

St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1314

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A PERFECT WAY TO SPEND THE HOLIDAY (MURRAY GRANT PHOTO)
Many adults, children and even a dog took advantage of the warm weather on Victoria Day to enjoy the water and the sunshine at the Falls.

St. Marys residents honoured with Strong As Stone Awards

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Eight St. Marys residents were recognized for their selfless contributions to the community during the May 12 regular council meeting.

As part of the Town of St. Marys' Strong As Stone program, Mayor Al Strathdee and members of council presented framed certificates and bouquets of flowers to Bruce and Nancy White, Sydney Touzel, Anna Doupe, Nathan Brown, Julie Shackleton, and Marco and Louise D'Angelo.

"Annually, this program allows residents to acknowledge selfless deeds that enhance the quality of life within our community," Strathdee said before presenting each recipient with their award. "We extend our deepest gratitude to all those who dedicate their time, talents and energy to assist others and strengthen our community. Additionally, we wish to express our appreciation to everyone who takes the time to submit nominations.

"It's my pleasure to present our 2026 Strong As Stone recipients. Each nominee reflects the heart and soul of our town, stepping up in moments of need and showing what it means to care for one another. Volunteers like these are the very foundation that makes St. Marys Strong As Stone, inspiring us to believe in a brighter future, a more compassionate future, for everyone who calls our community home."

The program allows community members to nominate residents whose volunteer work and acts of kindness make St. Marys a better place to live.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

St. Marys approves TOARC funding agreement for West Quarry cleanup project

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

St. Marys council has approved a funding agreement with the Ontario Aggregate Resources Corporation (TOARC) as clean-up and rehabilitation work continues at the town's West Quarry site.

At its May 12 meeting, council approved the agreement, which will see TOARC contribute up to \$37,641 toward debris removal, site restoration and related rehabilitation work at the former industrial quarry site.

The agreement formalizes a partnership announced earlier this year between the town and TOARC aimed at cleaning up the former limestone quarry, improving safety and preparing the site for future passive recreational use.

"Originally, I told council there wouldn't be a funding agreement but then when we got into the logistics of the project, it just made more sense for the town to remain as the constructor, so the town is ... front-ending the costs and this is an agreement for them to

CONTINUED TO PAGE 8

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COMMUNITY

St. Marys residents honoured with Strong As Stone Awards

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Before each award was presented, Strathdee read a short description of the recipients' volunteer efforts and the reasons they were selected.

Bruce and Nancy White were recognized for sharing their culinary skills through local initiatives, including church suppers and fundraising meals like those prepared for Giving Tuesday. They have also supported the Nourish Market by creating healthy recipes using market produce and offering tastings to encourage residents to try nutritious foods.

"We really, really, really believe in the Nourish Market," Nancy White said. "It started very innocently, looking at people that were in need. Those people, believe it or not, are not that trusting. That's what I've learned. So, when they opened (the market) up to the entire community, that's when it started to have success."

"... People who are in need, when they come in, they look at the floor, they don't look at people around them, they quickly get what they need and leave. And because of food, they're now staying and talking, and that's been huge for us and we really enjoy it. So, thank you."

Sydney Touzel was honoured for raising awareness of intimate-partner violence and supporting Optimism Place in Stratford. Touzel planned, trained for and completed a more than 20-kilometre run on the six-year anniversary of a life-threatening attack she survived, raising funds and awareness while sharing her story through interviews and guest-speaking opportunities.

Anna Doupe, a cancer survivor and lead organizer of the St. Marys Terry Fox Run/Walk since 2018, was recognized for her work growing participation and fundraising for the annual event. In 2025 alone, the local run raised more than \$17,000. Doupe has also helped modernize the event by introducing cashless donation options and increasing its social-media presence.

Nathan Brown was recognized for volunteering his culinary talents at community events including the annual To St. Marys With Love supper and the Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser walks, where he prepared meals using Nourish Market ingredients. Brown also volunteers as a hockey coach and serves as president of St. Marys Minor



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE TOWN OF ST. MARYS)

Eight St. Marys residents were recognized with Strong As Stone Awards during the May 12 regular council meeting. Pictured are this year's recipients with Mayor Al Strathdee.

Soccer.

"It's really humbling to hear all the words for all the nominees tonight," Brown said, thanking Nancy and Bruce White for filling in at To St. Marys With Love when he couldn't cook the annual community meal. "... Nourish is one of my heartstrings as well with all the fresh food available to everyone."

"... The only thing I can leave with the group; do the best you can with what you have where you are. That's it."

Julie Shackleton was honoured for her wide-ranging volunteer efforts, including her role in helping inspire the addition of festive Christmas lights on the green bridge. Shackleton is also active with the St. Marys Kinette Club, delivers Meals on Wheels through the Friendship Centre, supports the Library Pantry and volunteers with the local Giving Tuesday committee.

"I'm beyond proud to accept this hon-

a great support in this community of volunteers. We wouldn't be where we are without them.

"I have to mention, too, town hall; they listen to our ideas and they make action on them, which certainly helps. And the Friendship Centre girls; there is nobody like them. That is vital in our community and I'm so glad we have that organization as well."

Marco and Louise D'Angelo were recognized for their work preparing nutritious meals for seniors at the Friendship Centre, donating produce from their community garden to the local food bank and pantry, and supporting charitable events including the United Way Coldest Night of the Year and Giving Tuesday.

"We're definitely honoured to be given this award," Marco D'Angelo said. "We're quite new to this town, we've been here five years, and if it wasn't for the Friendship Centre and our team, we never would have been so integrated with this town. So, we thank you for that."

"Everything we've done, we're very honoured to be in this town and do what we've accomplished so far."

After the individual presentations, the recipients gathered with Strathdee and council for a group photo.

The next call for Strong As Stone nominations is expected to begin in spring 2027, with details to be shared through local media, social media and the town's website.

our, but I have to speak on behalf of all the people who are behind me when I do these things," Shackleton said. "There's



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Getting ready for another season of paddling as Yak Shack will open soon

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Looking for something enjoyable to do this summer? Look no further than the north end of Milt Dunnell Field where locals and visitors can find the ever-popular Yak Shak.

There are six single-person kayaks with paddles available to rent for free for those hoping to paddle the Thames River and Trout Creek. There are approximately five kilometres of paddling routes to explore. There is also an accessible dock that makes it easier to enter and exit the kayak.

Reserve a kayak on ACTIVE.net and stop at the library about 15 minutes before the scheduled time. At the library, they will give paddlers a key, a lifejacket, a paddle and a safety kit. At that point, the kayak is ready to take out and enjoy. After arriving at the library to check in, paddlers must show their photo ID for staff to cross-reference their booking. This is mandatory so please remember to bring it along.

The borrowed items must be returned after the rental ends. The accessible dock has many features designed for easy access including a stable and secure platform, a kayak-launch assist mechanism, handrails and grab bars, and transfer benches that allows paddlers to move from a wheelchair or the dock to their kayak safely.

The Yak Shack is possible due to donations from the public and community organizations, allowing it to remain a free service for all of those wishing to get out on the water.

Thanks to a generous donation from Community Living St. Marys and Area, Andrea and Andrew Hodges, James Lapointe and a grant from the Federal Economic Development Agency of Southern Ontario, kayak rentals remain free for all of those wishing to get out on the water.

Town staff told the Independent the Yak Shack is expected to open for rentals as of May 21, after the accessible dock is reinstalled.



(GORD BARNETT PHOTO)

The Yak Shack is located in Milt Dunnell Field in Lions Park at the north end. There are six kayaks available to rent.

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COMMUNITY

Our second year of home upgrades are underway



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As I sit here typing out this editorial at the last minute before the paper goes to press – as I always seem to do – everything around me is a little chaotic.

We have contractors ripping out our upstairs bathroom so it can be cleaned of black mold – a lovely little surprise the previous homeowners neglected to inform us of – before it can be expanded and reconstructed into more of an ensuite bathroom.

