

STRATFORD TIMES

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Saying goodbye to Diane Sims

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

My friend, Diane Sims, was the unwavering author of her own life, and she wouldn't let anyone – not family, not doctors, not her illness – tell her how her story would come to an end.

On Friday, May 8, Diane ended her story the way she wanted. Her body had been failing for longer than I'd known her, the result of living with end-stage Multiple Sclerosis (MS), and she made the decision to end her suffering by proceeding with Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) – a mercy of our modern health-care system she had long advocated for, earning her the Order of Canada, and one that allowed her to live and die on her own terms.

Three days prior to Diane's death, she and her husband, Dennis Young, invited me to visit with Diane and interview her one last time. Diane was many things – an author, an advocate, a loyal friend and a force to reckon with – but she was a journalist at her core, and that's probably why we got along so well.

I was nervous going to see Diane. I had only experienced one other deathbed conversation with my dad, and I wasn't sure what state she'd be in when I saw her. Would she even have enough energy to talk in any depth?

It was shortly after 4 p.m. when I walked into Diane's bedroom at home. She was in bed with Dennis, they were watching some detective show on Netflix they both enjoyed, and the window was wide open, ushering in a refreshing chill. Diane said she appreciated the fresh air.

Diane turned off the show and Dennis nodded a quick greeting before rolling over and closing his eyes. Before long, he was snoring softly, an oddly calming backdrop as Diane and I talked.

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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

In typical Canadian fashion, Stratford resident Samm Simon holds a Tim Hortons coffee as he runs through Milverton. Simon is running from the Festival City to Tobermory, a total of 251 kilometres, in support of the cancer programs at the London Health Sciences Centre, Stratford General Hospital and Wellspring Stratford. As of press time, he has raised \$22,000, split equally with the organizations.

City files legal challenge against province

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After numerous Stratford city councillors spoke out against the Province of Ontario's strong mayor powers, council has followed through and filed a legal challenge against them.

Following council directive from its May 27, 2025 meeting, the City of Stratford and its solicitor have filed an application through the court, arguing the legislation "raises constitutional considerations, including

that the strong mayor legislation is inconsistent with Section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the unwritten constitutional principles of the rule of law and democracy resulting in the removal of effective representation on city council," according to a media release from the city.

Specifically, the city's application seeks to have the strong mayor legislation be declared as having no force and effect. It argues the legislation undermines the ability for elected officials to have an equal voice

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Goodbye, Diane

Here's that story I promised you

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

I asked her how she was feeling. I knew it wasn't good.

"Physically, my body is breaking down," she told me. "Mentally, I'm sad. I'm sad about leaving Dennis. I'm sad about not being able to do what I used to love doing, writing and speaking."

Diane was always honest and open with me about how her body was deteriorating. She said she had a wound in her thigh that had gone necrotic, something that was clearly causing discomfort physically and mentally, but she assured me her pain was under control.

In those first moments, I realized with some relief Diane's mind was still sharp. Throughout our conversation, she recalled specific dates and the names of her family, friends and every doctor who had ever treated her with perfect clarity. We laughed. I cried.

She spoke first about how she'd resigned from Stratford's accessibility advisory committee earlier in the day, delivering the news by phone from her bed and sharing one last moment with the people who had helped her push for an accessible entrance at the police station and reduce the slope of the bridge to Tom Patterson Island, the latter of which has not yet been implemented.

She said she was proud of how far the accessibility committee had come under her and Roger Koert's leadership, and she knew she was leaving it in the good hands of people who cared.

"It's now a very strong committee," Diane said. "I'm happy to be leaving it at this time."

I then asked how she felt about the life



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

she'd lived.

"I've lived an amazing life. ... It's been a life of giving back," she told me.

She spoke of her work with MS Canada and her role as a founding member of the National Ovarian Cancer Association, now Ovarian Cancer Canada.

She talked about her work as a journalist, having achieved a bachelor's degree in religious studies, a bachelor's in journalism and a master's in journalism by age 30 before working at CBC Radio in Sudbury, the Manitoulin Expositor, the London Free Press and later as communications manager for the Canadian Council of Land Surveyors.

"I had worked at the Manitoulin Expositor, which was the love of my life, working there. ... Then I got the job as assistant editor of Legion Magazine, which was another love of my life."

She told me working with veterans was one of the most meaningful parts of her career. Her father had been a lieutenant in the Second World War, and that personal connection deepened the meaning of the work.

She said most of the veterans she interviewed had never been asked by their own families about the most defining years of their lives, only knowing "dad was in the war," but not what he survived or carried afterward.

"Working with the veterans was just such a joy," she said. "I felt so honoured and so humbled to hear their stories."

"Often, their own families hadn't asked them or cared about their stories. ... If you served six, five, four, even three years in the war, that was a defining time of your life."

As Diane shared her stories about work, her illness was a constant backdrop and, at points, became her sole focus. Diane was diagnosed with MS at 17, and the complications of that disease were always close at hand. Yet, despite living under the spectre of her illness, she remained defiant and unwilling to accept any fate prescribed to her.

"I was told I'd be in a wheelchair very soon," she said of her initial prognosis. "I'd be bedridden by 27 and I'd be dead at 35."

"I looked at him and I said, '**** you.'"

Diane told me about how she found out she had ovarian cancer in vivid detail, recalling the day she told her doctor she was sick with more than the flu after months of symptoms, tight clothes

and feeling unwell. She pushed her doctor to do an internal exam, only to find out she had a 10-pound tumour the size of "an oddly shaped football."

Though her doctors managed to remove the tumour through immediate emergency surgery, they told her she would only have a year to live. Diane refused to accept that prognosis and brought her case to another one of her doctors in Toronto. Through an additional medical procedure intended to scrub the rest of her body of cancer cells, Diane's doctors extended her life expectancy to five years.

"So that's when I decided I was going out on my terms," she said – a decision she made long before MAiD was legalized in Canada.

Diane outlived her doctors' best hopes by more than two decades. Diane knew her body, pushed for answers, reached for friends and refused to let a diagnosis become destiny.

After describing cancer, MS and years of health crises, Diane did not frame her life as tragic. She said it had been full of miracles and full of downers, but she chose to live with joy and gratitude rather than self-pity.

I suggested that decision may have kept her alive, and she agreed.

Diane packed a lot into the two hours I spent with her, only pausing for a few moments every so often to collect her thoughts or remember a specific detail she felt was important.

One story that sticks out to me now and illustrates just how willing she was to challenge those in power was about her time serving on the Eastern Ontario Health Board. While serving on the health board's finance committee, she was told 20 nurses had to be laid off by Christmas. At the next board meeting, the committee began planning a Christmas party at a golf-course resort for board members, senior staff and spouses.

Diane objected, requested a recorded vote and was dismissed by an older board member who told her she "didn't know the way things are done." She lost the vote, then took the issue to the media. She also contacted Ruth Grier, then minister of health, who later issued a directive barring health boards and agencies from using general revenue funds for Christmas, retirement or birthday parties.

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A Passion for People

Goodbye, Diane

Here's that story I promised you

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

There was a cost. Diane received a death threat over her decision to speak out, but she remembered a Kingston radio interviewer telling her, "You have a lot of balls."

"When all else fails, go to the media," she said.

Near the end of our conversation, I asked Diane how she felt about what comes next.

"I have tremendous faith in a mysterious, magical, mystical divine," she told me. "I have connected with the divine, through my life, with Jesus."

Diane described an afterlife where those closest to her would be waiting for her arrival. She said she would love if her brother, Harv, was there to greet her first.

She told me she had said nearly all her goodbyes, but the hardest would be her last.

"Saying goodbye to Dennis; that is the hardest thing," she said. "I want him to grieve, but I want him to get past the grieving and live again."

"He has been the perfect help for me through all of this. Dennis definitely is a miracle in my life. I want to leave gazing into his baby blue eyes."

Before I left, Diane asked if I could write this story and publish it in the newspaper before she had planned to die on May 19. She asked if I would bring her one last edition of the newspaper so she could read what I wrote about her.

I told her I would, gave her a long hug and said I'd see her next week. She didn't make it to next week.

Assisted by her doctor, Diane died at home, surrounded by the people she loved and staring into the baby blue eyes of Dennis, the person she loved most.

There are worse ways to go.

The conversation I had with Diane is

how I'll remember her. In every story she told, there was a lesson about living life to its fullest no matter what obstacles might be in your way.

Diane always stood up for what she believed in and didn't let anyone tell her "the way things are done." At the end of her life, MAiD gave Diane the ability to live as long as she could continue speaking up for those who couldn't, and as long as she could share her own story for those who could find inspiration in it.

I know I did.

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City files legal challenge against province, believes strong mayor powers impede charter rights

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

and effectively participate, violating the right of effective representation for citizens.

While council publicly discussed potentially filing a motion last year, the decision to ultimately proceed with it was not publicized prior to the filing – a point of contention for Coun. Cody Sebben at the most recent council meeting on May 11.

"I do agree these powers are unnecessary in many ways, undemocratic," Sebben said. "At the very least, should not be imposed on municipalities. However, I have two main points of concern regarding council's decision to begin litigation of choice against the Province of Ontario. One: the debate, discussion and decision took place by choice in closed meetings ... by the same council which has seen members vote against hearing delegations and supported the idea of cutting time residents are committed to speak at meetings. Being heard in meetings, and indeed, hosting public meetings is more crucial to democracy than being rid of strong mayor powers, and should take precedent over costly litigation, which brings me to my second concern: cost.

"This is, no doubt, an important issue, not unlike other provincial legislation

and shortcomings," Sebben continued. "If members of this council believe it's important enough to take the province to court, there's nothing stopping individuals from doing so, privately (with personal money, but shutting residents out of the conversation and then committing undetermined amounts of Stratford taxpayer dollars on unnecessary litigation ... Well, we know, and I've heard tonight, that our residents are truly struggling."

"I think this was properly done in camera," said Coun. Mark Hunter, who moved the initial motion to investigate last year and has been a vocal critic of the legislation. "... We were getting legal advice, and what we did was provide instructions to a solicitor. And there are good reasons for keeping it quiet, because it protects our financial interest as a city."

Sebben clarified that he does not believe anything improper was done during the closed meeting and that it was legally allowed; however, would have preferred council to direct their solicitor in open session.

After a motion from Sebben, council agreed to publicize the cost of legal services during this challenge.

The strong mayor legislation was introduced by the province in 2022 and

has since been expanded to municipalities across Ontario, including Stratford. The province has stated the legislation is intended to support shared provincial priorities, which are currently housing initiatives and housing-related infrastructure.

The powers allow heads of council to appoint a municipality's chief administrative officer (CAO), hire certain municipal department heads and reorganize departments, create committees of council, propose a municipal budget, propose certain bylaws the mayor says advances a provincial priority, veto certain bylaws the mayor says could interfere with a provincial priority and bring forward matters for discussion by council if the mayor says they could advance a provincial priority.

Last year, when discussing the powers, councillors one by one called them undemocratic, upsetting, offensive, broken and scary, among other adjectives.

Hunter noted during past discussions the potential for suing the province regarding the powers, though weighed both the legal costs and the potential impact it would have on provincial support in other areas.

"I don't want to give up on (Canadian values) just for a few bucks," Hunter ultimately said at the April 28, 2025

meeting.

From the beginning, Ritsma has maintained the same position as he has now. He has not invoked any of the powers, save for putting forward the 2026 budget which council subsequently debated and passed.

"I've stated this openly many times that I strongly value that of relationship building and collaboration with council, with staff, with our public, with our residents, and to that end, there hasn't been an issue with regards to strong mayor powers used by myself," Ritsma said at the most recent meeting. "Council and the CAO have not been impacted by strong mayor powers. They have retained the power and responsibilities that I believe is yours and that's how we've operated ... (the powers haven't) impacted us in this council chamber, and I value that and continue to promote the idea of democracy through strong relationships and collaborations."

The city will continue to publicize status updates on the application, as appropriate.

Costs associated with this work are being managed within the city's approved operating budget, though as Sebben's motion dictated, they will be shared with the wider public.



