charges after a drug bust on March 4.

In early 2026, the Woodstock Police Service Street Crime Unit (SCU), formerly known as the Criminal Intelligence and Drug Enforcement Unit, began an investigation into the trafficking of illegal drugs in the city.

Officers arrested two city residents, a 51-year-old female and a 40-year-old male, in the area of Dundas and Reeve Streets.

As a result of the investigation, both have been jointly charged with the following offences:

- Possession of a Schedule I Substance

for the purpose of trafficking – Fentanyl

- Possession of a Schedule I Substance for the purpose of trafficking – Cocaine

- Possession of proceeds of property obtained by crime under \$5,000

Officers seized drugs and cash with an estimated total street value of \$1,380 in cocaine, \$1,232 in fentanyl, and \$1,690 in currency.

Both accused were released on an undertaking.

The Woodstock Police Service would like to encourage anyone with information about this investigation to contact the Woodstock Police Service at 519-537-2323 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

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Woodstock man charged following child porn investigation

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

A Friendly City man is facing nine charges after following an Internet child exploitation investigation conducted by the Woodstock Police Service.

As a result of a preliminary investigation, the force's Internet Child Exploitation Unit and Criminal Investigations Branch, with assistance from the Ontario Provincial Police Child Sexual Exploitation Unit, arrested 31-year-old Clay Thibodeau on March 10.

Thibodeau has been charged with the following offences:

- Accessing child sexual abuse and exploitation material
- Makes, publishes for the purpose of publication, child sexual abuse and exploitation material
- Possession of child sexual abuse and exploitation material
- Make available child sexual abuse and exploitation material
- Three counts of failing to comply with a prohibition order for previous child sexual abuse and exploitation material-related charges
- Failing to comply with a probation order for previous child sexual abuse and exploitation material-related charges

Police say he has previous convictions for accessing and distributing child pornography, and the investigation remains ongoing.

"The Woodstock Police Service is a member of the Provincial Strategy to

Protect Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation on the Internet and conducts investigations into Internet child exploitation offences in partnership with numerous police services across Ontario," explained a police press release.

"This investigation was made possible through funding provided by the Ministry of the Solicitor General," it added.

The case is under a publication ban, a legal order that prohibits the public release of certain information from a court case. A publication ban restricts what can be published in newspapers or online, broadcast on TV or radio, and shared on social media

Importantly, the information can still be discussed inside the courtroom—it just can't be made public. Judges impose publication bans to protect victims or witnesses (especially in sensitive cases), fair trial rights, minors involved in cases or confidential evidence.

Violating a publication ban is a criminal offence and can lead to fines, charges and even jail time in serious cases.

Members of the public can report suspicious Internet activity related to child exploitation to the Woodstock Police Service or online at www.cybertip.ca, where Internet safety tips for parents, children, and Internet users are also available.

The Woodstock Police Service would like to encourage anyone with information about this investigation to contact the Woodstock Police Service at 519-537-2323 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Large Item Collection begins March 30 in Oxford

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Oxford County's annual Large Item Collection begins in Ingersoll on Monday, March 30.

The curbside waste collection event also runs in Zorra, East Zorra-Tavistock, Norwich, Blandford-Blenheim, South-West Oxford, and Tillsonburg, on designated weeks from April to early July. The City of Woodstock coordinates collection for Woodstock residents.

Large Item Collection is for oversized household items only. It is not intended for general spring cleanup.

Acceptable materials include household furniture, carpet rolls and under padding (no longer than 3 feet, rolled and bundled), pool filters (no sand), pool covers (bundled), water softeners (no salt or contents inside), mattresses, and box springs. Unacceptable items such as glass, mirrors, automotive parts, small garbage that can fit into garbage bags, and items piled on trailers/wagons or loose in cardboard boxes will not be collected.

Large items must be set out by 7 a.m. on the Monday of your collection week, including statutory holidays. Late set outs

may not be collected. Bag tags are not required for large items; however, each item must not exceed 45 kg (100 lbs). Residents are responsible for removing any unacceptable items left at the curb.

Large Item Collection schedule

- Ingersoll: March 30 (Zone 1), April 6 (Zone 2), April 13 (Zone 3)
- Zorra: April 20
- East Zorra-Tavistock: May 4
- Norwich: May 11
- Blandford-Blenheim: May 25
- South-West Oxford: June 1
- Tillsonburg: June 15 (Zone 1), June 22 (Zone 2), June 29 (Zone 3)

Woodstock residents should refer to the City of Woodstock for collection details at <https://www.cityofwoodstock.ca/en/residential-services/large-item-collection1.aspx>.

"Think before you throw. The landfill isn't your only option. Many items can be donated to local charities, sold through online marketplaces, or upcycled into something new. Before discarding, consider how your unwanted items could benefit others or be repurposed," said an Oxford County news release.

Find a complete list of acceptable and unacceptable materials, zone maps, and dates at www.wasteline.ca.

Visit us online at
theecho.ca

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What 1994 film features a character describing a Quarter Pounder with Cheese as a "Royale with Cheese" in France?
2. What legendary musician wrote "Purple Haze," "Little Wing," and "Voodoo Child"?
3. The Pyramid of Giza is the only ancient wonder still standing today — what other ancient wonder was also located in Egypt?
4. What is the name of the galaxy closest to our Milky Way?
5. In the Bible, who is the eldest son of David?
6. Which country is known as Suomi?
7. How many lines are in a limerick?
8. Do you male or female toads croak?
9. What magical phrase did Ali Baba use to open the cave?
10. In Toy Story, what is the name of the boy who owns Woody and Buzz?

This week's answers are found on pg. 33



Large Item Collection



MAR 30 INGERSOLL
Zone 1

APRIL 06 INGERSOLL
Zone 2

APRIL 13 INGERSOLL
Zone 3

APRIL 20 TOWNSHIP
OF ZORRA

This program is for large items only. Items that are not accepted will be left behind and must be removed by the homeowner.

Place items at the curb by 7:00 a.m. the Monday of your collection week.

For full details, including a list of acceptable and non-acceptable items, please visit www.wasteline.ca.

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www.wasteline.ca

Note: In Woodstock, Large Item Collection is managed by the City of Woodstock. Please see the 2026 City Services Calendar for details.

Home show draws a crowd

The Woodstock Home Show once again proved to be one of Oxford County's most anticipated annual events, drawing a steady stream of visitors to the Oxford Auditorium throughout the three days. Running from March 20 to 22, the event transformed 875 Nellis Street into a bustling hub of creativity, craftsmanship, and commu-

nity engagement.

Residents from across the region filled the aisles as more than a hundred exhibitors showcased the latest trends in home improvement, interior design, landscaping, and lifestyle innovation. Attendees explored everything from cutting edge renovation solutions to sustainable outdoor living concepts, with many

exhibitors reporting strong interest and meaningful conversations with homeowners. Throughout the day, visitors engaged with local experts who offered practical advice on remodelling, energy efficiency, garden planning, and modern décor. Many attendees remarked that the show provided a rare opportunity to compare services, gather

inspiration, and speak directly with professionals in a relaxed, friendly environment.

The event also highlighted Woodstock's growing community of small businesses and independent tradespeople. Several first time exhibitors used the opportunity to introduce their services to a wider audience, as returning vendors noted that the show

continued to be a valuable platform for building long term client relationships. Families, couples, and DIY enthusiasts discovered innovative products, interactive displays, and hands on demonstrations. From custom cabinetry to smart home technology, the show offered something for every style and budget.

By the time doors closed, organizers reported strong attendance and overwhelmingly positive feedback. The Woodstock Home Show once again reinforced its reputation as a cornerstone event for homeowners seeking inspiration, expert guidance, and a deeper connection to the local home improvement community.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Hundreds of visitors made their way through the aisles, taking in the variety of home improvement ideas and services on display.



Hugh and Jordy warmly welcomed visitors to their display, taking time to share insights and engage with everyone who stopped by.

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Kenneth and Stiena took a moment to dive into innovative home design concepts, leaving the show with a collection of new ideas for their condo.

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Mark and Emma took a moment to rest at their display after a steady stream of visitors.

POLICE BRIEFS

Oxford OPP briefs

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

SWOX man facing drug charges following execution of search warrant

A search warrant in South-West Oxford Township led to the seizure of illegal drugs, property of crime and the arrest of a local.

Members of the Oxford detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), West Region Tactics and Rescue Unit, West Region Emergency Response Team (ERT), West Region Canine, Brant, Middlesex, Norfolk, Huron and Elgin Community Street Crime Units (CSCU) assisted in an investigation led by the Oxford OPP CSCU.

There was an increased police presence on Robinson Road during the early morning hours of March 24 while OPP executed the search warrant, where an arrest

was made without incident.

A 56-year-old resident of South-West Oxford has been charged with the following offences:

- Possession of a Schedule I Substance for the purpose of trafficking - Cocaine
- Possession of a Schedule I Substance for the purpose of trafficking - Opioid
- Possession of property obtained by crime under \$5,000

The accused is currently being held in custody awaiting a bail hearing before the Ontario Court of Justice in Woodstock.

The execution of the search warrant resulted in the seizure of illegal drugs with an estimated potential street value of approximately \$80,000, along with \$4,000 in Canadian currency.

"The possession and distribution of illegal substances in Oxford County is not only illegal, but also unsafe. Individuals who commit these types of crimes are putting the health and safety of small

communities at risk. I am very proud of the dedication and teamwork that were demonstrated during this investigation," said Oxford OPP Detachment Commander Tony Hymers.

Plattsville man charged after collision

A single-vehicle collision resulted in minor injuries and impaired driving charges.

On March 22, at approximately 10:30 p.m., Police came across a vehicle in a ditch while on general patrol on Oxford Road 29 at 10:30 p.m. on March 22.

Police say the 27-year-old driver sustained minor injuries and was charged with dangerous and impaired driving. He has been released from custody and is scheduled to appear in a Woodstock courtroom on May 5.

Police searching for driver after failing to remain at collision

Police are looking to identify a driver from a two-vehicle motor vehicle collision.

Police received several reports of a two-vehicle collision in the eastbound lanes of Highway 401, near Mill Street, in South-West Oxford Township on March 22, around 4:55 p.m.

A white pick-up truck struck a blue SUV. Police have identified the driver of the truck and are looking to identify the driver of the SUV.

Police are asking anyone who may have information, including video surveillance, to contact them at 1-888-310-1122 and reference occurrence E260379170.

Under the Highway Traffic Act, every driver must remain at the scene of a collision and exchange information, offer assistance and/or report to police, depending on the severity of the collision.

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meaningful addition to your big day. Along with a variety of over 60 quality wines, The Wine Cellar & Cheese Shop offers a variety of local and imported cheeses, perfect for pairing.

Sourced from Oxford County and beyond, their selection enhances any gathering, whether it's a bridal shower, rehearsal dinner, or wedding reception. Experience a taste of the cheeses & charcuterie as you bottle your wine, and order a similar experience for your guests during cocktail hour, on one of their giant live-edge boards!

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A beginner's guide to engagement ring shopping

Couples far and wide will tie the knot this year. Weddings join two lives together and often culminate with a lavish party that sees extended family and friends gather around tables enhanced by floral arrangements and delicious food. But long before guests can choose chicken or beef or newlyweds mail the final thank you note, couples must first take the initial step on the road to the wedding. That means getting engaged. Traditionally, engagements involve a sparkling gem that symbolizes love, fidelity and a whirlwind series of months poring over every possible wedding detail.

Shopping for an engagement ring is a unique experience. A ring requires a significant financial investment and serves as a lifelong symbol of commitment to another person. To navigate this sparkling world of diamonds and settings, shoppers can focus on key areas, notably budget, gem classification and finding a reputable jeweler.

Establish an engagement ring budget

Those ready to pop the question need not adhere to the outdated "three months" salary rule when selecting an engagement ring. Instead, the ring should be chosen based on financial realism and means. The Knot's 2024 Jewelry & Engagement Study indicates the average cost of an engagement ring in the United States comes in at approximately \$5,200. However, many couples spend less, showing that a marriage need not start on shaky financial footing due to the cost of a ring. If cost is a factor, lab-grown diamonds often cost 50 percent or more less than natural diamonds, yet they are chemically and physically identical to mined diamonds. One also can consider another gemstone, particularly if diamonds are beyond a budget or seem too traditional.

Know the four Cs

Diamond shopping involves mastering the Four Cs, which refers to Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat Weight. A person should prioritize the cut above all else, and try to find a diamond in budget that has a cut that brings out the gem's brilliance and fire. It can be challenging to distinguish a diamond's color with the naked eye. Very often a near-colorless G-J diamond can look identical to a colorless one (Grade D). Color grades increase up to Z, with the diamond being more yellow/brown as the grading goes on. Clarity refers to tiny flaws (inclusions) in the diamond. A diamond that is Very Slightly Included will have inclusions not visible without magnification, making them a safe bet for saving money over those without any inclusions at all. Carat weight refers to the diamond's weight and not its size. Diamonds just shy of the full- or half-carat mark tend to be less expensive but still look impressive.

Choose a reputable seller

It's best to choose a gem that has been graded by an independent laboratory like the Gemological Institute of America. Customers also should select a jeweler they trust, which may require some research and word-of-mouth recommendations. A knowledgeable jeweler also can make suggestions on setting and gem shape. Upon purchasing the engagement ring, one also might consider having it independently appraised for further purchase protection.

An engagement ring purchase requires careful consideration and a significant investment. But once the stress of purchase wears away, the lasting memories of the engagement and wedding to come will make everything well worth it.

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Tips For your Wedding Attire

The Groom should be unique from the groomsmen by selecting different colours for their suit-tuxedo, neck attire differentiation

There are 122 various shades of white. Groom and groomsmen should have exact same shirt otherwise colour variations will show in pictures.

Sometimes a groom may want a second shirt for the special day, especially in hotter days or those that tend to sweat more.

Colour of groomsmen neck accessories should be the same as bridesmaids' dresses

Colour of shirts should not comprise colour of wedding dress. If the gown is off white or a darker shade of white, DO NOT wear white shirts - otherwise dress will look dirty and be exaggerated in pictures

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Parents and grandparents should be the second-best dressed people at the wedding.

How to remember and honour loved ones at a wedding

A wedding is a happy day in a couple's life together. Couples who have lost loved ones in recent years, whether it's parents, grandparents, close friends, or siblings, may find their happiness mixing with feelings of loss. It can be challenging to fully celebrate in the absence of a beloved loved one who was supposed to be there joining in the happiness.

Responding to feelings of grief and loss on a wedding day can be challenging, but there are ways couples can pay homage to late loved ones during wedding celebrations to make the loss a little easier to bear. Here are different ways to remember the special people who are there in spirit.

- **Save a seat.** Reserve a seat at the ceremony and reception with a small placard that reads something along the lines of "In loving memory of the mother of the bride. She is forever present in our hearts."
- **Include a note.** Include an In Memoriam note in the wedding program with special words about the person who is missed.
- **Light a candle during the ceremony.** The officiant can say a few words and invite someone to light a candle in honor of a late relative or friend.
- **Carry a special memento.** Whether in the bouquet or in the pocket of a tuxedo, carrying a small souvenir that represents the deceased loved one. If there is an item that belonged to the loved one, it can be worn during the

wedding. It could be a dress, a piece of jewelry, a pair of cufflinks, or even an embroidered handkerchief.

- **Toast with a drink.** The atmosphere at a reception is more lively than during a ceremony. Offer a toast to the person who is missed or serve their favorite food at the buffet.
 - **Play a special song.** If the deceased loved one would be featured in a signature dance, like the father/daughter, mother/son traditions, play a song that was meaningful to that person and enlist someone to stand in for the absent person.
 - **Request donations.** Set up a memorial table and make mention of the person's favorite charity. Ask guests to donate in the loved one's honor.
- Remembering a special person who has passed on at a wedding can ensure that individual is honored and included in a couple's big day.



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Why it pays to trust a pro with wedding photography

User-friendly technology and greatly enhanced connectivity has changed the way people approach various tasks. The do-it-yourself home improvement trend is a testament to that shift, as homeowners now have access to professional grade tools and can easily take to social media for inspiration and instructions for renovations that were once the domain of experienced contractors.

Though it can be fun and budget-friendly to embrace a DIY approach in many settings, that strategy is not ideal for every situation, including the day couples tie the knot. A couple's wedding day is one to cherish forever, which is why it pays to rely on skilled professionals. That's particularly so with wedding photography, which will serve as the official record of a day filled with love and laughs. Modern technology may compel some couples to think they can go without the services of a professional photographer on their wedding day, but there are many reasons to trust this important job to an experienced pro.

- Photographers can get great shots no matter the conditions. There's a difference between snapping great shots of an idyllic setting on a smartphone and taking wedding day photographs couples will look back on for years to come. Experienced photographers have cameras capable of far more than those on a smartphone, and these skilled professionals also possess the knowledge of how to get great shots in settings that might not be so conducive to photography. A dimly lit reception hall dance floor may prove challenging for untrained amateurs, but professional photographers know what to do to get great shots in such settings. Professionals also know how to utilize natural light to their advantage when taking shots outdoors.

- Photographers handle the details. Couples have enough on their plate when planning weddings. Taking on photography duties requires identifying the right photo locations, knowing when to take photos to maximize surroundings, ensuring bridal party members are all ready to go so photos can be taken within tight deadlines, and post-wedding detailing. That's a lot to take on, and it's work best left to professionals.

- Photographers free up time. Many new-

lyweds note their wedding day seemed to fly by and was over before they knew it. Such sentiments may be even stronger when couples take on too much responsibility come the wedding day. A professional photographer will coordinate shots and timelines with couples prior to the big day and take over getting bridal party members where they need to be when they need to be there. That frees up time for couples to spend more time with each other and their guests come the day of the wedding, which in turn can make it feel as though the day didn't fly by.

- You get a professionally finished product. Amateur photographers simply won't produce as stunning a finished product as professionals who take and touch up photos for a living. A wedding day photo album is a keepsake couples will look back on for years, so it's best to ensure its contents include photos taken and touched up by a skilled professional.

Couples can find ways to cut costs with their wedding budgets. But it's best to avoid cutting corners regarding photography, as there's no way to turn back the clock and get better shots if the efforts of amateurs fall short of expectations.



Tamblyn to perform at Harrington Hall April 19

AMANDA NELSON
Echo Contributor

The Harrington and Area Community Association is hosting a concert at Harrington Hall, 539 Victoria St., Embro, on Sunday, April 19, at 2 p.m. Doors open at 1:30 p.m., and snacks, soft drinks and desserts will be served to guests.

Ian Tamblyn, a multi-award-winning singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and storyteller, will perform for the first time in the region next month and says he's looking forward to visiting somewhere new.