In addition to redoing the bathroom, the same contractors will be redoing our flooring and subflooring upstairs. There are parts of the subflooring that have clearly rotted over the years and need to be shored up, ideally before I stick my foot through the floor in the middle of night.

The contractors will also be working to remove several sup-

port pillars upstairs that were installed, again by the previous owners, to support the roof long after they decided to turn two bedrooms into one without replacing the load-bearing wall with any other kind of support.

Again, that was something we didn't find out about until months after we purchased the home. An inspector told us at the time of the sale that the support posts would be fine for the short term, but it would be something we would need to deal with sooner than later.

At the same time as all of that, we are having our backyard redone. We're looking at establishing a firepit and seating area, a shallow deck

and outdoor dining space, and bother perimeter gardens and a keyhole garden for vegetables.

There are other stages to the plan – maybe a hot tub down the road – but this is the first phase, and we do have a bit of a quick deadline for this work. The plan is to have it done by the last weekend in June so we can host our wedding shower in the backyard. Luckily, the contractors we found are confident they can get it done before then.

Fingers crossed!

Finally – and potentially the most exciting part of all of this – we're getting central air conditioning installed today! Yes, we waited until it was unbear-

ably hot and we had lost access to our shower before booking an install, but luckily, we were able to get someone here right away thanks to a family connection – and we got a pretty good deal on it, to boot.

For us, especially when it comes to renovations, change seems to happen all at once. Though that does come with its fair share of chaos, it is chaos for the better and sooner than later we will be able to sit back and enjoy the fruit of our short-term inconveniences.

Oh yeah. I almost forgot. We're also planning a wedding for Sept. 5. I guess we'll just keep this chaos going for a little longer, then.

Bravo

We have 1 Bravo this week.

1) Bravo to the new owners of Foodland, Shauna and Josh Baldwin for putting the bench out front of the store. It is greatly appreciated.

Boo

We have no Boos this week.

*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.

Quote of the Week

"It's a crazy feeling, a lot of emotion. It was a war all series long and for it to end up being Game 7 in overtime. Sometimes it just takes one shot and coming across the line; I just thought there was a shot opportunity. Great to see it find the back of the net, and there's no better feeling than celebrating with your teammates after a win like that."

- Montreal Canadian Alex Newhook after scoring the OT goal in Game 7 that will take the Habs to the Eastern Conference Finals

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Overheard AT THE COFFEE SHOP

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The attendant at the gas pump asked if I wanted a receipt and I said no, I would rather forget this whole experience!

Wow look, a long weekend... and it's gone.

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others? Either email them to us at info@stmarys-independent.com with the title "Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519.284.0041 or drop by the office to let us know!

Sample event signals Stonetown Cheese's return to Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Stonetown Artisan Cheese had lots of samples available at Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe during a sample event on May 16. Every cheese offered was a hit with the customers.

EMILY STEWART
Independent Reporter

Cheese lovers could try locally made cheeses right in downtown St. Marys over the Victoria Day weekend.

Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe hosted a sample event featuring Stonetown Artisan Cheese products on May 16. Visitors to the store had a chance to try Stonetown's award-winning Gruyere-style cheese, Grand Trunk, as well as dill-flavoured cheese curds and other firm aged or flavoured cheeses such as Wildwood, Homecoming and Game Changer.

Jenn Stacey, owner of Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe, said foot traffic was down compared to other Saturdays in the store amid the stormy weather and the long weekend. Still, those who came in were happy to sample a variety of cheeses.

"Anyone that has been through has tried it and has purchased stuff," she said.

Stacey always aims to carry unique products not usually found at the grocery store. The collaboration is part of the Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe's mandate to include more locally made products as much as possible.

"The Cheese Shoppe itself is kind of in a transition of we want everything as close to home as possible for our customers," Stacey said. "Big box stores, they've got their own thing, right? We want to be small and carry stuff that other stores don't carry."

Rachel Dundas, office manager at Stonetown Artisan Cheese, is also happy about the return of Stonetown's cheeses to the shop.

"There's a lot of people in the Town of St. Marys that don't even know who we are and a different demographic might shop here than come to the farm, so this gets our cheese out there a little bit more," said Dundas. "Any kind of local support is amazing."



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STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



FRIENDSHIP CENTRE CHOIR

May 27 | PRC | 6:30 PM

Join The St. Marys Friendship Centre for a heartwarming evening of music, community, and sweet treats as the Friendship Centre Choir wraps up their season! Tickets are \$12 each. Pre-registration is required and available on a first-come, first-served basis through ActiveNet.

Tickets: townofstmarys.com/activenet

TOWN HALL STAIR RECONSTRUCTION

Town Hall's outdoor staircases will be undergoing construction starting the week of May 11. Access to the Town Hall service desk and public washroom will be closed for approximately six weeks. Services usually offered at Town Hall will be provided online, by phone or at other municipal facilities.

Learn more: townofstmarys.com/news



DOWNTOWN PARKING

The limit for on-street parking in the downtown core is 3 hours. Extended duration parking is available at one of the 4 municipal lots: Water St. N, Jones St. E, Opera House and Elgin St. E across from Canadian Tire (enter from Water St. or Wellington St.).

Learn more: townofstmarys.com/parking

CAR SEAT SAFETY

June 8 | Fire Hall | 9:30 - 11:30 AM

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Senior of the Week



We welcome your submissions for our weekly Senior of the Week. Please send a photo and a brief description to info@stmarysindependent.com and we will feature them in an upcoming issue.

If you would like to nominate someone for Senior of the Week, contact us at 519.284.0041 or info@stmarysindependent.com.

St. Marys awards architectural contract for next phase of 14 Church St. project

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

St. Marys council has awarded a more than \$118,000 architectural-services contract for the next stages of the town's planned multi-generational community hub at 14 Church St. N.

At its May 12 meeting, council awarded the contract for phases one and two of the project to John Rutledge Architecture for a total tender price of \$118,508 including taxes and a \$15,000 contingency. The contract covers architectural work related to the former Mercury Theatre building, which council previously approved as the future home of a community and cultural hub featuring flexible programming, meeting and community spaces.

"We had originally budgeted for one phase of architectural fees, but during the RFP process, we put out for Phase 1 and Phase 2, so this includes the repairs of the façade and the windows, as well as the interior design of the building," town facilities manager Ray Cousineau said.

While only Phase 1 funding had been approved in the 2026 capital budget, staff recommended council award both phases now after receiving what the report described as "advantageous pricing" from John Rutledge Architecture.

Fourteen bids were submitted through the request-for-proposals process, with John Rutledge Architecture receiving the highest evaluation score from a three-member staff review team. The successful proposal included a Phase 1 cost of roughly \$23,165 including HST and a total cost for both phases of approximately \$103,508 before the contingency amount was added.

"They were all very good firms to look through. It was very tough to grade (the proposals), but two staff members and myself graded these proposals and we settled

on John Rutledge Architecture for this project," Cousineau said.

In his report, Cousineau said staff believe the strong pricing is likely the result of Rutledge operating as a sole proprietor while using sub-consultants who are also sole proprietors. He added the proposal came in below the town's projected overall architectural budget for the project.

"In the budget I presented (to council) back in January, total architectural fees to get us to tender ready and contract admin was \$200,000, and project design was around \$150,000," town CAO Brent Kittmer said. "So, this is a savings of around \$40,000 compared to what a+LiNK (Architecture Inc.) was projecting."

Staff recommended moving ahead with both phases immediately for two primary reasons. First, doing so allows the town to lock in the favourable pricing. Second, it could allow the overall 14 Church St. project to become tender ready as early as 2027, something staff say would strengthen the town's position when applying for provincial and federal grant funding.

To fund both phases, council approved a variance of roughly \$93,212 from the town's capital reserve. The original 2026 budget included \$15,000 for facade design and window-replacement work.

The 14 Church St. project has been in development for several years and is envisioned as a multi-use community hub featuring flexible programming and gathering spaces for residents of all ages. Proposed uses for the building include library maker-space programming, meeting rooms, office and study space, sound studios, community programming areas and space for social-service agencies.