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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Eric Ball, MakerSpace coordinator with the Stratford Public Library, stands in front of a mural of the Carnegie library on St. Andrew Street. The mural is made entirely from LEGO bricks. With 576 eight-by-eight tiles, a whopping 36,864 pieces were used by volunteers of the MakerSpace for just the design.

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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Province of Ontario renews SBEC agreement with Stratford Perth Centre for Business

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Province of Ontario has renewed its Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) agreement with the Stratford Perth Centre for Business, ensuring the continued delivery of programs and services that support entrepreneurs and small businesses across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County.

Delivered locally by investStratford and funded in partnership with the province, the Stratford Perth Centre for Business plays a pivotal role in regional business expansion. The impact of this partnership was evident in 2025, during which the centre conducted over 170 business consultations, directly supporting the establishment of 43 new

enterprises and the expansion or maintenance of 48 existing businesses.

Through this ongoing commitment from Ontario's Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, the centre will continue to provide one-on-one advisory services, business planning support and targeted programming for entrepreneurs at all stages of development. These resources include the Summer Company program, which offers students mentorship and financial assistance, and the Starter Company Plus Program, which supports adults in launching or purchasing a business through grants and training.

Leveraging its partnership, the centre is evolving its services to meet the modern needs of the local economy. Beyond traditional advisory services, the

organization is committed to providing a foundation for success by integrating new technologies like AI, supporting the mental well-being of owners and offering innovative succession planning. Through initiatives like the Evolving Entrepreneurship podcast and AI training modules, the centre continues to foster a more inclusive and prosperous business community.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our rural communities," said Matthew Rae, MPP for Perth-Wellington. "They create jobs, support local initiatives and keep our communities strong. By supporting new entrepreneurs, we're helping drive growth and opportunity across our communities."

"The province's renewal of the SBEC agreement reflects the value of locally

delivered business support services," said City of Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma. "This continued investment will help ensure that small businesses in our community have access to the tools and resources they need to succeed."

investStratford CEO Joani Gerber added, "This agreement supports a coordinated regional approach to economic development and reinforces our commitment to fostering a strong and resilient business environment."

The provincial investment will enable the Stratford Perth Centre for Business to continue supporting entrepreneurship, innovation and job creation throughout Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County.

For more information, visit www.stratfordperthbusiness.ca.

April unemployment decreases to 5.2%, still lowest in province

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

In April, the unemployment rate in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region decreased by 0.1 percentage points to 5.2 per cent yet holds steady as the lowest unemployment rate in the province for the past four consecutive months. Meanwhile, the provincial unemployment rate remained unchanged this month at 7.5 per cent, both unadjusted for seasonality. Employment in the region decreased by 2,400 (-1.4 per cent) in April, with losses in full-time employment (-0.7 per cent; -900) as well as losses in part-time employment (-4.2 per cent; -1,600).

In April, the region's overall population aged 15 and older increased by 400 where-

as the labour force size decreased by 2,700 people. The number of people not in the labour force in the region increased by 3,100. This reduced the region's participation rate by one percentage points to 60.1 per cent. Employment in the region decreased in both the goods-producing sector (-0.5 per cent; -300) and the services-producing sector (-2.1 per cent; -2,300).

The goods-producing sector saw a decrease in overall employment numbers in April (-0.5 per cent; -300). Losses were experienced once again in agriculture (-9.0 per cent; -700) and construction (-3.9 per cent; -800), whereas gains were seen in manufacturing (+4.6 per cent; +800) and utilities (+2.3 per cent; +300).

Overall employment in the services-producing sector saw a decrease of -2.1 per

cent (-2,300 people) in April. Public administration experienced the largest percentage decrease in employment (-18.6 per cent; -800), followed by health care and social assistance (-11.8 per cent; -2,900) and other services, except public administration (-11.3 per cent; -900). On the other hand, transportation and warehousing experienced the largest percentage increase in employment (+13.0 per cent; +600), followed by information, culture and recreation (+9.3 per cent; +500) and wholesale and retail trade (+8.3 per cent; +2,300).

"We continue to monitor the local workforce as participation rates in the region continue to decline", said Dana Soucie, chief executive officer for the Four County Labour Market Planning Board, in its monthly report. "Collaborations and innovative programs remain critical as we move forward to address our unique rural workforce needs."

Current Job postings for the Bruce, Grey, Huron, Perth region have increased overtime since the pandemic and can be found at www.connect2JOBS.ca. The current number of job postings currently exceeds 1,500.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. An educated guess made at the start of an experiment is called what?
2. What does VHS stand for?
3. Which celebrity has fulfilled the most Make-A-Wish requests?
4. The Dead Sea is located between which two countries?
5. An orca can also be called a what?
6. What archeologist discovered King Tut's tomb?
7. How many time zones are there in Canada?
8. What year did Leonardo DiCaprio finally win his first Oscar?
9. Before Tokyo became the capital city of Japan, where was the capital located?
10. How many syllables are in the word Mississippi?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

The St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church Mary Martha Society is hosting its annual yard sale from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday, May 23, at 115 Cambria St. (the corner of Nelson and Cambria). Pictured are St. Peter's office administrator Jessica Robins and Mary Martha Society member Wendy Wharran showing some of the housewares, jewelry, toys and other items that will be available for purchase at the yard sale.

Perth County survey shows strong business confidence, growth across sectors

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Businesses across Perth County are continuing to show confidence in the local economy, with many planning for change or growth in the coming years, according to the county's latest business retention and expansion (BR+E) survey.

County economic development and tourism staff shared the survey results with council at its May 7 meeting as part of a broader update on economic activity and tourism across the region.

"This time, our BR+E was focused on being a concise, business-level, intelligence-gathering exercise as opposed to a community-level temperature check," said county economic development officer Justin Dias. "So, that survey has been completed and those results help to inform our staff's response and deliver resources to those businesses requesting additional funding, joining our programs, or other resources related to their survey responses."

The 2026 BR+E survey collected 142 responses from businesses across Perth County, representing a range of sectors including retail, agriculture, arts and recreation, manufacturing and construction. Responses were spread across all four lower-tier municipalities, with the largest share coming from North Perth, followed by Perth East, West Perth and Perth South.

One of the most notable findings from the survey is 66 per cent of respondents indicated they are planning some form of change within the next two years, whether that be expansion, relocation, downsizing or selling their business.

At the same time, businesses identified a range of supports they would like to see from the county, with grant and loan programs topping the list. Other commonly requested supports included marketing assistance, social media and digital marketing training, artificial intelligence tools, succession-planning resources and workforce-related supports.

Workforce challenges remain a key concern for many businesses. More than 40 per cent of respondents reported difficulties recruiting or retaining employees, with common issues including a lack of qualified applicants, competition for labour and a limited pool of candidates.

"Of the 142 business responses, 68 per cent chose to remain anonymous, and that's understandable," Perth County Warden Dean Trentowsky said during the council discussion. "But 42 per cent of the respondents reported experiencing workforce, recruitment or retention challenges. ... I guess my concern is ... how do we help them if they remain anonymous, but they indicate they're in trouble and need help? ... It's kind of like a 911 call comes in and they say, 'I need police, fire and ambulance,' and then they hang up the

phone and we don't know where to go.

"We have the ability to offer some assistance, but how do we make that connection ... and try to offer some assistance?"

Speaking to Trentowsky's concern, Dias said the county can address the issues raised around workforce, recruitment and retention challenges through a general approach. One piece of that puzzle, Dias explained, is letting businesses across the county know about the relaunch of Ontario Job Grant, the redesigned Canada-Ontario Job Grant program that provides up to \$10,000 in funding to help employers train their employees and update their skills so they can adapt to a changing economy.

"This is a program designed to help employers access the specific training they need to help their employees upskill or get the skills they need to be retained or once they're recruited," Dias said. "That's something we shared yesterday on our socials; we're going to push that out to ensure as many businesses as possible can take advantage of it."

Coun. Rhonda Ehogoetz also noted that Perth County council and its member, lower-tier councils can continue pushing for new housing and higher densities in their communities to support employers as they bring new workers into the county.

Despite those challenges and broader economic pressures such as inflation

and uncertainty, roughly two-thirds of respondents still rated Perth County as a good or excellent place to do business.

In addition to survey results, staff also provided council with a snapshot of where business expansion is occurring across the county using building permit data.

In the agricultural sector, nearly \$97 million in construction activity was recorded in 2025, including new builds, renovations and additions. West Perth accounted for the largest share of that activity, followed by Perth East, with North Perth and Perth South each making up smaller but still significant portions.

Commercial and industrial construction activity also remained strong, totalling more than \$53 million across the county in 2025. In contrast to agricultural development, Perth South led the way in commercial and industrial investment, followed by Perth East and North Perth, with West Perth accounting for a smaller share.

Staff noted the inclusion of building-permit data provides a more complete picture of business expansion across Perth County, capturing activity that may not be reflected through formal funding applications or direct economic-development support.

The county plans to continue tracking this data on a quarterly basis moving forward to better understand growth trends and support ongoing business-development efforts.

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Perth County to submit concerns over province's Bill 98 planning changes

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth County council has endorsed planning staff's comments on the province's latest round of proposed planning and development legislation, raising concerns about the impact Bill 98 could have on local decision-making, rural planning and municipal flexibility.

At its May 7 meeting, county director of planning Andrea Hächler presented a report outlining staff comments on Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, before the May 14 provincial comment deadline.

"With the bill came out 21 related Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) postings that municipalities have been invited to comment on," Hächler said. "The bill proposed nine pieces of legislation be changed, including the Planning Act, the Development Charges Act, Building Code Act and Municipal Act.

"... You'll note I only commented on seven of the nine (legislation) changes because I felt those impact Perth County the most. ... This was released on March 30 and we were given to April 29 to comment. Luckily, that deadline was extended to May 14, so I was able to get a report to council and we'll have time to get comments into the ERO posting."

Bill 98 is the 19th piece of provincial legislation related to land-use planning and development in the past eight years. The bill received second reading April 14.

The proposed changes include standardizing municipal official plans, reforming site-plan control, establishing a minimum residential lot size in fully serviced settlement areas, prohibiting some mandatory enhanced development standards at the lot level, streamlining complete-application requirements and updating parkland dedication rules.

While county staff say they support efforts to make planning processes more efficient and user-friendly, Hächler raised concerns that some of the proposed changes would reduce municipal discretion and limit Perth County's ability to respond to its specific rural, agricultural and settlement-area contexts.

One of the major proposed changes would allow the province to prescribe a standard structure, table of contents, list of schedules and land-use designations for all municipal official plans. The county's official plan would need to comply with those requirements by Jan. 1, 2029.

"Just simply standardizing official plans doesn't give us the ability to address area-specific contexts," Hächler said. "Perth County in particular has prime agricultural lands, you have smaller, rural settlement areas and we definitely don't have an official plan that would look like a City of Toronto official plan or a Region of Muskoka official plan."

Staff cautioned that while consistency may help in some cases, a one-size-fits-all approach could limit the county's ability to reflect local landscapes, resources and land-use patterns. Staff also warned standardized designations could result in more official plan amendments to address site-specific circumstances.

"So, we're asking the province to allow us to build in site-specific contexts and not to standardize official plans to that extent," Hächler said.

The county also raised significant concerns with the province's proposed site-plan-control changes. Bill 98 proposes removing site-plan control as a land-use planning tool and replacing it with a more standardized process focused on public health and safety. The legislation would also limit the number of circulations, create different review streams depending on project complexity and introduce a site-plan review panel or arbitration pro-

cess for applications exceeding statutory timelines.

County staff are not supportive of removing site-plan control, noting it remains an important tool for addressing matters such as access, grading, drainage, stormwater management, building location, parking, garbage storage and snow storage.

"The stormwater and the grading and stuff like that; is there another way we can ensure those are being done without site-plan control?" Coun. Hugh McDermid asked during the council discussion.

"There is a bare minimum that your building officials can ask for through the building permit that would likely speak to grading and drainage. However, in terms of any sort of compatibility issues (with neighbouring properties), we wouldn't be able to address those any longer," Hächler responded, noting the locations of things like garbage dumpsters and snow-storage areas, as well as the types of outdoor lighting within a proposed development would not be subject to change regardless of their impact on neighbours.