"This will be a new experience for me, and despite the fact that I've been playing for over 55 years, I've never been to Harrington," said Tamblyn. "For one reason or another, I seem to find myself in small places with little enclaves of community-based concert halls and coffee houses. I've been doing that for many, many years, and really, I prefer playing in such places."

Tamblyn was nominated as English Songwriter of the Year by the Canadian Folk Music Awards in 2022, and in the same year, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada.

His music reflects diverse

themes, including Canadian landscapes and people. His upcoming album focuses on small communities across Canada.

"I did four albums celebrating the four coasts of Canada — the Superior coast, the West Coast, the Arctic coast, and the Labrador Coast," said Tamblyn. "I've been to all of them, and I wanted to do an album reflecting those parts of the country, not just the landscape, but the people there as well."

Attendees will hear a range of music, as Tamblyn says he generally gets a feel for the audience and bases his performance around that.

"Each evening, I don't have a planned set list. I sort of go where I want to go and also get a general vibe from the audience and see what works for them," he said.

The association is a volunteer-operated, registered non-profit that manages several local facilities and events. Its primary role is to oversee and maintain the Harrington Conservation Area and the Harrington Grist Mill, both owned by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, as well as manage Harrington Hall — the venue for the upcoming concert — on behalf of the Township of Zorra.



(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

Ian Tamblyn, singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and storyteller, will bring his Canadian music to Harrington this April.

The association hosts a number of events each year, including a Christmas potluck, an open house on the second Saturday in August, and one or

two concerts. Its largest fundraiser is the "Celebrate Harrington Community Auction," an online event scheduled to take place shortly after the up-

coming concert.

Tickets for the concert are \$30 and available in advance at exploreharrington.ca or by calling 519-536-0955.

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo **SPORTS**

Ingersoll DCI girls, Woodstock CI boys capture WOSSAA curling bronze

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

Woodstock CI Red Devil curling coach Scott MacIntosh gave full credit to an Arva Medway Cowboys curling team, which continued an undefeated run through Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletics Association (WOSSAA) curling championships on Monday, March 9, at the Listowel Curling Club.

But he wasn't taking anything away from his own squad, which exceeded pre-season expectations with a regional bronze medal performance.

"We won the league, made it to WOSSAA and held our own at WOSSAA."

The Red Devils opened WOSSAA semi-finals against Medway, dropping a 9-2 decision whose final score was extended via a big Cowboys second end, set up by a couple of errant take-out attempts.

"They made their shots, we missed a few, and that cost us in the end," said MacIntosh.

WCI rebounded, taking to the ice that afternoon against the Exeter South Huron Panthers for a dominant 8-1 win in the bronze medal game.

"They shook after six ends," said MacIntosh of a decisive victory.

Entering the season, his goal had been to extend and build the program with a 'decent squad' skipped by Alexis Schaefer.

"We felt we'd do all right and hoped to do better," said MacIntosh, pleased to see the entire unit grow and develop through practice and regular Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast Division action. Schaefer performed as expected on the back end of a team effort, including strong play from the front end and vice Mikhail Petrukhnov.

"Everyone contributes but their shots made a difference in ends big-time," said MacIntosh. "That's the difference between winning the league and win-

ning a bunch of games."

Pleased with this year's performance, MacIntosh also sees potential for the 2026-27 season.

"I think we'll have a good team next year," he said, pointing to four potential returnees and Petrukhnov's projected ascension to skip. "We should be in a good position."

The Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers girls found themselves in a tough position during their opening WOSSAA game against the London Saunders Sabres. Taking to the ice early in the morning, a bit nervous, they found themselves trailing.

"It took us probably four ends to get into the game," said co-coach Elaine Di Stefano.

By the time the Bombers found their game, the result was out of reach with the Sabres well on the way to a 7-3 semi-final victory.

In retrospect, an outdoor lunch break featuring homemade submarine sandwiches from Di Stefano, potato-based 'vegetables' from a curling parent, and fresh air from Mother Nature provided a welcome opportunity to reset.

"The magic between subs, chips and outdoor sunshine," Di Stefano summed up.

The Bombers retook the ice with renewed purpose, both starting and finishing strong through an 11-2 win over London CCH. Stratford District SS went on to edge Saunders 7-6 in the gold medal game.

"We played our game from the first end all the way through," said Di Stefano. "Made our shots, swept well and were ecstatic to win bronze."

The majority of both IDCI girls and boys curling teams are eligible to return next season, says Di Stefano, looking forward to the potential from mixed talent and dedication while celebrating a WOSSAA medal in the school's first visit since 2004.

"It's a huge milestone for the program, that's for sure."



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The TVRA Southeast champion and WOSSAA bronze-medal-winning Woodstock CI Red Devils boys curling team, from left to right, are coach Scott MacIntosh, Harry Langford, Alexis Schaefer, Mikhail Petrukhnov, Grace Nelson, Ryan de Wit, and coach John Weaver.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The TVRA Southeast champion and WOSSAA bronze medalist Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers girls curling team, from left to right, are coach Mike Bryson, Lucy Zimmermann, Marley Papis, Jaelyn MacLeod, Taylor Posthumus and coach Elaine Di Stefano. Absent from the photo was manager Ana Potter.

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Boys' captains/veterans basketball double-header tips off April 1 at Woodstock CI Devildome

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

The tricky part will be figuring out who the straight man is as the Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast 2026 Boys Captains/Veterans Basketball Games tip off Wednesday, April 1, at 6 p.m. inside the Woodstock CI Devildome.

Game commentators Eric Molinaro and Jason Poole don't follow the lead of many famous comedic duos, one so-called straight man, the serious half of a pairing, setting up the humour of the funny one. Jerry Seinfeld to his sitcom's cast for example, Dean Martin to Jerry Lewis or even further back, Bud Abbott to Lou Costello of 'Who's On First' fame.

It's not that Molinaro and Poole can't accept differing roles, working together as part of the Woodstock CI Red Devils athletic program. It's just maybe that on evenings celebrating both girls and boys hoops excellence, they're simply having too much fun.

"We do play well off each other," said Molinaro, noting if there is such a thing, he's probably the more serious of the two, focussing on in-game stats. He makes them sound 100 per cent accurate, even if there is a sneaking suspicion there's a little factual creativity in some, Molinaro largely reserving his public 'chirps' for fellow officials.

Poole on the other hand, takes a bit more of a free rein, throwing out the odd good-natured



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

College Avenue junior Knights' Lukas Mickevicius, shown here altering a Parkside shot during TVRA Southeast final action at CASS, will be taking to the court for the annual Captains/Veterans boys basketball game.

comment of a humorous vein.

"Let's say tease publicly in a fun, professional way," said Molinaro, who has welcomed Poole into a tandem role he played solo for years. "It's nice to have another voice on the microphone."

Whatever tack each takes, the energetic patter certainly adds to evenings that do have a competitive component but are

far more about having fun. The tradition reaches back to Woodstock Huron Park coaching icon Bill Gillespie, in whose honour a donation from the evening's proceeds is made to the Terry Fox Foundation.

The event certainly features many of the best basketball players in the TVRA Southeast, but by design, the games also highlight, as the name suggests,

long-serving players.

"It's not just the all-stars," said Molinaro. "It's about recognizing kids who put time into their programs. You can select a kid who never missed a practice, played all four years, it's about them as well."

The junior game tips off at 6 p.m. with Team Purple (Kameron Roos, Easton Freeman, Greyson Padfield, Lukas Mickevicius from Woodstock College Avenue, Hunter Grass, Jude Buncher and Jack Lichty from WCI, and Alro Minnaar, Nasir Haidari and Tehg Randhawa from Woodstock Huron Park) under Huron Park coaches Matt Keith and Mike Willigenburg; facing team White: Josh Morgan, Atiki Wani, Jessie Adeoye and Tristan Manalo of Woodstock St. Mary's, James Strathearn, Junior Wiredu and Trevin Patrick from Tillsonburg Glendale, Sheridan Lincoln and Percy Gavin from Ingersoll DCI, and Ewan Gaynor from Lord Dorchester, guided by St. Mary's coach Shayne Simpson.

In the senior game which follows, CASS's Kaleb Krupp, St. Mary's Warriors Kymani Small and Jeremy Zamora, Lord Dorchester Beavers Kalen Greenfield, Mason Fauker and

Andrew Urquart, and Glendale Gemini Gavin Wernham, Kayden Pittao, Jacob Mogg and Kypton Lofthouse will represent Team White under Warriors bench bosses Duane Kamala-Thomas and Carlos Henao. Huron Park coaches Jag Rai and Mark Rupoli will counter with Huskies Jance Jorgensen, Josh-deep Chahal, Bakhtawar Sindu, WCI Red Devils Jack Carnegie, Preston Hilderley, Kael Wetlaufer and Nick Hagen-Johnson, IDCI Blue Bombers Zach Patton and Trestyn Veldman, and CASS Knight Devon Fordham.

Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for students, with proceeds from that and an array of draw prizes donated to the Terry Fox Foundation. The evening features a trio of popular halftime challenges, a half court shooting contest, dunk contest and popular mascot faceoff. The Oxford Basketball Officials' Association also presents the Bill Gillespie Award, recognizing an individual who has shown years of commitment, leadership and committed to basketball in Oxford County.

"The basketball builder, pone might say in the community," Molinaro concluded.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

College Avenue junior Knights' Lukas Mickevicius, shown here altering a Parkside shot during TVRA Southeast final action at CASS, will be taking to the court for the annual Captains/Veterans boys basketball game.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

College Avenue's Greyson Padfield (right) swats away an attempted layup during TVRA Southeast final action and will be on the court for this year's junior Captains/Veterans basketball game.

PJHL roundup – Braves take series lead into weekend games as playoff streak snapped

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Tavistock may have taken the first two games of their Provincial Junior Hockey League's Doherty Division final in easy fashion, but the Navy Vets sent a message on Tuesday night they will not go down easily.

The Braves came into the game at the Southwood Arena with a 2-0 series lead, but the Navy Vets made a statement of their own with a 5-2 victory. Tavistock came into the matchup on a ten-game playoff win streak and won 22 of their last 24 games in total.

Woodstock led 2-0 after two periods on goals by Carson Littlejohn and Owen Ireton as they were consistently able to get behind the Tavistock de-

fence. Evan Palubeski cut the lead in half early in the third period but the Navy Vets scored three straight to seal the win. Jackson Andrews scored his first of the playoffs for the Braves with 44 seconds left in the game.

Woodstock was able to find room behind the Tavistock defence consistently, something Braves head coach Zac Berg said contributed to the loss.

"We strayed from our game plan and we weren't staying above our checks like we have been doing throughout the playoffs. We can't rely on our goalie to make every save and that's what cost us in the end."

Berg added there weren't many positives to take away from the loss.

"To be honest, it wasn't us tonight but we can't

panic after one loss. We rattled off ten in a row during the playoffs, so this was eventually going to happen, and it wasn't the worst thing for us."

He added he is confident his team will put in a better effort in game four on Friday night at home.

"We have been doing it all season long, bouncing back from tough losses. If we can do that, we will be totally fine."

Navy Vets head coach Adam Wallace said his team rose to the challenge to stave off being on the brink of elimination.

"The effort was good, the detail was good. It was nice to have a bounce-back game like that because the first two weren't great."

He said his team did a better job scoring on the chances they had, and



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

Woodstock downed Tavistock 5-2 at home in game three of the Doherty Division final series. The Braves lead the best-of-seven series 2-1

added his players were ready to go after a pair of

lopsided losses.

"It's easy to get down after losing the first two, especially in the division final. The biggest thing was the mindset of being prepared, ready to go and treating it as another game and not get away from the things that brought us success this season."

Wallace said his team's leadership group stepped up their play and led the charge.

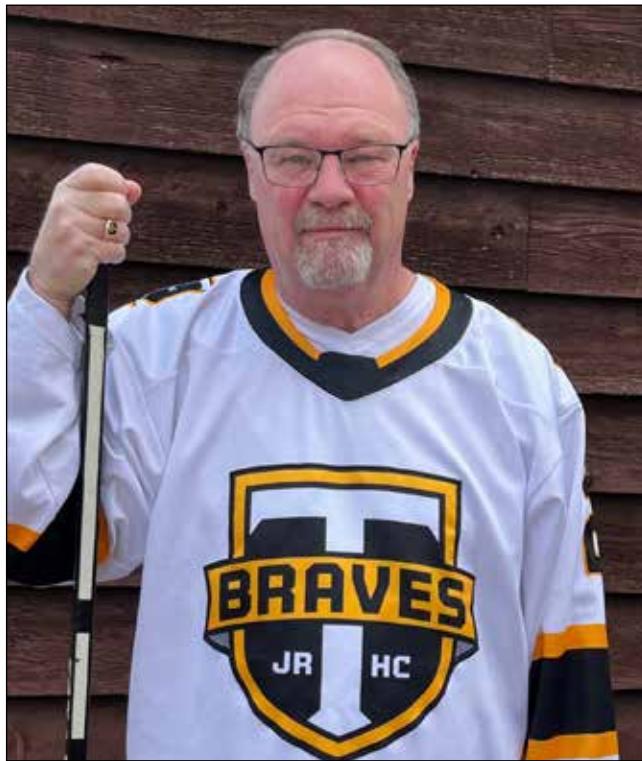
"It's always nice when the big boys show up for us and they did that tonight. I thought the entire team did that and played their roles and did what they needed to do to make our team successful."

Game one resulted in a 5-1 home ice win for the Braves as they scored twice in the first period and three times in the second. Captain Marc Dionne and Ethan Stover led the attack with a

pair of assists each, while Yann Raskin added a goal and a helper. Other goal scorers were Jack Hodge, Yann Raskin, Ryan McKellar and Keegan Metcalf. Raskin's "Michigan" goal gave the Braves a 3-0 lead in the second period and seemed to take some wind out of the sails of Vets.

Tavistock took game two by the same 5-1 count in Woodstock and were led by Keegan Metcalf's three points. Ryan McKellar and Ethan Stover added two assists each, while Hodge, Keaton Bartlett and Jacob Reid-Brant scored single markers. Stover chipped in with two helpers.

Tavistock outshot Woodstock 82-46 over the first two games of the series. Game four will be played in Tavistock on Friday at 7:30 p.m., with game five set for 6:45 p.m. on Sunday in Woodstock.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione (left) and East Zorra-Tavistock Mayor Phil Schaefer have placed a gentleman's bet on the PJHL Doherty Division final series. The loser will have to wear the opposing team's jersey during the first Oxford County Council meeting once the series is over.

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Embro celebrates minor hockey partnership

Embro Minor Hockey successfully hosted the 50th Anniversary of the Embro–Ohio Exchange from March 20 to 22, commemorating five decades of international friendship and community partnership.

The event brought together athletes and families from Embro, Zorra Township, and Ohio for a weekend of hockey, hospitality, and historical reflection. The exchange started in 1976 when an Ohio hockey team became stranded in the region due to a severe snowstorm. Embro residents opened their homes to the visiting players and their families, establishing a bond that turned into an annual tradition. This year’s anniversary event honoured that legacy while celebrating the continued commitment of both communities.

The weekend began Friday afternoon

with the arrival of Ohio families at the Embro arena for an opening ceremony. A series of games followed, featuring U7 through U15 teams and showcasing the talent and sportsmanship of young athletes from both sides of the border.

Saturday’s schedule included another full lineup of games, as well as the highly anticipated Coaches Game—Team USA versus Team Canada. The annual match-up once again served as a highlight of the exchange, drawing significant attendance and reinforcing the friendly competitive spirit that defines the event. The exchange concluded Sunday with the final round of games and a closing ceremony at 1 p.m.

Participants and families gathered for pizza to celebrate the weekend’s success and the partnership between the two hockey communities. (RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



The 50th Anniversary of the Embro–Ohio Exchange ended on a heartfelt note as players traded gifts to commemorate the long standing friendship between communities.



The Embro–Ohio Exchange delivered fast paced, end to end action as players battled hard in a spirited showcase of cross border hockey tradition.



The organizing committee for this year’s event was made up of Emily, Jocelyn, Kayla, Mad-di, Veronica, Natalie, Danika, and Jacalyn, whose planning and coordination ensured another successful Embro–Ohio Exchange.

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A year full of smiles – Woodstock Denture Clinic celebrates one-year anniversary

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

The Woodstock Denture Clinic reached its first-year business anniversary on March 20 and hopes for more anniversaries and continued service.

The denture clinic on 78 Montclair Dr. provides a variety of services including exams, partial dentures, implant-supported dentures, standard dentures, repairs, and specialists referrals.

"Time is just flying by. It's hard to believe that we've hit a year now but it's been great. The Woodstock community is awesome and we hope to be around for a while," said Ben Beattie, dentist.

Before becoming part of the Woodstock Denture Clinic, Beattie graduated from Fanshawe College's dental assistant program and worked in POW labs for many years. He's also a graduate of Georgian College and is thrilled to be working in his hometown of Woodstock shortly after

graduating from the denturist program.

"Being able to stay here, have a practice here has been great. Staying in the community, staying local is something that not many people get to do," Beattie said.

Denture services are also provided by Sarah Lauzon, who graduated from the denturist program at Georgian College with honours and previously worked at Pow Lab Inc. as a lab technician.

For the one-year anniversary, Beattie said that the Woodstock Denture Clinic plans to continue to address who they are and that they're ready to provide quality denture services to the community. He also hopes to get more involved with community events and engage with fellow local dentists.

"Just trying to keep our name out there and be seen," he said.

More information about the Woodstock Denture Clinic can be found online by visiting <https://www.woodstockdentureclinic.ca> or by calling 519-320-7080.

OLG Community Recognition Program Cheque Presentation



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Left to right are: Karen Smiley, Municipal and Government Relations Manager with OLG; Mike Crabbe, General Manager for Woodstock Chamber of Commerce; Chris Cunningham, Executive Director of South Gate Centre; Councillor Deb Tait; Jason Taylor, Gaming Executive with Gateway Casinos and Entertainment; Kathleen Devine, Senior Municipal Relations Manager with OLG; Mayor Jerry Acchione; Councillor Liz Wismer-Van Meer; Councillor Bernia Martin; Councillor Connie Lauder; Tim Dukes from Operation Sharing.

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Representatives from the City of Woodstock, OLG and local agencies came together on Thursday at South Gate Centre to recognize the annual contributions the City receives from OLG as a casino gaming host community.

OLG presented the City with a cheque for \$1,698,460, recognizing contributions from April 2024 to March 2025. The funding goes towards a variety of projects and initiatives, such as the City's fee assistance and community grants programs and the Community and Social Well-Being Reserve Fund.