Council approved a master plan for the project in August 2025 with estimated total capital costs at the time sitting at just over \$4 million.

WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

1. What corporation is Canada's largest uranium supplier?
2. What major man-made waterway is in Egypt?
3. What is Drake's latest album (2026) called?
4. What does DEFCON stand for?
5. Who is Disney's tiny fairy introduced in 1953?
6. What type of dish is a Minestrone?
7. Billiard cloth on a pool table is commonly referred to as ____?
8. What celebrity launched a perfume called glow?
9. What are you to do if you happen to catch on fire?
10. What is the most dangerous level of Tornado?

This week's answers are found on pg. 23

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Wildwood Dragon Boat Challenge hits the water May 23



MICHELE IVANOUSKI
Thames River Paddling Club

Come feel the energy at our family-friendly day of paddling races, games, food and music at Wildwood Conservation Area May 23 with the Wildwood Dragon Boat Challenge.

Paddlers range from novice to top-tier levels with competitors ages ranging from 12-80 years old.

There will be a silent auction with some amazing donations to bid on including gift cards from garden centres and golf courses, numerous gift baskets and tools. Tantalizing treats from Joe's Diner's food truck will be available for purchase. Check out CPR and AED demonstrations from Andrew's Legacy with a chance to get a new legacy duck.

Proceeds go towards two non-profit groups, including the Thames River Paddling Club (TRPC), a volunteer-run or-

ganization offering dragon boating, kayaking, canoeing and outrigger canoeing which brings water sports to Wildwood Conservation Area. Funds raised will go towards new equipment and ongoing maintenance.

Their partners, Andrew's Legacy, is an organization led by the Stoddart family, which has taken the untimely death of their son, Andrew, and put their energy towards placing automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in public places.

At 15, Andrew passed away from a sudden cardiac arrest while playing soccer in Kintore. Funds will go towards setting up additional AEDs in our community, of which they have now placed over 70. Visit their website for more information or to donate at andrewslegacyforever.ca.

Organizers hope to see locals at Wildwood Conservation Area for the Wildwood Dragon Boat Challenge running from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 23.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Here is an update for those that have been curious about CJ the Bear and where his latest adventures have taken him. CJ has just arrived home from a wonderful trip to Jordan and Egypt. He even met a new bear friend. Now he is on his way to Portugal. Pictured above is CJ the Bear with his travel partner Nancy.

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<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">DOOR CRASHER 7MM LAMINATE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PAD ATTACHED FROM \$199 /SQFT</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">BUY IT TODAY... TAKE IT TODAY</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">VINYL STAIR TREADS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TREAD & RISER INCLUDED FROM \$49.99 EA</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">BUY IT TODAY... TAKE IT TODAY</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">VINYL ACCESSORIES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">T-CAP REDUCERS NOSING 1000'S IN STOCK</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">BUY IT TODAY... TAKE IT TODAY</p>
<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">7'X10' AREA RUGS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">100'S TO CHOOSE FROM STARTING FROM \$199</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">BUY IT TODAY... TAKE IT TODAY</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2'X9' ACOUSTIC WALL PANELS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">4 COLOURS TO CHOOSE FROM \$139 EA</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">BUY IT TODAY... TAKE IT TODAY</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">1"X6" SQUARE BASEBOARDS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">14 FOOT LENGTHS FROM \$149 /LINFT</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em;">BUY IT TODAY... TAKE IT TODAY</p>

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St. Marys approves TOARC funding agreement for West Quarry cleanup project

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

reimburse us,” town public works director Jed Kelly said.

“Typically, TOARC engages all the contractors, so they’re dealing with that all themselves, but this is like a one-off for them, so it’s a little bit different.”

According to Kelly’s report to council, the project includes removing industrial debris such as waste concrete and steel, clearing invasive species and unhealthy trees, regrading embankments and restoring the site with hydroseeding to create open greenspace.

The project will also include improved water access through the removal of sections of chain-link fencing, installation of scenic wood fencing and armour stone, relocation of memorial trees and the retention and fencing off of six large concrete pillars connected to the site’s industrial history.

Cleanup work at the site began earlier this month and is expected to be substantially complete by early to mid-June. Kelly noted in his report the project remained on schedule at the time of writing with no unforeseen issues identified.

“We are nearing the end of the concrete removals as of this morning (May 12),” Kelly said. “There’s a little bit more that we’re finding on the north end, so ... that kind of gives you a sense of where we’re at with the project.”

Speaking to the amount of industrial waste being removed as part of the cleanup, Kelly said the materials visible on the surface before the project began were about one-third of the industrial



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Town staff marked the start of the West Quarry cleanup project on April 27. Work is ongoing with industrial waste, debris and excess vegetation being removed daily.

waste at the site, the majority of which was hidden below the surface. As the cleanup work continues, Kelly said the town is discovering more and more from the town’s industrial past.

“We’re finding cables, old anchor bolts, various voids, just old tin. There’s an old boiler in there. There’s just all this industrial waste – it’s metals and things like that,” Kelly said. “And it’s hidden. You scrape that excavator and then something pops up. Even today, it was like, ‘Oh, there’s a roll of metal cable that was half an inch under the ground.’ So, we’re scraping virtually every inch, and I know that sounds excessive to some, but I think that’s what you need to do, and we are finding voids that we have to scrape out or fill, so there’s a lot of waste in there.”

In response, Coun. Jim Craigmile said

he was shocked by how much waste was actually buried under the surface at the West Quarry.

“It’s surprising to me that some of us as youngsters didn’t get impaled in there,” Craigmile laughed.

“Certainly, I was shocked when I walked the site,” Mayor Al Strathdee added. “We all talked about it being an industrial-waste site, but it certainly was dangerous in certain areas, and we were letting young families fish there. It was probably not the right thing to do, which reinforces in my mind that this project is the right thing to do.”

Under the funding agreement, TOARC will fund portions of the rehabilitation work directly related to debris removals, earthworks, hydroseeding, permitting and geotechnical engineering. The or-

ganization’s contribution forms part of a larger rehabilitation project with an estimated total cost of roughly \$115,585, including fencing, trail connections, landscaping and restoration work.

The town previously approved \$100,000 for the project in its 2026 capital budget. Kelly’s report notes the TOARC funding will help the town complete additional project elements this year, including protective fencing around the six large concrete pillars, scenic wood fencing near drop-off areas and new trail and sidewalk connections linking the quarry to the existing fishing platform.

As part of efforts to reduce project costs and environmental impacts, the town is sourcing materials locally. Clay for the site is being donated by a local developer, topsoil will be generated from screened compost material at the town landfill and removed concrete will be recycled for use in future municipal infrastructure projects.

The cleanup project follows more than a year of planning, public discussion and council debate over the future of the West Quarry property, including council’s recent decision to preserve and fence off six large concrete pillars tied to the site’s limestone-mining history rather than demolish them.

Once rehabilitation work is complete, the town intends for the site to function as an open greenspace for passive recreation while broader public consultation continues on the long-term future of the quarry lands.

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Eight-year-old Lenny Vergeer is heading to Kiwanis provincials

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Lenny Vergeer has loved music her whole life. Her mom, Kerry Vergeer, shared that she is always making up lyrics, sings to herself while colouring, makes videos and sings with her dad.

Lenny has been in musical theatre at the Stratford Dance Company for the last three seasons and has been taking lessons with Kate Promane, a local vocal coach for eight months. Her parents have noticed a big difference in confidence and vocal strength since she has been working with Promane.

All of this paid off as she won both of her categories with honours and distinction at the Stratford Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts at the end of April. Lenny came in first for Musical Theatre for her age group with the song, "Tomorrow," from Annie. She also took first for Popular Voice with "The 30th" by Billie Elish.

What's next for Lenny? With these wins, she has advanced to provincials in Kitchener June 8-13. The 10-and-under division is done virtually for provincials so Lenny had to record her previous songs along with one more in each category from Stratford with the help of Kiwanis.