Staff also argue the province could reduce the number of application circulations by restoring municipal authority to require pre-consultation before an application is submitted. While many applicants already take part in pre-consultation voluntarily, staff say applications submitted without that early discussion can take longer to review.

Another proposed change would give the minister authority to set a minimum residential lot size in fully serviced settlement areas. The proposed minimum would be 175 square metres, roughly equivalent to a lot nine metres wide and 19 metres deep.

While county planning staff say they generally support smaller residential lot sizes and have been exploring reductions through local zoning bylaw reviews, the report raises concerns that the proposed minimum may be too small in some situations. Staff identified potential impacts related to stormwater management, reduced permeable area, parking, driveway spacing and sightlines, particularly for corner lots.

Bill 98 also proposes changes to the way municipalities can require studies and materials as part of a complete planning application. The province is considering a standardized list of core and contingent studies, as well as expanded electronic submission requirements.

County staff caution that a provincewide online submission model could create barriers in rural areas where internet service may be limited or unreliable. The report also notes the needs of the traditional Anabaptist community, where modern technology is not used, should be considered.

Staff also raised concerns about proposed changes to Minister's Zoning Orders that would remove the legislative requirement for the minister to provide public notice on amendments or revocations. County staff recommend public consultation and consent from the host municipality before changes are made to existing MZOs.

On parkland dedication, the proposed changes would require municipalities to accept a broader range of lands, including some encumbered lands and privately owned public spaces, toward parkland requirements. Staff warn this could lead to smaller, disconnected or less useful parcels that do not align with municipal parks and trails plans.

In its report, county staff acknowledge the province's goal of supporting more residential development but note planning applications in Perth County generally meet legislative timelines and there are already a significant number of approved residential units in serviced settlement areas.

Council directed planning staff to submit the county's comments to the province and forward the report to the county's lower-tier municipalities for information.

Redaction

(for librarians everywhere)

(on the occasion of the Stratford Film Festival screening of the film, "The Librarians.")

Expunge. Delete. Expurgate.

Censor. Discard. Obviate.

You steal language from the page,
reap it as wheat before the sickle,
hold it like beach glass before
the wilting beam of your prosecution
to reveal its blot, the literary stain
you know exists and must be removed
before it is discovered and the
brimstone is allowed to wreak its havoc.

To you a book is not a book.

It is the accused, called to the stand
for cross examination, yet presumed guilty
long before the slam of the judge's hammer,
no testimony required, hearing denied.

But know this: we will not yield to your
selective amnesia, nor bend to
the thrust of your dusty verdicts.

The moon's eclipse does not mask
its wisdom beneath its gauze, nor
deny the tides that seal our dreaming
into the poetry of the passing hours.

And even though the blooms may wilt,
they still insist their fragrance across
our harbours, the shadow of their
powdery veil pressed eternally
into the evening air.

And so the way of books.

You may excise the page with the
smoking scalpel of your ignorance
but you cannot erase the word,
for the word is alive and the word
is the flesh of our understanding.

Your cancel culture cannot nullify ideas,
puncture the sanctity of thought or
obviate the blessed vessel of an open mind.

Redact. Repress. Eradicate.

Remove. Purge. Eliminate.

Some things are holy and immutable.
The flower is made to open.
The moon is designed to shine.
And a book once removed will
echo its presence forever.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

Grab a 'Pup of Coffee' and help animals in need at the humane society

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Hot drinks, cookies and coffee cup-shaped dog treats will be sold to support the Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo and Stratford Perth (HSKWSP).

Hartman's Coffee and Tea and the Barkery Stratford are selling special treats until May 25 and will also collect monetary donations and pet supplies like dog and cat food, treats, litter and pet accessories to stock up the humane society's Pet Pantry.

The Barkery has Pup of Coffee cookies available for \$3.25 each, with \$2 of each purchase going towards the fundraiser. The store will also have a donation box for anyone looking to contribute financially to the regional humane society and will collect pet supplies.

"There are so many pets that need homes in their facilities and it is a huge cost to run them," Heidi Rolleman, owner of the Barkery, said to the Times. "Any kind of donation is helpful and we do what we can with our resources here."

Hartman's Coffee and Tea will also sell coffee and cookies with proceeds supporting the Pup of Coffee fundraiser.

Rachael Kuntz, HSKWSP events and fundraising coordinator, said that even more local businesses are participating. Sweets by Jess is making the fundraising cookies for Hartman's Coffee and Tea and Pup of Coffee was organized by Pawsitive Difference Professional Pet Care's Christine Foster.

"Just to see so many local businesses in Stratford come together to support such a great cause and help animals in our care is really amazing to see. We love the support of our local community," Kuntz said.

Fundraisers like Pup of Coffee and other donations keeps the humane society's operations running. The organization does not receive any government funding.

"All of our outreach programs and other fundraising happens by the generosity of our community supporters so it's very needed," Kuntz said. "There's always animals coming through our centre who need some extra love and care and we're happy to provide that into the community. The need is always great and we so appreciate all of our supporters."

More information about the HSKWSP can be found online by visiting kwsphumane.ca.



(HEIDI ROLLEMAN PHOTO)

Pick up a Pup of Coffee treat for your pet at The Barkery Stratford from now until May 25, where \$2 from each treat sold will support the Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo and Stratford Perth.

Karaoke World Championships qualifiers bring global singing competition to local stages

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

Local singers are getting the chance to take their voices from southwestern Ontario to the world stage through the Karaoke World Championships.

The international amateur singing competition began in Finland in 2003 and brings together singers from countries around the world. KWC Canada lists Ontario finals for July 11 and 12, 2026, with nationals scheduled for Aug. 17 to 22 in Calgary.

Rob Puschelberg, a longtime karaoke host, is running qualifying events at multiple local venues, including Chuck's Roadhouse in Stratford, Good Times in Woodstock, and, starting May 17, the Foundry Tavern in Cambridge.

"I'm really excited," Puschelberg said. "I've done two events in Woodstock and seen some really, really good talented singers."

Competitors perform two songs of their choice. Over the course of the qualifying series, singers can return for multiple weeks, with their top scores used to determine who advances.

Puschelberg said the format encourages singers to keep improving while also helping venues build a strong weekly crowd.

"Not everybody's going to win, but everybody's going to grow," Puschelberg said.

He said the competition is about more than singing. Judges can offer feedback on areas such as stage presence, breathing and performance, giving singers a chance to develop before moving on to higher levels of competition.

"Our whole thing, with the judges and myself, is to do whatever we can do to make them better, so that they have a better chance at the provincials, the nationals and the world," he said.

Puschelberg has been hosting karaoke for nearly 31 years. What started as a personal love of singing grew into a career

built around helping others feel comfortable on stage.

"To me, music is probably the best drug in the world," he said. "The feeling that people get from music can be life-changing."

He said karaoke can create community for people who are new to town, nervous to sing or simply looking for a place to belong.

"You take somebody that's struggling, give them a microphone and a song that they know and a little bit of encouragement and a good audience that'll cheer for them, no matter how good or bad it is, and once they feel accepted, it's crazy," he said.

Qualifying nights run Tuesdays at Good Times in Woodstock and Wednesdays at Chuck's Roadhouse in Stratford, with registration at 7:30 p.m. and competition starting at 8 p.m. Starting May 17, Sunday qualifiers will run at the Foundry Tavern in Cambridge, with registration at 5:30 p.m. and competition starting at 6 p.m.

After each competition, the night continues with open karaoke.

Registration for the Karaoke World Championships qualifiers is available through KWC Canada.

Single-venue registration costs \$30 for solo competitors, while multi-venue registration is \$50 and allows singers to compete at multiple qualifying locations.

Duet registrations are also available, with single-venue entry priced at \$50 and multi-venue entry priced at \$75.

"I want this to be something that people are going to want to come and watch," said Puschelberg, "because they're going to want to come and cheer on their local singers and help them progress through the competition."

Organizers are also encouraging audience members to attend and support local singers throughout the competition series.

"Bring the crowd, bring the energy. Come be part of the audience and cheer on local singers."



(ROB PUSCHELBERG PHOTO)

Contestants gather at Chuck's Roadhouse in Stratford for the inaugural qualifying night of the Karaoke World Championships hosted by Gemstone Entertainment. Local singers are competing for a chance to advance to the Ontario provincial finals and potentially represent Canada on the world stage.

City takes another step forward to buy Scotiabank Data Centre for police, expected to cost \$26M all-in

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After a few months and change of preliminary investigation, the City of Stratford is nearing a final decision on the purchase of the former Scotiabank Data Centre located at 10 and 52 Wright Blvd.

As chief administrative officer (CAO) André Morin said during the Stratford city council meeting on May 11, the building is a unique opportunity but it is still just one option of many.

“We looked at the building,” Morin explained. “Staff have looked at that building. It brings a unique opportunity that may be able to save the city some funds.”

Morin estimated the all-in cost for the data centre to be \$26 million, which includes the purchase price and renovation costs. It will be funded primarily through a combination of debt, reserve funds and development charges – as well as revenue from the potential disposition of municipal properties, such as the sale of the current police headquarters at 17 George St.

Through the George Street location and a leased satellite office at 789 Erie St., the Stratford Police Service utilizes 26,258 square feet of space – though a space needs study estimates police need a total of 55,200 square feet for its current scope.

The data centre is 100,625 square feet. Morin confirmed that 17,000 could be leased to the provincial courts, which is what representatives from the courts estimated would be desirable. The rest of the space could be housed by other municipal departments, services and shared spaces, creating efficiencies that could bear cost-savings. As a significantly larger building, the upkeep costs are higher, however it being a much newer building and the fact they would stop leasing 789 Erie St. means the city could save \$26,277 a year in operating costs.

Aside from purchasing a new building like the data centre, there are a few other options for the city. According to Morin’s report, building a new facility could cost \$49-\$55 million. Renovating the George Street headquarters and constructing a new build on the grounds to meet police needs could cost \$35-\$40 million. As noted in Morin’s report, purchasing the data centre is the most cost-effective solution apparent to the city at present.

“We need to provide a space for (police)



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

10 and 52 Wright Boulevard, the former Scotiabank data centre, may be Stratford’s next police headquarters, as council and staff continue to consider it as the most cost-effective solution to the service’s space.

that meets their needs so they can serve the community to the best of their ability,” Coun. Lesley Biehn said. “And the way that all of these numbers are working out, if you look at Wright Boulevard, not only would we be meeting their needs so that they can serve us better, but we would also be saving the taxpayer \$15-\$20 million in the process of doing that. And so in my opinion, it’s just a win-win. I don’t see a downside to this.”

“We do have a strongly vibrant downtown, and I think the key is to not self-inflict harm to our vibrant downtown,” Coun. Cody Sebben pointed out. “... If the police headquarters do move in that location ... I think it would be hard pressed to find occupants or tenants of that location that will have as much foot traffic and economic activity coming from that location, whether it’s officers, employees and people utilizing the courts and the space.”

Local architect Robert Ritz, who has advocated for police to occupy the current Y on Downie Street, again delegated at council, entreating members to investigate the location fulsomely before moving forward with purchasing the data centre.

Most councillors were skeptical, especially since Morin estimated the cost to properly investigate the location would cost an additional \$36,000.

“The major focus of council’s priorities for this term was the Grand Trunk renewal,” Ritz said. “The police headquarters is not even on the list. The new police headquarters is not listed on the police 2026 capital budget, agreed, but police do need to be under one roof in a state-of-the-art building with wildly sudden urgency. Missing a market opportunity is not a valid reason for urgency.

“... Take a step back and before moving forward, conduct the required due diligence to make a comprehensive comparison between the 10 Wright building and the YMCA as the repurposed police headquarters,” Ritz urged.

“This has been a historical conversation,” Mayor Martin Ritsma said. “And that’s why we are currently renting space that separates out our police services. It used to be on Downie (Street) and we outgrew that, and now we’re on Erie. And so we have talked about this in my four terms on council. Coun. (Bonnie) Hender-

son would probably say in her five terms on council. So this is historical. There is a reason why we’re talking about it today, and we have a 1963 building which is deficient in technology, accessibility and size, and at some point we have to make a decision and here’s an opportunity for us to move something.

“We’re not making a decision tonight with regards to whether it’s an absolute, but it’s another step forward, but I think it follows the path of concern that we’ve had since taking out additional space on Downie Street a number of years ago.”