"Our partnership with OLG has a lasting impact in our community by providing direct support to local non-profit organizations, social service agencies, and individuals and families in need. This funding also helps to address critical issues in our city, including mental health, homelessness and food insecurity," said Mayor Jerry Acchione.

Following the cheque presentation, representatives from the Food Rescue Hub spoke about their work to rescue surplus food from restaurants, farms and other

producers and redistribute it to those in need. South Gate Centre also offered a tour of their newly built facility, including the Rotary Community Kitchen space, which will use rescued food items from the Hub.

In 2025, Woodstock City Council approved a \$100,000 donation from the Community Grants and Community and Social Well-Being Reserve funds to help the Food Rescue Hub secure space and equipment for a new facility.

"OLG is proud to be a vital part of the City of Woodstock. Since the organization started in 1975, 100 per cent of OLG profits have been reinvested in Ontario to support provincial priorities," said Kathleen Devine, OLG's Senior Municipal Relations Manager.

"From critical infrastructure to important local programs, to community festivals, OLG's profits are hard at work in the City of Woodstock and across our province to build stronger communities. We also appreciate the contribution of gaming employees at Gateway Casinos Woodstock, who are making life in your community that much better. When you play at an Ontario casino, you play for Ontario," she added.

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Green Beer and Good Cheer: St. Patrick's Day at Joker's Crown

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

Green beer was flowing freely on March 17, as local Ingersoll pub The Joker's Crown filled to the brim with patrons celebrating St. Patrick's Day.

The festivities extended well beyond a single day, with the pub hosting a full week of celebrations from March 13 to 17. Special events included karaoke, open mic nights, and a "Best Dressed" competition, where participants had the chance to win prizes such as a free dinner for two, complimentary drinks, and golf games. The restaurant also extended its hours for the occasion, staying open until 1 a.m.

Despite snowy weather, the turnout was strong, with many guests embracing the holiday spirit in festive green attire.

Live music kicked off at 6 p.m., featuring local musician Paul Van Straten (a.k.a. Floyd), who was later joined by Woodstock native Alex Pellow-Mason. The pair, an unofficially reunited duo, entertained the crowd with a mix of familiar covers, including Brown Eyed Girl (playfully reworked as "Green Eyed Girl" for the evening), Free Fallin', and Losing My Religion, among others.

Partway through the performance, Pellow-Mason paused to recognize a special occasion.

"We're celebrating Paul's birthday to-



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Joker's Crown employee, Juanita Ménard, dressed up for St. Paddy's Celebration in Ingersoll.



St. Patrick's Day Celebration at The Joker's Crown 2026.

(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

night as well," he announced. "So, if you would all join me..."

The crowd happily obliged, filling the pub with a spirited rendition of "Happy Birthday" before the musicians continued their set.

Following the performance, Van Straten

thanked restaurant owner Chris Brooks Kneilands and wished everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day.

The evening was filled with music, camaraderie, and, of course, plenty of beer, marking another lively and memorable celebration at The Joker's Crown.

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Endometriosis Awareness Month: understanding the condition, reducing delays, and supporting better care

REBECCA KITCHEN

Echo Contributor

Endometriosis Awareness Month is a global initiative aimed at enhancing understanding of endometriosis, a chronic condition that affects about 1 in 10 women and individuals assigned female at birth in Canada, translating to around one million people. The condition, often underdiagnosed, under-researched, and dismissed, requires increased awareness to minimize diagnostic delays and advocate for essential research and support.

Endometriosis occurs when tissue similar to the uterine lining grows outside the uterus, causing inflammation, scarring, and persistent pain. Symptoms can vary widely, from severe pain to mild discomfort, complicating diagnosis as many symptoms may be misattributed to other conditions. Common symptoms include chronic pelvic pain, painful periods, discomfort during intercourse, digestive issues, fatigue, and fertility challenges. Early recognition of these symptoms is crucial for improving outcomes.

The impact of endometriosis transcends reproductive health, affecting physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Chronic pain and fatigue can hinder personal and professional lives, leading to anxiety and depression. It is important to manage pain through a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating medical treatments, pelvic health physiotherapy, heat therapy, gentle exercise, stress management, complementary therapies, and mental health support. Tailored, compassionate care is emphasized as individual responses to treatments vary.

Awareness during Endometriosis Awareness Month combats stigma and misinformation, facilitating better communication with healthcare providers, reducing delays in diagnosis, improving access to pain management, and advocating for research funding and education. Significant progress requires more focused research to understand the condition better, improve diagnostics and treatments, and enhance the quality of life for those affected.

In summary, Endometriosis Awareness Month serves as a platform for visibility and action to foster understanding, reduce delays in diagnosis, and improve care. Advocacy and awareness are vital to driving change and significantly benefiting the millions affected by endometriosis.

Tips: Endometriosis and Adenomyosis sometimes go together. Here is a checklist for you or someone you know to help you get the answers you need and clarify a potential diagnosis.

Symptom & Health Checklist Questions to Ask Yourself if You Suspect Endometriosis or Adenomyosis

Pain & Menstrual Symptoms

- Are my periods painful enough to interfere with work, school, or daily activities?
- Do I experience pelvic pain outside of my menstrual cycle?
- Do I experience cramping that does not respond well to over-the-counter pain relief?
- Do I feel pressure, heaviness, or deep aching in my pelvis or lower back?

(Heavy, prolonged bleeding is particularly common with adenomyosis.)

Digestive & Bladder Symptoms

- Do I have pain with bowel movements, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, or nausea that worsens, especially during menstruation?
- Do I experience bladder pressure, urgency, or pain that fluctuates with my cycle?
- Have digestive symptoms been mistaken for IBS without clear improvement?

Pain with Intimacy or Movement

- Do I experience pain during or after intercourse?
- Does certain movement, exercise, or prolonged sitting increase my pelvic pain?
- Do I feel deep internal pain rather than surface-level discomfort?

Fatigue & Whole-Body Impact

- Do I experience ongoing fatigue that feels disproportionate to my activity level?
- Does pain or exhaustion affect my sleep?
- Do symptoms impact my mental health, mood, or ability to cope day to day?

Fertility & Reproductive Health

- Have I experienced difficulty conceiving or unexplained fertility challenges?
- Have I had pregnancy complications or persistent pelvic pain postpartum?
- Have symptoms continued or worsened after childbirth or breastfeeding?

Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

- Could my symptoms be consistent with endometriosis or adenomyosis?
- What diagnostic options are appropriate for my symptoms? Would imaging (such as ultrasound or MRI) be helpful in my case?
- What treatment or pain-management options are available? Possibly foods to avoid or add in. (Extra fibre and/or ground flax seeds can help with absorbing inflammation and helping to move things along.)
- Would a referral to a gynecologist or pelvic health specialist be appropriate?
- How can we monitor symptoms if a definitive diagnosis is not immediately possible?
- What multidisciplinary supports (pelvic health physio, pain management, mental health, nutritionist, naturopath, yoga, personal training, fascial stretch, massage therapy) might help?

Severe or persistent pelvic pain, heavy bleeding, or symptoms that disrupt daily life are not normal and deserve thorough assessment. You are allowed to ask questions, seek second opinions, and advocate for care that takes your pain seriously.

In Woodstock, Lauren Humphrey is organizing an event to raise awareness of the cause. It will be held on Saturday, March 28th, at 10 a.m. at Roth Park. For more information on this event, please get in touch with her directly at lightandlau@gmail.com or call 289-659-4413.

Woodstock VON celebrates Meals on Wheels program

The spirit of community was on full display March 19, as the Victoria Order of Nurses hosted its annual March for Meals event at 550 Ingersoll Avenue.

Local leaders and residents were invited to step into the shoes of Meals on Wheels volunteers and witness the impact of the program firsthand. Participants gathered for a brief orientation before heading out on a delivery route.

This year's provincial theme, "More Than a Meal," resonated deeply throughout the event. Volunteers not only delivered nutritious meals but also offered friendly conversation and safety checks—simple gestures that often mean the world to individuals living alone or managing health challenges.

The VON shared that demand for the service has continued to rise dramatically. In just one year, meal deliveries increased

from 466,661 to 673,180, reflecting the expanding needs of seniors and adults with disabilities across Ontario.

During the route, participants met clients who rely on Meals on Wheels to remain safe and independent at home. Many expressed gratitude for the program's reliability and the comfort of knowing someone checks in on them regularly.

"Meals on Wheels is about nourishment, but it's also about connection," organizers emphasized. "For many clients, the volunteer who arrives at the door may be the only person they see that day." The event wrapped up at 12:15 p.m., with volunteers returning energized and moved by the stories they encountered. VON thanked all participants for helping raise awareness and encouraged the community to continue supporting this vital service throughout the year.

(RON YUZARK PHOTO)



Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione met with Robin and Janet from the VON before they sent volunteers out on their Meals on Wheels deliveries.

Visit us online at theecho.ca

Area Lions Club holds Jakeman's fundraiser

The Sweaburg Lions Club successfully hosted its multi day Pancake House Fundraiser, hosted at Jakeman's Maple Gift Shop located near Beachville.

The fundraiser operated on ten dates throughout March, running from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day. Jakeman's, a longstanding supporter of community initiatives, provided the venue for the event, enabling the club to welcome hundreds of attendees over

the course of the fundraiser.

Guests were served traditional pancake breakfasts featuring locally produced maple syrup, with proceeds directed toward the club's community service projects. In addition to the pancake meals, the event featured a variety of attractions designed to engage families and visitors. Activities included a petting zoo, Ox on the Run demonstrations, Taffy on Ice, tractor wagon rides,

and a selection of local vendors offering regional products.

The Sweaburg Lions Club acknowledged the contributions of volunteers, Jakeman's staff, and community partners whose efforts ensured the smooth operation of the fundraiser. The organization emphasized that funds raised will directly support local programs, including vision assistance, youth initiatives, and community development projects.



Volunteers Hanna and Keith efficiently served pancakes and sausages to Chris, Dexter, and Chris as part of the fundraiser's steady flow of guests.

(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

Ingamo Homes third annual Amazing Race scavenger hunt returns April 18

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Teams of four to six people can explore Woodstock in a scavenger hunt akin to the Amazing Race while supporting women and their children fleeing intimate partner violence (IPV).

Ingamo Home's third annual Amazing Race will take place on April 18, starting with check-in from 9:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. at Boston Pizza's Woodstock location on 431



(CRYSTAL DOYLE PHOTO)

Ingamo Homes' Amazing Race scavenger hunt fundraiser will return on April 18.

Norwich Ave. After opening remarks, teams will have between 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to solve riddles and complete the scavenger hunt. There will be a free pizza lunch at Boston Pizza after the scavenger hunt wraps up.

"We're really excited, and we're just hoping to continue letting it grow, and we've really been trying to build up our committee to get some ideas flowing in executing it," said Crystal Doyle, human resources administrator of Ingamo Homes.

Doyle hopes that more teams than ever will register and participate in the event by expanding the organization's outreach. The event is advertised on the website, and a recent email blast reached about 1,400 people. The Downtown Woodstock BIA is also helping with outreach.

Ingamo Homes provides second-stage housing, outreach, and programming to women, people who are transgender, and their children in Woodstock and throughout Oxford County as a way to put an end to gender-based

violence and IPV. The non-profit organization relies on grants, donations, and fundraisers.

"It's a great organization and a very important topic, maybe one that's not talked about quite enough, so we love to get our name out there, get people to know a little bit about what we do and then also having people have the opportunity to participate and get a little bit more information is just awesome," Doyle said.

Proceeds from the Amazing Race scavenger hunt fundraiser will support programming like the community kitchen, summer trips to places such as Clovermead Farms and Lake Lisgar, support for families, and food stabilization, in addition to public education and outreach programs such as workshops.

To register for the Amazing Race event online, visit <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/ingamo-family-homes-woodstock-inc/p2p/Ingamo-Amazing-Race-Challenge-2026/team/captain/sign-up>.



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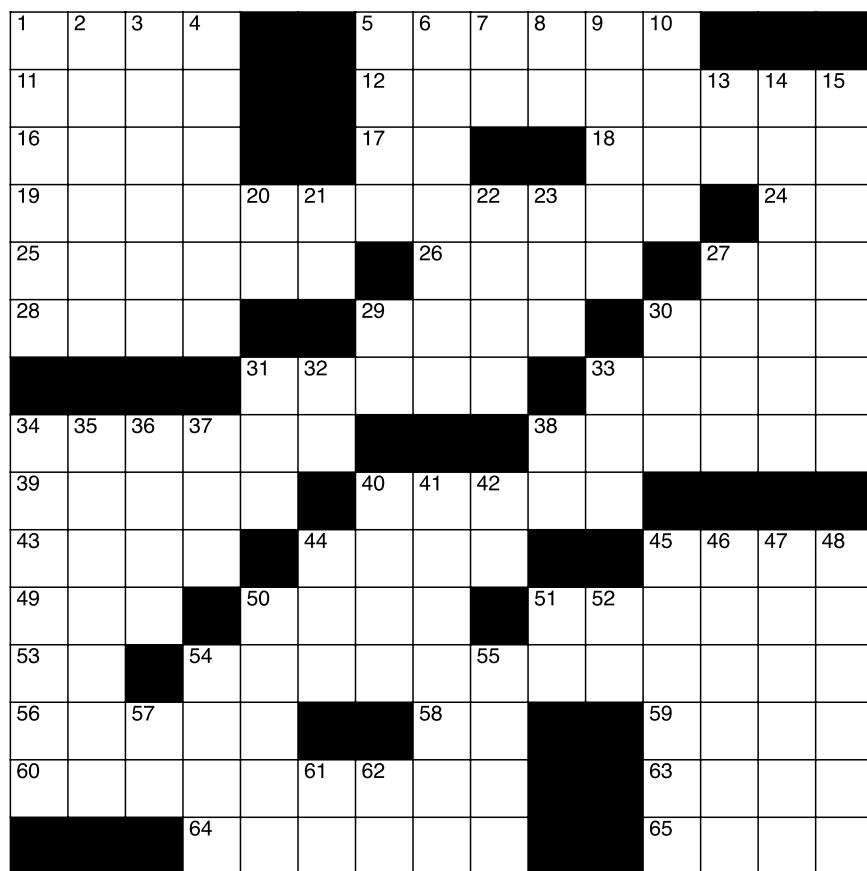
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CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS

1. "Bird of Paradise" constellation
5. Red Sox WS winner Bronson
11. Whirl
12. The State Dept. has a notable one
16. Energy, style and enthusiasm
17. Part of the mind
18. Mountainous country
19. Type of beverage
24. Atomic #109
25. Opposite of falsities
26. Female sheep
27. Rocky peak
28. Sensitive information sharing environment
29. Ethnic group of Thailand
30. Patron saint of Rome Philip
31. Psychedelics
33. Japanese pine
34. Have an impact on
38. Violent disorder
39. A French river
40. Early Mesoamerican civilization
43. Messenger ribonucleic acid
44. Musician Clapton
45. Ancient Greek sophist
49. Largest English dictionary (abbr.)
50. Valley
51. A way to unwind
53. Atomic #93
54. Recommending
56. Indigo bush
58. Larry and Curly's pal
59. Off-Broadway theater award
60. Fencers
63. Small Eurasian deer (pl.)
64. Relating to songbirds
65. A way to assign

CLUES DOWN

1. Some are "secret"
2. Intestinal openings
3. Distant planet
4. Assembly possessing high legislative powers
5. Genus of typical owls
6. One with distinctively colored hair
7. Red cross
8. An alternative
9. Abominable snowmen
10. About ear
13. The opening letters
14. Feeling of regret
15. Atomic #39
20. Luteinizing hormone
21. Atomic #55
22. Carries a debt
23. Albanian monetary unit
27. Semitic abjad letter
29. Yes
30. Negative
31. Earn a perfect score
32. Connecticut
33. Partner to cheese
34. Snack nuts
35. Quadruped's body part
36. Locate
37. Pitching statistic
38. "___, myself and I"
40. Utah city northwest of Provo
41. Football players in the trenches
42. One who runs the show
44. Wood
45. Performing artists
46. Slang for a cut
47. More breathable
48. Most crafty
50. Provokes into action
51. University of Dayton
52. Sodium
54. Large fish of the mackerel family
55. Not one
57. ___ and behold
61. Sports highlight show
62. "The Great Lakes State"

Solution found on Page 33

Finkle Street Dining celebrates a decade of community, sustainability, and local food



(JENNY PEACE-HALL PHOTO)

Jenny Peace-Hall, owner of Finkle Street Dining, is celebrating the restaurant's 10th anniversary by reflecting on the changes over the years and expressing gratitude to the loyal customer base.

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Known for its focus on supporting local, preparing high-quality food, and providing a warm atmosphere, Finkle Street Dining reached its 10-year mark.

Finkle Street Dining on 450 Simcoe St. celebrated its 10th anniversary on March 15. An eight-course menu and prize giveaways marked the occasion. Owner Jenny Peace-Hall is grateful for the support of customers, staff, and the flexibility of the community amid the restaurant's changes over the past decade.

"It's been emotional, actually," Peace-Hall said of the monumental anniversary. "It's phenomenal, but at the same time after reflection looking back at all of the things that Finkle has navigated through and what we've navigated through as a community with COVID and just all of our changes have been bittersweet and I have so much appreciation for our guests, for our team, how adaptive we are and just incredibly grateful for the support of the community as our providers and our suppliers in the area and our great agricultural area."

Post-COVID restrictions, which were difficult overall for the hospitality industry, Finkle Street Dining changed from the tap and grill it used to be to a casual fine dining restaurant focusing on serving high-quality food with local ingredients.

The restaurant uses ingredients from food producers within a 100 KM radius, such as Gunn's Hill Artisan Cheese, Jakeman's Maple Syrup, Great Canadian Cattle Co., Rymel Farms, Slegers Living Organic Greens, Good Leaf Farm, and Manna Mushrooms.

"What we grow in our community is going to be healthier, more sustainable for the environment, and it supports the land, it supports the people, it supports the area, so giving recognition to all of that, all of the producers, suppliers, to the Earth and to the community itself. We try to give back to the community in a multitude of ways," Peace-Hall said. "Not only in our services and offering space and wholesome real food to nourish their bodies with, but a space to build connection in the community."

Peace-Hall also expressed her utmost love and gratitude for her customers over the years.

"The reason we are still there is because of the beautiful people that walk through our doors daily," she said. "My team and I are still there because of you, and we can't thank you enough for your support, for continuing to choose us, and we are just so grateful and thankful we get to welcome you to our space."

More information about Finkle Street Dining, including the menu, can be found online by visiting <https://www.finklestreet.com/finklemenu>.

