

STRATFORD TIMES

VOLUME 5 • ISSUE 21

JANUARY 9, 2026

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Police offering \$10k for info on Derek Ritz

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Nine years after Derek Ritz was last seen at a home in Sebringville, in the Township of Perth South, at around 1 a.m. on Dec. 31, 2016, investigators with the Stratford Police Service are hoping to entice first-hand witnesses to come forward with new information that could close the City of Stratford's only cold case.

On Jan. 1, Stratford police announced it is offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the confirmed whereabouts of Ritz and the closure of this case, and/or the arrest and conviction of the person or people responsible. The city's police service officially took over the missing-persons investigation from Perth County OPP in April 2019, just over two years after Ritz, who was 51 at the time, was reported missing to OPP on Jan. 7, 2017.

"For me, the Stratford police and the (Stratford police services) board, and the investigator with Please Bring Me Home, I don't think the case has ever really gone away," acting deputy police chief Mark Taylor said. "We've pushed and pushed and interviewed as many people as we possibly can. We've got lots of information, just not that final piece to close the case for us. I think this reward is just a reminder and maybe a little bit of an incentive for people to come forward with further information that benefits the case, benefits us and helps everyone in trying to close the case for us."

Since the Stratford police took over the search for Ritz, investigators have interviewed more than 100 potential witnesses and conducted exhaustive searches of properties in the area for evidence of what happened to

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(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A major winter event late December froze the region, like this stretch of road in South Easthope Township pictured on Dec. 28. Area roads and highways were closed due to accidents and local police were busy pulling drivers from the ditch.

Winter wonderland turned to hazardous conditions this holiday season

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A powerful mix of freezing rain, rain and persistent snowfall kept road conditions difficult this holiday season.

What began as heavy freezing rain early on Boxing Day quickly turned to rain as temperatures rose, loosening a layer of ice that had begun forming on local roads and sidewalks. Later that evening, the weather shifted again, with snow continuing to fall on the area for the

next several days. Road conditions deteriorated enough to prompt Perth County to declare a significant weather event on Dec. 28.

In response, officers with the Stratford Police Service were out in full force in hazardous conditions over the holidays, responding to stranded and stuck vehicles, and ensuring residents of St. Marys, Perth South and Stratford remained safe during the worst of the snow and ice.

"It's a stressful situation for everyone in the community, including the emergency services workers who are

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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Missing for nine years: Stratford police offer \$10,000 reward for information about Derek Ritz

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Ritz on the night he disappeared.

Taylor said most of the information shared with investigators to this point has been rumours and hearsay, and investigators haven't been able to find any hard evidence that could close the case. The difficulty with the case, he said, has to do with that lack of physical evidence and first-hand accounts, with many potential witnesses providing investigators information they heard from friends or friends of friends.

"Right now, the difficulty is we don't know where he is," communications officer Const. Darren Fischer added. "I know that sounds really simple, but that's exactly what it is; being unable to find Mr. Ritz or anyone being able to confirm any possible location for him, as well, that can be corroborated."

While the investigation into Ritz's disappearance has faded from the public spotlight over the years, Shelly Smith, a friend of Ritz's, has worked diligently to keep the case front and centre with her awareness campaign and Facebook page, Justice For Ritz.

In addition to canvassing the city with flyers seeking information about Ritz's disappearance and speaking with media about the case and the need to solve it for nearly a decade, Smith also engaged Please Bring Me Home Canada, an organization that uses volunteers and private investigators to help police reunite missing persons with their families, to help with the Ritz case.

In 2025, Smith and Please Bring Me Home Canada pushed the Stratford police services board to offer the



(STRATFORD POLICE SERVICE PHOTO)

Derek Ritz was 51 years old when he was reported missing on Jan. 7, 2017, seven days after he was last seen leaving a home in the area of Avonton Road in Sebringville on Dec. 31, 2016.

reward for information on Ritz's whereabouts, a notion Taylor said police and the board members agreed could be helpful in solving the investigation.

"When the reward for Ritz finally became available – especially after nine long years – it meant far more

than just money," Smith said. "For myself and Please Bring Me Home, the ones who have been fighting, searching, advocating and refusing to let that person be forgotten, it says Ritz matters and our fight matters.

"Families (of missing people) and advocates often feel like they are shouting into the void. A reward acknowledges that Ritz's case deserves attention, effort and resources – officially and publicly. Even after nearly a decade, hope doesn't disappear, but it has somewhat been buried under exhaustion and grief. A reward has relit that flame."

Smith says she and the investigator assigned to this case at Please Bring Me Home Canada refuse to let Ritz's case be forgotten. The Please Bring Me Home investigator has spoken with more than 60 people as part of their investigation, sharing all information they obtain with the Stratford Police Service.

From the perspective of the Stratford police, Taylor said investigators are appreciative of the efforts put in by the Please Bring Me Home investigator and Smith, both in keeping the case alive in the minds of area residents and in trying to find closure for Ritz and the people who care for him.

The \$10,000 reward offered by the Stratford Police Service will be available to anyone who provides information that results in the confirmed whereabouts of Ritz and the closure of this case, and/or the arrest and conviction of the person or people responsible. Anyone with information, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is urged to contact the Stratford Police Service.

All information can be directed to Det. Sgt. Mike Weyers at 519-271-4147 ext. 8184, or to Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

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Winter wonderland turned to hazardous conditions this holiday season

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

engaged in addressing those matters and attending calls for service during that time," community resource and media relations officer Const. Darren Fischer said. "Roadways are slippery and snow-covered and icy, and it's a dangerous time to be travelling around on those roads, so I think we just have to be aware of that weather and be cautious ourselves along with passing on that message to others to be patient and careful while they're out travelling."

Fischer said public works staff in St. Marys, Perth South and Stratford worked closely with the police service, giving

police an eight-to-10-hour heads up to ensure vehicles are not parked on the street where snow-clearing operations are planned to occur, making the job of keeping roadways clear easier for plow operators.

While Stratford police did not provide the number of collisions that occurred within the three municipalities during the worst of the holiday winter weather from Dec. 26, 2025, to Jan. 1 before press time on Tuesday, the local police service did say the only road closures during that time were short in duration and had to do with rescuing stuck vehicles and stranded drivers. Perth Line 26, for example, was

closed for several hours Dec. 29, 2025, between Perth Road 113 Perth Road 111 as tow truck operators and emergency crews worked to remove multiple transport trucks that had become stuck and were blocking the road.

Perth County OPP, meanwhile, told the Times there were 62 collisions across the county, excluding the Stratford Police Service's jurisdiction in Perth South, in that same time period.

OPP closed a number of roads in Perth County due to blowing and accumulating snow between Dec. 29, 2025, and Jan. 1 with all roads in the county reopened by Jan. 2. Closed roads between Dec. 30 and

31 included Highway 23 from both Highway 7 to Mitchel and Mitchell to Palmerston; Perth Line 33 from Perth Road 107 to Perth-Oxford Road; Perth Road 107 from Perth Line 56 to Perth Line 43; Perth Road 131 from Perth Line 55 to Perth Line 61; and Wilmot/Easthope Road from Highway 7/8 to Punkeydoodles Corners.

"The decision to close a road is not taken lightly," regional media relations coordinator for the OPP West Region Derek Rogers told the Times. "Road closures may have significant impact on personal or commercial traffic. Public safety and officer safety are the main considerations when deciding to close a road."

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Editorial

Predictions for 2026



STEWART GRANT

Publisher

A New Year's Day poll on Smerconish.com asked people, "Will the world be in a better place at the end of 2026 than it is today?" Of the 25,000 responses, just over 60 per cent replied "No" while the remainder replied "Yes". What do you think?

It's a subjective question that's hard to measure, but I had cast my Jan. 1 vote in the "Yes" column. Maybe that's just wishful thinking. The year is certainly off to quite an interesting start.

As I finish up this predictions article on Jan. 3, one of 2026's big questions had already been answered, with the news that Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has been removed from power by American forces. While Maduro was an illegitimate leader who had stolen the 2024 Venezuelan election, the brazen manner whereby he was taken out is very concerning, as are the unknown worldwide consequences that may follow.

Here's my crack at how the rest of the year will play out...

1. Despite Trump's comments to the contrary at his Jan. 3 press

conference, public pressure within Venezuela will sway the American President to eventually support Maria Corina Machado as the rightful leader of Venezuela.

2. A Democratic politician will call for the impeachment of Donald Trump for failing to gain necessary approvals for invading Venezuela, but this goes nowhere.

3. In Canada, the Liberal government's government will hold throughout 2026.

4. Pierre Poilievre will remain as Conservative leader following that party's leadership review in January.

5. Although there will be much speculation, China will not invade Taiwan in 2026.

6. A ceasefire will be negotiated in the Russia-Ukraine war.

7. Drone warfare, one of the staples of the Russia-Ukraine war, will

sadly make its first high-profile appearance on this side of the ocean, with a notable strike sparking heavy interest in counter-drone defense systems.

8. American tariffs on Canadian-made products will decrease during the year.

9. Despite worries about an AI bubble, the stock markets will record another positive year.

10. More information will be released from the Epstein files, but no arrests of high-profile personalities will occur.

11. In sports, the Stanley Cup will stay south of the border, with the Colorado Avalanche earning the NHL's top prize.

12. Fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs will be spared the agony of losing in the first round when the team fails to make the playoffs.

13. The Buffalo Bills make it to the Super Bowl but lose to the Seattle Seahawks.

14. Team Canada will edge Team USA in the Men's Olympic Hockey Finals.

15. France will win the 2026 World Cup.

16. Speculation will grow regarding Trump's physical and mental health as he turns 80 years old this year. He will survive the year, but with increased public focus on J.D. Vance as potentially needing to take over as U.S. President in 2027.

17. Late addition to the prediction list - Despite all his talk, surely Trump will not invade Greenland, Colombia, or Cuba in 2026, right??

Do you have any bold predictions for 2026? Feel free to email me at stew@granthaven.com to have your say.

Quote of the Week

"Even after nearly a decade, hope doesn't disappear, but it has somewhat been buried under exhaustion and grief. A reward has relit that flame."

- Shelly Smith on the \$10,000 reward for information on Stratford's only cold case, the missing Derek Ritz



Restoring small-town journalism, one community at a time!

STRATFORD TIMES

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Funded by the Government of Canada

Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

Canada

Letter to the editor: Net Climate Conversation a hopeful start to the new year

Climate Change is real. You can help. If you are wondering what you can do, we have some answers for you. We hope to answer the two most important questions: What can I do and how will this help?

On Jan. 21, 2026 at 7 p.m., we will gather at Stratford City Hall for the first Climate Conversation of the new year. The Energy and Environment Committee of the City of Stratford, which is working hard to make a difference in our community, will be the hosts.

Several guests will be on hand to explain different initiatives. You can meet our new climate change programs manager Autumn Loosemore. There will be a presentation addressing frequently asked questions about electric vehicles. Also on hand will be Stratford's waste management coordinator Emily Skelding. We will hear about the Save on Energy program and how to apply for

government rebates for reducing your energy use at home or at work. Students from the Eco Club at SDSS will be available to talk to other students about what they can do to make Stratford a more sustainable community.

The format of the evening will be a brief overview of each topic, followed by a chance to talk to the people involved in each of these programs. We will have handouts and resources available.

Come and join the Climate Community in Stratford. You will learn what others are doing about the climate crisis, and how you can help. All are welcome and no registration is required. What a very hopeful start to the new year!

We hope to see you on Jan. 21 at 7 p.m.

Felicity Sutcliffe,
Stratford

STRATFORD TIMES

Guiding Principles

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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Stop VAW launches community information sessions on intimate partner violence

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Stop Violence Against Women (Stop VAW) is hosting a series of community information sessions across Perth County from January through May.

Each session will feature professional service providers who will be available on site to offer support and practical information, along with a general presentation highlighting how community members can help address gender-based violence.

The monthly sessions aim to increase community understanding and accessibility, with a focus on shifting responsibility from individuals to the broader community. The approach emphasizes early detection, support and community intervention.

"Our goal is to shift towards community accountability and community responsi-

bility – to recognize that this is happening in our community and that this is a community problem," said Jenniffer Olenewa, community projects lead with Stop VAW. "It impacts everyone."

During each session, attendees will learn about the different types of abuse and how to recognize the signs of intimate partner violence (IPV). Participants will also learn what to say to support someone who may be experiencing IPV and about the community resources and programs available throughout Perth County.

"For the last 40 years, the anti-violence against women movement has been geared toward women who are experiencing violence, sending a message that somehow she is responsible for ending the violence, or that if she doesn't leave, it's her fault," said Olenewa.

"It's very disheartening, and it's time to

try something different," she said. "Different interventions, different strategies and really putting this back on the community."

Each session provides tools and resources to help community members recognize and address gender-based violence effectively.

"Our goal is to reach more community members so we can create a larger, shared understanding of intimate partner violence across all of Perth County," said Olenewa.

"What we're trying to do is give community members the skills they need so women don't feel solely responsible for ending violence that isn't their fault, and so people know how to recognize the signs and speak up."

Upcoming sessions include:

• Mitchell – Jan. 27 at Upper Thames El-

ementary School.

• St. Marys – Feb. 17 at Little Falls Public School.

• Listowel – March 11 at Eastdale Public School.

• Milverton – April 13 at Milverton Public School.

• Stratford – Date and location to be determined.

Food and drinks will be provided and free parking will be available at each location.

To learn more or to register for an upcoming session, visit stopvaw.ca and click on Events. Registration is required for food and drink planning only; no personal information will be stored.

Anyone concerned about intimate partner violence can contact Optimism Place's 24/7 support line at 519-271-5550 or 1-800-265-8598 (toll-free).

Canada is Our Poem contest winner announced

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

According to local poet Heidi Sander, the response to her national Canada Is Our Poem poetry contest was nothing short of overwhelming.