Mia Masui from Stratford is a talented piano player and has been the musical support for Lenny for both

Stratford Kiwanis and her recording for the provincials. She also had Lyndon Promane accompanying her on guitar, who happily learned her song choices so he could support her.

Another highlight for Lenny this year was the chance to sing "O' Canada" at the Lincolns' Game 5 in the Western Conference Final. Someone had let team president Brandon Boyd know of her talent and he reached out to see if she would do it. She was so excited to do this and bravely stood in front of over 1,400 people in attendance who were rooting her on.

Kerry Vergeer said Lenny is very proud of herself to be advancing to provincials in her first year at Kiwanis. With the encouragement from her voice coach, family and friends, Lenny worked hard to get ready to perform.

"Lenny is a talented and driven student. It's always a fun time working with Lenny as her voice teacher," Kate Promane said. "She is positive and energetic and intuitive. I'm so proud of her dedication and how her hard work is paying off."

When asked what her favourite part of performing is, Lenny said she just loves to sing for the joy of it. She has a passion for many genres of music and will always be found singing to herself.

In May, Lenny will try out for a role in the production of Fiddler on the Roof put on by the Perth County Play-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Lenny Vergeer stands in front of the Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts sign where she won in both her categories, Musical Theatre and Popular Voice, advancing her to provincials.

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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured from left, Anna De Vries, David De Vries, Jay MacPherson and Angela MacPherson show the 100 per-cent olive-oil products that are now available for purchase at Purpour on Water Street.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Anna and David Devries' son, Lyn, in Italy, shaking the olives from the trees into the netting.

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

One never knows when life will take them in another direction and that is exactly what happened for David and Anna De Vries when they visited friends in Umbria, Italy, and fell in love with the area.

Upon returning to St. Marys, their home for the last seven years, their Italian friends reached out to them letting them know of a 45-acre olive-tree ranch for sale that has 1,200 olive trees. Anna De Vries, who is a homeopathic doctor, and David De Vries, who works in the organic and regenerative agriculture industry, saw this as an opportunity to continue their focus on the health industry and a product that ties into that, leading them on a journey to begin producing 100 per-cent pure, cold-pressed olive oil.

They decided to look at this as a great opportunity and have now produced their first batch of premium olive oil. Their house in St. Marys is up for sale and the family will be relocating to Italy this summer. On the property in Italy, there is

also an old church the De Vries will be fixing up. The olive oil they're producing is now available for purchase in St. Marys at Purpour Refillery & Boutique on Water Street, owned by Angela and Jay MacPherson.

What is special about this premium brand? Most mixed olive oils contain approximately 100-120 polyphenols, which is a health micronutrient found in plant-based food that acts as antioxidants. De Vries' 100 per-cent pure extra virgin olive oil from Moraiolo olive trees contains approximately 629 polyphenols at pressing. This is extremely beneficial for health concerns like hypertension, cardiovascular risks, cholesterol, skin issues, inflammation, diabetes and much more. The farm, which is organic and uses no chemicals, is located in the region of Bettona, Umbria and the reason it does so well is the result of the variety of tree, sunshine, altitude and great soil. They also will be exporting EVOO from the region of Bettona that has a polyphenol analysis of 450 at pressing.

The olives are shaken onto netting and

collected that way. They are then cold pressed and processed on the same day at a brand-new local oil mill. After being gathered, they get put through a conveyor, separated, then pressed and cooled to 23°C.

"Our pure olive oil could be considered a nutraceutical, which is a product derived from food sources that provide extra health benefits," David De Vries said. "Italians take a spoonful of olive oil everyday and also drizzle it on most of their food because of the health benefits."

According to a study released in 2024 and conducted on over 23,000 Italian adults, daily consumption of extra-virgin olive oil is associated with a 23 per-cent reduction in the risk of all-cause mortality, confirming the central role of good fats for prevention.

As for the MacPhersons, they are sold on the product.

"We are very happy to be first on-board selling this amazing product," Jay MacPherson said. "We have put it on pizza, dipped breads in it, made salad dressings and understand the importance of the

health benefits that come along with it."

The De Vries' olive oil will also be DOP Italian certified, meaning the product is authentic, meets strict quality standards and is guaranteed traceable back to where it is produced.

There are two different kinds available at Purpour. One is a 100 per-cent cold-pressed, pure extra-virgin olive oil and the other is from Bettona, a group of smaller farms in that area. The logo was created in Italy and features the church that is on the property along with the exact beautiful hill landscape on the farm.

The De Vries have been getting some interest from Italian restaurants, and they are figuring out shipment and logistics to make the product more available. In November, Dave and Anna De Vries, along with son Lyn, spent some time in Umbria on the farm where they picked 450 trees in three days. They are looking forward to being in Italy full time.

"We love everything about it – the food, the culture, the weather, everything is good."



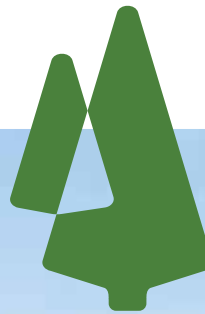
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Spring planting keeps Elhaven Farms busy in South Easthope

GARY WEST

Independent Reporter

Working the ground on a cool but dry weekend in Perth County's South Easthope Township meant dust in the air as farmers across the region busied themselves planting alfalfa, corn and soybeans.

For the Meadows family of Elhaven Farms, north of Harmony, spring planting season is one of the busiest times of the year on the family's dairy and chicken operation.

David and Christine Meadows laugh when asked about the hectic pace of spring work.

"When isn't it busy?" they said, echoing the sentiment shared by many farm families across Perth County.

With tractors cultivating, planting and stone-picking throughout the countryside, dust filled the air alongside the familiar scent of manure being spread on fields. Live-stock farmers often joke that it is "the smell of money."

For farms like Elhaven Farms, having access to their own natural fertilizer is especially valuable as ongoing global shipping issues and conflict in the Middle East continue to create uncertainty around commercial fertilizer supplies and crop-input costs.

We were lucky enough to climb into the buddy seat beside Dave Meadows as he worked the fields near the family's dairy barn on Perth Line 29, also known locally as Pork Street. Meadows was cultivating land in preparation for seeding an alfalfa and tall fescue grass mix.

Farming in South Easthope Township, where crop yields are often among the best in the country, plays an important role in supporting the economies of Stratford, St. Marys, Tavistock and surrounding communities.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Dave Meadows operates his 400-horsepower John Deere 9330 four-wheel-drive tractor while cultivating a 50-foot swath of land at a time near Harmony. The tractor's GPS guidance system allows for precise fieldwork with no overlap, helping save time and fuel.

Today, Elhaven Farms milks approximately 125 registered Holstein cows using robotic milking technology. Including dry cows, heifers and calves, the family cares

for about 325 dairy animals at any given time.

The Meadows family also raises more than 35,000 broiler chickens at a farm on Harmony Road. In recent years, the operation has expanded into raising dairy-beef cross calves as part of its beef operation, while Holstein bull calves are raised for the veal sector.

When she is not helping on the farm, Christine Meadows works as a teacher at nearby St. Ambrose Catholic Elementary School.

The couple's sons, 19-year-old Luke and 17-year-old Jacob, are both heavily involved in the local 4-H dairy club and already share a passion for farming that may one day see them take over the family operation as the fourth generation to manage the land.

Dave and Christine Meadows took over the farm from Dave Meadows' parents, Elwood and Carol Meadows, who spent decades building and caring for the dairy herd and farmland. Crop rotations at Elhaven Farms include corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and rye grass.

The success of Elhaven Farms would also not be possible without the dedication of longtime herdsman Dan Dunsmore. A local resident who first began working on the farm while still in high school, Dunsmore has now spent the past decade helping manage the operation alongside his wife, Vanessa, and their newborn son, Daniel Joseph.