Paton credits teamwork for consecutive OUA West Coach of the Year awards

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Woodstock's Kelly Paton, head coach and manager of women's hockey operations at Wilfrid Laurier University, is the Ontario University Athletics' (OUA) West Coach of the Year again.

Paton led the Laurier Golden Hawks women's hockey team to 21 wins during this season, a conference best for the team and the highest goals for since the 2012/2013 season. The team also had the fewest goals against in the OUA at 30 and tied for the second-highest scoring offence with 76 goals. Nationally, the Golden Hawks were ranked third at their highest and ended the season in fourth.

Throughout the interview with the Echo, Paton said that other team members at Laurier

Athletics, such as assistant coach Nik Knezic, department staff supporting conversations

on academic eligibility, part-time staff, and staff involved in physical therapy largely helped

lead her to the award.

"Coaching awards are truly shared and there's a lot of people supporting in different levels to help make sure that I can do my job to the best of my abilities so certainly appreciative of the work the staff and myself were able to do this year and I think it's certainly a reward that helps us prepare to do everything that we do prepare students athletes. Of course, we're happy for the recognition."

She added that, as coaching is a full-time job with non-traditional work hours, she's grateful for those who support her in her career in all aspects of her life.

"There would really be a long list of people if I tried to throw names in there, but I think the people close to me know the meaning that they have in my life in setting me up for success in my career, so just a lot of gratitude towards those people."

Paton also runs summer camps for the Woodstock Wildcats Girls Hockey program and received an outpouring of support from alumni, parents of athletes, and others part of the minor hockey association. The Woodstock Wildcats Facebook page celebrated Paton's win in a March 12 announcement.

"That's an association that's close to my heart, knowing that a lot of my sports experiences were in the City of Woodstock. For myself, I received a lot of positive reach out from friends, family, and sup-

porters from our program sharing their joy in this success and recognition," she said. "I'm just really lucky to have a great group of people around me that support me in my role."

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The Case of the Philandering Philatelist

SCOTT GILLIES

Echo Contributor

The recent exhibition and trade show of the Oxford Philatelic Society in Woodstock has triggered this week's column. While engaged in other research, I uncovered references to the Philatelic Society of Canada in the late 19th century. This organization dedicated to the study, collection and sharing of postage stamps published a weekly newsletter, some copies of which can be found online.

In the early editions dating to 1891 there often appears quarter page advertisements from a stamp collector in Ingersoll by the name of Thomas O. Pardoe Jr. This particular individual was always looking to buy or trade a wide variety of stamps and was also willing to sell them at reduced prices. Prices which appeared to be too good to be true.

One of these sizeable ads offered proof sheets of stamps for sale at 10 cents each or 3 for 25 cents.

He was one of more than 150 registered members of the Philatelic Society in Canada and the United States at the time. Others from Ingersoll included William Kennedy and someone named A. Pardoe – perhaps Thomas' brother Alan. Others from Oxford County included J. Ades Fowler of Woodstock and Palmer Willits of Norwich.

In 1891 one such advertisement offered to exchange a 1 cent Newfoundland stamp, or an

equivalent from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island for every two 90 cent orange US stamps turned in.

The fascination with stamp collecting reached an apex in the 1890s. There were more than 2600 post offices in Ontario each with their own unique cancellation marks.

To lend himself a certain modicum of professionalism, decorum and generosity Pardoe was recognized by the Society newsletter editor for having donated large number of postage stamps to the organization. In one issue, he was credited with donating 153 pieces, when most of the other ten American and Canadian donors that month had given fewer than 20 items each.

In July of 1892 it was announced that Thomas O. Pardoe was publishing "a small book devoted solely to the interests of the Philatelic Society of Canada. The book was to contain the revised constitution, a list of officers and members, a complete catalogue of their library, and other matters of interest in connection with the Society." Two thousand copies were to be issued.

It should be pointed out that in 1891, Thomas O. Pardoe Junior, was just 15 years old! His brother Alan was 11, and their father Thomas Sr. was 41. The latter worked in Ingersoll as a grocer; his son and namesake was also identified as a grocer's clerk in the 1891 Census of Canada.

Ten years earlier, there was another grocer



Ingersoll Post Office.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



Alexandra Hospital Ingersoll
Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital

NOW RECRUITING VOLUNTEER BOARD MEMBERS

Recruiting for board members for Rural Roads Health Services (RRHS), representing Alexandra Hospital, Ingersoll, and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital.

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RRHS Board members have a unique opportunity to help shape healthcare for our community. The Board's governance responsibilities include oversight and accountability for both hospitals:

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- Strategic planning
- Financial stewardship
- Quality and performance monitoring
- Public and partner relations

We encourage applicants with a broad range of skills and experience to apply for consideration. Applicants should be prepared to attend 2-4 meetings per month. Successful candidates will reside or conduct business in Ingersoll, Tillsonburg or the surrounding catchment areas.

If this opportunity interests you, please forward a completed application form found at <https://www.ruralroadshealthservices.ca/about/board-of-directors/> plus your resume and references to:

Attention: Board Chair, Rural Roads Health Services
c/o Lisa Dahm, Executive Assistant lisa.dahm@rrhs.ca

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 12:00pm Monday, April 13, 2026

in the town of Ingersoll. Like the Pardoe family, Joseph Gibson had been born in England and had moved to Oxford County in the mid 1800s. In 1881 he gave up his grocery business when he was appointed the Postmaster of Ingersoll. During his term of office – nearly 40 years – the volume of exports and mail passing through the government building located at the southwest corner of Thames and Charles Street West ranked it as one of the top ten in the country.

As the final decade of the 19th century proceeded, young Pardoe continued his public appeals to collectors to buy, sell or trade stamps and coins with him. In one edition of the Philatelic Society publication, he advertised that he was willing to purchase old coins of United States currency, Confederate bills, Civil War tokens and Colonial coins. He even took out an advertisement in French.

When something appears to be too good to be true, it generally is.

The editor of the Society newsletter began to flag Pardoe's quarter page ads and imply that he was swindling fellow philatelists out of their collections. In the February 1893 edition of The Canadian Philatelic Weekly, they printed a warning to all members of the society to be aware that "Thomas O. Pardoe Jr, who carried his swindling operations to such an extent from Ingersoll and whom we have more than once exposed in these columns, seems to have changed his location again."

"We have proof that he is in Yorkville Ontario, where he is operating under the name of

a stamp company. Pardoe's writing is of that kind one would remember, and in the writing of this firm we recognize that of Pardoe. The said firm sent us a large advertisement for insertion into this paper, which was similar to the advertisement used by Pardoe heretofore, offering rare Canadian stamps at very low prices. This time, British Columbias are offered. It is needless to say we refused the advertisement in question. It may be that some of our contemporaries, who are not familiar with Pardoe's style of writing, may accept this advertisement and it is for this reason that we publish this note to warn our customers to exercise caution in purchasing from firms at that place."

The editor echoed this sentiment in 1894 when it was reported that Thomas O. Pardoe, formerly of Ingersoll "who had swindled dealers and collectors", was now in trouble with the law in Toronto. He had been found guilty of mail fraud. It appears that he had placed several newspaper ads in the city, looking for five female typists to fill vacancies which never existed. These newspaper ads directed candidates to submit 25 cents with their application. While many such applications were received none were ever answered. The fraudster was sentenced to fifty days in jail.

The 1911 Census of Canada records that Thomas was indeed living in Toronto and working as a bookkeeper. The case of the philandering philatelist came to a conclusion with his death in January of 1914. He was only 38.

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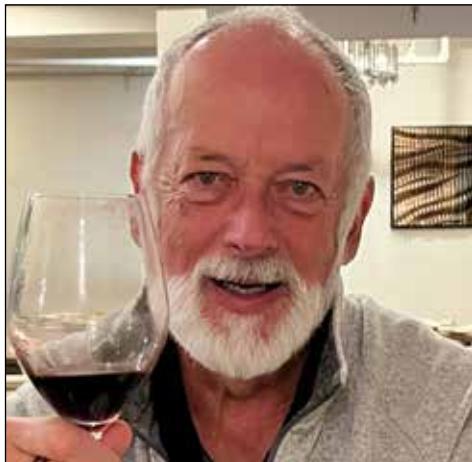


CEDARVIEW

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO!

TRAVEL

Staying put? But don't stay home!



PAUL KNOWLES

Echo Contributor

Let's be honest: there are an increasing number of would-be travellers who are getting rather chilly feet about venturing abroad. Many of us have chosen not to travel to the U.S. Others are understandably nervous about popular destinations like Mexico, after the cartel uprising; Cuba, with its collapsing infrastructure; or Egypt or Turkey, considering their proximity to the current war in the Middle East. As well, several African nations are doubling down on their oppression of LGBTQ2+ folk.

And then there are the issues that don't involve personal dangers, such as the new requirements in the U.K. for pre-travel documentation or (if you were born there), a British passport. This sort of

clearance before arrival in countries is also being initiated in many European countries.

As a travel writer, I will admit that I still plan to travel. My near-future plans include Italy and even Mexico, with other trips in the works.

But I do understand that we are all looking for alternatives. So, as we get closer to Spring, I want to suggest a few drivable destinations that don't involve leaving the province, but will, I promise, provide visitors with a great vacation.

Let's start with the Niagara peninsula. I don't say "Niagara Falls" because while this wonder of the world is undoubtedly the biggest draw on the peninsula, there is so much more to explore, here. Although it might be wise to consider staying in Niagara Falls, proper, because now, in the off-season, many of the hotels offer great deals on rooms, which often come with discounts on dining and even a casino voucher. If you're heading toward the Falls, check out those options.

But if you go, don't spend all your time in Niagara Falls. Niagara on the Lake is one of my favourite towns in Ontario, where you can browse in interesting shops, dine in good restaurants and pubs, and wander a couple of blocks off the main street to the banks of the Niagara River for terrific views of Lake Ontario, the riverscape, and our neighbouring country that sadly shall not be named.

My favourite pastime in the Niagara Region – as regular readers will know – is visiting wineries, and there are dozens to choose from. Many also have good restaurants, and some offer unique accommodations. For a full and infor-



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

Fielding winery is one of the best in the Niagara Benchlands wine region.

mative list of wineries, see winecountryontario.ca. And please note that the Niagara peninsula has now been divided into two official wine regions – Niagara Benchlands and Area, and Niagara-on-the-Lake and Area. If I had to choose only two in each, it would be Fielding and Ridgepoint in the Benchlands; Bighead and Konzelman in Niagara-on-the-Lake region.

Now, let's head east. It will also not be a surprise to regular readers that I recommend a getaway to our nation's capital, Ottawa. I simply don't think there is any equivalent destination in Canada, with as much to see and do, almost all accessible on foot.

Highlights, for me, include two art galleries (the phenomenal National Gallery of Canada, and the unexpected Ottawa Art Gallery, with a terrific Group of Seven exhibition). I recently wrote enthusiastically about the National War Museum, and I haven't changed my mind – it's really enthralling. In total, Ottawa is home to seven of Canada's national museums.

I always enjoy the quirky artifacts at Laurier House, which housed two Prime Ministers – Wilfrid Laurier and later, William Lyon Mackenzie King. The display of memorabilia from King's immersion in the occult is worth the price of admission.

There are many unique sites open for tours in Ottawa, from the temporary House of Commons and the current home of the Senate (once the railway station), to the Royal Canadian Mint and Rideau Hall, home of the Governor General.

For my last "stay-at-home" alternative to for-

eign travel, I am going to suggest a vacation that covers a distance of less than an hour and a half – the region that runs along the north shore of Lake Ontario and the western end of the St. Lawrence River, from Quinte West to Gananoque, including Kingston. We've had the chance to explore this region in the last couple of years, and there were a lot of unexpected delights throughout the area.

I would probably opt to stay in Kingston, because this historic city offers some unique and special bed and breakfasts and inns. And over the course of my week or so in the area, I would be sure to visit the truly fascinating National Air Force Museum in Trenton, and the Great Lakes Museum in Kingston (with a note that the highlight, there, the S.S. Keewatin, is not open for tours until May). I would also join Kouri's Kopters in Gananoque for one of their breathtaking helicopter tours of the Thousand Islands (also starting in mid-May).

All of the communities in this lake-side stretch offer unique dining experiences, local live theatre and concerts, and on-the-water adventures in the warmer months.

So if you are eager to travel, but hesitant to leave the comfort of your own province, these three areas provide terrific travel experiences. I have been there, I have done that, and I truly intend to do it all again.

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

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A Vimy warplane at the National War Museum in Ottawa.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

Riddles

The height of my feet, is around 6 feet. What am I?

Giraffe

I jump when I walk and sit when I stand. Who am I?

Kangaroo

I stay awake at night and sleep during the day. Who am I?

Owl

I am a king without a crown. Who am I?

Lion

While the alphabet goes from A to Z, I go from Z to A. Who am I?

Zebra

I have horns but cannot beep. Who am I?

Goat

I am three things. A fruit, a bird and a group of people. Who am I?

Kiwi

The strangest creature you will ever kind: Two eyes in front and many more behind.

Peacock

I move without wings, between silken strings. What am I?

Spider

Armored but not a knight, snapping but not a twig, and always home, even on the move. What am I?

Turtle

Sudoku

by PeterS 2026

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

Solution found on page 33

Featured Pet



MYLIE



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

Word Search

SPRINGTIME ANIMALS

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

- RABBIT
- DUCKLING
- LAMB
- CHICK
- FAWN
- BUTTERFLY
- BEE
- FROG
- ROBIN
- CARDINAL
- BLUE JAY
- RACCOON
- SQUIRREL
- DEER
- GOOSE

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

JUNE 28 / 9 AM - 3 PM OXFORD COUNTY ANNUAL COIN SHOW Woodstock Coin Club and the Ingersoll Coin Club

Woodstock Agricultural Society Fairgrounds,
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Admission: \$4.00. Buy, Sell, Trade & Evaluate!

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MARCH

MARCH 31, APRIL 14 & 28 | 1 PM

SACRED HEART PARISH EUCHRE

Henderson Hall, 133 John Street, Ingersoll

We invite everyone to join us for a Euchre afternoon. Refreshments provided.

MARCH 28 | 10 AM - 2 PM

EXPERIENCE FANSHAWE AT OPEN HOUSE

All locations are open. Explore our campuses at London,

Woodstock, Simcoe, St. Thomas, Clinton and Tiverton

Meet faculty and current students from all areas of Fanshawe.

Drop-in and ask about your program interests, career options and becoming a Fanshawe student. Hear from college experts on student life, admissions, financial aid, and more!

APRIL

APRIL 1 | 1:30 - 2:30 PM

CAREGIVER CORNER

Online (Zoom)

Join Nicole Bruder at the "Caregiver Corner" on ZOOM, where you will find a safe space to share your caregiving journey. First Wednesday monthly, from 1:30 to 2:30 pm. Call or email to receive the link. info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com or 519-536-3370.

APRIL 3 | 8 PM

"COME, TOUCH THE ROBE" AND OTHER SELECTED WORKS

Sacred Heart Church, Ingersoll

Join the Ingersoll Choral Society on Good Friday evening in a stirring performance of Pepper Choplin's cantata, "Come, Touch the Robe" and other selected works. With orchestral accompaniment. Free will offering will be received. www.ingersollchoralsociety.ca or visit us on FB.

APRIL 11 | 10 AM - 12 PM

DEATH AND DONUTS

55 Ingersoll Road, Lower Level, Woodstock, ON

Join the Caring Hearts Support Network for a morning guaranteed to spark curiosity and connection around death and dying.

Our host "Do Good" is located at 55 Ingersoll Road, Lower Level, Woodstock, ON. To register please email or call info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com or 519-536-3370.

APRIL 11 | DOORS OPEN 6:30 PM, SHOW AT 7:30 PM
IN THE MOOD WITH BIG BANDEMIC

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

An unforgettable night of toe-tapping, dancing, and singing along! This 17-piece big band PLUS a fabulous 10-piece strings section and two amazing crooners! Dress to impress in formal or semi-formal attire—1940s styles encouraged! Dance floor awaits! 19+ only. \$50. Book online at www.southgatectr.com/events or call 519-539-9817.

APRIL 11 | WORKSHOP 1 - 4:30 PM, PERFORMANCE 7 PM
CELEBRATE 65 YEARS WITH THE BRANT MEN
OF SONG: A DAY OF CHORAL SINGING
Hope Christian Reformed Church, 64 Buchanan
Crescent, Brantford

The Brant Men of Song are inviting all individuals and groups interested in singing to an afternoon workshop. There is no charge for this workshop. Participants may also sing with the Brant Men of Song in an evening performance starting at 7 pm. Financial contributions will be collected for the Brantford Food Bank. Come sing with us and enjoy the sound of many voices.

APRIL 18 | 9 AM

INGERSOLL DISTRICT NATURE CLUB CARPOOL TO FINGAL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Ingersoll Municipal Parking lot behind the Arena

Fingal Wildlife Management Area has hiking trails for all abilities, waterfowl viewing area and prairie grassland, creating a haven for nature enthusiasts. Call Ken for more information at 519 539 5234 or www.ingersollnatureclub.com

APRIL 18 | 1:30 - 4:30 PM

GEMS & JAVA - FUNDRAISER FOR ETHIOPIA

Hearts for Ethiopia is hosting Gems & Java, a fundraiser that changes lives in Ethiopia. Tickets available at www.heartsforethiopia.com. Until March 21st tickets are \$60. March 22nd tickets are \$65. Tables of 8 are \$460.00. For cash purchases, contact Heather hmckinnon15@gmail.com or (519) 535-9535. Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, 735 Frontenac Cres., Woodstock.

APRIL 25 | 3 PM

THE WOODSTOCK CHORALAIRES THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC, CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF SINGING

Knox Presbyterian Church, Woodstock

Tickets \$30, children free, available at Wildon & Markle Jewellers, online at ticketscene.ca. Guest artist, Luciano de Cicco (anthem singer at Blue Jays home games). Woodstockchoralaires.com

APRIL 29 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MIGHTY MEN OF ZORRA

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave.
Woodstock

"History and land helped them rise to the 1893 World Champions". Special presentation by William (Bill) Butt, Playwright. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

MAY

MAY 3 | 2 - 4 PM

KC AND THE SUNSHINE GIRLS

Mt Elgin Community Centre, 333204 Plank Line, Mount
Elgin, ON

Put on your Boogie Shoes for an afternoon of dance hits of the 70's & 80's. This Tribute Show is being hosted by Mt Elgin United Church. Tickets are available by calling Joanne 519-485-1988 or Dawne 519-421-6836.