"The Canada Is Our Poem prize was really created to invite writers from across the country just to reflect on what Canada means to them, especially during these times," Sander said. "I launched it in March when ... we were all facing a difficult time. There were a lot of questions. I felt that we needed solidarity as much as possible, and this was my little way to contribute."

"I wanted to create a space for many kinds of voices within Canada, so including celebratory, questioning, critical, tender, bold, whatever it might be. And it ended up that the response was overwhelming in that regard. You know,

the poems showed how alive and complex and deeply felt the idea of Canada still is. We received poems from across Canada representing a wide range of different lived experiences, different perspectives. ... The poems, some were shaped by memory, belonging, others were grappling with history, responsibility, the future. They didn't flatten Canada into a single story. There were a lot of contradictions and complexities that were presented, and that's what I found, that's what I was hoping to hear. And it was just wonderful to receive so many submissions that represented many voices."

Out of the many Canadians who submitted work, Sander shared that Stefanie Lee of Montreal was this contest's winner with her poem "The Dialect(s) of Mercy," as decided by judge Anna Yin.

Lee is a young writer living with a rare physical disability called nemaline

myopathy. Her winning poem explores Canada's history and its contemporary meaning through its created and found mythology, discussing brought cultures, the colonial institution of Canada and the Indigenous cultures here before the nation was founded. It was selected by Yin from a shortlist of finalists, which included Aubrielle Wright, Moe Zakzouk, Beth Keys, Ash T, Tina Kiklevski, Dean Gessie, Crys Wiltshire, Steve Locke,

Gabriella Varagnolo, Kortnee Sterr, Mary Anne Griffiths, Madison Barclay, Serafina Piasentin, Yashika Vahi, Chimezie Bright Osunwoke, Whitney Kitchur and Stratford's own Alex Oeming.

"It was such a tough choice," Sander said. "I don't know how (Yin) arrived at it ... The poems were so unique and they were all so different. There were some poems where people were writing love letters to Canada, and there were other

poems where people were asking really tough questions, hard questions, and were asking Canada to be better ... And I would say the winning poem, now that I think about it, she kind of touched upon both of those in a lovely way."

As Sander said, the top 200 poets – including those who made it to be on the contest's shortlist – will be included in an anthology published by Blue Moon Publishing, which will be available online and in local bookshop Fanfare Books this January.

Impressed with the submissions, Sander said she will continue hosting poetry contests moving forward, though it won't likely be another Canada Is Our Poem contest.

For more information on the contest, visit <https://tinyurl.com/28th4c47>. For more on this contest's winner Stefanie Lee, visit <https://e-motional.com/writingbystefanie/index.html>.

RADIANCE

(on the occasions of Rotary Hospice's Lights of Love and Lights on Stratford opening night)

We are told of how creation expelled the darkness and that it was good. And ever since, I think, we have chased brightness.

Even in the despair of our deepest valleys when our hearts are pierced and there is nothing but the weight of rain, we pursue the luminescence that gilds the beating heart of everything.

We are by nature

seekers of radiance, the gold within the igneous, the luring halo where the tunnel ends, the alchemy of petals chandeliered with dew. We live inside this heart-pump fuse of illumination. As moths to flame we lean into the glow, for at its flaring core we sense the kinship of belonging and how love blazes.

In the lighting of things, in the glimmer and glare of this polished universe, forgiveness gleams,

mercy beckons, tenderness enfolds and we breathe as one.

This is how we inhale light and how light enters us, the slow seep of love and caring, like iridescence into the flower, how stars embrace and bloom the heavens.

And so we live on, endlessly igniting candles in the dark, building the small fires we pass from palm to palm, the love that will endure, the light we are determined must burn forever.

-- David Stones, Stratford poet laureate

Facility dog Dusty joins Stratford Police Service to support first responders and community

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Stratford Police Service has welcomed a new four-legged team member aimed at supporting first responders and community members across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South.

NSD Dusty, an accredited facility dog and yellow Labrador retriever, has been donated to local police through National Service Dogs, with funding support from Wounded Warriors Canada. Dusty supports service members, civilians and first responders.

Dusty is a graduate of National Service Dogs' Facility Dog Program, made possible through donations and funding from Wounded Warriors Canada as part of its ongoing efforts to support first responders following critical incidents and to reduce occupational stress injuries.

Facility dogs are purpose-bred and trained to work under the direction of professionals, using specific skills to provide emotional support and a calming influence. Dusty will work alongside investigators, front-line members and social workers to support citizens across the region.

Unlike larger centres, such as London, which may have facility dogs dedicated to specific programs, Dusty will devote time to the first responder community while also engaging in day-to-day interactions.

"In the last several years, we have had the opportunity to witness the incredible impact these dogs have on those they serve," said Rachel Braden, a social worker and Dusty's primary handler. "They bring light in the darkest of times and provide a type of support that transcends what humans can provide."

Braden said the presence of a facility dog often creates an immediate shift in atmosphere.

"There's a basic human-animal connection," she said. "You walk into a room and



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Const. Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer with the Stratford Police Service, NSD Dusty, an accredited facility dog, and Rachel Braden, a social worker and Dusty's primary handler. Dusty recently joined police to support first responders and community members in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South.

if there's a dog to play with, everyone is just naturally a little bit calmer and happier. I would say it really helps with the bridging between police and the community."

She also noted that facility dogs differ

from service dogs, which are trained to support one individual.

"Facility dogs are purpose-bred and trained to work with a variety of people," Braden said. "This is probably one of the only situations where you'll see a dog in

a vest and you're allowed to say hello, because of the nature of the work they're trained to do with a professional."

Const. Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer, is one of Dusty's secondary handlers. He said Dusty helps reduce stress and ease interactions with police.

"When Dusty is here, there is an immediate lightening of the mood," Fischer said. "People get playful and you can see that serious work mode take a break for a moment. That decompression from the continuous, ongoing stress of the job. She really allows for a mental health break."

Fischer added that Dusty can also help break down barriers for people who may feel uncomfortable interacting with police.

"She has an opportunity to soften that visit a little bit," he said. "(Dusty) can help break down that barrier for people who have concerns about interacting with the police, so officers can better engage and offer support."

Police Chief Greg Skinner said Dusty and Braden add another layer of support for both officers and the community.

"Tragic events can happen to anyone at any time," Skinner said. "We may not be able to eliminate the trauma that comes with tragedy, but we can try to mitigate it through the provision of member and community support."

Skinner said the program will help support people in vulnerable situations, assist victims of crime and strengthen relationships between police and the community.

When Dusty is out in the community, Braden said members of the public are welcome to interact with and pet her. Fischer reminded residents that safety comes first and asking permission before petting any dog is always best practice.

Those interested in following Dusty's work can find her on Instagram at @sps_nsddusty.

Stratford Perth Centre for Business launches practical AI for Small Business micro-workshop series

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Stratford Perth Centre for Business (SPCB), in partnership with investStratford, is kicking off 2026 with the launch of AI for Small Business, a new micro-workshop series designed to help local entrepreneurs confidently use artificial intelligence to simplify day-to-day tasks and strengthen their operations.

The self-paced, online program features 10 targeted, plain-language sessions, each only 20-30 minutes long and focused on a single practical skill. Tailored for busy owners in retail, food and beverage, wellness, tourism and service-based businesses, every workshop provides a step-by-step walkthrough and a downloadable prompt

sheet. Participants leave each session with a ready-to-use asset – such as a marketing caption, job description, policy draft, financial tracker, or grant application outline.

"Small businesses are looking for simple, trustworthy ways to integrate new technology without feeling overwhelmed," said Joani Gerber, CEO of investStratford, in a media release. "This series meets entrepreneurs exactly where they are – busy, stretched and eager for tools that make an immediate difference in their workday. We're proud to help bring a resource to the community that supports real-world productivity and business growth."

The series covers practical topics such as creating social media content, drafting HR documents, completing market research, building basic financial forecasts and gen-

erating quick Canva graphics using AI. No previous experience with artificial intelligence is required.

"This program was built with one goal in mind – give business owners the confidence to try AI in a way that feels accessible and useful from day one," said Holly Mortimer, business advisor with the Stratford Perth Centre for Business and creator of the series. "These micro-workshops are short, friendly and to the point. If you can watch a Zoom recording, you can use this program to save yourself hours each week."

Entrepreneurs can purchase the full 10-session bundle for \$79, which includes all videos and downloadable tools. Workshops will be available on www.stratfordperthcentreforbusiness.ca or released weekly for enrolled participants at

<https://tinyurl.com/2zdfhfw7>.

The Stratford Perth Centre for Business operates as a department of investStratford in partnership with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. It is committed to helping small business owners achieve their business goals. The centre offers local small business support and complimentary consultation and easy access to resources, including business start-up services to support the development of new and already established small businesses. In addition to advisory services, events, seminars and training opportunities are held throughout the year to meet small business essentials. For more info visit stratfordperthbusiness.ca or contact info@stratfordperthbusiness.ca.

Looking back, looking ahead, part 1: Mayor Ritsma

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

During deliberations for last year's budget, Mayor Martin Ritsma warned of "gray skies" for Stratford.

Now, a year after that prediction, Ritsma is happy that things weren't as gray as he originally thought.

"I know negative things do exist, but I tend to take a more positive approach," Ritsma shared with the Times. "And so my reflection is positive. I thought we had lots more positive going on in our city, a lot of things that connected us, whether it was businesses, whether it was residents, etc. I thought it was a good year."

Focusing on the economy, Ritsma pointed to November figures from the Four County Labour Market Planning Board which indicated that Stratford and region had a 3.9 per cent unemployment rate, far lower than the provincial average of 7.2 per cent and the lowest in the province.

U.S. trade tariffs were a thorn in the region's manufacturing side, but through the work of the provincial and federal governments, the impact was mitigated. Heading into 2026, Ritsma estimated 85 per cent of the manufacturing sector, which makes up about two-thirds of the city's economic base, continues to be in good stead.

"Then I looked at the tourism sector, probably our best years since COVID," Ritsma said. "Especially with the (Stratford) Festival. We saw numbers of Americans coming back as strong as or almost as strong as pre-COVID, so those numbers were solid with the Stratford Festival."

Furthermore, being named as one of the country's top 10 destinations to travel to in 2026 by CBC's The Current was another feather in the city's cap, as area tourism organizations worked to prolong the tourism industry into the shoulder season.

Small businesses were also on the up, Ritsma said. More storefronts opened in the city last year than closed, and where other municipalities are struggling to keep their downtowns vibrant, Stratford's continues to thrive.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma reflects on 2025 and looks ahead to 2026.

From a corporate perspective, one of Ritsma's highlights of the year was seeing André Morin return to the City of Stratford as its newest chief administrative officer (CAO). While some may not fully realize how important a CAO is to the health and future of the city, Ritsma said it was a significant milestone for the city in 2025 and will continue to impact Stratford exponentially in the years ahead.

Morin's hiring followed a national search with 75 applicants from sea to sea to sea applying.

Stratford's keystone development, the Grand Trunk renewal (GTR) project, was also a highlight for Ritsma. As reported by the Times in the latter part of 2025, the project's ad hoc committee disbanded with mixed reactions from committee members who were by and large not satisfied with the committee's work. Later, many city councillors had expressed frustration with how the project had been handled from the start.

Through a past council decision, the current council was obligated to strike an ad hoc committee, Ritsma explained,

within 90 days of a new council forming. Over two years that committee did tremendous work, he said, distilling the hundreds of community ideas into a few, manageable guiding principles.

While many had concerns about what has been done this year, for Ritsma there was a lot of foundational work done.

"If you're in the business world, if you see a problem, you look at it, you assess it – 'Okay, this is our next step.' But when you're accountable to a municipality and its residents, it's businesses, it's downtown core, you have to be accountable and you have to take the time ... We only get one shot at this, and we want to make sure we do it right."

On that note, Ritsma praised Emily Robson, corporate initiatives lead with the city, for her work in keeping the committee and project on track.

Another highlight has been Stratford's continued work to close the infrastructure gap in the city. In 2025, \$37 million was spent updating the aging infrastructure in the city.

Turning to 2026, and on the subject of infrastructure, Ritsma said that it is a top priority for the city. \$56 million is earmarked to be spent in 2026 on 98 projects.

Facing an annual capital deficit of \$11.5 million, according to the latest update in the city's asset management plan (AMP), Ritsma is hopeful that the gap will be reduced. AI is one of the tools the city hopes to implement to better assess and identify the infrastructure needing to be repaired and replaced.

"We're going to be in a better spot than I would have anticipated in 2024 going into 2025," Ritsma said.

This coming year will be an important one for the municipality. It is the last year of this term of council, as an election looms for Oct. 26, 2026.

Ritsma revealed he will be seeking re-election this year and is looking forward to seeing who else will put their name forward to be a part of council.

As 2026 gets underway, Ritsma reflected on his prediction the year prior.

"I am an optimist, so I do believe we're going to have blue skies, but I do believe we're going to go through some storms," Ritsma said. "I really do believe that."

STRATFORD TIMES

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Tim Hortons - Huron
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Video 99 - Erie St
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Stratford Hyundai
Daisy Mart
Foodland
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Coldest Night of the Year returns to Stratford

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The United Way Perth-Huron and Shelterlink Youth Services are inviting people to register for the Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) walk, an annual fundraising event in support of vulnerable individuals experiencing hurt, hunger and homelessness on Feb. 28.

"We are looking forward to walking again," said Cate Trudeau, executive director at Shelterlink. "CNOY is a powerful way to stand with youth in our community. Thanks to the generosity of the Stratford community, we were able to support young people last year, helping prevent youth from becoming homeless and supporting their path to safe, permanent housing. We invite everyone to join us again as we continue working toward ending youth homelessness."

"Coldest Night has become a meaningful tradition in Stratford. It's wonderful to see so many returning teams coming back for the fifth or sixth year to help make change in our community," said Sonya Heyen, United

Way senior manager of resource development and communications.

"Stratford CNOY was the fifth largest out of 160 events across Canada last year. When the snow falls, we hope people in Stratford think about individuals in our community facing hurt, hunger and homelessness and walk with us again to achieve our goal of raising \$200,000."