Dave Meadows and Dunsmore are also known for lending a hand to a neighbouring farm family facing serious health challenges, helping with planting and harvesting alongside other local farmers.

"It's just the right thing to do," Dave Meadows said. "That's what caring farming neighbours do when someone is going through difficult times."

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COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER: A country of resources and opportunity

TETIANA DIDKOVSKA

Independent Columnist

On the global map, some nations attract attention through culture, history, or iconic landscapes. Others stand out for a different reason – the combination of natural resources, geographic position and economic potential. Ukraine belongs firmly to the latter category.

First and foremost, it is a land defined by its soil. Ukrainian black earth, known as chernozem, is considered among the most fertile in the world. This natural advantage has positioned the country as a major player in global agriculture. High yields of grain, oilseeds and other crops not only sustain domestic needs but also contribute significantly to international food supply chains. In this sense, Ukraine plays a quiet yet crucial role in global food security.

However, agriculture is only part of the picture. Beneath the surface lies another layer of importance. Ukraine possesses substantial deposits of iron ore, coal, natural gas and a range of rare and strategically important minerals. These resources are essential for modern industry – from energy production to advanced technologies. In an era defined by growing demand for raw materials, such reserves represent long-term strategic value.

In addition, Ukraine is known for its significant deposits of amber – fossilized tree resin formed millions of years ago. Valued both as a gemstone and for its use in jewelry and decorative arts, amber represents a unique natural resource. The biggest Ukrainian deposits, primarily located in the northwestern region, add another dimension to the country's resource base.

Equally significant is Ukraine's geographic position. Located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, the country serves as a natural corridor for trade and transportation. Overland routes, rail networks and infrastructure connecting major regions pass through its territory, creating opportunities for logistics and transit development. Historically and today, control and access to such routes carry both economic and strategic weight.

Ukraine also has access to two seas – the Black Sea

and the Sea of Azov. These coastlines provide gateways to international markets, support port infrastructure and enable maritime trade. At the same time, coastal areas offer favourable conditions for tourism and recreation, contributing to economic diversity.

Natural variety further strengthens this position. Ukraine's landscape includes mountain regions such as the Carpathian Mountains, vast plains and extensive river systems. Among these, the Dnipro River stands out as one of Europe's largest. It has long served as a vital transportation route and continues to play a central role in energy production, water supply and internal connectivity.

As a result, beyond agriculture and industry, tourism represents an additional and often underestimated sector. The combination of coastlines, mountains, rivers and protected natural areas creates favorable conditions for both domestic and international travel. From seaside resorts to hiking trails and cultural landscapes, the country offers a wide range of experiences.

Taken together, Ukraine emerges as a multidimensional system of resources and opportunities. Fertile land, significant mineral reserves, advantageous geography and environmental diversity form a complex and interconnected foundation for development. Few countries combine all these elements within a single territory.

Such combinations rarely go unnoticed. In global practice, regions that unite agricultural strength, industrial capacity, transit potential and natural assets tend to attract sustained and sometimes competing interest. Their importance is defined not only by what they produce today, but by what they can enable tomorrow.

Ukraine fits precisely into this category. It is a country where value exists both on the surface and beneath it; where geography amplifies economics and where natural advantages translate into strategic relevance. From one perspective, it is a landscape of fields, rivers and coastlines. From another, it is a concentration of assets shaping long-term decisions far beyond its borders. In such cases, conclusions do not always need to be stated directly. They are often understood.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

1: Ukrainian black earth, known as chernozem. 2: Ukraine is known for its significant deposits of amber. 3: Located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, the country serves as a natural corridor for trade and transportation. 4: The combination of coastlines, mountains, rivers and protected natural areas creates favourable conditions for both domestic and international travel.

Straight From The Shelves

By Laura McAsh, St. Marys Public Library

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UP THIS WEEK

- Fri., May 22: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 - Sat., May 23: Edith's Storytime Adventures (10 a.m.)
 - Mon., May 25: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
 - Tues., May 26: Tuesday Book Club* (11 a.m.)
 - Wed., May 27: EarlyON Play & Read (9:30-10:30 a.m.), Mahjong- (1-4 p.m.)
 - Thurs., May 28: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- *Registration Required
~Held at the Friendship Centre - Meeting Room A (317 James St. S.)

Ask the Arborist

By Joel Hackett • 519.272.5742 • jtsquote@gmail.com

Joel Hackett is a certified Arborist residing in the St. Marys area. Currently, he spends most of the year running Joel's Tree Service. For contact call 519.272.5742 or email jtsquote@gmail.com



Dear Arborist,

I have a tree, it's in a very crowded spot and you can't get into the back yard. There is a pool, a deck, a fence, a pool house, and a lot of rocks stepping down a steep hill. I think it's dying and am wondering how you handle something like this.

Thanks, Jason

Dear Jason,

Well, a first option to consider would be to try

doing deep root fertilizing. If the tree is not compromised by decay, wounds or cracks, this may be effective. Deep root fertilizing often helps if a tree is less than 20% in decline.

However, if it's more than 20% in decline, or compromised, you will have to consider removing it. Normally, in a removal situation like this, a crane would be required to lift the tree up and out piece by piece.

Sincerely, The Arborist

EAT AT OUR HOUSE: Seasonal springtime offerings



LAUREN EEDY

Independent Columnist

Here are a few recipes that take advantage of seasonal ingredients and are sure to delight even the pickiest of palates this spring. Enjoy!

Frozen homemade electrolyte drinks

Perfect for staying hydrated and replenished during long spring and summer days without the use of powders or synthetic ingredients.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup unsweetened coconut water
- 1/2 cup fresh orange juice
- 2 tbsp fresh lime juice
- Pinch of high-quality salt
- Ice for serving
- Optional: add maple syrup or agave. Can also switch out juice for a natural one of your preference not containing sugar.

Method:

- Combine the coconut water, orange juice, and lime juice in a large glass or jar. Add the pinch of salt and stir vigorously until it

is completely dissolved.

- If you prefer a bit of sweetness to balance the tart citrus, stir in your preferred amount of maple syrup or agave.

- Chill or freeze. Pour the mixture over a glass filled with ice and enjoy immediately.

- If you want an icy, slushy-like consistency, place the mixed liquids in the freezer for one to two hours before serving.

Asparagus casserole

Serves: 6-8; Prep: 30 minutes; Total: 1 hour

The star of the show is the season's first local vegetable, asparagus. Meatless Monday never looked so comforting.

Ingredients:

- 6 tbsp salted butter, plus more for baking dish
- 2 pounds asparagus, ends trimmed and cut into thirds
- 1/2 cup panko crumbs
- 1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 4 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 1/4 yellow onion finely chopped
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup grated, aged white cheddar cheese
- 4 oz cream cheese, cubed at room temperature

- 1 tbsp chopped fresh chives

Method:

- Preheat oven to 400°F. Butter a two-quart casserole dish.

- Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over medium-high heat and prepare ice bath in a large bowl. Add asparagus to water and cook until bright green and crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Immediately transfer to ice bath to stop cooking. Drain and pat with paper towels.

- In a medium bowl, combine panko, parmesan, almonds and lemon zest. In a large skillet, melt 2 tbsp butter and pour over breadcrumbs to coat.

- In same skillet, melt remaining 4 tbsp butter, add garlic, onion and 1 tsp salt. Cook, stirring occasionally 3-5 minutes.

- Stir in flour and pepper, cook until raw smell disappears. Gradually whisk in milk stirring continuously until sauce thickens slightly. Remove from heat and stir in cheddar cheese, cream cheese and lemon juice. Fold in asparagus.

- Spoon mixture into the baking dish. Sprinkle with panko mixture and bake until golden and bubbly, 20-25 minutes.

- Allow 5 minutes before sprinkling with chives and serving.

Rhubarb cream cheese bars

Serves: 9; Prep: 20 minutes; Total: 1 hour



(LAUREN EEDY PHOTO)

Fresh rhubarb and asparagus are on the menu this spring!