MAY 27 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave.
Woodstock

"A Celebration of Oxford County's Past". Guest speaker Liz Dommasch, Oxford County Archivist. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

MAY 30 | 10 AM - 2 PM

FRIENDS OF THE WOODSTOCK PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK SALE

Woodstock Public Library

Email: fotwpl@gmail.com. Website: https://www.instagram.com/friendswoodstocklibrary/?hl=en

JUNE

JUNE 7 | 8 AM - 1 PM

KIDS DU

Southside Park, Woodstock

KidS Du is back for its 9th season. This event is a non-competitive run-bike-run for kids aged 3 to 13 with a focus on participation and having FUN! All courses are geared to the various age groups as set by Triathlon Ontario. KidS Du is held in Southside Park, Woodstock. Register before May 19 to guarantee a tshirt. For information and online registration visit woodstocktriathlonclub.ca

JULY

JULY 6-10 | 9 AM - 12:30 PM

BASKETBALL POWER CAMP

Huron Park Baptist Church, 199 Berwick St, Woodstock,
ON N4S 7L6

Ages 5 to 14. Please call 519-421-4722 for more information.

ONGOING CLASSES, CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS

3RD TUE. OF MONTH | 6:30 - 8:30 PM

CAREGIVER CONNECTION

Revel Realty Woodstock, 111 Huron Street (Virtual/hybrid options available)

Are you worried about your child or youth? Parents and Caregivers for Mental Health (PCMH) is here to listen, support, and walk alongside you on this journey. Our free Caregiver Connection peer support groups offer parents and caregivers a community of support. Can't make it in person? Join one of our virtual or hybrid groups!

Visit family.cmho.org or email oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca for more information.

EVERY FRIDAY | 1 PM

TILLSONBURG DUPLICATE BRIDGE CLUB

Tillsonbur Senior Centre, 45 Hardy Ave, Tillsonburg

Don't have a partner? Come anyway and we will match you up with someone. For more information, visit their Facebook page: TburgBridge.

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

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

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY

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

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

LAST TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH | 10 AM - 12 PM

MONTHLY VON BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Ingersoll Pharmasave, 19 King St. E., Ingersoll

Last Tuesday of every Month.

3RD WED. OF MONTH

COLOURING THROUGH GRIEF

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

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

Call 519-536-3370. Check out website

www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

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

PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

21 Wellington St., Woodstock

(Virtual options available)

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

VON OXFORD GRIEF CARE:

FREE MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

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

TILLSONBURG

WHEN: 2nd Tuesday of every month

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

TIME: 6:30PM-8:00PM

COMING EVENTS

INGERSOLL

WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month
 WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll
 TIME: 10:30AM - 12:00 Noon

WOODSTOCK

WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month
 WHERE: Sakura House Hospice 715180 Oxford Rd.4, Woodstock
 TIME: 10:30AM-12:00 Noon

4TH WED. OF MONTH | 1 - 2:30 PM GRIEF SUPPORT FOR MAID RELATED LOSS Thamesford Library, 165 Dundas St., Thamesford

This monthly in-person grief support group for loss related to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) offers a compassionate, safe space to explore this unique loss. The next meeting will be on March 25th from 1 - 2:30 p.m. The group is free of charge and pre-registration is requested. To register or inquire about an evening group, contact 519-866-3016 or email faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca.

OXFORD COUNTY DIABETES EDUCATION PROGRAM

Are you looking for support with your Diabetes? Our Team of Registered Nurses, Registered Dietitians and a Social Worker is here to support YOUR goals. We can help with medication adjustments, lifestyle and diet changes, stress management, weight reduction strategies and more. Appointments are available at Alexandra Hospital Ingersoll and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital and by phone. SELF REFERRALS ARE WELCOME. Please call 519-485-9611 to book an appointment. Let's work together!

THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF OXFORD COUNTY

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

THE LIONS CLUB OF WOODSTOCK

The Lions Club of Woodstock has been serving the community and Oxford County with kindness and generosity since 1931. The Lions always place the needs of neighbours and communities first. Through the dedication and hard work of our volunteer members, we are serving those in need together. If you are interested in becoming a member or simply wish to learn more by attending one of our monthly meetings, please email Steve Iorio at steveiorio4@gmail.com for more information.

OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS

Are you looking to start a summer pastime? Are you interested in your family history? Oxford Branch has an extensive collection of family history and genealogical resources that can help you. Come visit our Resource Centre at 82 Light Street, Courthouse Square, Woodstock. We are open Tuesdays to Thursdays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Volunteers are ready to help you get started or help you research for missing information. You can also connect with us on the web at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting genealogical research in Oxford County. Hope to see you through the summer!

FREEZER MEALS PROVIDED BY ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Pulp Fiction
2. Jimi Hendrix
3. The Lighthouse of Alexandria (Pharos)
4. Andromeda Galaxy
5. Amnon
6. Finland
7. Five
8. Both
9. Open sesame
10. Andy

SUDOKU SOLUTION

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

BEACHVILLE LEGION EVENTS: 434852 Zorra Line, Beachville

WEDNESDAYS | 7-8 PM
GENTLE CHAIR YOGA

THURSDAYS | 7 PM
EUCHRE

APRIL 2 & 9 | 7 - 8 PM
LINE DANCING

THURSDAYS | 8:15 - 9:15 PM
RUMBA AND BACHATA DANCING
 No partner required.

FRIDAYS | 8 PM
DARTS

APRIL 10 & 17 | DOORS OPEN 6 PM, PLAY BEGINS 7 PM
OXFORD COUNTY FELINE WELLNESS AND OUTREACH BINGO

APRIL 12, 19, 26 | 1 - 4 PM
THAMES VALLEY BLUEGRASS AND OLD TIME COUNTRY PICKERS
 Open Mic(acoustic only). Come enjoy the music.

APRIL 1, 15, 29 | 4:30 - 6 PM
OX ON THE RUN LIBRARY BOOK MOBILE

APRIL 3 | 5 PM
GOOD FRIDAY FISH AND CHIPS DINNER
 Call 519-423-6363 to order to avoid disappointment.

APRIL 11 | REG. 9 - 9:45 AM, PLAY BEGINS 10 AM
OXFORD COUNTY DART TOURNAMENT
 Doubles followed by singles \$10 per person, per event. All entry money paid out.

APRIL 24 | 5:30 PM
PULLED PORK AND BAKED BEAN DINNER
 Call 519-423-6363 to order and avoid disappointment.

APRIL 25 | 7 - 11 PM
KARAOKE

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

THURSDAYS | 1:30 PM
SHUFFLEBOARD

TUESDAYS - THURSDAYS | ENDING IN THE EVENING
DART LEAGUE

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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APRIL 2 | 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM
SOUP N SANDWICH

APRIL 7 | 7 PM
EXECUTIVE MEETING

APRIL 11 | 3 PM
MEAT DRAW

APRIL 12 | 5 - 6 PM
SMOTHERED CHICKEN
 Dessert is extra, Pre-order & pay no later April 7th. Please contact the Legion 519-537-3112 or email rclbranch55@rogers.com

APRIL 14 | 7:30 PM
BRANCH GENERAL MEETING & ELECTION NIGHT

APRIL 19 | 5 - 6 PM
FISH N CHIPS
 Dessert is extra, Pre-order & pay no later April 14th. Please contact the Legion 519-537-3112 or email rclbranch55@rogers.com

APRIL 25 | 4:30 - 6 PM
WING NIGHT
 Wings are 1 price and w/fries are a separate price. Please contact the Legion 519-537-3112 or email rclbranch55@rogers.com

APRIL 14-21
RUMMAGE SALE
 Come in, it's like a yard sale. You like it you buy it.

SATURDAY EVENING ENTERTAINMENT:

APRIL 4 | 7 PM - 11 PM
DJ WOLFEMAN

APRIL 11 | 7 PM - 11 PM
BLUE SKY

APRIL 18 | 7 PM - 11 PM
MIKE THORPE

APRIL 25 | 7 PM - 11 PM
2 FOR THE ROAD

GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER MONDAY | CLOSED
LEGION IS CLOSED

Celebrate Good Friday with Crispy's Fish & Chips!



- Pre-orders: March 27 - April 2 (before 4PM)
- Pre-payment required
- Limited slots available
- Dine-in & Takeout available all day
- We are open 11AM - 9PM on April 3rd
- Limited Menu on Good Friday

Order Early to Avoid the Rush!

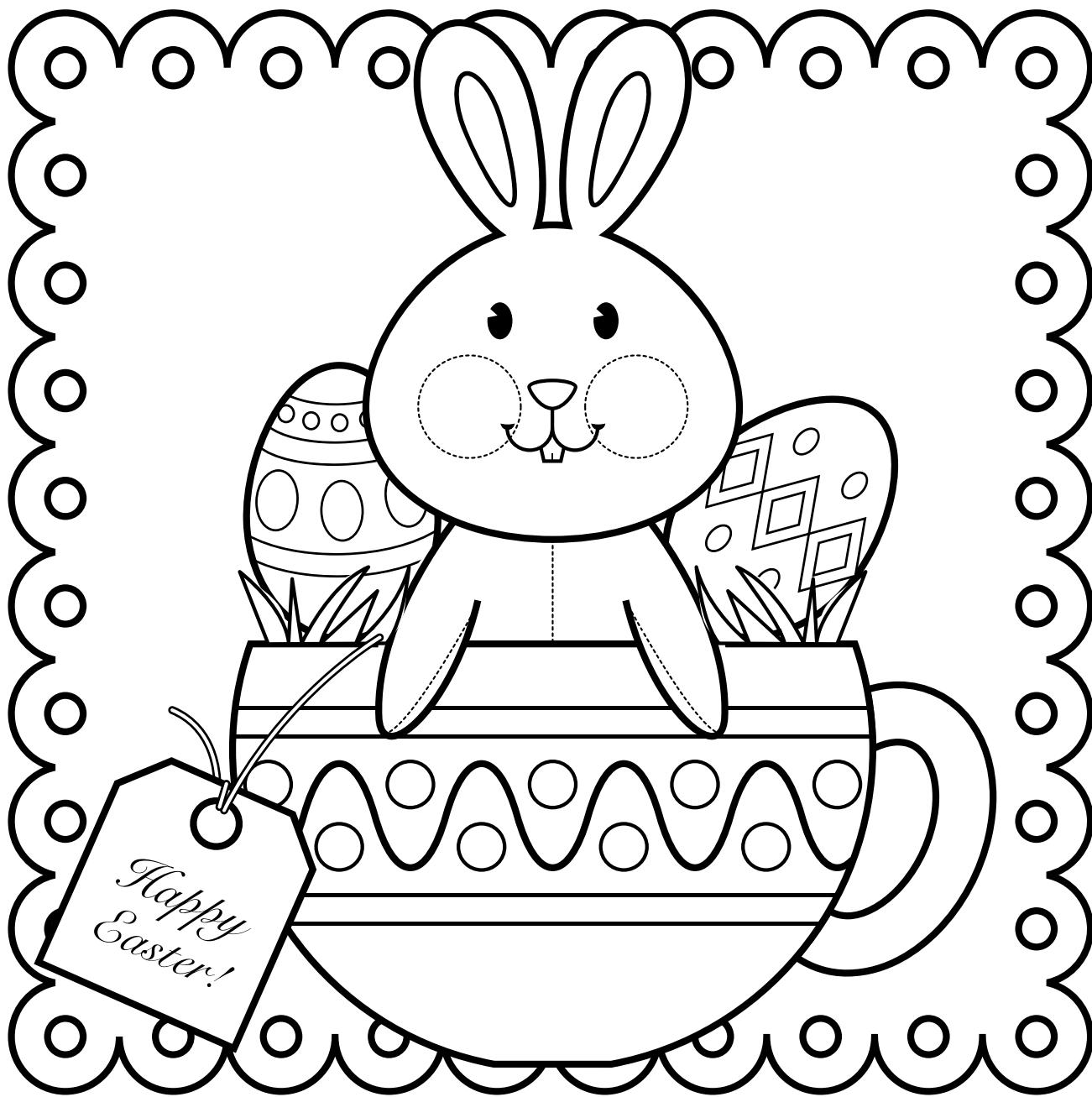
194 Springbank Ave N, Woodstock
519-290-8800



Everybunny's Favourite



EASTER COLOURING CONTEST



We're on the hunt for
EGG  **CELLENT**
artists!

Let's hop to it:

Decorate this Easter picture with your favorite colors, then **drop it off before 9 p.m. on April 2nd** to:

Food Basics

223 Clark Rd E, Ingersoll

or

868 Dundas St, Woodstock

Winner gets an Easter basket full of goodies!

Let your creativity shine!



Colouring Contest Rules:

1. Contest is open to children ages 4-10. Relatives of newspaper employees or contest sponsors are not eligible to win. 2. Contestants may use crayons, markers or coloured pencils to colour the pictures. Adults may assist in completing the contest entry form, but may not assist in coloring. **Winners will be selected by random draw and will be contacted via phone/email.**

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

E-mail: _____

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Visit foodbasics.ca to view our flyer and store details.

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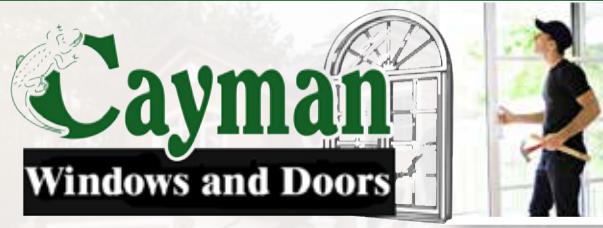
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BIRTHDAY

PLEASE HELP US
CELEBRATE
Laura Robinson's
95TH
BIRTHDAY

Monday, April 6th
1:00pm-4:00pm
Old St. Paul's Church
723 Dundas St. Woodstock




We are so grateful to celebrate with you — your presence is truly the only gift we need.

OBITUARY

RAYMOND "MOON" MCMULLEN



Raymond McMullen, affectionately known as "Moon," passed away peacefully on March 9, 2026, in his 85th year. Raymond was predeceased by his beloved partner, Wilma Jean Proulx, and by his children, Mary Kay and Jimmy. He was also predeceased by his brother Gordon and his sisters Doreen and Beverly. He will be lovingly remembered by his dear sister Shirley Allan, as well as Bob and Brenda Taylor, and his numerous grandchildren who will cherish his memory. Raymond was widely known throughout Oxford County for his generous heart and joyful spirit. For more than 30 years, he proudly played Santa Claus for countless families, bringing smiles and holiday magic to children and adults alike. He appeared in the Woodstock Santa Claus Parade and spent many seasons greeting visitors in the Santa House at Museum Square, becoming a cherished part of Christmas traditions for many families in the community. Raymond's kindness, humor, and warm personality touched everyone who knew him. His legacy of joy and generosity will live on in the memories of the many lives he brightened over the years. He will be deeply missed and fondly remembered by family, friends, and the many children who knew him simply as Santa.

Visit us online at theecho.ca

OBITUARY

HOWARD BLAKELEY BOAKES
JULY 2, 1942 – FEBRUARY 22, 2026



With sorrow, and his family gathered around him, Howard slipped away peacefully on Sunday February 22, 2026. Howard was born in Paris Ontario, and was a dedicated lifelong dairy farmer, a community man and a good neighbour to many in the Curries and Oxford Centre area, where he lived for the past 62 years. Howard was a member of the Oxford County Plowmen Association, Oxford Soil and Crop, a former 4H leader, and member of the Cockshutt Tractor Club. He was a past member of Curries United Church, Chairman of Pleasant View Cemetery in Curries, and later attended Mount Elgin United Church.

Howard played Slow Pitch Baseball and Hockey in his younger years, enjoyed his hobbies of Antique Tractor Plowing with fellow friends, collecting Antique tractors and had a large collection of toy tractors.

He will be missed by his loving family, his wife and best friend Marlene (Edwards), sons Kevin (Marla) and Kerry (Shannon), grandchildren Aaron (Alicia), Ethan, Blakeley (Christa) and Ryan (Lauren), and his 3 great grandchildren, Danika, Ainsley and Emmett.

Survived by his sister-in-laws Bonnie Boakes, and Janet Clark, brother-in-law Stanley Edwards (Rita) and several nieces and nephews.

Predeceased by his parents Elmer and Martha Boakes, brothers Ken and Melvin.

There will be a Celebration of Life held on Sunday March 29th, 2026 from 1-4 pm with words of Remembrance being read at 2 pm, in the Oxford Centre Hall, (Middletown Line and Old Stage Road).

Donations in memory of Howard may be given to Woodstock Hospital or VON Canada, and greatly appreciated by the family VON Canada.