Families, service clubs, church groups, workplaces, sports teams and more are encouraged to visit cnoy.org, register a team and start fundraising. Walkers raising over \$150 – \$75 for youth under 18 – receive a CNOY toque. For event updates, follow the Stratford Coldest Night of the Year page on Facebook.

Funds raised also help support United Way's Stratford Connection Centre, providing a safe place for vulnerable people, including access to basic needs and connections, and Shelterlink's work supporting local youth through their programs and services.

United Way and Shelterlink would like to thank our current sponsors: Chris' BBQ &



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Volunteer walkers at the 2025 Coldest Night of the Year fundraising walk turn down Lakeside Drive.

Country Style Catering, GOTECH, Home & Company Real Estate, Malt Staging and Design, Mark's, McDonald's Stratford, Peter

Maranger & Associates, Robert Ritz Architect, Soup Surreal and Stratford Orthodontics.

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+ HST & ITC

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PRICE DROP

\$21,495 OR \$174 B/W
LOW KMS - 93,245 KM

+ HST & ITC

2023 Hyundai Elantra SEL



PRICE DROP

\$21,999 OR \$158 B/W
LOW KMS - 18,469 KM

+ HST & ITC

2025 Nissan Sentra S PLUS



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\$22,999 OR \$165 B/W
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2021 Nissan Rogue SV



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OPP wraps Festive RIDE campaign with nearly 300 drivers facing charges

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The annual Festive RIDE (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) campaign has concluded with nearly 300 drivers now facing impaired driving charges.

From the start of the campaign on Nov. 20, 2025, until its conclusion on Jan. 1, 2026, OPP West Region officers conducted 3,095 Festive RIDE spot checks across 13 detachment areas. This is the highest number of Festive RIDE events conducted in West Region in five years.

The charges below represent the final campaign tally:

- 269 impaired driving charges.
- 40 warn-range suspensions.

In Perth County, OPP conducted 175 events, laying seven impaired driving charges and one warn-range suspensions. Notably, Perth County had the lowest number of impaired driving charges laid in the West Region and tied with Brant County for the lowest number of charges laid in total.

Provincially, OPP officers have laid 1,268 impaired driving charges and 150 warn-range suspensions in 11,130 RIDE check events in OPP-patrolled areas across Ontario.

Last year's West Region Festive RIDE campaign resulted in 292 impaired driving charges and 19 warn-range suspensions following 1,938 RIDE check events.

"West Region remains committed to keeping our roads safe through proactive RIDE programs and focused impaired-driving enforcement efforts," said Insp. Michael McConnell, OPP West Region Traffic and Marine Manager, in a media release. "We remind all drivers to plan ahead, make responsible choices, and always drive sober-if you've been drinking, arrange a safe ride home."

If you suspect that someone is driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs, it is important to call 911 to report it. For more information on Canada's impaired driving laws, visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/impaired-driving>.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

OPP West Region officers conduct a Festive RIDE spot check in Wellington County on New Year's Eve, the last day of its holiday event. Across the region, 269 impaired driving charges were laid while in Perth County OPP laid seven.

Kinsmen open its post-secondary bursary program

The Kinsmen Club of Stratford is pleased to promote a fantastic funding opportunity for volunteer-minded post-secondary students in the community – \$1,000 bursaries through the Kin Canada Bursaries program.

All students attending a recognized university, college, trade school or technical institute in the 2026-27 academic year are encouraged to apply. Kin Canada Bursaries are awarded to students based on demonstrated financial need, volunteerism, and knowledge of Kin Canada and the

Kinsmen Club of Stratford (or the club nearest to them).

For more information or to apply, please see www.kin-canada.ca/apply. Applications are due by Feb. 1, 2026 at 11:59 p.m., PST. Applicants are welcome to reach out to the Kinsmen Club of Stratford to ask questions about how the local club and Kin across the country make an impact on Canadian communities.

For more information, please contact Roger Howson at roger-maddi@wightman.ca or phone 519-274-2714.

Shelf help

SHAUNA COSTACHE

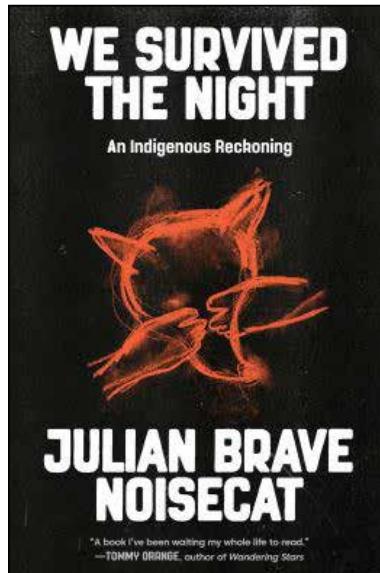
Stratford Public Library

We Survived the Night, by Julian Brave NoiseCat
@SPL: 305.8979430092 Noise

Every December, my will to read falls off a cliff. As the holidays ramp up, my ability to focus on any kind of narrative heads the inverse direction. In the wake of the holidays, I'm a couch puddle wondering how carbs became the cause of -- and solution to -- all life's problems. If I'm going to read in the month before or after the holidays, it needs to be something engaging, dishy enough to put family in perspective, and interesting enough to overcome the inertia of autoplay on TV screening. In other words, winter is for memoirs from brilliant, funny people who are a bit of a mess sometimes.

Enter Julian Brave NoiseCat's new memoir, *We Survived the Night*. NoiseCat is the son of renowned Secwépemc artist Ed Archie NoiseCat, and he's a writer, film-maker and activist in his own right.

He's still a young man in his early 30s, and readers could be forgiven for wondering if three-ish decades gives anyone enough time on the planet to spin a good memoir.



But, NoiseCat is not just telling his own story. He's telling the story of his father, who was rescued from an incinerator at a residential school as a newborn, and his mother, who poured so much love into keeping NoiseCat connected to his Secwépemc family and roots after her marriage came apart. He's telling the story of how colonialism still divides Indigenous communities, how residential schools' impacts echo through families. And, he's telling the story of Coyote, trickster of the West Coast, alongside all of this.

Because this is Coyote's story, and Julian's story, this memoir is much, much funnier than the subject matter or title might imply. The different layers lend perspective, humour and empathy to a life story that could otherwise be too heavy for the reader to help carry. Switching between lenses helps the reader feel the deep love that binds NoiseCat to his family and community, while clearly seeing the pain colonialism still inflicts.

We Survived the Night is the rare memoir that tackles big issues, a messy family, and an accomplished life, and does it all with style and humour.

Perth County CFFO

Annual General Meeting

January 19, 2026 from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m.
at The Arden Park, Stratford

Dan McTeague from Canadians for Affordable Energy will speak at 1 p.m.
"Affordable Energy=Affordable Food, Where do Farmers fit into the Equation?"

RSVP Anna 226 880-0337

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. When was the last time Canada won the IIHF World Juniors?
2. Which Canadian province is known as 'The Land of 10,000 Lakes'?
3. What country has the most oil reserves?
4. What does TNT stand for?
5. What is the national bird of New Zealand?
6. What Disney princess has the longest hair?
7. In what year did Adolf Hitler become Chancellor of Germany?
8. What kind of animal is a platypus?
9. What is the square root of 64?
10. What is larger, a US gallon or a UK gallon?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

Help give the breath of life this February during the Kin Valentines Gala Dinner

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

On Saturday Feb. 7 the Kinsmen Club of Stratford will be hosting its annual Valentines Gala Dinner in support of cystic fibrosis and all are invited. Tickets are \$50 a person and include a roast beef buffet, entertainment by local band Upside of Maybe and a silent auction. All proceeds go to support cystic fibrosis research, one of the chief projects for the national club.

Over the years the Stratford Kinsmen have run many fundraising events in support of cystic fibrosis research. Since 1964, Kinsmen across the nation have raised in excess of over \$60 Million.

To the general public, cystic fibrosis remains somewhat of a mystery. What are its symptoms? Can it be cured? How is it treated? Cystic fibrosis isn't always visible. Behind everyday moments are invisible burdens: hours of daily treatments, countless pills, hospital stays and the constant weight of managing this disease. Researchers have not yet found a cure, but there have been huge advancements in treating the disease.

In 1964 the life expectancy of a child with cystic fibrosis was age four. Today, because of research, patients are getting married, having children and even have grandchildren. However, it is important to remember that patients have their life on the line day after day. Kinsmen's greatest hope lies in developing genetic therapies, which are more complex and costly than anything they've ever pursued.

Cystic fibrosis patients are fierce advocates, who live boldly and believe that life is meant to be lived fully, no matter the obstacles. That is why Kin continues to back the fight against the disease. One day there will be a cure.

The local Kinsmen Club has pursued community-building initiatives aside from cystic fibrosis research. Major fundraising and service projects over the past 65 plus years have included the arena booth, Stratford Blues and Ribfest and high school bursaries to name a few. Kinsmen and Kinettes also hosted the Antique Show, Millionaires Night and Winter Carnival. The club still hosts the annual Canada Day celebration and fireworks.

Most recently the Kinsmen have made financial donations to the Stratford Hospital Foundation, Wellspring for Cancer, Rotary Aquabox, Stratford Library, Connections Centre and gym equipment for a new outdoor facility by the skate park.

Kin Canada is Canada's largest all-Canadian service organization, made up of Canadian men and women who gather together in clubs to volunteer their time for the purposes of bettering their communities by performing hands on service work, raising funds for important community projects and having fun.

If you would like more information on the Kinsmen Club of Stratford or would like to come out to a meeting, find more information at www.stratfordkinsmen.ca.

For tickets to the Valentines Gala dinner, find them at Black Angus Bakery & Catering or call either 519-272-6912 or 519-274-5781.

Stratford Summer Music donates half of MusicBarge proceeds to United Way

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

After a season filled with great music, Stratford Summer Music (SSM) and United Way Perth-Huron are proud to celebrate SSM's recent donation to the United Way.

"We appreciate Stratford Summer Music donating \$1,793.62 – half of the proceeds from their MusicBarge program – to our annual campaign," said United Way executive director Ryan Erb. "Together, we're strengthening supports in our community, ensuring help is available when and where residents need it."

United Way's annual campaign raises funds to help address pressing local issues including poverty, housing, mental health and well-being. This year, its goal is just over \$2.5 million, achievable in part due to the work of SSM and other area institutions and residents.

The MusicBarge is an integral part of SSM's annual multi-week summer festival, and perhaps its most visible. Along with the festival, it hosts year-round programming, showcasing over 100 artists in a variety of events across indoor and outdoor venues throughout Stratford. With a commitment to artistic excellence, the festival presents a diverse lineup of local, national and international talent, offering performances across a wide range of musical genres. SSM aims to deliver world-class music experiences, bringing a level of quality typically found in large urban centres, to audiences in the community.

"MusicBarge transforms the waterfront into a place of connection, where live music is open to everyone," said SSM executive Director Crystel L. Spicer. "Stratford Summer Music is grounded in community and guided by a belief that music is most powerful when it's shared widely and inclusively."

For more information on SSM, visit stratfordsummermusic.ca.

To volunteer or donate with the United Way, to learn more about it, call 519-271-7730 or 1-877-818-8867, mail to 32 Erie St., Stratford, Ont. or visit perthhuron.unitedway.ca.

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River Gardens Retirement residents host Mayor Ritsma for breakfast

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Every year at the end of December, Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma accepts an invite to have breakfast with all the men who live in the much-decorated River Gardens Retirement Residence.

Ritsma gives those attending an outlook on what the city is working on for the future, and answers questions from those residents with what concerns them at the present time.

The question came up about when the much dilapidated "Golden Bamboo" building on Ontario Street might be coming down, since it is a particular eye sore as people enter the city.

The mayor said there was now a new owner and developer and council is just trying to come to terms with how many floors the proposed future buildings might be, in order to comply with neighbours beside the location proposed and the zoning bylaws that are presently in place.

The mayor talked about doctor and nursing staff at Stratford and area hospitals, and said the Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance, under the guidance of CEO Andrew Williams, is in much better shape than other immediate areas of the province, and this area continues to attract doctors and nurses.

He said he has talked to many in the medical field and most say the city has



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma explained to the men at the River Gardens Retirement Residence what he sees in the future for the taxpayers of Stratford at the end of December, an annual tradition for the residence.

what they are looking for: schools, churches, recreational areas, farmers markets, seniors programs, top quality eating establishments and, of course, the area's best theatres.

When the question came up about the Grand Trunk renewal project and the buildings there, he said the 18 acres will continue to be used as the city's bus terminal, and also parking, and knows projects

like a new public library and new YMCA building are projects city council would like to see at the site, if possible.

Ritsma said the advisory committee that had been set up offers area residents a say in what they would like to see at that Coope site, where railway locomotives once called home.

He said, as with other cities, adequate housing continues to be an area council is always trying their best to improve and

knows many projects are now underway on all sides of the city, that will help alleviate some of those issues.

He said the city continues to work hard on rent-geared-to-income housing, where he knows it is an ongoing issue to manage.

He knows there are many workers at manufacturing plants in Stratford that travel to and from work outside of Stratford, and with more housing, those workers could stay in the city and raise their families here, and they would spend their money here, instead of out of town.

With 2025 figures for construction in the city not yet available, in 2024 Stratford completed 119 infrastructure, road and building projects, for a total expenditure of \$37 million.

In 2026 there are 190 projects in the pipeline for a \$56 million city expenditure.

He stated that if council and staff don't tackle aging infrastructure like water, sewage waste and streets, down the road there could always be disasters lurking, if problems aren't looked after before they become an even bigger problem.