Another seasonal offering, this time to satisfy our sweet cravings.

Ingredients:

For short crust bake:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 tsp salt

For cream cheese layer:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

For rhubarb filling:

- 2 cups fresh rhubarb, diced
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp cornstarch

For crumble topping:

- 1/2 cup all purpose flour
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter

Method:

- Preheat oven to 350°F. Line an 8x8-inch baking pan with parchment paper.

- In a bowl, mix flour, softened butter, brown sugar and salt until crumbly. Firmly press into bottom of prepared pan.

- Bake the crust for 12 minutes until lightly golden.

- In another bowl, beat cream cheese, granulated sugar, egg and vanilla until smooth. Spread over warm crust.

- Toss rhubarb with sugar and cornstarch then evenly spoon over cream cheese layer.

- In a small bowl, combine flour, brown sugar and melted butter until crumbly. Sprinkle over top. Bake 30-40 minutes until the crumble is golden and centre is set. Cool completely before slicing into bars.

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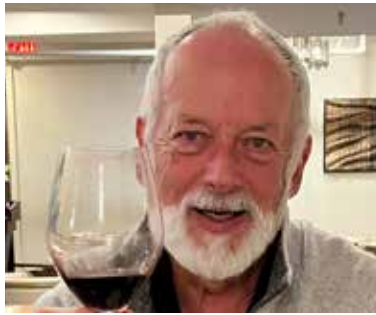


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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: It's not only about the onions



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

You could easily get the impression that, in Tropea, it's all about the onions. Well, that's not the whole story, but the onions do play a big role in this lovely Italian seaside town.

We were in the southern tip of Italy – Calabria – on a Senior Discovery Tours visit. It was a great trip – so good, that we have arranged to repeat the tour next year with a group of friends! So obviously, there were more attractions than just onions.

However, the Tropea onions are actually world-famous among foodies. We first learned about them in the Calabria episode of Stanley Tucci's television series about food in Italy. He visits Tropea, which is on the western, Terranean Sea coast of Calabria (his ancestral home), and among other taste delights, he eats a sweet, red, Tropea onion like an apple, and claims to enjoy it.

If that makes Tropea sound like a slightly quirky destination, so be it, but I would not have missed it for the world.

Let's leave the onion fields for a moment, and take in some

other, also-quirky features of the town – the cathedral, for example.

I know; I can hear some of you jaded travellers moaning, "Not another cathedral!" And we all know the sentiment.

But the Cathedral of Saint Mary of Romania has at least one feature that, I will admit, I have never encountered elsewhere. Mounted inside the main doors, one on each side, are unexploded World War II bombs. The fact that they landed near the cathedral but did no damage is credited as a miracle to the Madonna, and celebrated by the prominent presence of these devices (now disarmed, thank goodness) inside the cathedral.

The cathedral is genuinely ancient; it was built in 1160 and is dedicated to the Virgin of Romania, patron saint of Tropea. The church design shows Arab and Byzantine influence, and pride of place behind the altar is given to a 13th-century Byzantine icon of the Virgin of Romania. Not only is the Madonna credited with the miracle of the unexploded bombs, she also is deemed responsible for saving Tropea from earthquakes, plagues and other natural disasters.

The shops of Tropea have an ambience all their own. Several feature very large displays of miniature figures and buildings showing life from ancient times and illustrating crafts that have been lost to history. These displays fill the entire wall space in some shops, and there is no charge to see them – though donation boxes may be in evidence.

Almost every store has a display, for sale this time, of bug-eyed, large-nosed ceramic faces guaranteed to ward off the evil eye. I don't know if they work; I do know they are guaranteed to make you smile. They're hilarious.

The town itself has its own unique beauty – narrow alleyways hung with flower baskets, ancient archways and doors, shops with their displays spilling out onto the street. In one such store, the shopkeeper spoke not a word of English – and I have no Italian past "vino" – but he still managed to sell me a jar of bruschetta spread, and another of a "mousse" made from – you guessed it – Tropea onions.

Better yet, as an inveterate collector of wildly coloured and patterned socks, I was thrilled to find a reddish-purple pair illustrated with, yep, onions. I wear them with pride.

Tropea is right on the sea, and the town offers some spectacular views of the Mediterranean (The Terranean Sea is just one section of that larger ocean). The view includes the sight of the active volcanic island, Stromboli, which rises as a nearly perfect triangle out of the sea.

Our day trip included an additional stop at Pizzo, another seaside town half an hour north of Tropea. There, while there is a castle with an intriguing history and more beautiful views, the highlights were two culinary experiences.

First, we went to a pizzeria for a plethora of genuine Calabrian pizza. The servers just kept



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Tropea stores often have displays of miniature characters enacting historic crafts.

bringing pizzas to the table, one kind after another – a delicious, simple Margherita pizza, then ham and mushroom followed by a veggie version with zucchini, eggplant and more. But the two signature choices were an 'nduja pizza ('nduja is a spicy, spreadable pork and chili pepper sausage unique to Calabria) and a tuna and Tropea onion pizza.

They were amazing. We were stuffed to the gills. And then they took us for tartuffo – two kinds of gelato moulded around a chocolate centre covered with cocoa and nuts. It turns out we weren't all that full after all.

Tropea and Pizzo, like Calabria in general, is a very unspoiled part of Italy. Local customs, legends and culinary

traditions have survived here, largely intact.

But these are seafront communities with lovely beaches, and our guide admitted that "in summer, Tropea is very, very crowded." But in the shoulder seasons – the long spring and fall of southern Italy – the tourists are largely absent, but the wonderful features remain and are readily available to delight visitors like us.

And as I mentioned, we are going back.

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.



Unexploded bombs hang near a statue of the Madonna in the Tropea Cathedral, making a miracle of deliverance from harm.



The 13th-century icon of the Virgin of Romania hangs over the altar.



Caricatures that ward off the evil eye – or at least make you smile.

The era of social media and chatbot bans



LOREENA MCKENNITT

Independent Columnist

When I heard presenter Kulbir Colin Singh Dhillon beckon parents to stop referring to AI as a “tool” or “technology,” but rather as a “species” and that our children would need to “walk through dystopia before reaching Utopia,” it dawned on me that things were more serious than I thought. Many heard these insights at a recent presentation for parents at Stratford District Secondary School on the use of AI. All with a mixture of curiosity, concern and trepidation.

Although the presentation was not intended to be a consultation, as some parents had hoped, the 15-minute overview came in the same weeks that the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan announced their intention to ban

social media and AI chatbots for youth under 16. In so doing, they joined a growing number of governments around the world embarking on similar measures.

There are two striking commonalities between social media and AI. First, neither category of products has been adequately researched or proven safe for society, particularly for children and youth. Vass Bednar addresses this in her May 6, 2026, The Globe and Mail article, “AI products are defective and dangerous. Why are we using them at all?”

Second, there has been an absence of protective framework of regulation and accountability. Bans, like an emergency brake, now offer governments the time and opportunity to study and respond with appropriate legislation.

Australian Communications Minister Anika Wells, when commenting on a three-month update on that country’s social media ban, cautions that a ban is not a cure, but rather, part of a treatment plan which will need other measures to bring about the desired effects over time.

Many reference points are

needed when developing regulations, such as digital sovereignty, privacy and age appropriateness.

Governments will be taking into account that a handful of tech companies are propping up the stock market while spending vast amounts of money on data centres – all of which have yet to turn a profit. They will be taking into account a deeply skeptical public who fear for their jobs and democracies.

They will be listening to those with concerns for the environment or the disappearance of farmland, alarmed at the proliferation of data centres, drawing vast amounts of water and energy such as reported in the May 9 edition of the Toronto Star “Power Play.”

Educators and parents will share their concerns about the loss of human agency in their children’s education such as with critical thinking, or cursive writing which was just brought back to the curriculum – at the same time, adopting technology that can do almost everything for them.

So, what more can parents do while they wait for the bans

and other regulation to fall into place?