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Conquer Winter

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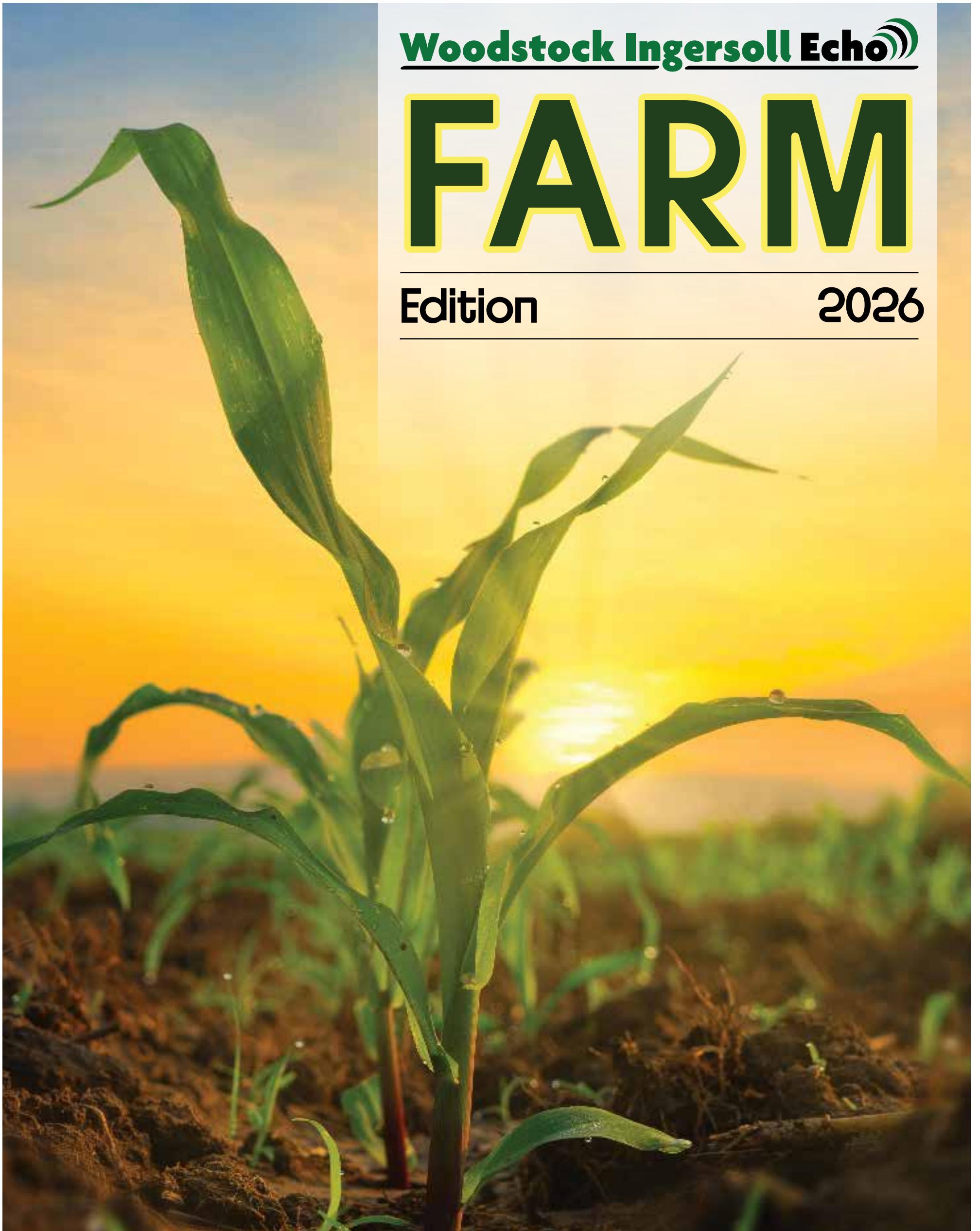
*Limited time finance offer provided through Kia Motors Finance on select new 2026 **Seltos** models through participating dealers to qualified retail customers, on approved credit, who take delivery from February 3, 2026 to March 31, 2026. Representative finance example based on a new and previously unregistered 2026 **Seltos**. Selling Price is \$26,095. 4.99% finance APR for 84 months, with a \$0 down payment or equivalent trade-in, equals 84 monthly finance payments of \$473 - which includes: \$2,100 delivery and destination fees; \$100 A/C charge (where applicable); regional fees of up to \$22, \$599 dealer administration fee, lien registration fees (up to \$150, including lien registering agent fee); and all other applicable fees and levies (all of which may vary by region and dealer). Cost of borrowing is \$3,510.88 for a total obligation of \$37,036.80. Excludes licensing, registration, insurance and applicable sales taxes. Dealer may sell for less. Dealer order/trade may be required (but may not be available in all cases). Offer ends March 31, 2026 and is subject to change and extension without notice. While supplies last. See your participating Kia dealer or visit www.kia.ca for details. Information in this advertisement is believed to be accurate at the time of printing. International models and features shown. Kia is a trademark of Kia Corporation. X-Line model shown.

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo 

FARM

Edition

2026



Tavistock company participates in Mexican trade mission

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

SoilOptix recently joined one of the largest Team Canada trade missions ever organized, an extensive delegation that travelled to Mexico to deepen trade and economic cooperation.

Kitchener-Conestoga MP Tim Louis, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canada-U.S. Relations Dominic LeBlanc, helped lead the mission and participated in discussions aimed at strengthening supply chains, expanding export opportunities, and building reliable international partnerships.

The mission brought together more than 250 Canadian companies and organizations. Nearly 400 business leaders participated in more than 1,900 business-to-business meetings, resulting in over 20 contracts and memoranda of understanding.

SoilOptix, recognized for its precision agriculture technology, showcased Tavistock's strength in agricultural innovation during meetings focused on trade expansion and long-term economic cooperation.

Paul Raymer is the company's President and CEO, and once Mexico's trip was over, he headed to Brazil for another opportunity.

"We've been very fortunate to have been invited. Global Affairs extends an invite to what they call candidate companies. I don't know how we got on this list, but we did, but it didn't mean we were in. We had to

apply and tell our story, and ever since we have been getting these invites, we have been getting in since 2024."

There has also been a lot of focus in South Asia, and SoilOptix has attended other trade events in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and Australia. Raymer said the Canadian government is providing opportunities for Canadian companies to grow.

"One thing I will say is they do a standup job. We should have a great deal of pride in what the Trade Commission Service does to be able to support companies like ours to help with getting boots on the ground with in-person engagement with prospective companies."

He appreciated the level of effort the federal government put into setting up conversations with prospective clients, even though his product is an expensive one.

"The big thing is with all these countries, aside from Australia, is the economic factor and that's always been a bit of a wait. What was really surprising to me in Mexico was the level of appetite there was unbelievable."

Raymer explained the government set up meetings for him on other trade missions, but sometimes the potential customers were no-shows.

"A dozen meetings were scheduled for us in Mexico and every one of them showed up. Every one of them had a high level of interest and were all well-qualified companies to have conversations with."

SoilOptix sells soil mapping technolo-

gy and software that uses gamma radiation-based sensor data.

Raymer said he and other participating companies sit down with government officials once a trade mission is over to provide input during question-and-answer sessions.

"The feedback is very important to them and within six months they are sending out a survey looking for traction. It is important to them to show they aren't just waving money around. They are trying to measure the success of each trip."

Along with being an MP, Louis is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs for Canada/US Trade. Raymer said Louis took a great interest in his product and was very supportive.

"He sat down with me and wanted to learn more and his staffer told him he had 10 minutes. He asked what he had after our meeting and was told his break. We ended up talking for ten minutes. He wanted to learn more about us and although he doesn't have a background in agriculture, he's been getting more involved in showcasing the sector."

The MP also participated in one of Raymer's meetings with a potential buyer

"Participating in national trade discussions allows me to advocate directly for local businesses and ensure they have access to new and growing markets," Louis said. "This mission highlights our region's strength in agricultural innovation, with local companies continuing to extend their reach well beyond Canada's borders."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Kitchener-Conestoga MP Tim Louis, left, poses with SoilOptix President and CEO Paul Raymer on a recent trade mission to Mexico.



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FCC to support producers as fertilizer market uncertainty grows

FARM CREDIT CANADA

Echo Contributor

As conflict in the Middle East heightens concerns about the rising cost of inputs, Farm Credit Canada (FCC) is expanding its trade disruption customer support program to help agribusinesses, farm operators and food processors affected by rising fertilizer costs and energy prices.

FCC president and CEO Justine Hendricks said rising global tensions can leave producers wondering how it may affect the inputs they rely on.

“While we cannot control those events, we can ensure producers have the financial flexibility and support they need to navigate uncertainty,” said Hendricks. “FCC is ready to help producers keep their operations moving forward.”

Originally introduced in response to trade tariffs affecting Canadian agriculture, this FCC program will now also offer support to help producers and agribusinesses manage financial pressures caused by unexpected market

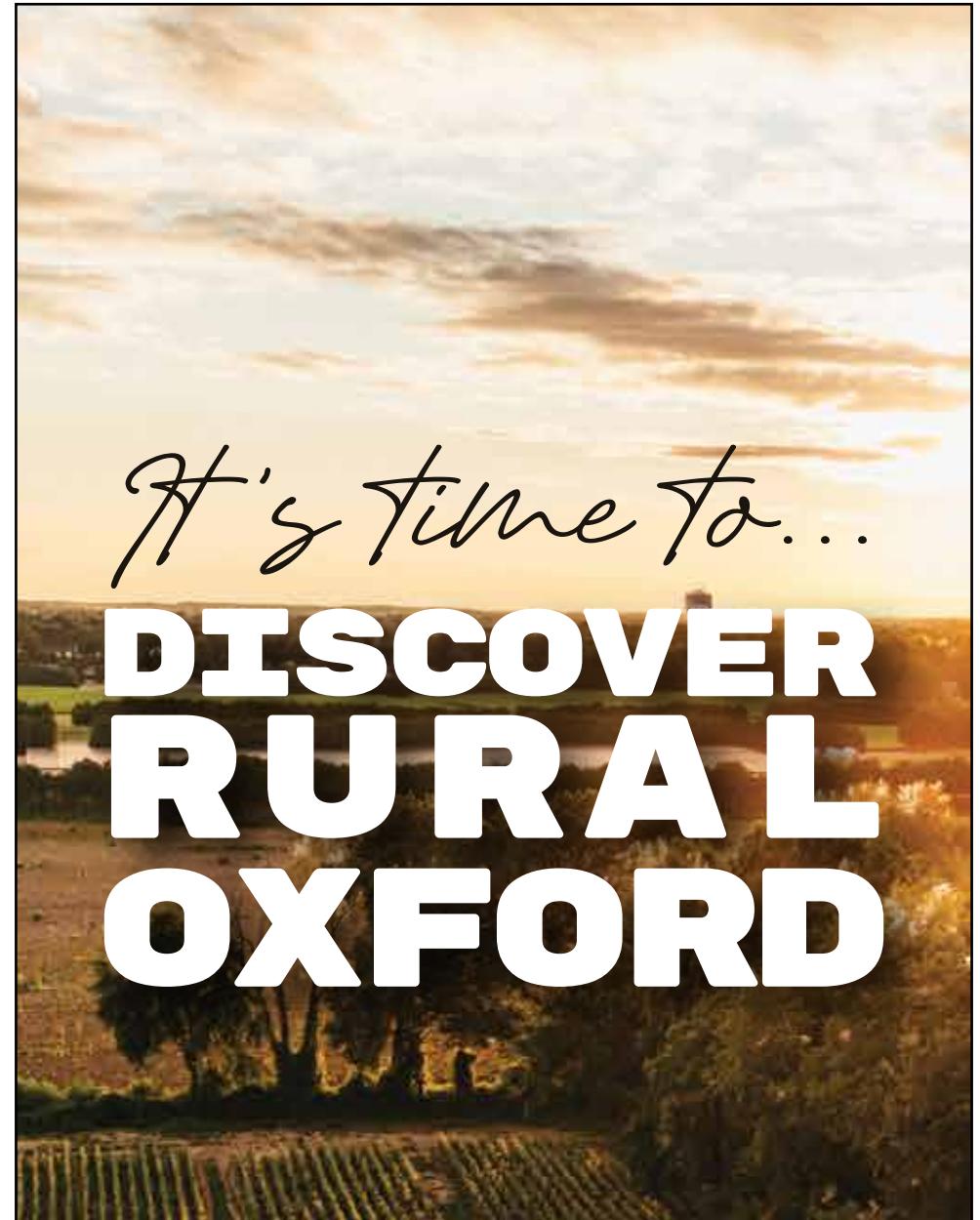
shocks.

Global urea prices have already risen amid concerns about potential supply disruptions from a region that plays a major role in global nitrogen fertilizer exports.

Through the trade disruption customer support program, FCC is offering relief for existing customers and new clients who meet lending criteria. The program offerings include access to an additional credit line of up to \$500,000, new term loans and the option for existing FCC customers to defer principal payments for up to 12 months on existing loans.

FCC said it will continue to work with industry partners to ensure that Canadian agriculture and food businesses can navigate changing market conditions and keep the industry moving forward despite uncertainty.

Customers and noncustomers who are interested in finding out more may contact their local FCC office or call 1-800-387-3232 to discuss their individual situation. Lending due diligence will be carried out on all applications.



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Oversupply and trade issues drive down dry bean prices for Ontario growers

AMANDA NELSON

Echo Contributor

The 2026 Ontario Bean Growers annual general meeting was held in Stratford last month, where dry bean growers from across the region came together to discuss growing concerns around exports, particularly trade, transportation and domestic demand.

Alvin Klassen of Dry Bean World outlined current challenges as Canada continues to navigate overproduction of black beans and ongoing tariff changes that are limiting trade and creating uncertainty for growers.

“In the last five years, we’ve experienced several severe ups and downs in commercial markets related to supply and demand, with the influence of producer and dealer pricing,” said Klassen.

Despite steady global demand for dry beans, many growers are finding it harder to turn a profit.

Prices across North America have dropped sharply in recent years — in some cases by nearly half — while input costs such as fuel and fertilizer have remained high.

“Throughout North America, we are now sitting where bean prices are half of what they were three

years ago, and the cost of production hasn’t gone down at all,” said Klassen. “In fact, seed pricing hasn’t gone down, and it’s making it very difficult to sustain production.”

The issue, Klassen said, comes down to supply and demand. A strong harvest has left a surplus of beans in storage — known in the industry as “carryover” — giving buyers less incentive to pay higher prices.

At the same time, export challenges and limited processing options in Canada are making it harder for farmers to move their crops efficiently, adding further pressure to an already strained market.

Jeff English of Pulse Canada said the organization is working to increase domestic consumption through its “Love Canadian Beans” campaign, which aims to raise awareness that many beans sold in stores are grown in Canada and encourage more people to include them in their diets.

“It’s not about telling people how to eat, but showing them how beans can be incorporated into everyday foods we already know and love,” said English. “It’s about giving some familiarity to supporting what we see as a great, sustainably grown Canadian crop.”

English added that advancements in bean processing technology could also help grow the domestic market.

“Now that we have companies extracting proteins and starches from pulse crops, we should have an opportunity to put more protein into different foods — not necessarily calling them beans, but using them as a high-protein ingredient,” he said.

Bill Rosenberg, parliamentary assistant to the minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness, also addressed growers, highlighting the significant role Ontario’s bean producers play in the province’s agri-food sector.

“Our agri-food sector now generates around \$52 billion in annual GDP,” he said. “This is why Ontario is known around the world for safe, nutritious and delicious food.”

“Eighty to 90 per cent of the beans grown here in Ontario are exported around the world, and that is something to be proud of,” he added.

Overall, the message to growers was clear: while global demand is growing, the industry must navigate trade instability, supply chain risks and the need to build stronger domestic markets to remain competitive.

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Buckthorn: A prickly problem

JASON RAMSAY-BROWN

Echo Contributor

In the late 19th century, Ontario farmers thought fondly of common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), a small, shrubby tree brought here from its native range in Europe and Asia.

It grows quickly, forming dense thickets that make excellent windbreaks and hedgerows. As an added benefit, it was considered medicine for various conditions including constipation and rheumatism. As farming spread throughout Ontario, so did buckthorn, framing fields throughout the province.

In the 21st century, buckthorn is known as one of the most widespread and troublesome plants on the landscape. Able to thrive in sun or shade and a wide range of soils, it's now found in woodlots, hydro corridors and along roadsides and riverbanks across all of southern Ontario. Whether you're driving a sideroad or wandering your local trails, there's likely a buckthorn in sight both ahead and behind you.

The problems with buckthorn are plentiful. Classified as a noxious weed under Ontario's Weed Control Act, our farmers are probably aware of the agricultural issues. Over winter, buckthorns host the soybean aphid (*Aphis glycines matsumura*), an invasive insect that feeds on the crop, reducing yields. It also hosts the fungi that causes oat crown rust (*Puccinia coronata corda. f. sp. avenae*) and barley crown rust (*Puccinia coronata var. hordei*), which cause serious damage to these grains. For these reasons alone, buckthorn is an often-used example when discussing the economic impacts of invasive species on industry, which the Invasive Species Centre recently estimated could be as high as \$3.6 billion each year in Ontario.

Buckthorn's impact on our natural world is more severe. As is the case with many plants introduced from abroad, buckthorn is of little ecological value to local insects and wildlife. Deer, for example, avoid browsing buckthorn in favour of just about anything else. This puts additional pressures on other food sources, reducing opportunities for those species to spread while more buckthorn fills the void. On the flip side, many of our most common birds, like American robins (*Turdus migratorius*) and cedar waxwings (*Bombicilla cedrorum*), will feed on buckthorn berries. Unfortunately, these provide them little nutrition and have a notable laxative effect. The birds fly away full but

poorly nourished and quickly pass the seeds elsewhere, furthering the spread of buckthorn.

Once buckthorn has taken root, it's likely to form dense thickets with alarming speed. The shade produced can severely limit nearby plants' access to sunlight. For all but their most shade-loving neighbours, this is likely a kiss of death.

Buckthorn's impact on soil is just as vicious. Its leaves are high in nitrogen, and when they decompose, they deliver that nitrogen to the soil. This may sound like a good thing, but it's important to understand that our native plants, species that could have been found here long before settlement, generally prefer much lower levels of nitrogen than those brought here from elsewhere. Buckthorn's impact on the soil makes it less suitable for natives and more friendly to exotic species. Where the spread of buckthorn leads, other species of questionable ecological value follow.

Public lands, benefit from large-scale solutions and the experience of practiced professionals. Private lands are a different beast. Most of us may not even recognize buckthorn to see it, let alone understand how best to battle this scourge.

Buckthorn is a tall understory shrub with multiple stems that can eventually reach the heights of a small tree, some six to eight metres. Its grey-brown bark is often cracked or flaky and dotted with small spots called lenticels. Leaves are egg-shaped with jagged edges and veins that curve towards the tip. You'd think its characteristic thorns would be the telltale sign, but there's a more distinctive trait: look just beneath the bark for a layer of orange tissue called the cambium. Any of the popular plant-identification apps should prove reliable in confirming identification.

Strategies for removal depend on size. The Ontario Invasive Plant Council offers a comprehensive Best Management Practices document on their website, ontarioinvasiveplants.ca, which is full of excellent advice.

Seedlings and small plants are easy to pull by hand. Be sure to get as much of the root as possible and tamp down the disturbed soil after. Saplings will likely require use of a weed-pulling tool as the roots hold soil firmly. Removed materials are best stashed in a sealed bin or contractor bag for a year before disposal. When that's not possible, hang the plant upside-down from a nearby branch with its roots



(JASON RAMSAY-BROWN PHOTO)

Common buckthorn is known as one of the most troublesome plants in the landscape, causing as much as \$3.6 billion in damage to Ontario's agricultural industry.

exposed to sunlight.

Significant challenges come when you're dealing with mature buckthorn. The most common approach is to cut it down close to soil level. Girdling can work but is not nearly as effective. With either approach, be prepared to manage resprouts for up to three years. Stumps can be tarped over to minimize resprouting.

Making the best use of your time is key to long-term success. Removing a dozen trees is a great start, but preventing three dozen from spreading their seeds may be an even greater victory. Prioritize the removal of females before they start fruiting in July. Lob off all branches in reach while waiting for girdling to do its job.

The next two years are critical. Buckthorn can produce a huge number of seeds, which stay viable for many years after they fall. Expect those to sprout. The best defense is to introduce competition by planting natives. An outstanding choice is black elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) which has leaf-out and leaf-fall timing similar to buckthorn. Another suitable choice might be northern spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) which is fast-growing and plentiful around these parts. Look for local native plant sales and nurseries to source these and other suitable choices. If planting isn't an option, consider mulching or tarping the exposed soil to help suppress that next generation of buckthorn.