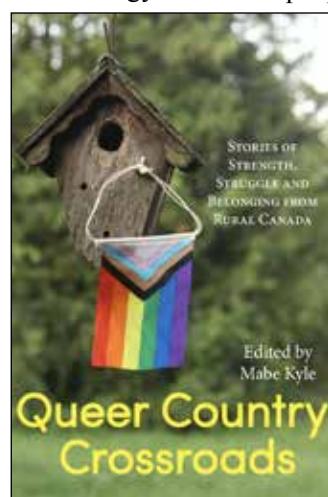
In closing, the mayor said he was adamant at holding the budget to a 3.5 per cent increase for the cities taxpayers (it ended up being a 3.19 per cent increase), and hopes that future years will be even less, if possible, while maintaining services that residents have come to expect, from its leaders in the picturesque Festival City.

Queer Book of the Month: Queer Country Crossroads by Mabe Kyle

SYDNEY GOODWIN

Times Correspondent

Queer Country Crossroads, edited by Mabe Kyle (they/them), is an anthology that compiles short stories and poetry from various queer authors all throughout Canada.



ships that come along with feeling like you're alone in how you feel. Kyle wanted to make sure they provided a blend of hopeful, loving stories, and more difficult times in people's lives.

The project overall took two years to complete. It was a very interesting process, connecting with all of the authors. Kyle wanted to make sure they got a wide range of queer voices, reaching nearly every single province and territory in all of Canada, and ages ranging from 17-70. When they wrote the introduction, Kyle was at a very vulnerable spot in their life, after the death of a person who had worked closely with Kyle during

the creation of this book, and their story included in the piece. Kyle wanted to make sure their friend's story was heard.

Queer Country Crossroads can be purchased at many local bookstores or can be borrowed to read from the Stratford-Perth Pride Centre.

This anthology gets into the truth of what it's like to live as a queer individual in rural Canada, the difficulties and hard-

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Warriors reverted back to winning ways; veteran trio makes impact in the GOHL prospect game

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors have reached their halfway point of the season. Through 27 games, the team is 17-6-2-2, good for fifth in the Western Conference. Statistically, the team has mixed results. They have the third-worst goals in the conference with 96, and the third-least goals allowed with 72.

The team management staff of director of operations Jason Clarke, general manager Nick Parr and assistant general manager Mark Nelson discussed the current state of the team at the midway point of the season.

"I thought we've been pretty good," Nelson said. "... You look at the amount of games we've lost, and we've had some close games and ones we thought we could have won."

"But I think overall, I think we must be fairly pleased with what we got. The kids are starting to get better and adjusting, and I think the learning curve is going the right way."

"I think performance-wise, we're a very hard-working team. I do like us defensively, and I think we've out-chanced a lot of teams," Parr said. "We haven't

Stratford Warriors

2025-26 Stats

(as of January 5, 2026)

Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Jonas Schmidt	F	23	13	14	27
Max Wildfong	F	29	16	9	25
Quinn Kipfer	F	26	8	13	21
Lucas Minard	F	28	11	8	19
Colin Slattery	F	25	6	12	18
Coen Galbraith	F	27	6	10	16
Evan Arnold	F	20	9	5	14
Dax Vader	F	27	4	10	14
Joseph Curtin	D	28	4	10	14
Will Coward	D	28	1	13	14
Jack McGurn	F	26	5	8	13
Aaron Green	D	22	4	7	11
Dominic Marshall	F	29	7	3	10
Rhyse Brown	F	26	3	7	10
McQuen HayLock	F	27	2	8	10
Grady Murphy	F	25	6	2	8
Haden Frayne	D	27	1	7	8
Drew Hodge	D	28	1	7	8
Matthew Blake	D	23	0	5	5
Jaxson Broda	D	2	0	4	4
Mateo Craievich	D	20	0	4	4
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	11-5-0-1	2.55	0.908		
Gage Hurst	7-0-1-1	1.98	0.915		

some other teams, a couple of teams above us. We have five games and hands-on, so we're in a good spot. But it also means we have to win those games that we have in hand."

"I am very happy with the group and the work ethic and our record to date. I think we'd like a few more wins if we can, but in the same frame, you know, we've got points in 21 of the 27 games. It looks a little different in the standings because of the games in hand," Clarke said.

"We're just not fine in the back of the net. I really think we continue to go, shoot teams the way we are. The pucks eventually got to start going in, and I'm really relying on that to start happening."

Team captain Haden Frayne likes what the team has performed and is confident in the potential turnaround.

"I think it's been good. Had a little bump in the road here the last couple of games, but I think it's just something that we can fix up," Frayne said.

"We have a good group in there, and we're all really close, and I think we can tie it together for this last half of the season. Have a good stretch for the playoffs."

Heading into the last week of games before the holiday break, Max Wildfong has been a key contributor for the team, which has struggled offensively in recent weeks. Wildfong has scored in seven straight games and recorded a point in 11 straight games.

"Yeah, it obviously feels great. I couldn't have done it with all my line mates, and it's not really in my head right now. I'm just kind of focusing on the team and just next those next games and just hoping to punch our ticket into the playoffs," Wildfong said.

With stormy weather, the Warriors were looking forward to the Christmas break on a warm note as they hosted the Elmira Sugar Kings at the Allman Arena on Dec. 19.

Elmira opened the scoring 32 seconds into the game and increased their lead to

2-0 midway through the period. Stratford got on the board late in the period on a powerplay goal by Aaron Green from Joseph Curtin and Coen Galbraith.

Stratford tied the game with 6:41 left in the second period by Jonas Schmidt's 12th of the season from Lucas Minard. But the visitors retaken the lead before the period ended with 1:49 left.

The Sugar Kings restored their two-goal lead less than three minutes into the third period, but Dax Vader's goal from Minard and Galbraith put the Warriors back to within one with 4:39 left in regulation.

Despite the final offensive push with the extra attacker, with less than two minutes left in the period, the Warriors were unable to find the equalizer, and the Sugar Kings prevailed with an empty-net goal, winning 5-3.

Head coach Dave Williams spoke to the Times about the team's performance against one of the league's top teams.

"There was a lot that I liked about how we played tonight. Kind of got chased in the game early on with that early goal, and it fell behind. I thought we stuck with it, got ourselves back tied up and kept pushing here at the end. So, there's lots to like," Williams said.

"It never feels good to lose, but that's a pretty good hockey team over there as well. So, you're going to have nights where you play a pretty good game, but the team on the other side is also going to have their moments as well."

Stratford travelled to Strathroy on Dec. 20 to face the Rockets in their last game before the holiday break.

The Rockets got on the board midway through the first period and increased their lead to 2-0 with 7:04 remaining in the opening frame.

Dominic Marshall scored with 3:26 remaining in the second period, and Galbraith put the visitors to within a goal heading into the third period. Early in the third period, the Warriors killed off a four-minute penalty, and with five min-

utes remaining in regulation, they tied the game on a goal from Evan Arnold, assisted by McQuen Haylock.

The game went into overtime, but the Rockets prevailed 56 seconds into the extra frame and picked up.

Williams appreciated the team finding their way to get a point despite the tough start in the first period.

"Well, I didn't like our first period. Thought it's probably the worst period we played in some time. We talked a lot about it ahead of time, not getting on holidays ahead of ourselves, but felt like the group was already on holiday time with that first period and got it to the guys. I thought they battled hard in the second and third," Williams said.

Williams says the team is looking forward to having much-needed time off.

"Guys all get home and get a break. Our guys put in a lot of time and work hard, and sure, they're playing games they love. They're passionate about some of the personal sacrifices. Nice for everybody, coaches and staff and players included, to spend all the time with their family over the holiday."

On Dec. 30, three members of the Warriors participated in the GOHL U21 Prospects Challenge at the Western Fair Complex in London. Schmidt and Curtin were part of Team Williams, and Bender was part of Team Bondy.

Dave Schlitt, part of the Team Williams coaching staff, shared his thoughts on taking part in the event and what it means for the trio of Warriors competing in the game.

"I think, personally, I've always enjoyed being part of these events that the league fits into a good event. It's enjoyable working with other coaches across the league, getting to know them a little bit, and working with players from the different teams," Schlitt said.

"I think for our three guys, it's a good opportunity to showcase their abilities. And we've got the best 19, 20-year-olds from across the league, and it's a good opportunity to showcase their abilities. And hopefully put on a good performance for themselves individually, and maybe it's a good reflection as a whole."

Bender got the start in goal for Team Bondy and had a good performance with 16 saves in 18 shots, but was relieved at the 9:37 mark of the second period. Schmidt and Curtin combined for five points for Team Williams in the 9-6 win.

The trio spoke to the Times about their experiences at the event.

"It was fun. It's a different being on the other side, playing against them. But yeah, they're both really good players, so that was good to be able to play against them as well," Bender said. "Overall, it

CONTINUED TO PAGE 17

GOHL Western Conference Standings

(as of January 5, 2026)

Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
Chatham Maroons	25	6	1	2	53	159	99
Elmira Sugar Kings	24	4	2	0	50	142	74
St. Marys Lincolns	22	6	2	0	46	120	69
Stratford Warriors	19	6	2	2	42	109	77
London Nationals	21	10	0	0	42	142	99
Waterloo Siskins	15	10	4	2	36	104	91
St. Thomas Stars	15	13	2	1	33	114	110
LaSalle Vipers	15	16	3	0	33	110	127
Strathroy Rockets	14	15	2	0	30	120	120
Listowel Cyclones	12	16	1	1	26	85	94
Komoka Kings	10	19	2	1	23	105	139
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	31	0	0	0	47	205

SDSS Junior Bears golden in London

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford District Secondary School Junior Bears claimed their second tournament of the season by taking the Western University Purple and White Junior Boys Tournament in London on Jan. 4.

In the playoff rounds, the Bears dominated with two convincing wins over the London Catholic Central Crusaders and Cambridge St. Benedict's Saints, outscoring them 134 to 67.

In what head coach Chris Cassone called the team's best game of the year, the Bears defeated the top-seeded London Mother Teresa Spartans 57-43 to win the prestigious tournament title.

Stratford's Brent Van Nes picked up the tournament's top player honours, while Zach Bannerman was named to the All-Star team for his performance.

With the tourney victory, the Bears improved their record to 17-2 on the 2025-26 season.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The SDSS Junior Bears won the Purple and White Junior Boys Tournament on Jan. 4. Pictured here are Lucas Cassone, Graham Cassone, Ashton Van Kooten, Zachary Bannerman, Sam Ragogna, Landon Miller, Cole Weyers, Dilip Singh, Declan Martin, Brent Van Nes, Bilad Syed, Issac Brouwer, Koa Thompson, Chris Cassone (coach), Steve Rivers (coach) and Eric Steinman (coach). Absent were Will Heaton and Ma Hughes.



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January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month

No one should face dementia alone.

Join us this January to end stigma and support families.



Alzheimer Society
HURON PERTH
#ForgetNoOne

Each January for Alzheimer's Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society highlights an important conversation: dementia is a health crisis too many people avoid. This year's theme, *Forget No One*, calls on all of us to break the silence and reduce the stigma that keeps people from seeking help.

New polling shows that one in four Canadians would rather not know if they had dementia, and nearly half wouldn't know where to turn for support. Stigma delays diagnosis and leaves people facing symptoms alone, but it doesn't have to be this way. The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth is here to help, offering information, guidance, and community programs so no one has to face dementia alone.

This January, learn how you can be part of the movement to *Forget No One*.

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth accepts and welcomes new clients and volunteers. Registration is required for all programs, education, and support services. Programs may be offered in-person or virtually. If you are in need of support or have questions about programs and services, please call one of the offices.

Huron 519-482-1482 | Perth 519-271-1910

First Link Premier SUPPORT

One on One Support

Free, confidential support services to individuals, families, and friends affected by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Support Groups

Groups provide an opportunity to discuss topics related to dementia with others who can relate to similar situations and behaviours.

EDUCATION

Education is an important part of understanding and learning to live well with dementia. Education is provided to people whose personal or professional lives are impacted by dementia, including registered clients, healthcare professionals, and anyone with questions about brain health.

Education Hour

Free online webinars available through www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth

Memory and Aging Program™

Developed for those who are experiencing normal age-related changes in memory or who are interested in learning more about this topic.

First Link Learning Series

The First Link Learning Series offers a comprehensive overview of dementia, coping strategies, planning, resources, and supports.

Taking Control of Our Lives

A self-management program for people living with dementia and their care partners.

Learning the Ropes for Living with MCI®

A program aimed at community dwelling older adults experiencing Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and their close family member/friend.

SOCIAL RECREATION

In-Home Recreation

Offers individualized activities that promote cognitive stimulation for people living with dementia through ongoing weekly visits from staff or volunteers.

Minds in Motion®

An 8 week community based social program incorporates physical activity and mental stimulation for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and their care partners.

Social Recreation

Provides opportunities for individuals living with dementia and their care partners to socialize while benefiting from activities that improve well-being.

Over half of Canadians say they worry about dementia, and yet so many still feel they have to carry that fear quietly.

Stigma convinces people to wait, to stay silent and to push the questions away.

But silence doesn't protect us, connection does. If dementia is on your mind, for yourself or someone you love, you don't have to sit with that alone.

Would you want to know?

One in four Canadians say no – that's stigma. Knowing about dementia means learning, getting help, and finding hope.

Many Canadians would rather not know if they have dementia. This is what stigma looks like. It delays diagnosis, limits access to support, and isolates people who need connection the most. Education opens the door to support.

One in four Canadians would be worried about telling their loved ones

if they were diagnosed with dementia. Fear and anxiety are real.

Stigma around dementia looks like any negative attitudes or discriminatory behaviour against people living with dementia, based on their condition or diagnosis. When a disease is as prevalent as dementia, yet still poorly understood, it's easy for false beliefs to spread. These negative beliefs and negative attitudes harm people living with dementia and care partners, affecting their self-worth and quality of life.

No one should ever feel like they need to hide and support is closer than people think. Reaching out is the first step.

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth are helping people understand, plan what's next, and feel less alone doing it. You don't have to have all the answers before you reach out.



Make the call. You can cut your fear and anxiety in half by connecting to the Alzheimer Society. The person at the other end of the phone has answered similar calls hundreds of times.

They know what they're doing – they can help you.

— Fred K.

What Dementia Stigma Really Looks Like

Let's break it down, and break it, together.