The good news is there have been plenty of experts who have led the way in understanding the complexity of human development in relation to technology. They include clinical psychiatrist Dr. Mari Swingle, author of *i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming and Social Media Are Changing Our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species*, Dr. Jean Twenge, addiction specialist Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, Dr. Ruston, producer of the award-winning *Screenagers* films, Dr. Aric Sigman’s report to the European Union on medical concerns, or former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy’s report on mental health.

Most recently, it has been Jonathan Haidt’s book, *The Anxious Generation*, which has launched the global wave of government responses.

One of the many individuals supporting Haidt’s efforts is Katherine Martinko, whose book, *Childhood Unplugged*, will form the basis of her presentation at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School on Monday,

May 25, from 7-8:30 p.m. It offers accessible and no-nonsense guidance for parents looking to mitigate the most consequential social media and smartphone behaviour at home.

We know there is so much to benefit from well-designed and regulated technology as we are seeing particularly in the medical field. The goal of our government on behalf of its citizens should be deliberate and thoughtful in its process. They need to take the necessary time for due diligence, identifying the highest standards and best practices and taking lessons learned from other jurisdictions. We must ensure that whatever decisions we make now will be good for many generations to come.

Each and every family has their own, unique experience and I welcome hearing from anyone who wishes to share or reach out to info@wisecommunities.org.

Loreena McKennitt is a member of The Order of Canada, director of The Falstaff Family Centre (Stratford) and founder of The Stolen Child Project and Wise Communities.

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What am I?
A carrot

I'm green and tiny, and I come in a pod with my friends. What am I?
Peas

I'm yellow with lots of kernels, and you can pop me for a snack. What am I?
Corn

I'm green on the outside and white on the inside. Rabbits crunch me too! What am I?
Lettuce

I grow underground, and people turn me into fries. What am I?
A potato

I'm red and juicy, and some people argue if I'm a fruit or vegetable. What am I?
A tomato

I'm long, green, and crunchy, and I sometimes become a pickle. What am I?
A cucumber

I'm white and can make you cry when you cut me. What am I?
An onion

I'm leafy and green, and I make a healthy salad. What am I?
Spinach

- Word Search -



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- Squash
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- Radish
- Turnip
- Broccoli
- Lettuce



The **Riddle Kid**
OF THE WEEK



Lena Ready (5)

Hey Kids... Every Riddle Kid that appears in the paper gets a FREE MILKSHAKE at the Sunset Diner!

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic is pleased to be the sponsor of the

PET OF THE WEEK



LOVE YOUR DOG? HELP KEEP OUR COMMUNITY CLEAN, TOO!

Please remember to pick up after your pup when out for walks. It keeps parks safe, sidewalks pleasant, and protects local waterways. **SCOOP IT. BAG IT. BIN IT.** Thank you for being a responsible pet owner—your neighbours (and their shoes!) appreciate it!



MILLIE

Our Pet of the Week is Millie, a four-year-old feline. Millie loves her treats and playing with her two siblings at the Frehner home in St. Marys.



Thorndale News

A section within the
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Thames Centre Heritage Depot officially opens

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

On May 14, the Thames Centre Heritage Depot located at the Flight Centre in Dorchester officially opened.

In her address to those who attended the grand opening, Susan Ralyea of the Thames Centre working group welcomed everyone for coming and acknowledged the Thames Centre council and administration for their support, as well as Carol Small of the committee to Establish a Middlesex County archives (CEMCA) and Krista Taylor-Rempel of the Middlesex Centre Archives for their encouragement and inspiration.

"Since 2020, our aim has been to advocate for a Middlesex County-supported archives through CEMCA and locally," Ralyea said. "In late 2023, we recognized the need to be more strategic about raising awareness of the preservation needs



(NANCY ABRA PHOTO)

Pictured is the official ribbon cutting for the Thames Centre Heritage Depot at the FlightExec Centre in Dorchester. From left to right are Thames Centre director of community services and facilities Steve MacDonald, Thames Centre clerk Jana Nethercott, Thames Centre Coun. Chantel Crocket, Thames Centre Heritage Depot volunteer Lynn Crocket, Thames Centre Mayor Sharron McMillian, Thames Centre Heritage Depot volunteers Susan Ralyea and Nancy Abra, Thames Centre CAO Jillene Bellchamber-Glazier, heritage depot volunteer Paul Stevens.

in Thames Centre, which had been sadly lacking for many years. We built relationships with members of council, other

community leaders and the press to grow our support base."

After Middlesex County council passed

a unanimous motion made by Thames Centre Mayor Sharron MacMillan to fund a third-party feasibility study on a Middlesex County Archives in November 2025, Ralyea said that "motivated us to actively work toward establishing a temporary storage space in Thames Centre to safely store important social-cultural materials currently held by residents.

"Our end goal is, of course, to transfer these treasures to a Middlesex County Archives eventually, although we do recognize a feasibility study is not a promise. We will take one day at a time and will begin our journey modestly. Thank you for making history with us!"

The Thames Centre Heritage Depot, which is totally run by volunteers, is open eight hours every month in Dorchester on the second and fourth Thursday, and will hold a collection day in Thorndale on the third Wednesday of each month from 10 a.m. to noon.

Thorndale Fire Station 2 donates to Muscular Dystrophy Canada

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

Firefighters across Canada champion the non-profit registered charity, Muscular Dystrophy Canada, with Thames Centre Fire Department one of the more than 600 fire departments and associations that support this important cause.

For more than two decades, the Thorndale Station 2 has hosted its annual firefighters' breakfast in May and their Boot Drive in August during the Thorn-

dale-wide yard sale to raise money for Muscular Dystrophy Canada. Last year alone, the firefighters raised \$11,300 across the two events.

On Sunday, May 24, from 8 a.m. to noon, the firefighters at Thorndale Station 2 will be cooking up and serving their famous breakfast to the community.

"We greatly appreciate the continued support of our family, friends and the community of Thorndale in the past and for the future," Thames Centre District Chief Wes Fox said.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Firefighters with the Thames Centre Thorndale Station 2 were on hand to present Mike Brennan, who represents the Muscular Dystrophy Canada Middlesex chapter, a cheque for \$11,300, money raised by Thorndale Station 2 in 2025. From left to right are firefighters Rik VerVoort, Andrew Murrell, Mike Fox and Derek Johnston, Mike Brennan from Muscular Dystrophy Canada Middlesex, Thames Centre District Chief Wes Fox and firefighter Rob Wakem.

Thorndale and Area Horticultural Society keeping active in the community

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

At last Wednesday's Thorndale and Area Horticultural Society meeting, special guest speaker Brenda Symns, an accredited judge from the London Garden Club, demonstrated two floral arrange-

ments using spring flowers.

Also at this May meeting, the society held a member's Flower Show with 44 entries in the various flower specimen and floral-design categories.

Before the society breaks for the summer, it will host its June 10 meeting with the annual spring potluck at 6:30 p.m. at

the Thorndale Lions Community Centre with guest speaker Will Heeman talking about strawberries.

Until then, the Thorndale and Area Horticultural Society annual plant sale is on Saturday, May 23, from 10 a.m. to noon at the railway park area on King Street, opposite the cenotaph. There will also be

bags of turkey-mushroom compost for sale.

As for the society's annual fundraiser, the Green Thumb Garden Tour of local area private gardens will be held on Sunday, June 28, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets can be purchased from society members.

OBITUARY

Holliday



Douglas Charles Holliday
April 22, 1951- May 14, 2026
It is with profound sadness that the family of Douglas Charles Holliday announces his passing.

Doug was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, and friend whose infectious laugh and generous spirit left a mark

on everyone fortunate enough to know him. Born and raised in St. Marys, Ontario, Doug's life was shaped by family, community and connection from the start. Doug was born into a loving family, and had many fond memories of his early childhood before his mother passed and the family was separated.