After a closed meeting at the end of the open session that evening, council met again and directed Morin to negotiate “a portion of this matter” on behalf of the city. Staff will be completing its due diligence including confirmation of renovation costs, post-disaster structural assessment and verification of space requirements in the coming weeks.

A report covering the findings of the due diligence investigation and a detailed implementation plan will be presented and debated by council prior to any final purchasing commitment.

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Elgin Audiology reminds residents hearing health is brain health

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

May is Hearing Awareness Month, and this year Elgin Audiology is reminding the southwestern Ontario community that hearing health goes beyond whether their ears work well or not. As David Pfungstgraef said, a person's hearing problems can have a huge ripple effect on their wider physical and mental health.

"Communication for humans is really important," said Pfungstgraef, co-founder and primary audiologist of Elgin Audiology. "It's how we have survived over the ages, and what we rely on for many, many things. So, if we see folks that aren't communicating well or aren't able to listen and hear, a lot of changes can happen, not just with their hearing but with their general health. We can see folks that have been tagged as having cognitive decline or other mental health issues, who can just be having issues with hearing loss.

"... With the research we're seeing, we are starting to realize that we have to begin treating hearing loss in order to have a healthy brain. I think that's one of the important things that we're now finding, and we need to help those individuals earlier in life, so that ability to communicate and keep the brain healthy is sustained for longer as life progresses."

Elgin Audiology is a group of private practice audiologist-owned clinics, as Pfungstgraef said, with locations in Stratford, St. Thomas, Aylmer, Blenheim, West Lorne and London. Its goal is to help people hear better in their daily lives. While many associate audiology with hearing aids, and that is a service it provides, it is chiefly focused on the service side of hearing health – how can it help get clients' hearing back to the best it can be.

Pfungstgraef is an audiologist with 35 years of experience in the field. He first became intrigued by audiology through an uncle, who wore hearing aids and wondered how he could help him hear better. Spurred to find out if something better could be done, Pfungstgraef went through the audiology program at Western University and worked at the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital before starting Elgin Audiology with fellow audiologist Joanne Parsons.

One of Elgin Audiology's specialties in addition to hearing aids is pediatric hearing care, which is how it started in Stratford. Pfungstgraef is also the regional audiology consultant for the Ontario Ministry's Infant Hearing Program in the southwest, which serves an area that goes from Lake Erie to Tobermory.

"The Infant Hearing Program has been around from the Ontario government for about 20 years," Pfungstgraef said. "... Hearing loss can go unnoticed in a very young newborn or an infant. ... About three to four babies per 1,000 may have a hearing loss at birth

that needs to be assessed and treated so that they can develop typical communication skills such as speech and language, or through sign language.

"... The goal is to try to have those kids seen and assessed within the first three months, and if they need devices like hearing aids or treatment for communication development started within six months. It's a great program, and I would say probably one of the best in the world, actually."

Pfungstgraef advises everyone to get their hearing checked if they ever notice changes – especially if they are over the age of 45. Once at that milestone, he said it is prudent to check hearing as routinely as one goes to the dentist or gets their eyes checked.

"When you come to see us, you actually see an audiologist," he said. "... We're regulated and licensed like your optometrist and audiologists are trained at a graduate university program. If you are noticing a problem with hearing loss, give us a call because your ears deserve an audiologist."

Elgin Audiology is located at 150 Huron St. in Stratford. More information can be found at <https://www.elginaudiology.com/>.

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House of Blessing gets thousands in cash, cheques and food donations

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Last week was an exiting time for staff at the Stratford House of Blessing food bank, when it got unprecedentedly large donations organized by two local couples.

Stratford's Bruce and Margaret Whitmore and Shakespeare's Richard and Jean Smelski said that while they continue to eat very well in their areas, local food banks are in real need.

Initially, the couples thought that maybe they could each ask 100 friends to give one or two boxes of cereal to the cause. They were hoping they could get 250 boxes of cereal, just cereal, and keep it simple.

The four had been reading about food insecurity in Perth County in farm papers and had to know more.

The Whitmores visited a couple of food banks, including St. Joseph's Saint Vincent de Paul food kitchen and the House of Blessing, to see how big the problem might be.

They then contacted all 13 county food banks to get numbers of clients served. Even some working families needed food bank help to feed their family, and they were shocked that 250 boxes of cereal

would not come close to the need. They decided they were going to need a bigger base of donors.

The Whitmores and Smelskis said they tapped agribusinesses which had a vested interest in cereal, including seed companies, farmers, farmer organizations, input depot, elevators and grocery stores.

The Whitmores visited three places to get a read on how the idea would be received in early January of 2026. As luck would have it, former students either owned or managed those three organizations.

The first said they would give 100 boxes, the second place matched that amount and the third place said they would give \$1,000 for cereal.

Bruce said, "they were on a roll, and it was doable."

They contacted all 13 food banks in Perth County to find that 1,805 households went to a food bank once a month. In fact, cereal becomes supper by the end of the month in some households and they were told that the 20 per cent increase in usage was expected this year and that was before gas prices spiked.

When both couples knew of the serious need, they raised their expected goal to

2,500 boxes of cereal and set out to visit agribusinesses.

They said they were welcomed by the nicest people in many organizations, who knew there was a problem of food insecurity and responded just as the three businesses before them had.

Bruce said they followed up two or three times to get a cheque, because company managers had to look at their budgets or contact head offices. Very few declined the invitation to help and some preferred to work with the Food Grains organization, which was also a great way to help those in need.

At this time, the couples said they are at \$18,304 in donation pledges, with a couple of organizations still to come with their

donations. A couple of cheques will also be coming from head offices, but they are sure the money will come.

The Whitmores and Smelskis have delivered 151 boxes of cereal to the House of Blessing already and there are 149 more boxes to come. They will turn over all the cereal and cheques on hand to the House of Blessing and they will divide up the proceeds on a percentage basis, depending on the number of clients served by each food bank in Perth County.

According to Bruce and Richard, this effort was a one shot deal but they were very happy for all those individuals and organizations that donated, and now hungry families will be eating, because of those most generous in their giving.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Richard and Jean Smelski, Margaret and Bruce Whitmore, Lori Stewart of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and Eva Hayes, executive director of the Stratford House of Blessing pose behind over a hundred boxes of cereal, all thanks to a one-time campaign undergone by the Smelskis and Whitmores.

Help Avondale and House of Blessing stock their shelves for the summer

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Avondale United Church will host its annual Community Food Drive in partnership with Stratford House of Blessing.

The church will be collecting non-perishable food items in its parking lot on June 6 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. While House of Blessing will not be on-site, the donations will be divided between Avondale's Food Shelf and the House of Blessing's food bank.

There's been a nearly 25 per cent increase in clients who use the food shelf from April 2025 to April 2026.

"I expect that will continue to increase with the cost of food and the cost of living in general. A lot of our clients are really struggling," said Joanne Ehgoetz, chair of the food shelf committee. "We have a lot of working people, but they just don't make enough to make ends meet anymore or sometimes in an emergency somebody had to take a week off sick and said, 'We needed that week's salary to make the ends meet.'"

Avondale and House of Blessing are looking for non-perishable food items in particular such as peanut butter, cereal, granola bars, instant coffee, canned fruits and vegetables and cans of pasta sauce, jam, tuna and condensed soup.

There's a drop in donations for the Food Shelf during the summer months as many people are busy and/or on vacation. Ehgoetz said the food drive aims to ensure there's plenty of pantry staples available from June to September.

"The idea of the food drive is to think of us through the summer and when you're away and you have your barbecues and your plenty, then remember the people that aren't going to be as fortunate," she said. "We can't very well ask them for perishables because they may not last us for the whole summer, then."

Ehgoetz added that every donation helps, even if all you can afford to donate is a can of soup or a can of tuna. However, be mindful of the shelf life of the food and avoid donating expired items.

"I've heard people say 'Well, if they're hungry, they'll eat it,' and the dignity of our clientele is something we really take seriously so we ask people to check their best-before-dates before donate it to us," she said. "Just because somebody can't afford to buy their own food, should they get their leftovers? And we feel that's not right either."

Donors are asked to enter the Avondale parking lot from Huntingdon Avenue. Hot dogs and pop will be available at the food drive to purchase by donation. Tax receipts will also be issued for monetary donations.




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The Sideyard brings coffee, treats and community together across Perth County

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

After more than 10 years running a side-hustle baking business, Vanessa Simpson has expanded her company by launching a mobile events and workshops business built around a café-style coffee-and-treats trailer.

The Sideyard is a mobile trailer serving specialty coffee, dirty sodas, charcuterie-style boxes, artisan sandwiches and seasonal baked goods. Simpson also offers experiences and has a small mobile cart with similar items for indoor events.

“The idea had always been to open a brick-and-mortar café-style experience selling my treats,” said Simpson. “I also really love coffee, and I love making artisanal-style sandwiches. So I started getting my friends together and offering them different-style arrangements, foods and sandwiches, just to see if I had something

unique enough or if they would spend X amount of money on what I was making, and I kept getting really good feedback.”

Highlighting other local businesses and farms across Perth County is also an important part of the business. Simpson plans to use fresh, in-season produce, with strawberries and raspberries soon appearing in baked goods and menu offerings.

“Any ingredients that we use in my baked goods or my sandwiches, I try to get them all locally sourced around Perth County to try and give back to local businesses and help promote them too. My candy, for instance, is from Corner Store Candy in Stratford. So I try to get my own brand out there, but I also really emphasize supporting local businesses too.”

Another aspect of the Sideyard is its events and workshops, where Simpson plans to host crafting sessions such as wreath-making and flower arranging.

“I love to host,” said Simpson. “I host

parties, gatherings and get-togethers all the time and I love having big, extravagant parties. So that's kind of where the events and workshop side of things come from, and having a mobile trailer, it just made sense. I have a little flower farm that I've started on my property, so I'll be able to incorporate that into what I offer.”

Right now, Simpson said the business offers a wide range of services, with plans to narrow the focus over time based on customer demand. People booking the trailer for events can choose the features they want, and Simpson will create customized packages to fit their needs.

“It's kind of like a one-trick pony offering a little bit of everything right now,” said Simpson. “Eventually, I'll try to hone in and really narrow down my packages and experiences. Right now, I just want to see what people like and what's popular. You can rent it out for showers, weddings, birthdays, graduations, just about any-

thing.”

The Sideyard is hosting the Blooms and Brews Spring Makers Market in collaboration with Shakespeare Brewing Co., on May 23, serving favourite drinks, snacks, grazing boxes, artisan sandwiches and baked goods.

Although mobile, the trailer will also be parked outside Shakespeare Brewing Company at 2178 Line 34 in Shakespeare throughout the summer. Beginning with opening cruise night on the first Thursday in June, the Sideyard will operate all day. After that, the trailer will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., with extended hours during cruise nights.

For more information about customized event packages or where to find the Sideyard this summer, visit them on Instagram at @thesideyardco or email Simpson at thesideyardco@gmail.com.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Vanessa Simpson serves customers from the Sideyard trailer during the business' launch party at Shakespeare Brewing Company last weekend. The mobile café offers specialty coffee, baked goods and event packages while highlighting locally sourced products from across Perth County.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

One of the Sideyard's signature dirty sodas is pictured during the trailer's launch party at Shakespeare Brewing Company last weekend.

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Stratford Walking Tours returns with new women's history experience and much more

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Now entering its third season, Stratford Walking Tours continues to offer residents and visitors an opportunity to explore the city's rich history, architecture and cultural heritage through guided walking experiences.

Founder Lauri Leduc, who grew up in Perth County, said the idea for the tours was inspired by the 18 months she spent living in the United Kingdom, where she frequently participated in walking tours.

Leduc's tours blend architectural details, historical stories and lesser-known facts about Stratford's past.

One of the newest additions this season is Step into HERstory, a women's history walking tour that highlights the accomplishments of women who helped shape Stratford.

"The first tour is in collaboration with Kerry from Fresh Idea Collective, but after that I will continue to offer it publicly once a month," said Leduc.