Stigma shows up when:

- Harmful reactions or "jokes" come from misinformation
- People make negative assumptions or stereotypes
- Those living with dementia are treated as less capable or less worthy

Stigma isn't harmless, it hurts. It can:

- Lower quality of life and self worth
- Delay diagnosis and support
- Push people into silence instead of connection

Why it matters:

- When stigma keeps people from seeking help, families lose moments, support, and tools that could make life easier and more meaningful
- No one should face dementia alone

How you can fight stigma. Your everyday actions make the biggest difference:

- Learn and share accurate info
- Stay connected with people living with dementia
- Speak up when you hear stigma
- Reach out to the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth for support

Let's rewrite the story, together.

#ForgetNoOne

Alzheimer Society
HURON PERTH



Silence around dementia keeps people from getting help.

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Alzheimer Society
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Local Awareness Month Events and Education

During Alzheimer's Awareness Month, Alzheimer Societies across Canada unite to challenge dementia stigma and create a community where everyone feels more comfortable talking about dementia and sharing their own experience.

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth has a variety of education events coming up. Talk with the Doc! Top Five Geriatric Research Papers with Dr. Alexandrea Peel will take place on ZOOM on Wednesday, January 28 from 1:30 – 3:00 pm.

Every year brings new research regarding aging, dementia, and more. Dr. Peel, a local geriatrician well-versed in dementia care is going to comb through the news and focus on five studies that we should be paying attention to now.

Talk with the Doc, also includes a lively Q&A session with Dr. Peel after the presentation. This is a FREE event. Self-register at <https://bit.ly/DocTalk2026>.

You can register for one session and have access to all four. There is no cost to join and the sessions are all held on Zoom so you can join from anywhere.

The Alzheimer Society provides many educational opportunities for everyone. From online webinars to in-person speakers and classes, there are opportunities for you to learn more about brain health and dementia.

Contact the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth for more about these and other upcoming programs, support services, and education.



Living with dementia is about more than challenges. It's about resilience, creativity, and hope. By seeing strengths and expanding possibilities, we can change the way the world views dementia.

Life after a diagnosis can still be meaningful and full of purpose.

— Mario G.



EDUCATION HOUR

One hour - one topic, No cost, hosted virtually over ZOOM
Presentations on brain health, cognitive changes and dementia.

Dementia Overview
Monday, January 19
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Your Journey of Support
Starts Here
Wednesday, February 4 & March 4
10:00 AM

Care Partners:
Dealing with the Feelings
Tuesdays, January 20, 27
February 3, 10
1:30 PM

Understanding Brain Changes
Monday, March 2
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

What is Mild Cognitive Impairment?
Monday, January 26
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Communication Tips
Monday, March 9
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

10 Common Warning Signs
Monday, February 2
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Brain Health
Thursday, March 12
1:30 PM

Types of Dementia
Monday, February 9
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Demystifying Memory Clinics
Thursday, March 19
1:30 PM

Self-Register: bit.ly/ASHPEducationHour
www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth
Questions: 519-482-1482 or 519-271-1910



What is her name?
What did I come down here for? Where did I put....? The Virtual Memory and Aging Program, reviews age-related memory changes, how to optimize your brain health, and helpful memory strategies.

It is designed for anyone experiencing normal age-related changes in memory or anyone interested in learning more about this topic.

Wednesday, February 4 1:30 - 3:30 pm
Wednesday, February 11 1:30 - 3:30 pm
Wednesday, February 18 1:30 - 3:30 pm

\$25 Workbook Fee. Registration required. Group size limited.
Self register at <https://bit.ly/MAPWinter26>

Over half of Canadians worry about dementia. Stigma keeps people from getting help.

The Alzheimer Society is here to help, because no one should face dementia alone.

Alzheimer Society  #ForgetNoOne
HURON PERTH

Your voice helps others find connection.



www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth

What is a Dementia Friendly Community?

A Dementia Friendly Community is a place where people living with dementia are understood, respected, and supported. It's an environment where they will feel more confident in their abilities to contribute to community life, will be included in conversations, and

have a choice and control over their day-to-day lives.

People with dementia and their care partners have the right to live well in the community, together. As more people are diagnosed with dementia every year and choose to live

at home, we need to determine how we can better support people living with dementia. Join thousands of Ontarians in showing your support for people living with dementia and their care partners. Together, we can create a Dementia Friendly Community.

Help Make Your Community Dementia Friendly

Dementia Friendly Communities™ training will help you better understand the everyday experiences of people living with dementia.

dementia in their communities.

The course has 4 modules approximately 15 minutes each:

What is a dementia-friendly community?: An introduction to the concept and dementia-friendly efforts at the community level.

Dementia-friendly interactions: Social environment considerations, such as ways you can communicate effectively with someone living

with dementia. Dementia-friendly spaces: Physical environment considerations, such as ways you can optimize your space to be dementia-friendly. Dementia-friendly policies, practices and services for organizations: Provides specific scenarios and recommendations.

The information is practical and is helpful for all community members. Reach out to the Alzheimer Society to learn more.

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ABOUT A LOVED ONE, FRIEND
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Listowel - March 11
Eastdale Public School
Milverton - April 13
Milverton Public School
Stratford - TBD

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U18 Warriors building confidence from the Ajax Tournament win

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U18 Warriors are still in good spirits after winning the Ajax Winterlude Tournament on Dec. 14.

Owen Chambers, Cam Parsons and Rylan DeBoeck shared their thoughts on the win.

"It was good ... and it's good to come out with a win, especially when it was quite unexpected, going against a lot of better teams than us, but we pulled through," Chambers said.

"It was a surprise, but I think the results come from a lot of hard work from the boys. We put in some good practices before the tournament, and the results showed," Parsons said.

"Oh, they were super unexpected. I mean, we came in with one win, came out with the championship, taking out even a top-two-ranked team. Feels great to make that underdog story happen and come out on top," DeBoeck said.

Stratford resumed regular season play on the road against the Kitchener Jr. Rangers on Dec. 18. Kitchener scored seven unanswered goals in the final 35

minutes of play as the Warriors were soundly beaten by the top-ranked ALIANCE team, the Rangers, 9-1.

The Warriors turned around on Dec. 20 as they scored all three goals in the third period to shut out the Jr. Sting in Sarnia for their second regular season win in 2025-26. The next day in Cambridge, the Warriors scored four unanswered goals, three in the second period, to pick up another win, beating the Hawks 4-2. But on Jan. 4, however, the Warriors dropped a 5-1 decision to the Waterloo Wolves at the Allman Arena.



JANUARY 24, 2026

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Warriors reverted back to their winning ways, Veteran trio makes impact in the GOHL prospect game

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

was good. It was fun. I was happy to be selected. I had a fun time."

"I mean, it was lots of fun. We experienced playing against each other. But he (Bender) made a great save on me in the first, and obviously, we get to shoot on him all the time. So, it's a bit of an advantage, maybe, to the shooter, but yeah, it's really fun to play against him and play with Kurtz (Curtin) and be coached by Schlitty (Schlitt) in a bit of a different way," Schmidt said.

"Yeah, it was obviously a lot of high-octane players, and I was really fast, but really offensive out there today. And yeah, it was a lot of fun to play, play with and against different guys."

"It was a very skilled game, very fast, different from what you see on a regular night. But, I mean, it was a lot of fun, and I'm glad we got to be a part of this event. And, I mean, I think the game went well for all three of us, so I'm very, very happy," Curtin said.

Before the Warriors returned to action, they acquired a familiar face in Jaxson Broda from the Trenton Golden Hawks of the Ontario Junior Hockey League (OJHL) on Jan. 1. Broda played with the Warriors from 2022 to 2024, appeared in 45 games and registered nine goals with 24 assists for 33 points.

While playing with the Golden Hawks, Broda was a member of the 2024-2025 OJHL Championship (Centennial Cup) team.

Williams said he likes the re-acquisition of Broda to the team and hopes the championship experience can prove beneficial for the club heading into the preseason in less than two months' time.

"That's a really nice addition, a really nice Christmas surprise ... So I think it should be a really smooth transition for him coming back," Williams said.

"Haven't had him play here for a season, and he's been a really good player for Trenton, so we expect to come

back and be a really significant piece here as we push the regular season into playoffs."

Broda says it feels good to be back with the Warriors.

"It's amazing. I missed the environment around here. Obviously, the guys are always good when you come around here. So, it was big," Broda said.

The Warriors resumed regular-season play on Jan. 2 with a home game against the LaSalle Vipers at the Allman Arena.

Curtin opened the scoring on the powerplay with his fourth of the season from Schmidt and Broda at the 7:57 mark.

With the assist, Broda recorded his first regular-season point with the Warriors since Feb. 25, 2024, when he racked up five points against the Brantford Bandits.

LaSalle tied the game with 3:34 left in the period, but Coen Galbraith scored his third goal of the season with 19.7 left in the opening frame from Broda and Grady Murphy to put the home side up 2-1 through 20 minutes.

The Vipers tied the game again at the 7:23 mark but produced two critical miscues in a span of 17 seconds apart led to goals from Haylock and Evan Arnold and giving Stratford a 4-2 lead, and then a goal from Aaron Green later in the middle frame to put the Warriors ahead 5-2 heading into the final period.

Galbraith scored his second of the game, fourth of the season, to provide the Warriors assurance, and the Warriors opened their first game of the new year on a positive note with a 6-2 win.

Given the limited time of practice in preparation for the week's games, Williams was pleased with the team's performance against the Vipers.

"It's great to start off with a victory. Sometimes you're never sure about the rest or how rusty you're going to be when you come back, but even the weather was a bit weak. But had a couple of good speeds, had a good start with the guys. Really happy with the efforts," Williams

said.

Galbraith and Haylock say it is great for the team to get the first win after the holiday break off their backs, given the tough two weeks leading up to it.

"It's good to get that first win in 2026, especially after not being on the ice as much ... but it's good," Galbraith said.

"I think it's a big thing. You know, we're at home. We've had a little bit of a losing streak, which we need to fix up, but it's going to get the first one out of the way and bring it into Sunday," Haylock said.

On Jan. 4, the Warriors travelled to Listowel to face the rival Cyclones for the first time, renewing their "Battle of Perth County" rivalry for the third time this season. Although the two sides played a close game in their last encounter at the Allman Arena back on Dec. 14, this was a convincing one-sider.

Wildfong got the Warriors on the board with his 16th of the season from Broda at 3:39 into the first period. Listowel tied the game up at the 6:35 mark, only for Quinn Kipfer to respond for the visitors with his eighth of the year from Colin Slattery 20 seconds later to re-take the lead.

Listowel tied the game with less than five minutes left in the period, but the Warriors retook the lead for good with 2:11 remaining with the goal by Slattery from Kipfer and Green. Galbraith from Schmidt at 5:56 extended the Stratford lead, and the team continued to pound on the opposition as Arnold and the second goal from Galbraith gave Stratford a comfortable lead heading into the third period.

Schmidt scored his 13th goal of the season from Dax Vader and Will Coward at 3:41 of the third period, putting the visitors up 7-2. The Cyclones got one back midway through the period, but it was a consolation as the Warriors lit up the scoreboard and started their first weekend of 2026 on a clinical, dominating note.

Jason Clarke to step down as director of hockey operations for Warriors

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

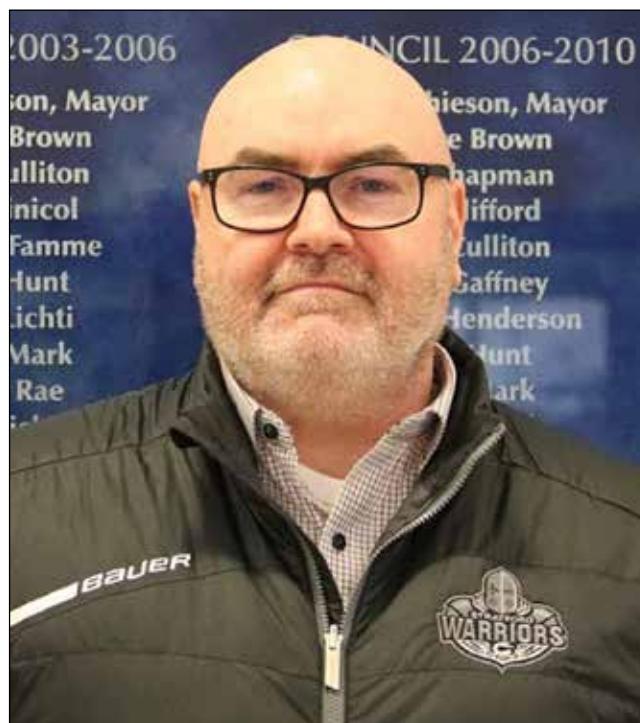
stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Hunter Steel Stratford Warriors announced that Jason Clarke will be stepping down from his role as director of hockey operations at the conclusion of the current season, according to a media release on its Facebook page. It will be an end to a distinguished 32-year career in the game at various levels.

Clarke assumed the role in the spring of 2021, providing leadership, stability and strategic direction for the organization. Since that time, he has overseen hockey operations while continuing to build on the culture and standards that have defined the club's success.

Prior to taking on the director role, Clarke had already made a significant impact with the organization, serving in roles as assistant coach and head scout since 2015. Over his tenure, the club captured two Cherrey Cup championships and advanced to Game 7 of the Sutherland Cup, marking competitive and successful seasons in recent history.

Clarke's departure from the role marks the end of a chapter – not only with the club, but in a career that spans more than three decades of dedication to hockey as a



coach, scout, manager and executive.

"I'm incredibly proud of what we've accomplished together," Clarke said. "This organization, the players, coaches, staff and community have meant a great deal to me. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve in this role and to be part of so many memorable moments."

During the most recent board meeting, the board approved the appointment of the club's current general manager, Nick Parr, as the new director of hockey operations. Parr brings strong leadership, continuity and a deep understanding of the Warriors organization, and the board is confident he will guide the hockey program forward with professionalism and vision.