A defining chapter came in grade 12 when he was welcomed into the Graham family; a bond that became one of the great gifts of his life, and one he cherished until his final days. He went on to attend the University of Guelph, earning both his bachelor's and master's degrees in Agricultural Economics, before building a successful career in finance.

Doug gave back as naturally as he breathed. His years of dedicated service to the St. Marys Hospital Foundation reflected a man who understood that a community is only as strong as the people willing to support it. He brought that same energy to everything he did whether he was behind the wheel of a fast car, holding court at breakfast with his close friends at the Sunset, or sharing an ice cream cone with one of his many grandchildren.

Doug is survived by his beloved wife Barbara (Pfaff), and his children, Chris and Marla, Jenny and Brad, Jim and Allie, Matt and Erin, Ashley and Dan, Courtney and Ben, and his grandchildren, Braedan, Turner, Brooklynn, Max, Ruby, Hazel, James, Katie, Charlotte, Violet, Weston, Ellie, Jolee, Louisa, and Harvey. He is lovingly remembered by his adoptive Graham family: Mark and Karen, Scott and Laurie, Jeff and Kathy, Sue and Bruce, Steve and Kelly, Laurie and Mark. Cherished by his siblings, Liz and Bob, Jim and Gail, Les and Jackie, Marilyn and Kevin. Dearly missed by Larry and Cathy Pfaff. He was predeceased by his father Ernie Holliday, his mother Mary Cappa, and brother Ernie. Predeceased by his Graham family members Tom and Evelyn Graham, Bill and Janet Graham, and Thomas Graham.

Doug's laugh was the kind you could hear across a room and never forget. He will be deeply missed. A celebration of Doug's life will be held in the Community Hall at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, 317 James St. S. St. Marys, on Saturday May 23rd, 2026, from 1 - 4pm with Words of Remembrance at 2:30pm. In lieu of flowers, donations to the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation would honour his memory.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

OBITUARY

Ament



Ruth Ann Ament (Richardson) after a strong battle with cancer, passed away peacefully surrounded by her loved ones, at St. Marys Memorial Hospital on May 11, 2026 in her 71st year.

Beloved wife of Larry Ament, married Sept. 5, 1975. Loving mother of Jennifer Ament (Jeff Inch), Kara Matthews (David),

and Timothy Ament (Priya). Proud grandmother of Kendra, Kylie, Avyn, and Lainey. Daughter of Alma (nee Dixon), predeceased by her father Laverne Richardson and step-father Adam Coulter. Sister of Gary Richardson (Janice), Debbie Seiler (Terry), George Richardson (Karen), Robert Richardson (Jane), Laura McEvoy (Ray Hunt), Cheryl Penner (Harvey, both deceased), and Kraemer Coulter (Sharon). Ruth will also be missed by nieces, nephews and extended family members.

Long-time employee at Scotiabank, retiring from the Stratford location, she loved shopping, gardening, golfing, board / card games, travelling, going to the trailer and spending time with family. Sincere thanks to the staff at CarePartners and St. Marys Memorial Hospital for their wonderful care.

A private family funeral will take place. A Celebration of Life will be held at Highway 2 Golf, 4744 Dundas St. Thorndale, on June 13, 2026 from 2 pm. Memorial donations may be made to the Canadian Cancer Society or Diabetes Canada.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

CELEBRATION

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on their 50th wedding anniversary May 22nd, 2026
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Solutions on pg. 23

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The Optimist Club of Downie presents our annual
BIKE RODEO
 at the
Pyramid Centre St. Marys
Saturday, June 6th, 2026
10am - 12pm

Road Safety

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Looking Back



AMY CUBBERLEY

Independent Columnist

Taxi and bus services

25 years ago (2001)

A second taxi service is ready to begin operating in St. Marys. Approval was given last week by Council for owner George Smith to operate his St. Marys City Cabs from a rented office space at 167 Queen Street East.

The Avon Maitland District School Board and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation District 8 held their Excellence in Education Awards at the Mitchell District Golf and Country Club last week. Kate Habermehl, a student at DCVI, was one of the recipients of an Excellence in Public Education honour. In addition to maintaining an A average, Kate has been Student Council Secretary, the yearbook editor, and a student leader of the DCVI school band. Also receiving Excellence in Public Education awards were Bruce Hunter and Betty Finnie of DCVI.

50 years ago (1976)

Collegiate students Peter Munro and Rick Hammond left for Brandon, Manitoba last weekend to take part in the Canada-wide Science Fair. Peter and Rick, along with a Stratford student, will be accompanied by Allan Slater, a science teacher at Stratford Northwestern.

Alex Riddell has been planting some of the beds of flowers at the tree footings on downtown streets this past week. He has found out too that a few business places would rather not have flowers.

75 years ago (1951)

The Corbett firm of St. Thomas is engaged to rid the town dump of its rat population and has distributed poison bait boxes in the area this week.

At one time on Sunday afternoon there were eight outboard engined motorboats streaking up and down the Thames and Trout Creek above the mill dam. Boats owned by Wes Butters and son Bill, Charles Langford, Francis Nelson, Tom Constable, John Cappa, Reg Hutton, and Ted Grose were afloat on "motor-boat alley" during the afternoon.

100 years ago (1926)

Mr. R. Bilyea of Thorndale has started a thrice a week bus service from St. Marys to Thorndale and London, the bus leaving Oddy's House twice a day on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. If business calls for more service, Mr. Bilyea will run every day.

Two members of the Klu Klux Klan in full regalia appeared on the downtown streets about nine o'clock Sunday night and left many curious folks behind them. Their identity was securely shielded by their peaked hoods and flowing white robes.

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- TUESDAY BUDDY CHECK**
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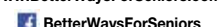


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Community Liaison Committee

The next Community Liaison Committee Meeting will be held on **Friday June 5th at 10am** at the St Marys Municipal Operations Center. Members of the public who wish to observe are welcome to attend.

Residents who wish to speak in front of the Committee may submit a detailed request in writing at least 3 days prior to the meeting in writing to the Committee. The request will be considered by the Committee and approved prior to the meeting.

Please submit all requests, questions, and concerns for the meeting to kara.terpstra@vcimentos.com by **June 3rd, 2026**.



A.N.A.F. UNIT 265
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Attention all members
General Meeting on Sunday May 24th @ 1pm

Brisket Dinner

Saturday June 13th - Details to Follow

Sausage on a Bun

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MEAT DRAW FRIDAYS AT 6PM

THE WEEK AHEAD



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PRC & Friendship Centre events - See the Stonetown Crier on Page 5

St. Marys Public Library events - See Page 14

FRIDAY, MAY 22

- Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon
- A.N.A.F. meat draw - 6 p.m.
- Parks Lawn Bowling Club learn to bowl - 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 23

- Wildwood Dragon Boat Challenge at Wildwood Conservation Area - 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- St. Marys Farmers Market at Milt Dunnell Field - 8 a.m. to Noon
- London Orchid Society orchid plant sale at 1240 Fanshawe Park Rd E, London - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Thorndale & Area Horticultural Society plant sale - 10 a.m. to Noon. Will be held at the railway park area on King Street opposite the cenotaph, Thorndale

- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw - 5 p.m.

SUNDAY, MAY 24

- Thorndale firefighters breakfast at Thorndale station 2 - 8 a.m. to Noon
- A.N.A.F. general meeting - 1 p.m.
- Purple Hill Country Opry outdoor stage show - Gates open 1 p.m., Show 2 p.m., Tickets \$35

TUESDAY, MAY 26

- Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee - 10 a.m. to Noon

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

- Friendship Centre Choir end-of-season concert at the PRC - 6:30 p.m.
- Stonetown Travel info presentation on Costa Rica at the PRC End Zone - 6:30 p.m.

THURSDAY, MAY 28

- Spring shopping for 50+ at Kingsway Lodge, lower level - 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- A.N.A.F. sausage on a bun - 12-1:30 p.m.



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May 13 - Darcy Ballantyne, St. Marys	\$50.00
May 14 - Heather McKertcher, Stratford	\$50.00
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