"I'll talk a bit about Rose McQueen, who's slowly getting some recognition," said Leduc. "I also found out about some women who were involved with saving city hall. It almost got torn down in the 1960s and there was a plan underway to get rid of it and build a brand new 10-story hotel on the site.

"So a group of seven women founded the Save City Hall League. Two of them were former councillors, some of them were from churches and some were on the board of education. They worked really hard and managed to get 2,000 names on a petition. They had rallies, they had meetings, they petitioned the councillors, and eventually, over the course of five years – it took five long years – they changed the council's mind and they saved city hall.

"The early newspaper said, 'a group of women got together,' like they seem to always define them as a handful of women gathered petitions, so that was also interesting to learn," said Leduc.

"So, I'll be highlighting stories like that."

Another new collaboration this year is Plants, Parks and Patterson, a guided Stratford history and nature walk offered in partnership with Gabrielle from Singing Nettle Herbs.

The tour explores the plants growing along the Avon River, the history and geography of the waterway and its significance to Stratford. Participants will also learn about the history of the Stratford Festival and how founder Tom Patterson helped bring the internationally recognized theatre festival to the city.

This season's lineup also includes the popular Ghost Walks in Stratford and another one in St. Marys, a Sunday Stroll

and River Cruise in partnership with the Boathouse and a general "History and Heritage" tour.

All walking routes are paved and accessible. Children and leashed dogs are wel-

come, and participants are encouraged to ask questions and take photos.

Tour schedules and booking information are available through www.stratfordwalkingtours.ca



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Lauri Leduc walks through downtown Stratford while leading one of the guided experiences offered through Stratford Walking Tours, now in its third season.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

18U Nationals smash the Cubs, soar past the Angels

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford 18U Nationals went two-for-two over the past week, crushing the Cambridge Cubs 13-3 on the road on May 7 and outlasting the Ancaster Angels 10-7 at a sunny but cold Stratford National Stadium on May 11.

In the May 11 matchup, Stratford pitcher Nolan Miller delivered a gutsy performance, pitching five no-hit innings with eight strikeouts, three walks and allowing two runs. After a tough start offensively in the first four innings, the Nationals scored five runs, giving crucial support to Miller.

Reed Bowles pitched in relief for the sixth and seventh innings and maintained the Stratford lead. The Nationals added insurance runs in the sixth and seventh innings to increase their lead to 10-3 heading into the eighth and final inning.

Ancaster made things interesting with an inside-the-park grand slam to pull to within three, but Logan MacMillan and

the defence made the key double play and a fly out to nail the victory.

Stratford Head Coach Mud Grasby was happy with the team's performance, acknowledging the challenges of playing in the cold and expressing humour about his and the team's weather preferences.

"It feels good. We're starting to come together, and we're starting to hit the ball in cold weather. It takes a while, but I like what I see so far," Grasby said. "I would rather want the warm weather, and I bet they would too."

Next, the Nationals will play their first three-game slate of the season, facing both Kitchener Panthers teams. On Victoria Day, May 18, Stratford hosts the Kitchener Diemert Panthers at National Stadium, then on May 18, they head to Kitchener to play the same Diemert Panthers. The three-game stretch ends on May 20 with a game against the Kitchener Hassan Panthers in Kitchener.

Grasby states that the strategy for the three games involves using the full pitching staff.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)
Nolan Miller reads the sign from the mound against the Ancaster Angels at Stratford National Stadium on May 11.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)
Alex Everett holds up in the batter's box in the fifth inning against the Ancaster Angels at Stratford National Stadium on May 12.

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15U Nationals pulls off dramatic win in season opener

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Will Molenhuis delivered a walk-off RBI single, winning the Stratford 15U Nationals' 2026 season opener with a 10-9 victory over the Brantford Red Sox at the blustering Stratford National Stadium on May 7.

In the first inning, after the Red Sox scored first on a two-out hit on the top half, the Nationals responded with a furious five-run outburst in their half of the inning, putting the home side up 5-1.

Brantford pounded the Stratford starting pitcher Jackson Goebel in the second and third innings to close the deficit to within two runs, but Stratford led 6-4 through three. Goebel pitched four batters in the fourth inning before being relieved by Cole Morris after giving up a run to cut the Nationals' lead to 6-5. Morris gave up the one-out triple, giving the visitors an 8-6 lead.

But the Nationals responded with a two-run RBI single from Landen McCann as he overcame an 0-2 count to provide the crucial game-tying hit. After Morris retired the order in a much-needed bounce-back fifth inning, the Nationals retook the lead on a two-out RBI base hit from Max Barter.

After a scoreless sixth inning, the Red Sox tied the game in the top of the seventh. The game went into extra innings, and after Morris and the Nationals retired the Red Sox in order, the Red Sox capitalized on their opportunity to score the winning run, with Molenhuis delivering the game-closing hit.

Morris, the winning pitcher, delivered a valiant relief effort, striking out five

batters and allowing three runs over three innings in place of starter Goebel.

Stratford coach Rick Boon was pleased with the team's efforts in the win, vowing to build on the win by improving the fundamentals.

"We got up to an early lead, which was important. We said, 'We want to jump up early.' And they just kept battling back at us. We kept fighting and fighting. ... It wasn't just a one-person effort. It was an effort by everybody. We did some really key things," Boon said.

"Just building each week on what we've accomplished this week. We had a couple hit and runs, we had a couple of bunts that were successful and running the bases as well, and we had good starting pitching. So we want to make sure that we get at least half a game out of each of our starters, and then we can go to a bullpen, which is good."

Boon commended Morris, the winning pitcher, who delivered a valiant relief effort, striking out five batters and allowing three runs over three innings in place of starter Goebel.

"Mo (Morris) did a good job coming with pen. He didn't get much of a chance to warm up because he was at shortstop, but when he came in this after that, he lived off his slider, which I said to him before the game, you have to go with what's working the best, and the slider was working the best for him. He was able to mix in the fastball, and he kept them off balance," Boon said.

Stratford is set to play again next week on May 14 against the Waterloo Tigers at National Stadium. The game will start at 7 p.m.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford Nationals and Brantford Red Sox exchange postgame handshakes at National Stadium on May 7.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Landen McCann (27) and Jake Price (29) were greeted by their teammates behind home plate during the five-run first inning against the Brantford Red Sox at National Stadium on May 7.



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(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Working the ground on a cool but dry weekend in Perth County's South Easthope Township, Dave Meadows kicked up dust with his tractor and 50-foot cultivator.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



Audition for Perth County Players' newest show *Fiddler on the Roof*

SYDNEY BOYLE

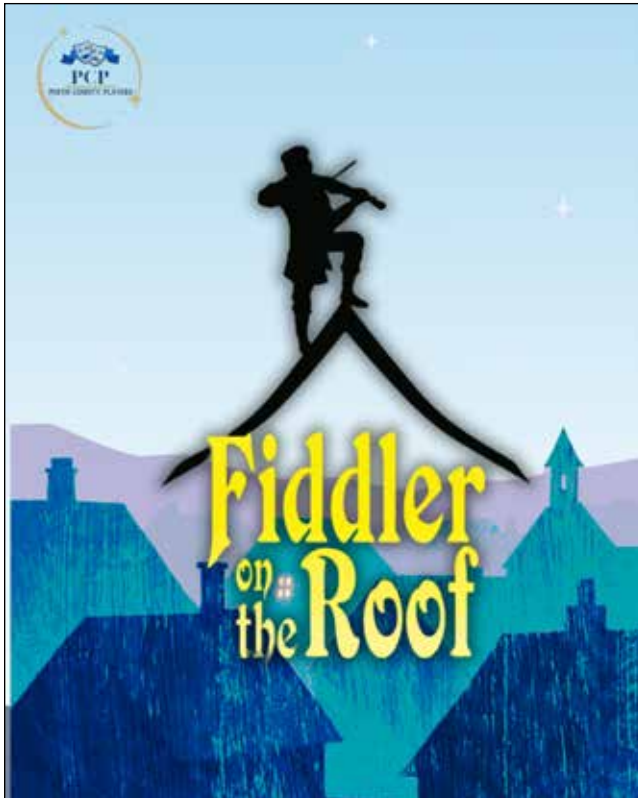
Times Correspondent

Perth County Players has offered unforgettable community theatre productions over the years such as *Godspell*, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Into the Woods*. With a wonderful team of both experienced and amateur actors, they put on a wonderful performance every year, and this year they're gearing up for their next production: *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Perth County Players was formed back in 2008 as a way to provide opportunity for amateur thespians to enjoy the experience of being in community theatre. Over the years, they have put on numerous memorable productions, but *Fiddler on the Roof* has always been at the forefront of their minds.

"Initially when we thought of this show, we were thinking of another show, and we said, 'Oh but that show doesn't have many characters, it's a big ensemble but it only has a few characters who actually have lines.' And then someone said, 'You know, it's not like it's *Fiddler*,' and we all just stopped and said well, why don't we just do *Fiddler*?" explained Michelle Cutts, the treasurer for Perth County Players, and the director of this production.

The show was something that they wanted to do for quite a number of years, but for a show like *Fiddler on*



the Roof, the size of the space is crucial.

"We were talking about it for years; for us it's such an incredible show. It's one of the musicals that is in people's top five of shows. Our main problem has always been space, we use to perform at Stratford City Hall and there really isn't space that you can do that show in. But now we've moved to Stratford Intermediate School and it gives us enough of the space that we need backstage to do a show like this," Cutts said in regard to their new space.

As Perth County Players begins to get ready for audition time, the crew now starts to think about who they want to embody these characters, and who from the community is encouraged to audition.

"We've started to book auditions, and we've got kids, we've got women, we've gotten older men, which is great, but we're looking for younger men. The roles are non-singing roles as we know those can be rather scary," Cutts said.

Auditions are being held May 27 and May 29 from 6:30-9 p.m., and May 30 from 1:30-5 p.m. To book an audition send an email to perthcountyplayers@gmail.com.

To know more about the group and stay up to date on the shows they're putting on, check out their website perthcountyplayers.com, or their social media on Facebook or Instagram under the name Perth County Players.

Stratford Festival, others get provincial funding for arts

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Province of Ontario announced six local tourism operators will receive a total of \$365,000 through the 2026 Experience Ontario program last week.

"Local festivals and events are a major driver of tourism in Perth-Wellington," said local MPP Matthew Rae in a media release. "This funding will help operators expand their programs, attract more visitors and support our rural economies."

This investment is part of a nearly \$20-million injection into festivals and events across Ontario to help municipalities and event organizers deliver high-quality programming and experiences for people of all ages. This funding

will also help organizers expand programming and draw visitors to stay longer in Perth-Wellington. Increasing stays in local accommodations, guests in restaurants, shoppers at local retailers and overall, support main street businesses.

"From Ontario's charming small towns to its dazzling urban centres, festivals and events bring people together, create lasting memories and showcase the best of our communities," said Stan Cho, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. "As we work to protect Ontario, these homegrown experiences play a vital role in celebrating our shared identity, bolstering main street businesses and ensuring our province remains a place people are inspired to explore – and proud to call home."

Since 2018, the Experience Ontario pro-

gram (formerly known as Reconnect Ontario and Celebrate Ontario) has supported more than 2,700 Ontario festivals and events.

"We're incredibly grateful to receive support through the Experience Ontario program. Hayloft's success is built on the strong support of our partners, volunteers and attendees, and this funding allows us to grow the festival significantly while elevating the experience for everyone involved," said Ralph Spoltore of the Hayloft Music Festival, a recipient of the funding. "We're proud to contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the community, and look forward to hosting an even bigger festival this summer."

Experience Ontario 2026 is supporting festivals and events of all sizes across the

province, strengthening tourism and supporting local economies while celebrating the people, places and traditions that make Ontario unique.

Funding as provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming:

- Stratford Festival 2026 Season: This Rough Magic, \$125,000.
- Stratford Tourism Alliance: Lights On Stratford 2026/27, \$55,000.
- Stratford Summer Music: Stratford Summer Music 2026, \$55,000.
- Hayloft Music Festival: Hayloft Music Festival, \$55,000.
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STRATFORD TIMES

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Creators of the Classic City: William 'Boss' Easson

PAUL WILKER

Times Contributor

William "Boss" Easson was one of the best-liked people in town. His steam-powered sawmill with its tall stack west of the Waterloo Street bridge on the north bank of the Avon River was a landmark.