The organization thanks Clarke for his leadership, commitment and lasting contributions, and wishes him the very best in the next chapter of his journey.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Jason Clarke will be stepping down from his role as director of hockey operations at the conclusion of the current season, an end to a distinguished 32-year career in the game at various levels. Clarke thanked the organization for the opportunity to serve and make memorable moments.

Send us your sports reports at stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Irish hit a tough patch as the season heads for the final stretch

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Irish continued to produce mixed results as they tried to remain in contention for a spot in the Outlaw Tournament, while focusing on building chemistry for the playoffs.

On Dec. 20, the Irish travelled to Alvinston for their matchup with the division-leading Killer Bees. Alvinston opened the scoring over a minute into the game. Connor Hall from Luca Marandola and Ethan Salter responded for Stratford with 5:26 remaining in the period, but the Killer Bees responded with a goal of their own with 2:55 left in the opening frame and led 2-1 heading into the second period.

A shorthanded goal by Mateo Cabral from Connor Hall at 2:28 of the middle frame put the Irish back level, but the Killer Bees scored three unanswered in the latter half of the second period to take the lead 5-2 into the final period.

Early in the third, the Irish staged a comeback effort, courtesy of goals from Stephen Pierog and Ray Robbins within 53 seconds apart to climb back to within a goal. But the effort fell short as the Killer Bees prevailed 5-4.

Stratford returned home on Dec. 27 to face the Halton Hills Coyotes in an inter-conference matchup.

In another tightly contested game for the Irish, the team overcame an early 2-0 defi-

cit to take the lead early in the third period. Brendan Charlton scored with 4:02 remaining in the second period, followed by captain Zach Magwood 3:28 into the third period to tie the game. Charlton's second of the game early in the third put the Irish in front for the first time, but the Coyotes responded with a pair of their own to retake the lead midway through the final frame.

But the Irish staged a dramatic late-game comeback with two goals in 34 seconds from Salter and Travis Winkworth, giving the Irish a thrilling 5-4 win over the resilient Coyotes. Mario Cavaliere picked up the win against his former team with a 38-save performance.

Irish owner/head coach Marco Alexander commented on the thrilling comeback win and faced a familiar foe in Marek Pavlas, who previously played with the Irish earlier in the season.

"Yeah, they're a good team. Obviously, Pavlas played for us, and then gets traded there to help them. You can see why he played unbelievable tonight, and Cavaliere, from them, came to our side to play. I think both goalies played unbelievably

to keep it such a tight game. Then in the third, you know, watch the resiliency from our team," Alexander said.

Salter expressed the importance of his role on the tying goal late in the game.

"It's important to get that time goal. We worked hard as a team and got the right bounce, and I was able to put it in," Salter said. "But it's really good to see the resilience of the team and to show that we have that push and drive when it matters."

The Irish hoped to kick off the final stretch drive of the season with a win against the Tilbury Bluebirds on Jan. 3.

Stratford got off to a quick start in the first period with two goals from Salter and Christian

Polillo, less than 90 seconds apart, to go up 2-0. Tilbury responded with a pair of their own to tie the game midway through the opening frame, but the Irish retook the lead with a goal from the newly acquired Matt Zebedee, only for the Bluebirds to take the lead for their first time heading into the second period with a 4-3 lead.

Tilbury padded their lead in the second period with three more to lead 7-3 by the midway mark of the period. Stratford responded with three unanswered goals

from Thomas Maia, Salter, and a second goal of the game from Zebedee, cutting the deficit to one heading into the third period.

The Bluebirds added insurance 46 seconds into the final frame. Second of the game by Maia responded for the visitors at 4:20 into the period, but their effort was thwarted by late goals from the Bluebirds en route to a wild 10-7 loss.

Although qualified for the playoffs, with the latest results, Stratford falls to six points behind the Strathroy Jets for the final wildcard spot at the Outlaw Tournament, with a record of 8-7-1 through 16 games and in third position in the Metropolitan Conference's Gateway Division.

Despite the injuries that have left the Irish playing shorthanded as of late, both Alexander and Salter say the team is confident it can develop its chemistry and prepare for the playoff run.

"Absolutely, I think the next couple of weeks, our guys are going to settle in. We still got some guys ... (whose) bumps and bruises (are) still hurting," Alexander said.

"In the next couple of weeks, we're going to start stepping up a level and gearing up for playoffs. Here, we got a lot left in the tank that we got to use," Salter said.

The Irish are in a bye week this weekend, but several members of the team will participate in the Metropolitan All-Star game at Alvinston on Jan. 10. Matt Montgomery, Ethan Salter, Matt Fuller and Thomas Hernandez will represent Stratford.



U16 Lakers come up short at the Marlies Tournament, eight Lakers and coaching staff at Komoka for U16 Prospects

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The U16 AAA Huron-Perth Lakers resumed tournament play after Christmas, participating in the 31st Toronto Marlies Holiday Classic. The Lakers played in Group C of the Tavares Conference during the round-robin.

On the opening day on Dec. 27, the Lakers shut out the Southern Tier Admirals 3-0 to open the round robin play in the morning, followed by a 3-1 win over the Markham Waxers in the evening. On Dec. 28 and 29, fortunes turned in the opposite direction for the Lakers, as they dropped a 5-2 decision to the Biosteel Sports Academy and relinquished a 2-1 second-period lead to lose 5-2 to the Mississauga Senators.

With the losses, the Lakers finished third in Group C at 2-2-0 and failed to advance to the quarterfinals.

Head coach Jason Brooks shared his thoughts on the tournament performance.

"We haven't played in a few weeks, and

following the Christmas break, you never know what you're going to get. I thought we got off to a good start. We won the first two games, kind of getting back into the rhythm. And then the beginning of our game against Biosteel, which put us in a tough spot to move on after losing that one. Had a really tough opponent in the Mississauga Senators. I thought we battled. I thought we competed in that game," Brooks said.

"Ultimately, the guys are better than us, but I like the way we battle competing in that game, so that was positive. Something to move forward, though, in the regular season is for us to just, you know,

bear down, learn from our mistakes in that tournament, try to get better from it."

Defenceman Tanner Luczka and the team's tournament leader in points, forward Ethan Bridges, say the team wasn't playing at their standard at the tournament.

"I don't think it was our team's best, but we competed. We were in every game this weekend," Luczka said.

"I think we had some moments, but it's not the best showing of what we could have done there," Bridges said.

On Dec. 17, ALLIANCE Hockey announced a total of eight members of the U16 Huron-Perth Lakers named to the 2026 ALLIANCE U16 AAA Prospects



Game on Jan. 4 in Komoka. In addition, the Lakers coaching staff of Brooks, assistant coaches Mike Jarmuth, Mike McLeod, Gregory Swan and Trainer Ashley Fielder have been named to the event.

Brooks said it is an honour to be a part of the showcase.

"Well, it's a credit to this group that the coaching staff is there. The success our team has had thus far in the regular season allows us as a coaching staff to be selected to represent Huron-Perth in that game," Brooks said.

"Obviously, for the players, it's a nice honour – tip of the hat for them – for this start of the season they've had. Selfishly, I think, as a coach of a team, I think we could have taken more of our players, but I respect the league and the decision that they have to take one player from every team, at least one. But for the guys that are going to go, they're going to go represent well and represent themselves well, and hopefully have a great game and have some fun while you're competing well."

New gallery and co-creating studio opens in Stratford

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The official grand opening ceremony and ribbon-cutting for Cuyuni Creates took place earlier this week, with local budding artists and community members gathering to celebrate a new art gallery and co-creating studio located at 315 Front St., Unit 5.

Cuyuni Creates, founded by Gabriella Fortunes, offers a space for local artists, creative workshops such as paint nights, community events and artistic expression, positioning itself as a vibrant hub of creativity in the city.

The space aims to foster connection and creativity for various art forms and age groups.

"We're building a community-focused gallery and co-creating studio that highlights emerging artists, culture and collaborative creativity," said Fortunes.

Fortunes notes that her interest in art began early in Guyana, where she was born. Later, in 2018, after moving to Canada to attend Nancy Campbell Academy, her love of art grew even deeper.

"My family is not here with me; they're in Guyana, but I have made my family here in Stratford," Fortunes said to the crowd of family and friends gathered at



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma congratulates and presents a certificate to Gabriella Fortunes, founder of Cuyuni Creates, during the gallery's grand opening earlier this week.

the grand opening. "If you know me, you know that I'm a very adventurous person. I came here as a high school student and attended Nancy Campbell Academy, where my artistic journey started."

While attending Nancy Campbell Acad-

emy, she was able to curate classes to suit her artistic desires, which led her to decide to open the new space.

"I decided to choose all the courses that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to take in Guyana, like visual arts and drama."

she said. "Nancy Campbell is a boarding school, but it's also like a performing arts school. I took all the artistic classes and courses, and then I realized I loved painting and that it was very therapeutic for me, and that's where it really began."

Her background, she says, profoundly influences both her art and her community approach, fostering the idea to create a space for artists, writers and small business owners seeking an affordable, inclusive place to work and showcase their talent.

"This space is truly not just my space," said Fortunes. "It's the space of the artists who are showcasing their work in here. Most of them are emerging artists, and that is very intentional. I want to give that space and welcome people and emerging artists so they can show their work to the world."

Mayor Martin Ritsma attended the event and spoke about his pride in the young, talented small business owners and artists who contribute to the city's cultural landscape. He added that he has long supported creative spaces.

"Art makes our community," Ritsma said. "When I look around this space, two words come to mind: talent and diversity."

For more information or to connect with Fortunes, visit www.cuyunicreates.com.

Beat the Winter Blues with Festival City Big Band at Avondale United Church concert

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Whether you're tapping your toes to the music or dancing along to a variety of Big Band tunes, the upcoming Beat the Winter Blues concert will give you a break from the bitter cold and a chance to warm up with local talent.

The Festival City Big Band will perform their second annual Beat the Winter Blues concert at Avondale United Church on Jan. 31 starting at 7:30 p.m. The 17-piece band first performed at the church in January 2025 with attendees eager to see the band perform again and those absent wishing they were at the show.

"It's a wonderful way to get through the long cold winter in Stratford, is to have something like this. A really, really affordable, happy, uplifting kind of entertainment," said Paul Harris, member of the Avondale Music Series Team.

Karen Brown, another member of the Avondale Music Series Team, said that there will be a dancefloor at the concert for anyone looking to dance the night away.

"Some people like to just sit back and listen, that's fine, tap their toes, but a lot of people like to dance and they get up. We've got a dance floor set up and they can dance their big band dances and it's a lovely event," Brown said. "Some of the dancers are the same ones that dance in front of the stage in the summer time when they're



(ALEAH GRAFF PHOTO)

After a successful show last year with warm reception, the Festival City Big Band will return to Avondale United Church on Jan. 31 for their Beat the Winter Blues concert.

playing at Queens Park. They didn't want to wait until summer, they wanted to do it now in the middle of the winter."

The Festival City Big Band has been a Stratford staple in the local entertainment circuit for more than 30 years. The band will play classic Big Band tunes, contemporary music and Big Band songs from other countries around the world.

The performance will feature the vocal

talents of Avondale's own Cathy Whelan and Chris Adair. Snacks will be served at intermission.

Proceeds from the concert will support Avondale's ministries, including their food shelf program and efforts to support local organizations like the Emily Murphy Centre and the Stratford Connections Centre.

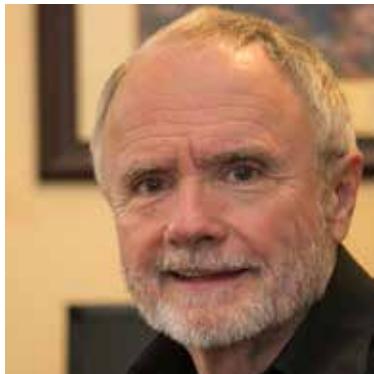
"Any money we get from something like

this, it expands our ability to support the good work that people are doing when they're having a rough time," Harris said.

Doors open at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door, and free for children 12 years old and under. To purchase tickets prior to the Beat the Winter Blues concert, either call Avondale's office at 519-271-7946 or visit online via <https://ticketscene.ca/events/57248>.

Opinions

Musings: There's no business like snow business



MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Columnist

On Boxing Day, the first day of the storm, we decided that it was just a short jaunt to Romeo's Café so we would attempt going out for breakfast before we really got snowed in. Inch along the street, there was almost no traffic. "After all", I said to Yvonne, "what kind of idiot would be driving around on a day like today?" She didn't have to answer. I could feel her sideways look that said: "Your kind of idiot." Very true.

Unless you went into hibernation after Christmas, you may have noticed some snow outside, as well as other vigorous expressions of precipitation. At one point, Environment Canada issued five simultaneous weather alerts: fog, heavy rainfall, freezing rain, snow squalls and high winds.

There was no need for Netflix with a continuously unfolding drama right outside our window, staged and directed by Mother Nature herself. One minute there was a scene reminiscent



of foggy Olde London town; the next, we were treated to a white desert landscape with snow devils spinning through the parking lot and plumes of white cascading off the rooftops.

At one point I looked out and saw that there was enough ice encrusting our car to warrant a chisel and blowtorch. I dreaded having to clear it off but I was in for one of the few pleasant surprises of the storm. The alternating freezing and unfrozen rain combined with the blow-hard winds left our car sparkling

clean with only a light dusting of snow in the grooves. Mother Nature had provided a free car wash.

People think I'm a bit odd for a number of reasons. One of those reasons is that I love to go for walks during snowstorms. When we lived in Listowel, there were ample opportunities for this with the added bonus of frequent power failures. The local pharmacist once commented that all you had to do was spit on the sidewalk in Listowel and the hydro would go out.

One stormy night I went for a walk around town at dusk in near total darkness. Since there was no traffic, I chanced being one of the town's many WALNUTS (Walking Around Listowel Not Using The Sidewalks). It was a humbling experience. Save for a few candles on windowsills, there wasn't a glimmer of light anywhere. This must have been a common experience for our ancestors: darkness, stores shuttered, no plowed roads, no snowmobiles and no emergency services. You were truly on your

own and at the mercy of the elements.