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Ontario soybean farmers face price pressure as China shifts buying and Brazil ramps up production

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Echo Contributor

Ontario soybean farmers are watching global trade negotiations closely as uncertainty around exports — particularly to China — adds to price pressure in a market already facing strong global crop supplies.

Brazil is expected to have a record

soybean harvest in 2026, a development that analysts say will weigh on prices worldwide.

“There’s forecast to be record production in Brazil, and when there’s strong production, that has downward pressure on price,” said Brian Innes, executive director of Soy Canada. “That’s the first thing to watch for prices in 2026. The second is what happens

globally with geopolitics and tariffs.”

Innes said changes in trade relations between major economies — especially the United States and China — can have a direct impact on the prices Canadian farmers receive.

“Due to the Trump administration, tariffs on soybeans have changed,” he said. “One thing to watch for 2026 is how the situation between the U.S. and China evolves, and how the situation between Canada and China evolves. That can have an impact on price if tariffs change.”

More than 70 per cent of Ontario’s soybean crop is exported, with prices shaped by global demand, particularly from China. While China historically sourced much of its soybeans from the United States, it is increasingly turning to Brazil due to generally lower prices.

The Canadian and U.S. soybean markets are also closely linked through cross-border trade and processing, which could impact prices for Canadian farmers.

“Products flow back and forth across the border,” said Innes. “For example, Ontario soybeans are shipped to Michigan, processed into soybean meal, and then shipped back into Ontario. Soybean meal and soybean oil trade back and forth across the border, and that’s

why prices are very linked.”

Soybeans are priced on global benchmarks — particularly U.S. futures markets — meaning Canadian prices move in step with broader world trends.

“The price that Ontario farmers see is based on what conditions Canada faces when exporting to the world, including China,” said Innes. “In the past, the difference between Michigan and Ontario was largely tied to exchange rates, but now, with global trade disruptions, Canada and the U.S. face different tariffs and different market conditions.”

Despite growing competition from lower-cost producers, Innes said Ontario remains well positioned as a high-quality soybean supplier.

Ontario is a global leader in identity-preserved and food-grade soybeans, a niche market that allows farmers to compete on quality rather than volume alone.

“We’re living in a time of unprecedented global uncertainty, and if market conditions change for Canadian soybean exports, that will have an impact on price,” said Innes. “But Canadian soybeans have been flowing under strong export conditions for some time, and that has meant strong demand for Ontario soybeans.”

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Local agriculture is not just an industry, it's the backbone of our communities

GALEN SIMMONS

Echo Contributor

There are few better places to live and work than rural southwestern Ontario when it comes to access to local food.

In our communities, fresh meat, eggs, milk, produce and grains are not abstract products shipped in from far away. They are grown, raised and harvested by our neighbours. They are the result of generations of knowledge, hard work and stewardship on the farms that surround us.

That kind of proximity to our food system is something many people elsewhere in the world and in our country no longer have, and it is worth recognizing and protecting.

Local agriculture feeds our families, but it also does much more than that.

Farmers help drive the local economy by supporting local businesses – equipment dealers, feed mills, veterinarians, seed suppliers, processors, truckers, retailers and countless other small businesses. They sponsor local sports teams, donate to community fundraisers, volunteer with service clubs, support fairs and 4-H, and consistently show up whenever their communities need them.

In many ways, the strength of our rural communities is inseparable from the strength of the farm families who live and work among us.

That's why supporting local agriculture cannot be limited to a slogan or a feel-good message during planting and harvest season. It has to mean something real.

It has to mean understanding the pressures farmers face every day, from fluctuating commodity prices, high input costs and uncertain economic conditions to labour shortages, shifting government policy, severe weather, climate change, pests, disease and the simple reality that much of what determines a farm's success is outside a farmer's control.

It has to mean recognizing farming is not just a lifestyle, but a business built on slim margins, long hours and enormous risk.

And it should also mean giving farmers the support they need not only economically, but personally. As we highlight in the farm edition included as a separate section in this edition of the newspaper, the stress farmers carry is real, and so is the need to stand behind them when times are tough.

CONTINUED TO PAGE B-10

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Breaking barriers: Women in Canadian agriculture

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Women play a critical role in Canadian agriculture but also face significant participation barriers.

Lack of resources and lack of recognition lead to under-representation among farm operators and in leadership roles within agriculture businesses and organizations. The growing skills gap across the agriculture sector makes it imperative to grow gender equity and lift women's participation in all aspects of farming.

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) estimates that achieving revenue equity—with female farm operators earning on average revenues in line with male farm operators—would add an additional \$5 billion to agriculture's GDP contribution. Achieving gender parity in the number of farm operators would magnify these economic benefits.

Recognizing the existing contributions of women could attract more women to the industry, which itself is a function of elevating the status of women's contributions equal to men's. FCC estimates that almost 88,000 additional female farm operators will need to be counted to achieve gender parity by 2026, 75 per cent are already farming but unrecognized as operators, and 25 per cent of which will need to be new entrants.

In the 30-year period spanning 1991 to 2021, the percentage of female farm operators in Canada increased from 25.7 per cent to 30.4 per cent. This upward trend is expected to continue, with the proportion of female farm operators expected to reach 31.1 per cent in 2026.

While encouraging, it's important to note that this trend is largely explained by men leaving the industry, not by more women joining. Farm consolidations and an aging farm population have reduced the total number of farm operators across Canada over time, with the number of men falling faster than the number of women.

While the proportion of women farmers has been

steadily on the rise, the actual number of women in farming has not been growing by much. In fact, between 2016 and 2021 the number of female farm operators grew for the first time since 1991, but only by 2.5 per cent – translating to less than 2,000 additional farm operators. Women are also still less likely than men to be the sole decision-maker on the farm.

Female farm operators face very different economic circumstances than male farm operators. Female operators tend to have smaller operations and lower farm incomes. The median farm operating revenue bracket is the same for both men and women at \$50,000 to \$99,999. But approximately 58.6 per cent of female farm operators work on farms that reported less than \$100,000 in revenues, compared to 51.1 per cent of male farm operators, based on the most recent census data from 2021. Conversely, only 17.9 per cent of female farm operators were employed on farms with revenues of \$500,000 or more, compared to 21.9 per cent of their male counterparts. Women have gained some ground in recent years in high value markets for products like beef, poultry and eggs. Men continue to dominate the grains and oilseeds market.

In the fall of 2024, FCC interviewed women working in Canada's agriculture sector to learn about their experiences. Overall, these producers felt that things are slowly changing for the better. Yet women still face barriers to full participation in farming.

The public still expects farmers to be male. Stereotypically, in many farm families the man is labelled as the farmer, while the woman is labelled a farm wife. Girls growing up in farm families may not feel encouraged from participating in the more operational aspects of farming.

This early socialization can shape how women perceive their roles on the farm, and their confidence in engaging in all aspects of farming as adults. Women also tend to be expected to take on more household and childrearing responsibilities and often provide economic stability for their families through off-farm employment, making it more difficult to engage in production work.

Women reported that they often feel like they must prove that they are as knowledgeable, skilled and capable as their male counterparts, and often feel judged to be less competent because of their gender. And that non-production roles dominated by women like accountant, or finance manager are often deemed not as important as operational roles that tend to be male dominated.

Men are more likely to inherit the farm over women, as tradition dictates that these resources be passed from fathers to sons. Women are often excluded from succession planning, and in large part are still expected to marry into farm families if they want to participate in farming.

Numerous aspects of farming were not designed with women in mind. For example, most farm equipment has been tailored to the male physique, and these design limitations can make it more difficult for women to engage in the physical side of farming.

Many women shared that their views on their own potential were shaped by what they saw represented as they grew up, which typically was men as decision makers on the farm, and women in supportive roles. A lack of representation of female leadership in agriculture can make it difficult for younger women to feel confident that they can take on leadership roles.

Women in farming are more isolated than their male counterparts and have less access to networking, mentorship and support. As agriculture continues to be a male-dominated industry, most executive and board positions within agriculture continue to be held by men. Women generally have less access to a network of like-minded peers sharing similar struggles who they can lean on for support and advice and often have the experience of being the only woman in the room.

This can be both challenging and intimidating. Women also face barriers to attending in-person networking events, as they are often juggling childcare and off-farm work.

The labour needs of Canada's agriculture sector are changing.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 11



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Local farms add to communities

CONTINUED FROM B-7

If we value fresh local food, vibrant rural communities and a strong local economy, then we must value the people who make all of that possible.

So, while you're reading about farmers and the issues they face both close to home and further afield, let's remember and be grateful we live where local food is abundant and close at hand. Local farms keep money circulating in the local economy and the farmers who work day and night to keep those farms running support community life far beyond the farm gate.

Agriculture is central to the identity of our local communities and farmers face real pressures that deserve public understanding and support. Supporting farmers means buying local when possible, advocating for fair policy and recognizing their broader contribution to community life.

After you're done reading this week's paper, go ahead and thank a farmer, buy something they grew, raised or produced, and pay just a little more attention to all the things, large and small, farmers do for our communities.

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Number of women in farming stagnant

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

In this era of digital agriculture and data-driven decision-making, there is a growing need for highly skilled farm labour. Reflecting this need, there has been an overall upward trend in educational attainment in the agriculture labour force in recent years with a declining number of workers having no formal qualifications, and an increasing number of workers with college and university degrees.

This trend is even more pronounced for women, who are more likely to be highly educated than their male counterparts. In 2021, nearly one-quarter of female farm operators possessed at least a bachelor's degree, compared to only 14.5 per cent of male farm operators.

The proportion of female farm operators without any formal education was only 9.3 per cent, notably lower than the 18.2 per cent observed among male farm operators.

The current gap in educational attainment between female and male farm operators is greatest for operators aged 30 to 39. Within this age cohort, 36 per cent of women have a university education, compared to only 17 per cent of men.

A high level of educational attainment makes it easier for women to take advantage of new tools and technologies of farming as they emerge. Many of these innovations are making it easier to overcome some of the physical and social barriers that women in agriculture have faced in the past.

A growing number of female farm operators are adopting new production technologies—things like automatic guidance steering and GIS. These tools can make it easier for women to achieve work-life balance. Women who are highly educated are also well positioned to be thought leaders and champions of the agriculture industry, playing a leadership role

beyond the farm level.

Women working in agriculture also continue to demonstrate a strong entrepreneurial spirit, leveraging their skills and expertise to enhance the value of what they produce. Women have been driving the emerging trend of direct-to-consumer sales of farm goods, with farms run exclusively or jointly by female operators being much more likely to adopt this marketing strategy. There are also a growing number of women working on farms producing organic goods and using sustainable energy sources and technologies. Women are also carving out space for themselves in growing niche markets, like sheep and goat production.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to achieve gender equity in Canadian agriculture. Currently the industry falls behind wholesale and retail, finance, education, health care and several other industries in terms of women's participation. Women in agriculture today are highly educated and driven, with strong business acumen. They are well equipped to foster innovation and accelerate new methods, tools, and technologies on the farm. At a time when productivity growth in Canadian agriculture is stagnating, leveraging their skills and entrepreneurial spirit will reap significant economic benefits.

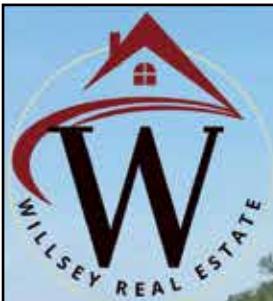
Here are some potential strategies to consider:

- Increase the visibility of women in agriculture. Recognizing the important work that women are already doing on farms and in boardrooms across Canada is critical.
- Enhance mentorship and networking opportunities. This will help to reduce isolation and build community for women navigating the agriculture and food space. Programs like AgriMentor, that

pair new and established women farmers with experienced mentors, and events like Advancing Women Conferences, can foster useful connections for women, helping to address time and cost barriers women often face when engaging in networking. Virtual initiatives can also help to make networking more accessible. The National Women in Agriculture and Agri-Food Network project is one example of a growing network that connects women in farming through both in-person and virtual initiatives.

- Ensure that women have equal opportunity to take on leadership roles. This requires not only reducing gender bias in promotion and hiring, but also ensuring women are supported in stepping into leadership roles when the opportunity arises, through access to things like flexible work arrangements and childcare accommodations.
- Improve access to resources. Women have historically been excluded from succession planning and equal access to land and capital. Programs that support women in accessing the resources they need to start their farm businesses are essential moving forward. FCC's Women Entrepreneur Program is one example of this. A broader cultural shift toward including women in succession planning is also needed to break this inter-generational cycle of exclusion. We are slowly seeing progress in this area, with more women being involved in farm transition planning.

Embracing the strengths and potential of women in agriculture can unlock billions of dollars in economic benefits for the agriculture sector. Achieving gender equity can drive innovation, improve productivity, and foster sustainability, leading to a more resilient and prosperous agricultural industry.



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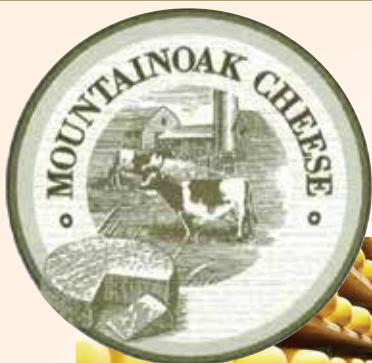


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Where's the Canadian beef?

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Finding the best cuts of Ontario beef in grocery stores has become a challenge recently, although Australian and now New Zealand cows seem to have taken over a good chunk of the market, and at a lower price.

"Unlike the rest of Canada, Ontario is a net importer of beef to meet the demand of our domestic consumers," explained Beef Farmers of Ontario President Jason Leblond, who has been on the organization's board for 8 years.

"Since before I started, we have been trying to increase the herd size to meet the demand for our feed lot sector."

The biggest reason why the beef industry isn't able to increase its capacity is the cost of production, something Leblond said makes it difficult for new players to get involved in.

"The cost of land, input costs, and we have strong competition from imported beef and even from other protein sources. We are always working hard to meet consumer demand to the best of our ability," added Leblond.

"For the cow/calf producers, it might be capital investment, it could be new entrants trying to get their feet under them to get additional cows. The cost of replacement

cattle is near the highest they have ever been."

Leblond said the cost of purchasing a cow is nearly \$2,000 more this year compared to about three years ago. He added everything needed to produce cows costs more.

"The price of diesel fuel, tractors and other equipment has increased substantially. But we are starting to see numbers where we are maybe more so in the black than what we are so used to seeing in the red all the time."

Leblond has 35 cattle on his farm and admitted he can't quit his day job. He added there may be an increase in farmers holding onto female cows for breeding purposes of about two per cent, something that will help the industry down the road.

"There are some good signs and some hope and we hope those signs keep going in the right direction for the next two or three years."

The Beef Farmers of Ontario are actively lobbying the provincial government to create improved loan guarantee programs to help producers purchase breeders.

"The government is the guarantor for loans given by the private sector to producers to purchase the breeding stock which gets more cattle into the food chain. The breeding process can take up to three years to reach the processing stage for those fantastic Ontario steaks," explained Leblond.

CONTINUED TO PAGEB-14

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We are writing this letter to express our sincerest gratitude for everyone's incredible support for our 2025 Poppy Campaign at the Woodstock Royal Canadian Legion Branch 55.

'Thank You' to all of our Volunteers, our Army Cadets, the Navy Club and Navy Cadets, the Woodstock Fire Department. Your willingness to donate your time and energy has made a significant impact on our community.

We would also like to thank Upper Thames Brewing, Sobey's, Foodland, Dee-Lights Bakery, Pizza Depot, and the Community for your donations this past year. Your generosity and dedication do not go unnoticed.

We were able to raise 35,348.43 for our Veteran's and their families.

We are truly proud to work alongside wonderful people in this community and hope to keep this support going for years to come. We cannot thank you enough for your commitment to making a difference in our Veteran's lives.

Sincerely,
Woodstock Royal Canadian Legion
Branch 55

Teresa Van Raay begins third term with Ontario Federation of Agriculture

DAN ROLPH

Echo Contributor

Teresa Van Raay is looking ahead to three more years of advocacy on behalf of the province's farmers.

Van Raay, a Dashwood native, was re-elected as an Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) director-at-large in November 2025, beginning her third three-year term with the organization.

Before she was first elected to serve in the OFA, Van Raay was a director with Ontario Pork for 14 years—an experience she described as eye-opening as she got to hear about the issues that farmers in the industry were facing.

"I realized how many more issues there are," she said. "When you look at taking on the diversity of concerns in all Ontario, it's daunting."

Van Raay said some of the most prominent issues facing farmers in Ontario include trade and land use, which she noted is vital to the future of growing food in Canada.

"Once land is asphalted or cemented over, you're not going to grow too much," she said. "Getting the word out about how important it is for Canadians to grow our own food, that's one of my biggest goals."

"The decisions made today affect our futures, and our next generation of farmers," she added.

When asked why she decided to seek a third term with the federation, Van Raay was clear that there's still work to do when it comes to advocating on behalf of Ontario's farmers.

"We're not done yet," she said. "It's a big portfolio, but the people in our industry who are elected to do this, all the ones who I've met, are in the positions for the right reasons. They want to make it better for their industry and for the next generations, all because we understand the importance of growing food."

Van Raay said she's taking many lessons from her time as director-at-large so far as she looks ahead to at least three more years of representing farmers. She said networking remains one of the most vital parts of the work.

"One of the things that I love to do is put the right people together," she said. "That can make a difference."

Stepping outside the "agricultural bubble" is also important when speaking about issues facing farmers throughout Ontario, according to Van Raay, particularly with those not in the industry who live busy lives and may not be aware of those issues until they start seeing empty grocery store shelves.

"We are such a small population that we're not getting the news out there," she said. "If there comes a time that there's a shortage, then people are going to stand up and be aware. But it might be too late if we haven't realized the importance of food security in Canada."

Van Raay said the upcoming municipal elections scheduled for later this year are an important issue that has her attention. With OFA regularly organizing all-candidates meetings for elections, she said it's important to present the correct questions to those who could be making decisions in council chambers in the future, ensuring they understand their communities, particularly when it comes to land use.

"We don't want to be collateral damage because no one's thought about how a decision might affect the farmer," she said.

Ontario's recent announcement about the amalgamation of conservation authorities also has Van Raay's attention. Under the government's plan, the province's 36 authorities will be consolidated into nine, removing representation from lower-tier municipalities.

"That's a big deal," she said. "One of the things we were really pushing with OFA is to have agricultural representatives."

"From what we did see, that's not there. That's very important to our communities."

A topic that has been getting more attention, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has been mental health in the agricultural community—an issue that Van Raay said is close to her heart.

"It's just become okay in the last seven or eight years to talk about it at the farm level," she said. "When a farmer's having a bad day, you just can't take a week off. The



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Teresa Van Raay was re-elected as an Ontario Federation of Agriculture director-at-large in November 2025, starting another three-year term of advocating for Ontario's farmers. Pigs still have to be fed, or the crops still have to get planted."