Easson was born in Strathmore, Perthshire, Scotland in 1824. In 1844, at age 20, he sailed with his parents for the new world. When the family landed in Montreal, William and his brother Andrew secured employment but their parents continued to Perth County where they cleared land in Ellice Township.

The Easson boys soon longed to join their family, and travelled as far as Hamilton by boat. There, they hired a driver who took them to the Sharman Hotel in Stratford, a settlement created about a dozen years earlier. When they learned that horses could take them only so far into Ellice Township, they took to the trail on foot to reunite with their parents.

Easson first worked with Henry Drum as a carpenter and later became a contractor. In 1857 he built a mill on the north bank of the Avon River, just west of the present Waterloo Street bridge. The sawmill, with its tall stack belching smoke, soon became a centrepiece in Stratford.

An early Stratford newspaper contains the first advertisement for Easson's Mill and reads as follows: "Easson's Steam Saw Mill. The subscriber has now completed his steam-mill and is prepared to execute any orders with which he may be favoured. Parties sending in logs to be sawn may rely upon having a quick return, as the mill is warranted to cut 1,000 feet per hour. Lathing and lumbering of all kinds are kept on hand. All orders will



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Easson built a mill on the north bank of the Avon River in 1857, just west of the present Waterloo Street bridge. The sawmill, with its tall stack belching smoke, soon became a centrepiece in Stratford.

be executed promptly and satisfactorily. Contracts for buildings taken on reasonable terms, as the undersigned has now the necessary machinery and materials to enable him to execute all work of the kind which has hitherto been the case."

The mill comprised several buildings and was powered by a large steam engine. The buildings occupied considerable space along the river, behind the houses on William Street, most of which were built by Mr. Easson on Easson property. Originally, these were workers' homes, built for employees of the mill. There were also stables, and a blacksmith's shop, and in the rush season of winter the mill employed upwards of 150 men, including those cut-

ting and harvesting trees in the swamp and bush which still covered a large part of Perth County.

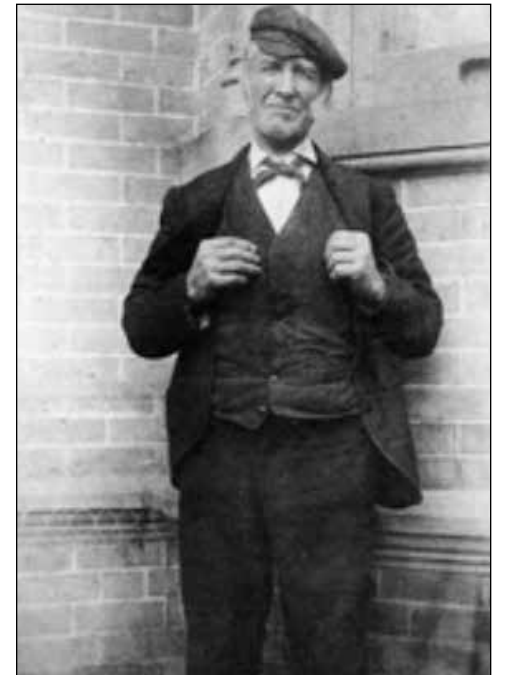
Easson's business career was a success from the start, and with the coming of the Grand Trunk Railway he received large timber contracts for a number of years. He became one of the leading businessmen in town. He was well-liked by his employees, who called him Boss Easson.

According to Mary Jane Lennon in her book *A Stratford Album*, Boss Easson was a man who worked hard and played hard, and slept through many Sunday sermons at Knox Presbyterian Church because he'd been up partying most of the previous night.

William Easson built the large mansard-roofed house which still stands at 113 William St. It was known as Avon Castle and was erected soon after the mill was operational. It had especially magnificent plaster work within and equally impressive detailing outside.

Easson is considered to be one of the founding fathers of Stratford. Easson Street is named in honour him. This article is taken from *Creators of the Classic City* www.streetsofstratford.ca.

For an excellent video documentary on Boss Easson, go to the Stratford District Historical Society site.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

William "Boss" Easson is considered to be one of the founding fathers of Stratford.

"Creators of the Classic City" is an ongoing Times series written by Paul Wilker, co-author of the e-book of the same name by him and Gord Conroy. Interested readers can find the free book online at <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ypken/pqiv/>.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

On May 6, the Optimist Club of Downie hosted a free kids bowling night at Mike's Lanes in Stratford. Sixty-five children took part with an awful lot of fun had by all. Now in its 50th year, the club is proud to continue this and many other traditions. It is holding the annual Bike Rodeo on Saturday, June 6 at the Pyramid Recreation Centre in St Marys.

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Queer Book of the Month: *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag*

SYDNEY BOYLE

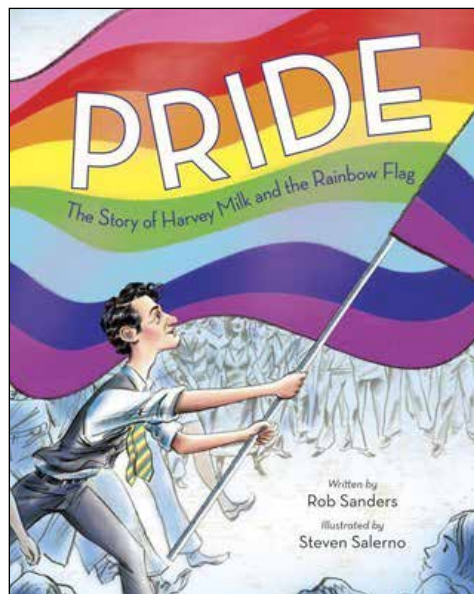
Times Correspondent

Harvey Milk was an ordinary man, but he had an extraordinary dream. That dream would change history.

Rob Sanders' touching and emotional story *Pride: The story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* is a moving, sad and inspiring non-fiction children's book of the life of Milk, and how his loud voice to demand equality, hope, pride and love for all regardless of who they love impacted the world. Coupled with the beautiful illustrations by Steven Salerno, this book wonderfully captures what Milk had gone through in order to get his voice heard, the impact he made working with the government, and how the flag he and the artist Gilbert Baker created made their presence known and never forgotten, even after all these years. This book does not shy away from the pushback that Milk faced while demanding equality and uses strong and direct language to make it clear what his motives always were. Though geared towards kids and therefore of course takes a lighter tone, Sanders still talks about the assassination of Milk and the San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, and how their

deaths could have been the end of Milk's movement, but instead became a driving force to make it even bigger than Milk had ever dreamed.

If you are interested in reading *Pride: the Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag*, it is available at the Stratford Public Library. You can also purchase the book at Fanfare Bookstore.



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Editorial

Are we training a puppy, or are we training ourselves?



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For the past few weeks, Julia and I have been taking our 10-month-old beagle puppy, Piper, for training at our local PetSmart.

We waited until she was a little

older so she could fully benefit from and participate in the training course – or at least that's what I tell myself when, really, we just didn't get around to it until now. In the meantime, she developed a somewhat wild streak, especially when other dogs are around, or she's playing with her sister, Phoebe, or she smells something particularly interesting – which is everything.

She used to get so excited when people came to the door or when we came home after being out, and she would be hard to control, which often led to her jumping up on us or our visitors, scratches from those sharp, little puppy claws, or even her falling off fur-

niture.

Don't worry, she's indestructible and nothing seems to phase her except when she gets a needle at the vet. For those, she'll cry bloody murder.

Piper is the first puppy I've ever owned. I didn't grow up with dogs and Julia got Phoebe before we met, which means I missed that all-important puppy-training stage. As someone who is used to owning cats, the notion of being actively involved in training and demonstrating that we are the leaders of our little family pack was somewhat unknown to me.

Beyond learning to use the litter boxes, cats are entirely independent and there is no doubt

they rule the roost.

Now, I've come to realize the importance of my own body language and posture, and that I need to communicate with our dogs in a way they understand, not the other way around.

So, to any of our neighbours who have heard Julia and I growling at our dogs while out on our walks or in the backyard, I apologize, but it's something you're going to have to get used to. I promise, we're not crazy. We're just learning how to communicate effectively with another species.

So far, we've definitely seen a behavioural shift in both dogs, not just Piper. Phoebe no longer

feels she needs to discipline Piper when she steps out of line, which has meant fewer snarly standoffs between the two dogs.

For her part, Piper is taking to the training very well. She loves hanging out with the other dogs in class, she really loves the treats we used to reinforce the behaviour we like, and she's quickly become the teacher's pet – taking after both Julia and I.

And on our part, Julia and I are much more comfortable taking our rightful places as pack leaders, ensuring the dogs obey our commands instead of us cowering down to their demands.

Are they perfect? No, but they're getting better every day.

Letter to the editor: Some cold water on large dreams

In an already tax-afflicted city, fiscal sobriety is not just welcomed but obliged.

City hall's 'open house' of April 20 mobilized a recognizable group of local activists favouring a grand reconfiguration of the entire GTR main structure ('Plan A'). Unsurprisingly, the event seemed more like a rally of political counter-culture than any serious pitch to counter council's own due process. Passionate depositions were made; but they were performative, and lacked cogent business cases. Even the architect-proponent himself, whose 'Plan A' pre-convicted activists championed, lacked supportive budget figures to pitch his vision.

The following few comments respond to public announcements by city hall leading to the open house, or depositions made during said event:

1. A valid and effective commemoration, one pre-

serving both heritage and community memory impeccably, needs no mega structure nor mega price-tag; neither must the largest part of its funding come from municipal coffers. Consider 'The Cenotaph.' More than a century later, it continues to define this city and to bind its community with no less fervour than in 1922. Yet, in total, citizens spent only \$25,000 on that memorial – just \$455,000 today. Moreover, \$19,000, about three-quarters of its funding, came from direct donations (source: London Free Press, Nov. 7, 2021).

2. No major public construction should be constrained by an edict of 'No developers.' Such a policy might satisfy persons holding private enterprise in low esteem. Yet, assuming the city and council had the requisite expertise, resources and continuity to take on a complex and costly project long-term, small-town parochialism would bake-in

opportunities for small-town cronyism.

3. Finally, significant cost-overruns on major public projects are legion. AI enquiries concerning the construction of our own Rotary Complex indicate: its original \$14.5 million budget did overrun by 45 per cent, for a \$21 million total (funding gaps the cause). Hence, even re-development budgets for the city's own rigorously examined GTR options – said to burden future generations by just 1 per cent every future tax year – are reasonably suspect.

In summary: commemorate heritage, but: small visions, having small budgets and small risks, are best to keep the tax component of shelter costs in Stratford almost affordable.

L.W. Naylor,
Stratford

Quote of the Week

"The way that all of these numbers are working out, if you look at Wright Boulevard, not only would we be meeting their needs so that they can serve us better, but we would also be saving the taxpayer \$15-\$20 million in the process of doing that. And so in my opinion, it's just a win-win."

– Coun. Lesley Biehn on relocating police HQ to the former Scotiabank data centre on Wright Boulevard.

STRATFORD TIMES

Guiding Principles

1. Everyone has a story
2. The news should be free for all to enjoy
3. Good news beats bad news
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5. Newspapers document history
6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

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Opinions

As I See It From America: An old guy can dream, can't he?



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Contributor

I realized a while ago that I often sit at home and in my office, at my desks – yes that is plural – and reflect and look at all the things that I am responsible for and whether I should soon retire or not. It is a daunting thought. At 69, I think I have quite a few more great years ahead of me and to think what I would be doing if I wasn't employed is in fact ... unthinkable. In many ways it is comforting that we will soon be in position where we will be secure financially for many years and we will still have the ability to do what we really want to do, visit where we really want to visit and accomplish what we still feel is on our bucket list all while

still being involved parents and grandparents. It also would give me so much more time to continue to develop our already very successful theatre, the Main St. 56 Theater.

I dream of the days when I can travel and be in Stratford more. I often look to see what is available for apartments and living spaces that would suit our needs but there does seem to be a shortage in your fair city. I also dream of the days when I can sit at my desk at our wonderful Main St. 56 Theater and plan and work towards improving the overall appeal of the theatre and our jam-packed seasons. We do so many wonderful things during the year and we never close or take a break. Often, we have three shows under production at once and it can be daunting, but it is exhilarating and thrilling to see them come to life and be appreciated by our wonderful audiences.