You might ask: Did I try to go for a walk in Stratford during our most recent storm? The answer is yes, but I didn't get too far. I aimed for the park but only got as far as the local variety store. I was dressed warmly enough, generally speaking, but had nothing to cover my face. I'd invest in a balaclava but, these days, I'm afraid I might get shot if I accidentally wear it into the mall.

When I do take my winter walks, I try to remember that I'm out on the streets by choice. There are others who don't have that choice and, for them, a snowstorm is no lark. Thank the heavens and the volunteers for the warming centre at the Connection Centre on Drou Street. It opened just in the nick of time on Dec. 17.

But, in a city as wealthy as Stratford, there should be emergency accommodation available to the homeless well beyond temporary warming centres. When this finally happens, we can all be given shelter from the storm.

Mark Hertzberger is a former social services supervisor, human resources manager, conflict mediator, and literacy practitioner. He has since freed his mind and now writes poetry and occasional opinionated columns. Mark has lived in Perth County for 27 years, the last 12 of which have been in Stratford where he resides with his wife, novelist Yvonne Hertzberger.

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Remember that time when **Amazon** sponsored your church fundraiser?



Remember when **Facebook** bought a case of Girl Guide cookies to support your daughter?



Remember when **Google** provided free pizza to your child's soccer team when they won the championship?

Opinions

WEBCRAWLING THROUGH THE MIRRORS



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

I don't know about you, but as we emerge from 2025, I've put in a request for peace, love and green thinking. My mirrors are reflecting beauty and hope in so many ways. The younger folk I've been in contact with are treasures the good and are willing to get out there to preserve it. A young woman who worked with me this summer learning about native plants is a strong native plant supporter in the Landscape Architecture program at Guelph. She painted me a beautiful spider on a Christmas card – and I gave her a spider ornament for

her tree. We both recognize the importance of insects and biodiversity. And I was so impressed by the youth editorial written by two amazing sisters, found on repealbill5.ca – filled with energy and caring.

As I look out my kitchen window to my clothesline full of birdfeeders, I see another mirror of beauty. The yard has been filled with cardinals, mourning doves, bluejays, flocks of juncos and goldfinches, and the surprise flock of the year, purple finches, glorious in their deep rose-red. Their food sources in the boreal forest further north have been scarce this winter due to climate change, and they are following food sources southward. When large numbers of northern birds suddenly appear in our midst seeking food support in the winter, it's called an irruption (there's your party word for this month – drop that one into a conversation). I cannot describe the breathtaking beauty that hovers around my safflower feeders. Bird scientists recommend we watch for other northern species as well. You may see redpolls, pine siskins

and evening grosbeaks!

I will close with a mirror's reflection that is heard, not seen. It has been our pleasure to visit (and sing in) several concerts. Music is good for the psyche, you know, as is dance. It's good to let loose once in a while! One concert that filled the evening with beauty and hope was a group called Windborne. We first heard them at the Goderich Celtic Festival. Their political satire was biting and their musical skills amazing. The seasonal concert we heard in London was soaring melody and harmonies that surrounded us all. We all walked out of the room feeling better humans – and connected humans.

Statistics Canada has noted that we are connecting with each other less frequently. Windborne noted this in a year-end reflection. "Over the past few years, it has become clear that the focus of our midwinter show is not highlighting a particular celebration or tradition, but the importance of finding connection and creating community. All the customs we sing about are, at their core, about bringing people together,

checking in on neighbours, helping those in need and strengthening social bonds. ... In a world where overwhelm is used as a tool to make us feel disconnected, isolated and hopeless, gathering together for celebration and contemplation is a radical act. In fact, it is part of doing the hard work of fighting for justice and equality, not separate from it."

Let's all look for reflections of hope and beauty in nature and in our communities, as we work together to ensure that our mirrors reflect beauty and caring – for all life and for a just and fair world – make it so.

UPDATES:

1) Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of Jan. 1, 2026: 428.4 ppm. The highest in human history (and climbing).

2) Mark Wednesday, Jan. 21 on your calendar for the first Climate Conversation of 2026. Climate Change: What Can We Do to Help? Speakers and exhibits will address ideas for change and how they will help. Come and meet your climate community, 7 p.m. at the city hall auditorium.

3) Also for Jan. 21, you can register for an online conversation between Robin Wall Kimmerer and Esther Bonney on Intergenerational Care for Land and Community at <https://wildones.org/category/wild-ones-presents/>. The conversation will be recorded and sent to registrants.

4) Please with strawberries take time to write to your MPP and to the Stratford City Council, urging removal of Bill 68, the amalgamation of 36 Conservation Authorities into 7. A) We fund the conservation authorities, not the province, B) The CAs know the areas and the communities where they work, and maintain healthy environments for water safety and flood control, and C) Central control from Queen's Park will not maintain the standards we have built as communities in partnership with our local conservation authorities.

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

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Opinions

Turning the page: The quiet power of a new beginning



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

There is something quietly hopeful about a new beginning. It doesn't announce itself with fireworks or demand sweeping declarations. More often, it arrives softly – like a clean sheet of paper waiting on a desk, or the first gentle light of morning after a long and difficult night. It doesn't ask us to be ready. It simply invites us to begin.

We often imagine new beginnings as dramatic events: a new year, a new job, a move to a new place, a clearly marked turning

point. But most real beginnings are far less visible. They take place internally, in small moments of choice. A decision to pause instead of push. To speak more kindly to ourselves. To stop carrying what has quietly become too heavy.

At certain times of the year, we are encouraged – sometimes relentlessly – to reinvent ourselves. We are urged to set ambitious goals, make bold resolutions, and emerge as improved versions of who we were before. While ambition has its place, it can also crowd out a quieter, more sustainable truth: meaningful change rarely comes from force. More often, it grows from gentleness, awareness, and patience.

A true new beginning does not require perfection. It requires honesty.

It asks us to take an unflinching look at our lives – not only at what we want to achieve, but at how we are actually living. Are we tired? Overextended? Running on obligation instead

of intention? Are we trying to meet expectations that no longer reflect who we are or what we need? Sometimes the bravest fresh start is not about adding something new, but about releasing something old: an unkind inner narrative, an overfilled schedule, or the reflexive habit of saying yes when our whole body is asking for rest.

New beginnings are also deeply personal. What feels energizing and hopeful to one person may feel overwhelming or even impossible to another. For some, a fresh start looks like movement and momentum. For others, it looks like slowing down, tending to health, rebuilding trust in themselves or simply learning to rest without guilt. Both paths are valid. Both are worthy of respect.

We don't often acknowledge the quiet courage it takes to begin again – especially when there is no applause. To keep showing up after disappointment. To hope again after loss. To trust life when certainty feels

fragile. These small, unseen acts of resilience shape us far more deeply than any public milestone ever could.

Perhaps this is why the image of a blank page resonates so powerfully. A blank page is not empty; it is full of possibility. It does not judge what will be written on it. It allows for revision. We can cross things out. We can start over mid-sentence. We can change direction entirely. Unlike pages already filled, it offers room to breathe.

And perhaps the most reassuring truth of all is this: new beginnings are not scarce. We do not get only one chance to start over. Life offers these moments again and again – in ordinary Tuesdays, in difficult conversations, in quiet realizations that arrive when we least expect them. We don't have to wait for a new year, a major life event or permission from anyone else.

A new beginning can be as modest as making space for silence in a noisy life. It can be as simple as choosing to listen

to yourself more closely. Or as profound as choosing yourself after years of self-neglect. It can happen in the middle of the story, not just at the beginning. You are allowed to begin again even if nothing on the outside has changed.

There is also something deeply grounding about recognizing that beginnings do not have to be rushed. Growth is not always loud or linear. Sometimes progress looks like steadiness. Sometimes it looks like rest. Sometimes it looks like learning to stay instead of pushing forward.

If you find yourself standing at the edge of a new beginning – whether marked by a date on the calendar or by a private realization – remember this: you do not need all the answers. You only need to take the next honest step. That step does not have to be big. It only has to be true.

Here's to the small starts. The subtle shifts. The quiet courage of turning the page and trusting that, line by line, something meaningful can still be written.

As I See It From America: Promise broken, promise kept



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

Today I am finding it a bit difficult. I made a promise to my readers that I would always attempt to maintain a positive side to my articles. That can be a feat beyond anyone's ability down here in the states. Each day can bring us more and more news that is unbearable, incomprehensible and confusing. Often, I must close my eyes and wrap my head around the very nature of the thing that is happening, just to get a basic understanding. I have not been able to see the reason, let alone the practicality of invading Venezuela, arresting its criminal of a president and his wife, and then declaring that the United States is going to

RUN the country. We can't even RUN our own country. How do we now add another country to the mix. Is this the fabled 51st state?

So, I guess all of you can rest now. Perhaps your strong opposition and refusal to put out your open arms lovingly to our current "clown in chief" has brought about a significant change. I am certain he is saying, "Why take on that north country neighbour and remove all of its resources, when I can take on that third world country that has been a pain in my butt for a long time in the south country and steal theirs? After all, they have resources too, plus the people aren't as picky!"

Since he is becoming increasingly unpopular here, perhaps this is his way of becoming a dictator. Maybe his thoughts are that when his regime here gets to be ineffective, knocked out of the mainstream and brought to a screeching halt, he and his cronies can go to the New Venezuela and rule as dictators. Because of it's screwed up politics of the past, I am sure that his way of governing would be more acceptable in the new 51st state. Lord knows they are used to

crooked politicians that rip-off the common man to obtain vast wealth and control. I am waiting for the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical to soon follow.

Meanwhile, we ponder what all of this means to the western hemisphere. If the United States can invade a country, remove its leader, bring said leader and his wife to New York under criminal charges and start running a country through a declaration, what does that portend for the future? How can he release and pardon a known drug trafficker that was arrested and in custody while using the very same excuse for this action? Something is rotten in Denmark ... or shall we say Venezuela?

In other actions, I am happy to report that the holidays here at the red and green cottage all went well. We did have a flu type health interruption, but that seemed to calm down a bit. I became a year older on New Year's Eve. My family, children and grandchildren were all so wonderful during this time of year. We circumvented damage from the windstorms, received a grand amount of snow and had troublesome ice for a while. I was reminded that this holiday

season was more like the winters of my past. It was crisp, cold and full of snow.

I am not a big proponent of wind. That was the only thing that kind of took me to task. I had to resettle and straighten many of our outdoor decorations more than once. As soon as I got them all settled, more wind came and off we would go again. I can be tenacious when it comes to outdoor decorations. My wife thinks I am crazy, but I think I am just being fastidious. It is something I learned in my youth. I remember my dad working and straightening, changing the big old bulbs and making sure everything always looked nice. "If you are going to put up a display for your neighbours to enjoy," he would say, "Make sure it always looks good." Dad was a simple man.

I never ask for anything for Christmas or my birthday. I really have all that I need or want. However, I am now the proud owner of several new pieces of clothing and as soon as I inserted them into my wardrobe, I had several things to take to the charity bin at the Presbyterian Church. The wife also engaged in the wardrobe cleanout. We

both marvel at how much stuff we have. One thing that never goes away, sometimes to a fault, is our many Stratford articles of clothing. They stay. They remind us and they are wonderful. I have a shirt from the Scottish Shoppe that I look at often and wear occasionally as well as a wonderful Stratford Festival hoodie. The wife has some of the same as well as her marvelous dresses from the Wardrobe. We both have a myriad of t-shirts.

So, we are done. The holidays are over and the new year begins. I wish we could report more happy news from our government front, but we can always report our plans and wishes for Stratford. We have been contacting friends, talking and planning our first trip in April and keeping up with our theatre friends as they are doing projects over the winter. We are forever grateful that when we can't really see positivity on what is happening in our own country, we can look towards Canada, and especially Stratford. Things are very optimistic in Stratford. Perhaps it will be easier than I thought to keep this column on the positive side.

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathaway Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford
Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games.
Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

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Saturday, January 10, 2026 at 10:30 am
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Monday, 12; 7:30-9:00 pm
St. Paul's Anglican Church 9 Dour St. (at Waterloo)
Free first class. For information contact stratfordscd@gmail.com or 519-272-1398

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday January 12, 2026, 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.
Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford
Featured Demonstration/Presentation: "Propagating

Native Plants", Nancy Burnett, Don Farwell and Carolyn Schmidt, Tri-County Master Gardeners Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford
Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # I104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

CLIMATE CHANGE - What Can We Do to Help?

Wednesday January 21, 2026; 7pm

Stratford City Hall

Come and find out about new initiatives and how you can help.

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRE

Friday, January 23, 2026; 6 p.m.

Royal Canadian Legion, 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford

Register your team of 2 for \$20. We play about 9 games. Prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3 place. Join in the fun. Plus, future game dates of Feb. 20, Mar. 27, and April 24. Register by

calling Anne 519-301-0914, Dave 519-703-6544, Legion 519-271-4540 or register online.

POUTINE & DRAFT BEER NIGHT

Friday, January 30, 2026; 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Royal Canadian Legion, 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford
Generous portions, tickets are \$20, children 12 and under \$10. Help us meet our goal of serving 100 meals. For tickets: Legion office @519-271-4540, Dave Hartney @ 519-703-6544

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

March 21; 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

St. Mary's Catholic High School, 431 Juliana Drive, Woodstock, ON, N4V 1E8
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Contact: dhfe@silomail.com
Web: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

STRATFORD TIMES

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

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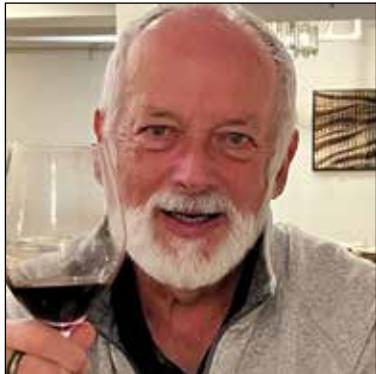
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Pick Up Locations

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Paris, a splendidly walkable city



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

If I were forced to choose among places to visit, I would always pick Ottawa over Toronto, Québec City over Montréal, or Amsterdam, Netherlands over London, England. And my reason is simple; those chosen destinations are all eminently walkable.