Speaking to farmers who may be struggling with mental health, Van Raay said Ontario's Farmer Wellness Initiative and the Guardian Network are programs worth highlighting. The Farmer Wellness Initiative provides mental health counselling to Ontario's farmers, farm families and employees at no cost.

The Guardian Network is a program driven by volunteers who are trained to identify those struggling with their mental health in the agricultural community, and Van Raay said she'd personally completed the training to become a guardian in the network.

"It's a really good program," Van Raay said. "The more we talk about it, the more it's okay to talk about it."

With such a wide range of issues needing attention, Van Raay said OFA's supporting staff have made the expansive task manageable.

"It's a great team, and a really diversified team," she said.

With at least another three years ahead of her where she'll be advocating for Ontario's farmers, Van Raay said it's her love for her home that will keep her going.

"It's so important to have strong rural communities," she said. "I love where I live. I love my Ontario. But we can't keep coasting and think that somebody else is going to take up the baton."

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Cost of getting into the business or expanding creating major roadblock

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B-12

Many local, small-town butchers are not suffering from a shortage of beef, including the best cuts such as tenderloin, striploin or ribeye, mainly because they have a steady supply of local beef producers nearby. Leblond said part of his association's job is to tell the consumer where they can purchase Ontario beef. That includes a website at www.ontbeef.ca.

"It's like a product locator. So, your butcher shop could have a profile on the site, and when someone is looking for beef in Oxford or any other county, they would type that in, and stores would pop up."

The cost of imported beef from Australia, New Zealand and even Mexico is cheaper than their Ontario counterparts. Leblond attributes that to something simple – lower production costs.

"Australia has a few different ways of growing its beef. The product they bring here is grass-fed and lean, factory beef trim for ground beef and hamburger. Another version is short-fed, essentially an animal that is fed for 90 to 120 days. That gets it to AA quality beef."

Leblond added Australia is heavily invested in the Wagyu beef industry, but the majority of exports head to Japan or Korea, where it was originally bred. Leblond added most Canadian beef is graded AAA, and 40 per cent of the income from calves born on his

farm ends up in feed lots across Ontario. The rest is exported, mainly due to the demand for what's left.

"40 per cent of the value of that animal goes into the export market. The taste here is for striploin and T-bone steaks, roasts and ribs. There are so many other parts of that animal that end up in export markets to use everything and retain as much value from the product."

The federal government announced in January it was resuming beef exports to China after a years-long ban that had shut down a major overseas market, helping meet demand for cuts that are less popular domestically.

"For us in Ontario, an expanded market is a good thing, and more options for our processors is a good thing. We always treat these announcements with some degree of wait and see because it takes time for people to make purchases and for the product to get there."

Leblond said he doesn't want to lay any blame for the high cost of beef on anything in particular but did say more than 50 per cent of Canadian beef heads south to the United States.

"The USA is also a net importer of beef. We are in a global market, and a lot of factors are at play. I would love to get beef cheaper, but I also want to make sure everyone in our supply chain is making money."



Echo

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Local maple syrup producers rebound after shaky start to season

SAM LAWSON

Echo Contributor

Local maple syrup farms are ending the season on a high note despite inconsistent and unpredictable weather at the beginning of March.

Recent warm weather has caused the sap to flow, and temperatures dipping below freezing at night create the perfect atmosphere within the tree.

“That’s kind of what you want, but it needs to freeze — that’s important. If it doesn’t freeze then that’s the killer,” said Steven Hern of Hern Line Heritage Maple Products.

“During the season, you can go two or three days with the warm, and then it needs to freeze and the tree kind of resets and brings up more sap again.”

Hern lives on a century farm outside of Exeter and has made use of a wood lot on the property to make maple syrup for the past five years. He said he taps four hundred trees on the 12-acre woodlot in mid-February to mark the beginning of the maple syrup season.

Hern said the trees haven’t let him down this year.

“So far so good,” he said. “We’re right on track I think to make a good crop so, can’t complain at all.

“I’ve only been doing it for five years, I haven’t seen a bad season, really. I’m a

bit of a novice that way, as far as experience goes and long-term stuff.”

Hern Line Heritage Maple Products aims to produce 1.5 litres of maple syrup per tap. And for 400 tapped trees, that adds up to a total yield of 600 litres of syrup.

Hern said they have produced over 300 litres as of mid-March.

“I think, with the way the weather looks, we’ll get a few runs yet,” Hern said.

Over at Bayfield Maple, with a larger production established, they’re looking at a yield of roughly 2,650 litres for the season.

Owner Tom Genoch said his bush on Pavillion Road has about 2,800 taps. The production trucks in sap from an additional 1,000 taps on a property owned by Genoch’s mother-in-law, Dianne Brandon, on the north side of Bayfield.

Brandon said they had an uncertain start to the season but still expect to get a good crop.

“We were really worried because it got quite warm, but it was early enough in the season that the trees didn’t start to bud,” Brandon said.

Brandon is a long-seasoned syrup producer, having made maple syrup with her husband Brian for the past 21 years.

The business has stayed within the family with Brandon’s daughter, Cathy,



(SAMANTHA LAWSON PHOTO)

A maple syrup season filled with highs and lows hasn’t held producers back from a successful harvest. Tom and Cathy Genoch of Bayfield Maple stand with their four children, Joe, Alice, Charlotte and Seb.

and her husband, Tom, now carrying on the sweet tradition.

Bayfield Maple stocks their product on the shelves of numerous local businesses, including Shop Bike Coffee, and sells wholesale to Cait’s Cafe in Goderich to be used in the cafe’s food and drinks.

Whether it’s large-scale or small-scale, making maple syrup has its ups and downs and remains entirely dependent on the weather.

In the end, a few weather hiccups weren’t enough to sour the season. Thanks to a timely turn, local producers are set to enjoy a sweet spring harvest.

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Concerns about fertilizer availability amid turmoil in the Middle East

FARM CREDIT CANADA

Echo Contributor

It has been nearly a month since the U.S. and Israel launched their first missiles into Iran, and that conflict has current and potential economic implications.

These remain highly uncertain and potentially very widespread – oil and liquefied natural gas refineries are shuttered with the Strait of Hormuz paralyzed, bond yields have risen in sync with inflation concerns, and exchange rates are in a state of flux. There is no shortage of economic topics to explore.

Nitrogen is a vitally important nutrient; one of three macronutrients used in primary crop production. There are many different types of nitrogen fertilizer products, each of which requires different production facilities and, importantly, access to an energy source, typically natural gas. Urea, ammonium nitrate and anhydrous ammonia are the three most common nitrogen fertilizers produced globally.

Disruptions in major producing regions can upend global trade flows and prices. That was seen in 2022 with Russia's war against Ukraine; the halt of cheap Russian natural gas to European production facilities, as well as sanctions on Russian exports, choked off supply and caused prices to skyrocket. Collectively, the Middle Eastern countries have an even larger say in global availability of nitrogen fertilizers than Russia. On a nutrient basis, the region has historically accounted for 12 per cent of global production and nearly 25 per cent of global trade.

It's unlikely other suppliers will be in a position to fill this vacuum. In the European Union, a significant share of global ammonia production – a key input for urea – was lost in 2022 and a pipeline running through Ukraine has remained offline since the invasion.

Prior to the Iran strikes, the EU was still only operating at a reduced 75 per-

cent production capacity. The recent surge in natural gas prices could pressure European producers to further reduce that capacity. China continues to restrict fertilizer exports to meet domestic needs, with urea shipments largely paused until August this year. Before the strikes, it looked highly unlikely Beijing would reverse course on these policies before August. Now, it seems even less likely.

Markets have reacted to the potential threat to supply. After slowly creeping up all winter, U.S. urea futures shot up \$130 per tonne, nearly 30 per cent, in the first two days after the start of the bombing.

While Canada is a net exporter of nitrogen, some parts of the country still depend on imports to meet their needs. And, depending on the crop and region, there are different times of the season when more fertilizer is required. Obviously, spring planting is a prime consumption period. But in the east, the spring is also a time when winter wheat is typically top-dressed. Corn typically requires more in the early summer as well. And post-harvest, producers may opt to spread fertilizer before the winter freeze-up, in preparation for the next growing season.

As utilization changes month-to-month, so too does Canada's import volumes. The timing of imports is dictated by seasonal demand, strategic planning and preparing for the upcoming growing season and weather. Fertilizer movement typically peaks in April and May to support just-in-time delivery for seeding and summer topdressing.

A survey conducted by RealAgricultures in 2022 found that, by late March, 45 per cent of producers had their spring fertilizer needs already stored on farm. However, there was a significant regional split.

More than 50 per cent of producers in the Prairies had their fertilizer on farm, but only 17 per cent of Quebec producers and 10 per cent of Ontario producers

could say the same. In the Maritimes, the number was zero per cent. On the east coast, the situation will be extremely challenging as price is frequently determined when producers pick up product on the way to the field. Pre-buying at a set price is rare. Producers in eastern Canada simply do not have the same on-farm storage capabilities, making them more vulnerable to market conditions in the spring.

Now, despite the lack of on-farm storage, some inventory may be sitting with wholesalers and retailers. Statistics Canada's latest fertilizer inventory data for December provides insight into these inventory levels and here again we note a regional divergence. While urea inventories in the west are the highest levels they've been in a decade, in the east, they are at their lowest levels since 2017.

However, one reason stocks looked elevated is that many farmers chose not to pre-buy or apply fertilizer last fall. That meant less product was sold, leaving more fertilizer sitting in retail and wholesale storage heading into winter. It also sets up the possibility of stronger-than-normal demand at planting, at a time when global supply is already tight.

Any disruption to imports or shipping during this narrow window would create supply challenges and higher prices to support just-in-time delivery for seeding and summer top-dressing.

Given the aforementioned shipping bottlenecks, some fertilizer may not reach North America in time for spring planting. A shipment that would normally be loading in the Middle East today might not arrive to the farmer until May. This may force farmers to adjust application timing or reduce use.

Canadian prices mirror the trends in the U.S. futures market. Complicating matters for farmers, Canada still has a tariff on Russian fertilizer imports. These tariffs are adding approximately \$100 per metric tonne for Canadian producers compared to their U.S. counterparts.

Not all crops require the same amount of fertilizer. Pulses, for example, are nitrogen-fixing, meaning they do not require it. But others are more fertilizer intensive. In terms of cost for all fertilizer, not just nitrogen, and prior to this recent price movement, we estimated fertilizer would account for 20 to 25 per cent of the total cost of growing a crop in 2026.

Unlike 2022, when rising input costs were offset by strong commodity prices, 2026 is shaping up very differently. Farm Credit Canada is estimating a 40 per-cent increase in the cost of nitrogen would cut average Saskatchewan margins in half, from \$50 per acre to \$25 per acre for an average wheat and canola rotation. It would also lower average margins in Ontario from \$365 per acre to \$345 per acre for an average corn and soybean rotation. These margin estimates are provincial averages and exclude the cost of land which is much higher in Ontario than in Saskatchewan.

The margin estimates only account for the shock to the nitrogen price. They do not consider potential margin compression because of other fertilizer price increases, potential yield reduction resulting from less fertilizer being used or higher fuel prices. A prolonged conflict could disrupt regional fertilizer production, especially if natural gas supply – critical for nitrogen fertilizer production – continues to be limited out of the Strait of Hormuz. Unless the war is resolved quickly, expect global fertilizer supplies to tighten further and put additional pressure on global food production and prices.

Communication during turbulent times such as these is crucial. Farmers may want to contact their crop input retailers to confirm they'll have the tonnes they need this spring and work together on any backup plans which might include adjustments to crop mix, fertilizer rates and target yields. Early discussions with credit providers may be necessary as well should the need arise as seeding approaches.



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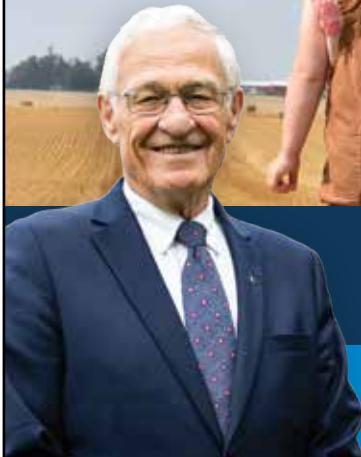
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Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health announce webinar

ALEX HUGILL

Echo Contributor

Maintaining mental resiliency in rural spaces amid loss is challenging.

On Tuesday, April 14, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. on ZOOM, the Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health will talk about the complicated relationship between grief and mental wellness among rural families.

The keynote speaker is Lauren Van Ewyk, a co-founder of the National Farmer Mental Health Alliance, registered social worker, and PhD student at the University of Guelph. Joining her are Diane Bergsma, co-founder of the Three Oaks Respite Cabin, and Ben Tobias-Murray, Farmland Access and Agricultural Planning Coordinator at Ontario Farmland Trust (OFT).

This session explores complicated grief as it shows up in rural life, where loss often affects not only families but also farms, businesses, and community roles.

Lauren will talk about generational loss, including the loss of people, land, health, and identity, and how these experiences are carried forward within rural families. The discussion will also examine how abrupt change can reshape roles and responsibilities and what that means for mental wellness over time.

There are many ways people have supported those who have experienced loss. Diane will introduce the Three Oaks Respite Cabin, a quiet place where farmers and first responders can receive support. Ben will share the Ontario Farmland's Trust activities to aid in farm succession planning and preserve Ontario's rich agriculture.

Anyone in the community is welcome to attend. To attend this event and future presentations, please register on the Gateway CERH website <https://www.gatewayruralhealth.ca/lectureseries>.

On Thursday, February 19, we attended the Southwestern Ontario Dairy Symposium in Woodstock.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Representatives from the Gateway CERH recently attended the Southwestern Ontario Dairy Symposium in Woodstock to promote its mental health and wellness programs for farmers.

Gateway CERH proudly participated as an exhibitor and delivered a brief presentation, discussing the Farmer's Safety and Well-Being Program.

We connected with farmers, dairy producers, industry leaders, and agricultural professionals throughout the event while attendees visited our booth to learn more about the organization's programs and research initiatives.

During the symposium, our president, Gwen Devereaux, delivered a brief presentation highlighting several key priorities, including:

- Promoting the Farmer's Safety and Well-Being Program and SHED Talks
- Advancing research that reflects real-world agricultural needs
- Collaborating with industry partners to strength-

en rural well-being

By participating in the Dairy Symposium, we continue to strengthen relationships within the agriculture sector and advance the program's mission to support the health, safety, and well-being of farmers in our rural communities.

For more information about Gateway CERH and its Farmer's Safety and Well-Being Program initiatives, please visit <https://www.gatewayruralhealth.ca/shed-talks>.

Founded in 2008, the organization is a not-for-profit rural health research organization run by a community-based volunteer board of directors. Gateway CERH's main mission is to improve the health and quality of life of rural residents through research, education, and communication.



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OFA VIEWPOINT

Start early, talk openly: why transition planning matters more than ever

GREG DIETRICH

Director, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

For many business owners, planning to transition what we've spent our lives building to the next generation of owners is something we know we need to do, but it's also something we tend to put off.

It's not hard to understand why as these are not simple conversations. They touch on money, legacy, fairness, identity and, ultimately, mortality. And it's even more complex for farm businesses, because here, we're also talking about generational history, legacy, and more often than not, the family home.

If there's one message I've taken to heart through my own experience and from hearing transition experts like Tom Deans, who was a keynote speaker at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture annual conference last fall, it's this: transition planning always takes longer than you think.

That's because you're not just transferring assets, you're also navigating family dynamics, tax implications, business struc-

tures and long-standing expectations. And as the size and value of farm businesses continues to grow, it's something that has to be handled carefully and thoughtfully.

According to Statistics Canada, the value of farmland and buildings in Ontario has surged by 68.4 per cent in just four years. The average value of an acre has climbed from \$12,341 in 2020 to \$20,782 in 2024.

This creates real challenges for transition planning. For the next generation of farmers, the cost of buying into the farm or taking it over can feel out of reach. Higher land values, tighter margins and increased financing costs all add pressure to a process that was already complex. It also raises difficult questions for families trying to balance what is fair, what is equal and what is financially viable.

Starting early makes all the difference. When you begin the process before there's pressure or urgency, you give yourself the time and space to work through those complexities, including how rising asset values affect the transition, and move forward deliberately.

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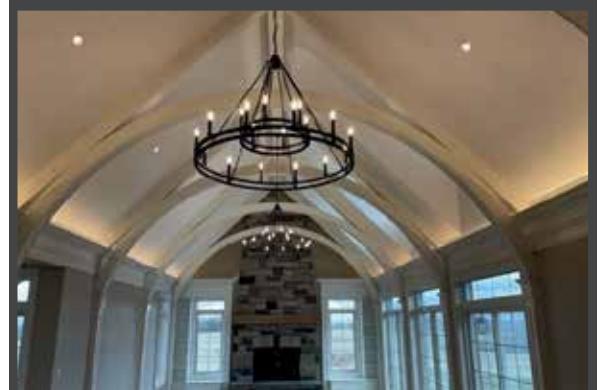
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Planning in advance reduces stress down the road

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Good transition planning means involving different experts like accountants, lawyers, financial advisors to make sure all the pieces fit together. As Tom Deans pointed out in his presentation last fall, too many families rely on silence and assumptions, rather than clear plans, and that silence can come at a real cost.

Even in families that get along well, these conversations can bring out strong emotions.

The younger generation has to genuinely want to farm and be ready to take on the responsibility. At the same time, the older generation has to be willing — and able — to let go. That's not always easy, especially when a lifetime of work and identity is tied up in the farm.

Planning ahead gives families the opportunity to talk through different scenarios, explore options and set clear expectations before decisions have to be made.

I farm with my family in southern Bruce County near Mildmay and one of the things I learned through our own transition process is that it's ongoing. My nieces and nephews are still young, but we're already thinking about how things might look like for them should they

choose to farm. Those early conversations about the future, roles and possibilities matter.

Farming itself is always evolving. The way I farm is different from how my parents farmed, and it will be different again for the next generation. Technology, production practices and business models continue to change. Transition planning needs to account for that; not just who will take over, but how the farm will continue to adapt and grow.

At its core, this is about more than assets. It's about people, relationships and the future of both the farm and the family.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution as every farm and every family are different, but there are some core concepts that apply to all businesses:

Start the conversations early. Revisit them often. Bring in trusted advisors. Be honest about goals, expectations and limitations. Recognize that a successful transition depends on communication and commitment from everyone involved. And the sooner you start, the better your chances of building a transition plan that works not just on paper, but in practice.

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