The Main St. 56 Theater is an all-volunteer production company between Rochester and Buffalo, N.Y., that is the home of The Batavia Players. We are 94 years old this year and one of the longest continuous running theatre

companies in the Eastern United States. We put on 13 productions a year, raise all our money and provide our Western New York area with award winning musicals, cabarets and plays. It is our goal to provide a wide range of theatrical experiences that include annual classical theatre offerings, at least one Shakespeare play, new plays and productions and full-scale musicals. This year, to date, we have presented our Annual Gala Cabaret, the fantastic play The Cemetery Club, Our One-Act Play Festival for new directors, Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew, a wonderfully written mystery entitled Happily Never After and currently are in production for Gypsy. It has been a whirlwind for sure.

The volunteers that we work with on a regular basis put their hearts and souls into all that we do. Last year over 134 wonderful actors ranging from three to 85 years of age made all our productions first class, award-winning and very professional. I could not have been prouder. This year we are off on another fantastic adventure that will end at Christmas time with the

musical Annie. The last time we did Annie we had over 34 young ladies audition for eight orphan roles. It was incredible and we are looking for another great response this year. We work well with children and teens and provide camps, learning programs and performance time for all that are interested in becoming a part of our theatre. It is hard work for them, but it is incredible to see them grow and perform and shine on our stage.

We also bring in a lot of people that have always wanted to be on stage and have never tried it or thought that they would have the opportunity. We have found some wonderful talents this way and it is amazing to include them all in our productions. The dedication of all our actors, designers, tech crew and house management team is the key to our success. We work with a wonderful group of directors, costume and set designers, carpenters and electricians. We are supported by a caring community and our city. It really is a dream come true as well as a tremendous amount of work.

And so, I digress, I wonder about retirement, and what will

happen when I leave my businesses, along with the financial security of weekly paychecks. How will I deal with having more time and branching out and doing the things I actually want to do. That is my dichotomy, financial security with continued employment or freedom to do what I need to do for our theatre and other wonderful things with my wife and family. I wish that all the uncertainty in today's political world was not part of my decisions, but it is. I am hoping that we all soon can take a deep breath and realize that we do have a wonderful future and not be afraid to open a paper or watch the television news.

For now, my dream is simple, enjoy all my creative theatre work at the Main St. 56 Theater. I will be solidifying our future financially so I can someday soon retire and enjoy the wonders of my favourite place in the world that you all call home, Stratford. Throw in a prayer for a bright and wonderful future. Hey, an old guy can dream, can't he?

Please let me know how you feel about this article. Contact me at burk.patrick1956@gmail.com

Shining a light on the marvellous moths

JULIA SCHNEIDER

Times Correspondent

What is it about moths? With butterflies they make up 17.4 per cent of all insects and as pollinators cut far above their weight, so why are we so much more aware of their sunshine counterparts?

This question arose recently when I was doing research for the City of Stratford's energy and environment advisory committee's publication Nature in the City: A guide to Ecological Gardening in Stratford. I wanted it to be comprehensive and represent all insects fairly, but I could find no one in Stratford who could provide me with expert information about moths, nor could I find any complete guidebooks. Butterflies were no problem, but moths seemed outside the ken of most everyone.

As a result the guide has virtually no information about moths. The only reference to them is that, unlike butterflies, they don't need sunshine, but that is not entirely true. In fact, I have discovered a lot of

things about moths since the guide was put to bed and feel a need to begin to set the story of these fascinating creatures right.

Did you immediately think we don't know more about moths because they are active when we are asleep? That's what I thought, too, but now I know that that not all moths are nocturnal. The Virginia ctenucha (pronounced "ten-OOCH-ah") flies by day and can be seen in open areas and meadows, and the tiny snowberry clearwing, sometimes mistaken for a hummingbird, is also active in daytime.

The Virginia ctenucha is a member of the tiger moth family, while the aptly named snowberry clearwing is a clearwing, with transparent wings. These are but two of the families of moths in Ontario; others include the sphinx, the underwings, the geometers (also known as inchworm moths) and the swifts. It is estimated that there are 3,300 different kinds of moths in Ontario; compare this to 167 butterflies.

Like butterflies, moths need shelter and

food sources for their caterpillars but most don't need sunshine and some, like the luna, the twin-spotted sphinx and the cecropia, don't need food as adults; they live off stored reserves when they emerge from the pupa. The moths that do need food often, like butterflies, have host plants that serve as their sole source of sustenance, but others, like the confusingly named apple sphinx, have a wider diet, in its case alder leaves, blueberry leaves and spruce needles.

Also like butterflies, moths have predators and clever ways to discourage them. Colours are a common method – bright colours signal caution. Thus the garden tiger moth warns off potential danger by indicating it will provide a disagreeable chemical meal to diners with its bright colours, while the iridescent blue of the Virginia ctenucha also signals a nasty taste if eaten. Disguises include the ruse by the twin-spotted sphinx: by angling its wings at odd angles when resting it resembles bark or dry leaves. The Polythemus moth,

on the other hand, roosts with its wings above its back and surprises hungry birds by displaying the fake eyes on its wings when in danger, and the luna at rest simulates the light green foliage of a birch tree.

To add to the surprising facts about moths, take a look at the names of the many different species of the underwings, some of which are so similar that entomologists find it difficult to tell them apart. There are the once-married underwing, the mother underwing, the charming underwing and the forsaken underwing. And the list goes on: the widow underwing, the girlfriend underwing, the sorrowful underwing, the betrothed underwing, the old maid underwing, the consort underwing, the bride underwing and the old wife underwing. One wonders how they differ; their names seem to say more about the moth namers than the moths themselves. They add, however, to the continuing mystique around this extraordinary creature and all the things we don't know about them.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US

CALL 519.622.2341 OR EMAIL STRATFORDTIMES@GMAIL.COM

Opinions

The era of social media and Chatbot bans

LOREENA MCKENNITT

Guest Columnist

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

Although the presentation was not intended to be a consultation, as some parents had hoped, the 15-minute overview came in the same weeks that the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan announced their intention to ban social media and AI chatbots for youth under 16. In so doing, they joined a growing number of governments around the world embarking on similar measures.

There are two striking commonalities between social media and AI. First, neither category of products has been adequately researched or proven safe for society, particularly for children and youth. Vass Bednar addresses this in her May 6 Globe and Mail article “AI products are

defective and dangerous. Why are we using them at all?”

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

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

Many reference points are needed when developing regulations, such as digital sovereignty, privacy and age appropriateness.

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

They will be listening to those with concerns for the environment or the disappearance of farmland, alarmed at the proliferation of data centres, drawing vast amounts of water and energy such as re-

ported in the May 9 edition of the Toronto Star Power Play.

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

So, what more can parents do while they wait for the bans and other regulation to fall into place?

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

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

government responses.

One of the many individuals supporting Haidt’s efforts is Katherine Martinko, whose book *Childhood Unplugged* will form the basis of her presentation at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School on Monday, May 25 from 7-8:30 p.m. It offers accessible and no-nonsense guidance for parents looking to mitigate the most consequential social media and smartphone behaviour at home.

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

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

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

WEB-CRAWLING FOR THE BIRDS



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

Last week there were two important events for anyone who is a fan of chickadees, house finches, goldfinches, wrens and cardinals. Not all of these are migratory birds, but they are all birds that we can see locally. They are treasures – treasures for their songs, for their colours, for their ability to keep troublesome insect numbers down and for reminding us how captivating nature is – and how good it is for us.

On Thursday, May 7, the Stratford Public Library, in partnership with Destination Stratford, held a Zoom event about bird-friendly windows. Brendon Samuels, an activist and educator dedicated

to sustaining relationships between people and nature in cities, shared strategies to protect migrating (and non-migrating) birds against millions of deaths crashing into windows. There are many tools available to save our birds, who do not perceive windows or glass railings as a wall. The windows and railings reflect the outdoors and the birds fly at full speed into the vista they see reflected in the glass.

Brendon discussed a number of options, from do-it-yourself approaches to special films over windows, to bird-friendly tape that puts dots at regular intervals on the glass when it’s applied to the exterior. The birds see the dots and interpret them as a barrier. You can also take a white oil-based marker and make regular dots on your windows, approximately one-and-a-half to two inches apart. Your eyes see right through the dots without any hindrance, but the birds see a wall! We’re lucky to have tools for the two techniques available in our own city. Blowes Stationery has ordered in the white oil-based chisel tipped markers for DIY dots. The Split Rail Country Store on the edge of town on Highway 119 has the



(DOUG TALLAMY PHOTO)

tape rolls of dots to share, and will happily order more for you.

On May 9, Destination Stratford celebrated World Migratory Bird Day in their lobby with one of the giant birds from the *Birds of a Feather* light show this winter in attendance – Avondee was there! They also made the Junior Birder Guides available for junior naturalists to practice their bird-watching skills. As well the library shared a bird listening station – did you learn to recognize familiar bird songs?

The Climate Action Group of CFUW was also there, sharing Patsy Berton’s beautiful paint-

ing of purple coneflowers. Their exhibit highlighted the importance of having native plants to form habitat for our birds.

Almost all birds feed their young on caterpillars – even the seed and nut eating birds! The caterpillars they want come from native insects, insects that have been around for centuries. Where do those insects hang out? The native insects lay their eggs on (and pollinate) native plants – the plants that have been around for centuries – even thousands of years. Chickadees need 9,000 caterpillars to raise one nest of babies! Habitat is more than just the nest – it’s the food and the migration support as well.

As a Bird-Friendly City, we have a unique opportunity to recognize the beauty and importance of birds – and to support them. In a world that seems to prize technology and extraction of resources over biodiversity, nature is clearly losing. We can help support the ecosystems that support all life, including humans. We can learn about our bird relations, create bird-friendly windows and bird-friendly gardens!

UPDATES:

Carbon parts per million

(ppm) in the atmosphere as of May 1, 2026: 433.95. CO2 levels fluctuate annually, but the overall trend line continues to rise, driven by fossil fuel combustion.

In a remarkable late night session at Queen’s Park, Bill 97 was passed on April 23 with limited public debate and skipping committee hearings. Part of the bill was to reduce our Conservation Areas from 36 to nine. Our conservation areas are staffed by experts. They protect nature and protect us from the destruction of biodiversity that makes our area safe for us – and safe from catastrophic damage due to climate change. A cabinet minister will have the authority to deliver binding direction during the transition process. A call or note to your local MPP to support your local conservation authority might be well placed. In our area, that would be the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA).

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.

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

CROKINOLE

Every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1-4 p.m. Ladies and gentlemen, fingers or sticks. For more information call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford

Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 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/> or call 519-275-4472 for more information

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from 2-4pm at Infinity Dance 451 Erie St. Next meeting May 24. Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/person, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamangement.com

SPRING TEA & BAKE SALE

Sunday, May 24; 2 - 4 pm.

Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

Enjoy dainties, finger sandwiches, tea and great conversation. There are door prizes, surprise prizes and our spring silent auction concludes that day. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for kids 12 and under. Call Anne 519-301-0914, Linda 519-276-7959 or the Legion Branch 519-271-4540 to reserve yours today.

FOOD TRUCKS

May 25, 2026 from 4:30-7:30

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

El Milagro, Wild Boar, Fo Cheezy, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

HOLY TRINITY VARIETY SALE

St. James Anglican Church, 41 Mornington St, Stratford

First Choice Night

Thursday May 28th, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Super Sale

Friday May 29th 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Toonie a Tote Hour

Friday May 29th 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Drop Off Items Accepted

May 12-13-14

May 19-20-21

9:00 am - 12:00 noon

If you can help - call Karen: 273-5398

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 1; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Ish n Chips, SWAT, Siggis, Pablos Street of India

Donations to Tavistock Health Clinic

YARD SALE

Saturday, June 6

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Dishes, books, jewelry, games, toys, knick-knacks, silverware, craft supplies, lamps, materials, china, decorations, small furniture, vintage and collectibles table, electrical appliances, plants and garden décor items

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 8; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Los Rolling Tacos, Born2Eat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to Camp Bimini

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 15; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Wild Boar, El Milagro, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 22; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Born2Eat, El Milagro, Ish n Chips

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 29; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Pablas Street of India, Swat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, July 6; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Siggis, Los Rolling Tacos, Berlin 95

Donations to Camp Bimini

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, July 13; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

SWAT, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

PLANT SALE

Saturday, May 23; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Siloam United Church, 1240 Fanshawe Park Rd. E.