I really enjoy visiting a city where many of the places I want to see are within walking distance of each other, and that is one of the reasons that we enjoyed our stay in Paris so much.

We are in the capital of France because we opted for an add-on stay before our Viking River Cruise on the Rhône River. Now, the full story is we made that decision fairly late in the game, so the more basic hotel included in the package was already fully booked. That being the case, did we want to splurge on the upgraded hotel at additional cost?

Well, heck, how often are we going to spend three days in Paris? We agreed to splurge.

That put us in the Sofitel Le Scribe Paris Opéra. It was a perfect location, and we liked our accommodation very much, but after ordering a coffee and tea upon arrival, and being billed something like \$35 Canadian, we quickly understood that we would seek food and



The Paris Opera House, a baroque revival masterpiece.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

drink elsewhere, which was never actually a problem in this city of cafés.

But the best part was everything we wanted to see could be reached comfortably on foot.

As soon as we had checked in and I had emptied my bank account to pay for a coffee and a tea, I tucked a map into my pocket and we set out to explore. The reason for the hotel's name became quickly obvious – we were only a few steps away from the Paris Opera House, an imposing example of baroque revival architecture completed in 1875. We learned that almost all of the impressive buildings in Paris are from the 1800s because Napoleon and his successors were all about urban renewal – or perhaps, all about knocking down everything in sight to build monuments to themselves, which sounds distressingly familiar. But I digress.

Right across the street from the Opera House is a high-end department store called the Galeries Lafayette. What's special here is the rooftop terrace, open free of charge, which provides a spectacular view of the city.

A couple of blocks into our wandering we discovered the Church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, an imposing structure built in the style of a Roman temple. It has an intriguing history – it was begun in 1763 during the reign of King Louis XV. Construction stopped completely when the French Revolution abolished the monarchy quite dramatically by beheading Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in 1793. Enter Napoleon, who became Emperor in 1804, and decided in this time of anti-church sentiment that the building be re-purposed as “A Temple to the Glory of the Grand Army.” An army which was, not coincidentally, headed by Napoleon.

Napoleon died and the monarchy was reinstated. The “Temple” reverted to its original intention as a church, but progress on completing the structure was still slow – it was not officially inaugurated as a church until 1842, almost eight decades after construction was begun. Today, it is still a church, but perhaps even better known as one of the finest concert halls in Paris.

We left the church and strolled toward the Seine River, accidentally arriving at one of the best-known features of Paris, the Place de la Concorde. This 20-acre square, situated between the Avenue de Champs-Élysées and the Jardin des Tuileries, is one of the most beautiful parts of the city. However, it has a history that is considerably less appealing.

While today it is dubbed “Concorde” (which means harmony or

friendship), in the late 1700s, this was the site of the beheadings of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and thousands of others who climbed the steps to lose their heads on the guillotine. At that time, the square was known as the Place de la Révolution.

There is no evidence of the bloodshed today. When we visited, the permanent monuments like the Luxor Obelisk (a 3,000-year-old monolith that was given by Egypt to France in 1829), and the spectacular fountains, were sharing space with an outdoor, nature photography exhibition.

Our wandering continued. We explored the aforementioned Tuileries Garden and found ourselves surrounded by Parisiens at their contented leisure. On the far side of the gardens, we were suddenly on the grounds of the Louvre.

And nearby were two destinations I have always wanted to visit – the Musée D’Orsay and the Musée de l’Orangerie. The former holds perhaps the world’s best collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces, while the latter is best-known for two rooms where the walls are covered with Water Lily murals of Claude Monet.

The two are on opposite sides of the Seine River, about a 10-minute walk apart.

And no, we didn’t actually accomplish all of this in one walk. We saved the Orangerie and additional exploration of the Louvre for the following day, when we also made the longer trek along the Seine to the Eiffel Tower.

So, if you are a walker, you simply have to love Paris.

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.



Paris, including the Eiffel Tower and many other famous landmarks, as seen from the rooftop terrace of the Galeries Lafayette.



The interior of the Church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine.

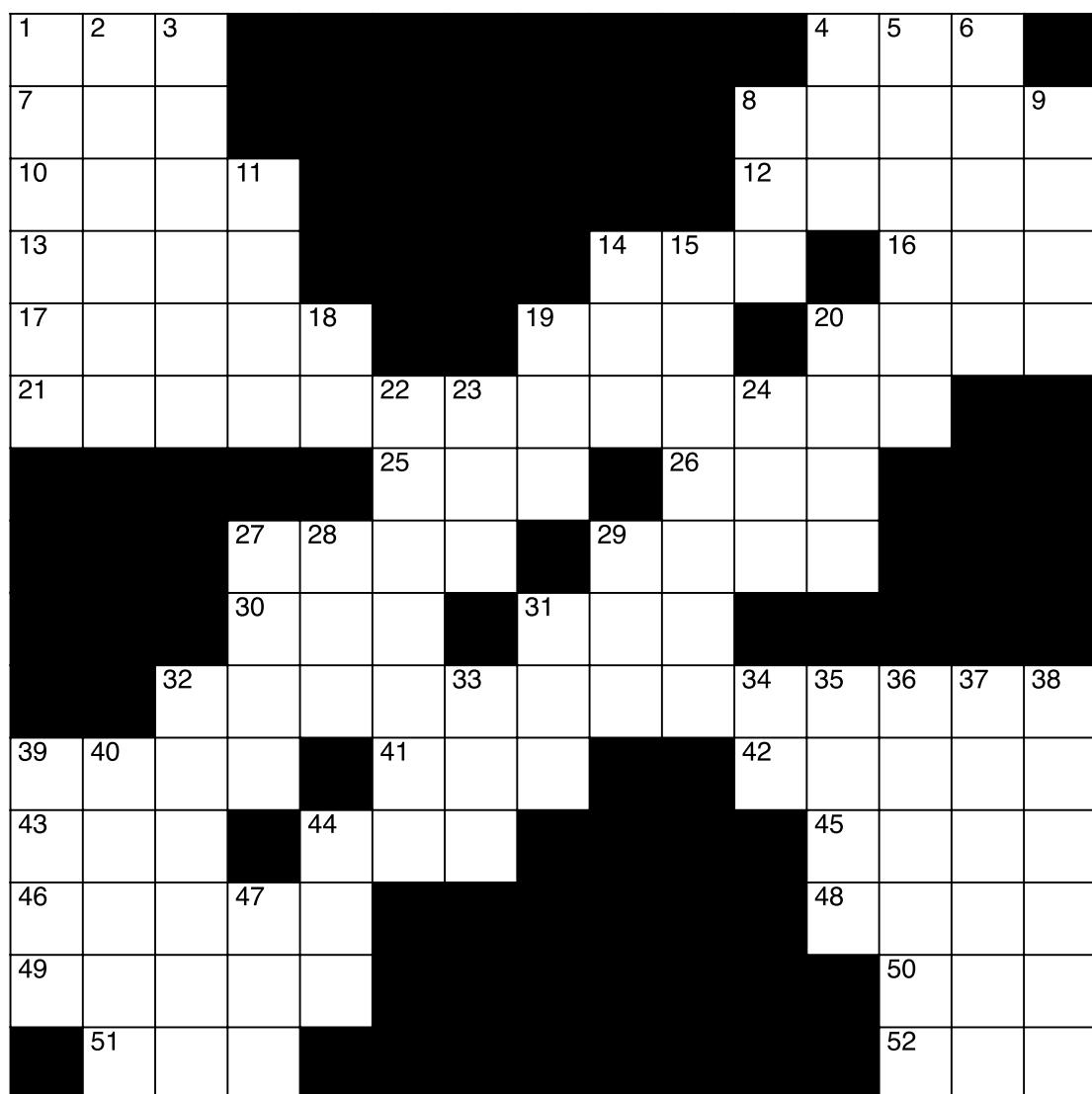
Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- Former CIA
- Language
- Constrictor snake
- Demand
- Rich man
- Short-tailed marten
- Zoroastrian concept of holy fire
- Superconducting super collider
- International group of countries within the Americas
- Sacred state for Muslims
- Shock therapy
- Engrave
- Localities
- Paddle
- Periodical
- Dishonestly gained money
- Gain possession of
- Actor DiCaprio
- High schoolers' test
- Mr. October
- Sign of healing
- One's grandmother
- Entrap
- One who simultaneously buys and sells
- Francisco
- Web-based data provider of marine life
- Type of snake
- Dark mark or stain
- Member of the Salii
- Former measure of length
- CNN's founder
- Witness

CLUES DOWN

- Acquire
- Console
- Hunting expedition
- Pie ___ mode
- Simple shoes for peasants
- Eurasian shrub
- Reciprocal of a sine
- Work together in harmony
- Grenade
- File extension
- Minute pores in a plant
- Medal of Honor
- Make a mistake
- Advance slowly, as if by inches
- Sandwich meat
- An awkward stupid person
- Strong tree
- Commoner
- Electroencephalograph
- ___ Mahal
- Congressman
- Disorderly crowd
- 007's creator Fleming
- Atomic #55
- Part of a door
- Short-tail martens
- Baltimore ballplayer
- Cuddle
- Gang in "The Outsiders"
- Of Croatia
- Body cavity
- Get free of



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

Solutions on page 27

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OBITUARY



GREGOR HERBERT READ 1944-2025

For more than three decades Mr. Read taught mathematics and the skills of computers and typing at Stratford Central Secondary School; he was known for his command of his subjects and for the positive, pleasant atmospheres he created for his students. But he also enjoyed – and never forgot – his extracurricular role as the coach of the school's football and rugby teams. So it's not surprising that earlier this month, after two difficult years without his beloved wife, Sue, and with his increasingly limiting health challenges, Coach Read determined his own personal strategy; on Saturday afternoon, December 13, he called his ultimate play, bravely to cross life's final goal line. Supporting him on that journey had been his faithful, adored daughter, Allison, her husband, Trent Sohnle, and a team of loyal friends (K. Butson, the Macleans, Smiths, Thompsons, Waldies, J. Miller).

Gregor Read was born in Bathurst, New Brunswick where, like a true Maritimer, he attended the University of New Brunswick and Mount Allison U., met and married Susannah Peggs, and, of course, played football. With his late parents, Alice & Herbert Read, his sister Janice Miller (Dr. Robert Miller, now of Guelph), and his late brother, Robbie, the family led the most prominent resort in Atlantic Canada, the Marshlands Inn of Sackville, N.B.. Yet a career in education won Greg over and brought him and his new wife into Ontario, even though Osoyoos, B.C. was always calling and sister-in-law, Joan Craig Peggs, always kept a welcome door open in Victoria.

As a citizen devoted to Stratford, Greg aimed to put into action the goals of the two clubs where he had been a member: Kinsmen (Serving the Community's Greatest Needs) and Rotary (Service above Self). In particular, with Sue and Allison the family devoted their considerable volunteer hours, attendance and financial support to the founding and the first two decades of Stratford Summer Music, and so it is to that organisation that memorial donations in Greg's honour are appreciated. (P.O. Box 1013, Stratford, N5A 6W4; online; etransfers; 519 271-2101)

Private arrangements entrusted to W.G. Young Funeral Home and Avondale Cemetery.

Those who knew Gregor well will remember his good humour and his kindnesses. He leaves behind a legacy of devotion to his family, constant friendships, generosity of time and energy, and an enthusiasm for fair play amid spirited sportsmanship.

OBITUARY

Palfery



Edwin Gerald Palfery passed away peacefully on December 31st at the age of 99 at Spruce Lodge, Stratford. Ed leaves behind his wife Jean Palfery (Irwin) his daughter Robin (David J Mountain) and grandsons Joseph and William Mountain. He is also survived by his sister Evelyn McMurray, 6 nieces, 7 nephews and their families. Ed was predeceased by his parents Victor and Mabel Palfery, siblings Florence Mordhorst, Ken Palfery and niece Lori McMurray.

Born in 1926, Ed's early years were spent camping in Mimico in the summers and living in Brooklyn, New York over the winters depending on available work for his father. When the US joined WWII, Ed worked as an Engineer's Assistant installing and repairing marine boilers on the ships preparing for convoy to Europe. After the war, he returned to Mimico and high school to attain a Canadian diploma.

He attended University of Toronto while teaching science at Meisterschaft College and playing the organ at Christ Church Mimico. He went on to become head of Science at Mimico C.I. and his 40+ year career culminated as Vice Principal of West Humber C.I.

His favourite place was his lab at Mimico, standing eating his lunch in his lab coat with the odd mouse or rat poking his head up from his breast pocket looking for treats, surrounded by students, plants and small animals. Ed's joy spending time with his grandsons knew no bounds including catching their childhood colds while playing Thomas the Tank Engine on the floor. He never appeared at our door without a small toy or candy in his pocket earmarked for the boys "just because."

A heartfelt thank you to the many PSWs, nurses and doctors who have looked after my dad at Chartwell Anne Hathaway, Stratford General Hospital and Spruce Lodge with such time and care. In lieu of flowers, donations to The Spruce Lodge Foundation or Avonbank Community Church are appreciated. Arrangements for a family service and burial at Avonbank Cemetery will take place in the spring. Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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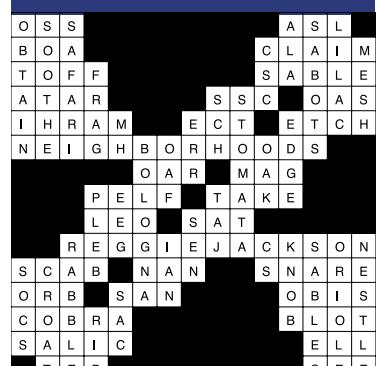
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