The London Orchid Society will be holding an Orchid

Plant Sale. Admission \$5.00. Contact Daryl 519-666-

2927 or www.londonorchidsociety.com.

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

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

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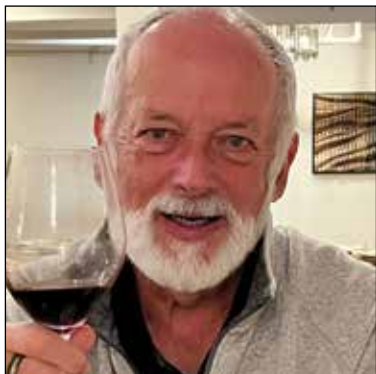
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Sunday 10:00 a.m.
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Uncovering a dark story in Canadian history



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

We couldn't help noticing a collection of large boulders scattered around the park in front of the Steveston Tram museum. My friend, Rod, called me over and pointed to an inscription on the first of the boulders.

"Steveston Nikkei Memorial," it read in large letters. "Nikkei" refers to people of Japanese descent who are living outside Japan.

Steveston is the community at the extreme south end of Richmond, B.C., which in turn is just south of Vancouver. We were in Steveston as part of a tour of the area during the 2026 Travel Media Association of Canada annual conference, which was hosted by Richmond.

The Nikkei Memorial was set up in 2019 and the first inscription explains "This Nikkei Memorial marks the 75th anniversary of the forced removal of Steveston's Japanese Canadian community in 1942, during World War II."

This is something those of us who live in southwestern Ontario don't hear a lot about. In fact, this is only one of many stories of racism and cruelty that are glossed over or ignored in our comfortable communities. Think about the treatment of Black people escaping slavery via the "Underground Railway," who were not, in



The onetime home of the shipbuilding Murakami family.

fact, well received in Ontario. Or the shipload of German Jews who were barred from landing in Canada, and who Prime Minister Mackenzie King sent back to Germany to die in concentration camps. Or First Nations people who continue to bear the scars of systemic maltreatment by the Canadian government.

I have come to believe travelling should involve significant doses of both entertainment and education. And sometimes, that education involves rather shocking revelations. I learned a lot during my brief visit to Steveston. The first lessons came from the stone monuments in that Nikkei Memorial.

During World War II, those in power decided people of Japanese descent were a potential threat, since Canada was officially at war with Japan. In Richmond alone, more than 2,000 Nikkei residents were relocated to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, or to farms in Alberta,

Manitoba and Ontario. Even more astonishing, some Canadian-born Nikkei people were deported to Japan, a country where they had never lived.

It gets worse. World War II ended in 1945, but it took four more years before the Nikkei were permitted to return to the B.C. coast. Surprisingly, some did!

Evidence of this officially sanctioned atrocity is everywhere in Steveston. We visited the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site and the Gulf of Georgia Cannery. A poignant poster about BC Packers explains, "At the height of the canning industry there were European, First Nations, Chinese, Japanese and Indian workers all working on the site. ... A surprising number of women worked here, some keeping their babies with them during the work day."

But "rigid racial separation was considered normal." And, come 1942, all of the Nikkei people were gone. There had been 250 families living on

the Steveston waterfront. Then there were none.

At the Britannia Shipyards, we visited the small wooden home of Otokichi and Asayo Murakami and their 10 children. Otokichi was a prominent shipbuilder and fisher; Asayo worked on the canning lines and was a devoted gardener. Their family moved into the home in 1929, and they thrived until 1942, when they were sent into internment.

As noted, some of the Nikkei actually returned to their communities when that was allowed in 1949 – some years later than this happened in the United States. But they came back to nothing – their homes and their fishing boats had been seized by the government and sold, mainly to white buyers. The money raised was brazenly allocated by the Canadian government to pay for the cost of the Nikkei's internment.

There was evidence of this dark period in Canada's history all over

Steveston, which is otherwise a delightful small community. But the good news is there is that evidence. The story of the Nikkei is being told in these historic sites. And finally, since 2022, it has been included in the history curriculum in British Columbia schools. Better very late than never, I suppose.

And it turns out the Nikkei story is not the only account of blatant prejudice visitors can discover at these meaningful historic sites. We also learned about the Chinese head tax, which had its greatest impact in British Columbia. Today, the City of Richmond's population is 70 per cent of Asian origin.

Chinese workers were welcomed during construction of the railway, especially the Canadian Pacific Railway which linked western Canada to the east. But when the railway was completed, white Canadians no longer wanted to share "their country" with Chinese immigrants. The head tax was implemented by the Canadian government. At first, any person of Chinese origin immigrating to Canada had to pay \$50. By 1900, it was \$100. Three years later, it climbed to \$500 (more than a year's salary). Yet hopeful Chinese people paid (about 81,000 people up to 1923), often borrowing the money from employers. Imagine what happened to those people when the shipbuilding and cannery businesses shut down.

I had heard about Japanese internment, and vaguely knew of a "head tax," whatever that meant, but my day as a tourist in Steveston was an eye-opening one, an experience I highly recommend to any traveller. Not a lot of laughter, but a very healthy dose of learning.

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.



The boulders in the Nikkei Memorial, which commemorate the internment from 1942-1949, come from Québec – the farthest point in Canada where Nikkei internees were unwillingly sent.



This statue, at the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site, is "dedicated to the pioneering Japanese fishermen."

Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Government lawyers
- 4. The back of a person's neck
- 8. Mild yellow Dutch cheese
- 10. In a less flashy way
- 11. Living room piece
- 12. Shepherd dog
- 13. A citizen of Iran
- 15. Moved slowly
- 16. Small finch
- 17. Previously
- 18. What a kid does on Halloween
- 21. Monetary unit
- 22. Using dry humor
- 23. Ocean
- 24. Greek goddess of the dawn
- 25. Not close
- 26. NHL legend Bobby
- 27. A ballplayer would love to do this
- 34. Charity
- 35. City in Finland
- 36. Loomed over
- 37. Vaccine developer
- 38. Avoids capture
- 39. We all need it
- 40. Openwork fabrics
- 41. Get away
- 42. Something you might hit
- 43. Soviet Socialist Republic

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Abstain from
- 2. Admirer
- 3. Expedition to observe animals
- 4. Act that is legally void
- 5. WW2 combatants
- 6. A tool
- 7. Looked at
- 9. Showing wild excitement
- 10. Banknotes
- 12. Tired
- 14. Printers need it
- 15. Women's patriotic group
- 17. When you anticipate getting somewhere
- 19. Functions
- 20. Breed of sheep
- 23. Mocking pieces
- 24. A major division of geological time
- 25. Andiron
- 26. Many not ands
- 27. Cuban city
- 28. He voiced "Olaf"
- 29. Criticize
- 30. "Thundercats" character
- 31. Markings
- 32. Gets up
- 33. MLB lefty reliever A.J.
- 34. An assembly of witches
- 36. High energy lasers (abbr.)

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If you're looking for a loyal companion, an adventure buddy, and a rewarding best friend all in one, Dumpling might just be your perfect match. He's available for adoption at the Stratford Centre and can't wait to meet his forever family! Find him here: <https://tinyurl.com/yc33u7mk>



Sudoku

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Solutions on page 27



SIMS, DIANE PATRICIA HELEN

Diane died gently at her home in Stratford, Ontario on the 8th day of May, 2026 at age 68. She passed staring into her husband's baby blue eyes.

As Rumi said, "the wound is where the light gets in". Diane had been wounded from age 14 when the Multiple Sclerosis began. As the MS progressed, she was later wounded with ovarian cancer that metastasized. She was further wounded with ongoing bowel obstructions, life-threatening bladder infections, blood infections and in the last few years a dying colon and deep raw bedsores. But Diane decided to let the light in. She lived in that light in a space of gratitude and joy. Writing, painting, time with friends and especially time with Dennis brought her great joy and immense gratitude, as did her faith.

When she was fully diagnosed with MS at the age of 17, she was told she would be dead by 35. She had two words for that doctor. She was told she had a year to live with ovarian cancer. She was then 38. And, in 2022, when she was diagnosed with the dying colon, there was another expiration date; three months. Despite these deadlines, Diane finished two bachelor's degrees and a Master of Journalism by age 30. She had a full journalistic career working with newspapers, national magazines, and broadcast media, especially CBC. After the ovarian cancer diagnosis, Diane turned to writing books. She wrote six in her lifetime, some of which went international.

Diane was born and raised along the shores of Lake Superior in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. She moved across Ontario with school and her career, especially enjoying her time on Manitoulin Island. There, she worked for the award-winning "The Manitoulin Expositor". Publisher, Rick McCutcheon, and office manager, Kerrene Tilson, became new lifelong friends. Diane spent the last 26 years in Stratford.

Her most recent thrill was receiving the Order of Canada from Governor General Mary Simon in 2025. The medal represents the highest civilian award in this country.

She was surrounded by friends and family she loved and who loved her. David Wadley and Cindy Howard were lifelong best friends.

Diane is survived by her cherished husband Dennis Thomas, her brother, David, and her friends and several cousins: Joy Lang, Ruthmarie Schroeder, Chris Samson and Bob Allen. As well as several nephews: Chris Sims, Jon Sims, Adam Ruppel and Sean Ruppel. Her friends include Christine Miokovic and Ed, and Elaine Anderson from University days when they were all 19. Stratford friends include Dee Boudreau, Judy Hammond, Robyn McGibbon, Glen Dias and Diane Koert.

She was predeceased by her parents, Evelyn and Gar Sims (Sault Ste. Marie), her brother, Harv Sims (Almonte) and her sister, Karen Ruppel (Uxbridge).

Diane is especially grateful for the loving care provided by her support worker, Alice Bebingh. Also, the loving care from her family doctor, Sean Blaine, CarePartners nurses, and Dr. Eric Thomas, the MAID assessor for Southwestern Ontario.

Friends are invited to the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street, Stratford on Monday, May 25, where the funeral service will be held at 11 a.m. with a celebration of Diane's life to follow in the reception centre. If you would like to make a donation, Diane would appreciate either the MS Society of Canada or the Stratford Perth Humane Society. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

CLASSIFIEDS

OBITUARY



CHARLES WILLIAM "BILLIE" WOODWARD

Charles William "Billie" Woodward, age 85, of London, formerly of Stratford, passed away peacefully at his residence on Friday, May 8, 2026. Born in Hamilton, son of the late Lawrence William and May Irene (Hodgins) Woodward. Bill is survived by his true love and best friend of 64 years Lynda Ann (Kelly) Woodward. Bill was predeceased by both of his children Kelly Woodward and Mark Woodward. Grandpa Bill will forever be remembered by Chloe (Justin), Emma (Tyler), Zachary and Max (mother Samantha). Bill will be fondly remembered by his sister Jan (Tom) Creeden, his sister-in-law Mary Carnie and his nephews Chad (Jen), Jeremy (Andrea) and Michael. Bill was an animal lover, Missy, Maeve and Bonnie will miss all the excessive treats terribly! Bill was predeceased by his brother-in-law Jerri Kelly and a nephew Shawn Creeden. Many friends will hold Billie forever in their hearts.

Billie was a track star in high school, always first and never last. He played every sport there was just so he didn't have to go to class. In high school, is where he met Lynda, and the rest is history even though the yearbooks said they would never last. Bill has always had dogs at home, and he always loved telling whoever would listen about them (smiling Mike)! He was a chartered accountant and later owned a successful Dairy Queen with the help of family.

In keeping with Bill's wishes cremation has taken place. The family will celebrate Bill's life privately with an interment in Avondale Cemetery. As expressions of sympathy memorial donations may be made to the Stratford-Perth Humane Society in keeping with Bill's love for animals, through the W. G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron St, Stratford, ON. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

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