

STRATFORD *TIMES*

VOLUME 6 • ISSUE 7

SEPTEMBER 25, 2026

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Mike Sullivan files lawsuits against Ritsma, Hunter

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After a tumultuous summer two years ago where Stratford resident Mike Sullivan was among three residents suspended from City of Stratford property, he is now seeking legal action. Sullivan filed two small claim defamation suits against Mayor Martin Ritsma and Coun. Mark Hunter last week.

In the summer of 2024, the City of Stratford banned Sullivan along with Barb Shaughnessy and Ken Wood over actions made during a February meeting which officials said breached the city's respectful workplace policy. Sullivan told the Times his two suits stem from the months that followed when Ritsma and Hunter both made comments Sullivan believes defamed him.

"In the case of Ritsma, he suggested that I was violent or had threatened violence," Sullivan said. "And Hunter, at a council subcommittee or committee meeting, said that people in the room were afraid of me being there ... the City of Stratford's policy that led to me being banned, which was what gave rise to the comments, required that you go through the city's appeal process, and then it requires that you appeal that decision to the Ontario Ombudsman. And essentially, I was waiting for the Ontario Ombudsman until this spring."

In the report, which only addressed Sullivan's complaint, investigator Johanna Dennie noted the city

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(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

A dragonboat team speeds along Lake Victoria on Sept. 19 for the Stratford Rotary Dragonboat Festival. Residents and racers gathered all along the banks for the races that Saturday.

Collaboration, teamwork at the heart of Burbach's bid for mayor

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

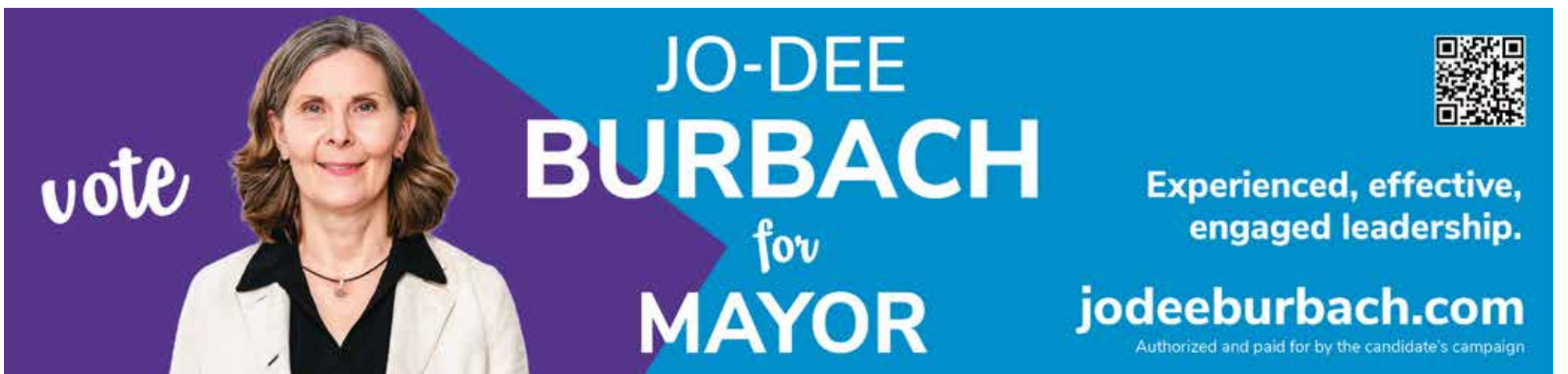
A few months into campaigning to be next mayor of Stratford, Jo-Dee Burbach says she is impressed with the positive energy and good response she has seen door to door and across Festival City streets. The conversations she has been having and the issues voters have mirror her own priorities this election.

"The conversation during the campaign so far has been around affordability," Burbach told the Times. "So hous-

ing, child care, transit, especially transit in and out of the city, definitely infrastructure like roads – that's a top of mind for a lot of people – and then how we best serve our unhoused population ...

"... Collaboration and teamwork is extremely important, and there are many ways to collaborate," Burbach continued. "The first and really important one is within council, so getting to know council members and developing a team spirit and working as a team is really important to me. And I think then once we work together to set our

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Collaboration, teamwork at the heart of Burbach's bid for mayor

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

priorities right at the beginning of the term, to move forward quickly. One of the other things that I think is really important for a mayor to do is to be able to communicate well with the public, and I think that's one skill that I can really bring to the office – is to make sure that people understand what's going on, understand how to engage with the city, how to join conversations and give their opinions and understand the reason why we're doing some of the things that we do."

Burbach has been serving as a City of Stratford councillor since 2018, originally getting into municipal politics after trying to navigate that world as a private citizen when she was attempting to create safer routes around her children's school (something she achieved after successfully delegating to the council of the day). Since then she has served on all five council committees and has led a number of initiatives within the city – most recently pushing for Stratford to develop an AI data centre policy.

On creating a better communication ecosystem within the city, Burbach wants to bolster the city's communications team with a "complete" plan from the mayor's office.

Burbach would also aim to keep a modest and more consistent budget year to year, if elected.

"In the past, we've had an infrastructure deficit and some of the tax raises that we've seen this term have been a bit uneven because we are making up for that deficit," Burbach explained. "So we've done some correcting along the way, and moving forward, I would say we should be able to keep to increases that are the cost of living ... between two to three per cent – we should be able to do better forward planning to make sure that we don't have those large tax increases."

Ultimately, Burbach believes Stratford residents should cast their mayoral votes for her in this election as a vote for her is one for consistency and efficacy.

"I'm an experienced member of city council for the last eight years," Burbach petitioned. "I've provided effective leadership. I've brought forward my ideas and I've championed them, championed them to try to convince my colleagues that we should move forward on some projects, and I've had some good wins. I'm also very engaged with the community. Got good relationships with many community groups. I'm engaged with other levels of government. I've built relationships with them as



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Mayoral candidate Jo-Dee Burbach is running for mayor of Stratford in the 2026 municipal election.

well. So, I think for many of the challenges that we face, again, we need to work together as a team, not only on council but as an entire city. We need to get rid of some of the siloing that we are seeing currently, and

work together more cohesively to achieve our goals."

For more information on Burbach and her campaign, visit her website at www.jodeeburbach.com.

Mike Sullivan files lawsuits against Ritsma, Hunter

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

did not address its concerns with his behaviour prior to issuing the letter of suspension. Under the respectful workplace policy of the day, and the amended version used today, staff must be satisfied that the issue has been thoroughly investigated and that there has been adequate communication with the person in question. Neither policy provides staff with guidance about what is considered adequate.

"We also noted that the restrictions issued by the city were very broad, given that the examples of inappropriate

behaviour provided were limited to one council meeting," Dennie wrote, who also wrote a near identical analysis of Shaughnessy's suspension. "The city did not explain why it was necessary to restrict you from all city buildings. We explained to the city that as a best practice, a trespass notice or a service restriction should be considered as a last resort and should restrict access as little as possible, based on the circumstances."

After that report was received, Sullivan decided to file the suits, seeking \$50,000 from Ritsma and Hunter both. His suits do not name the city, nor are Ritsma and Hunter representing the city or Stratford city council.

Speaking to the Times, Ritsma said he was surprised to be served with papers by Sullivan ahead of a city council meeting on Sept. 14. When asked if he is confident the court will be in his favour, Ritsma replied, "I believe so."

"In the role you have to make decisions, and you have to make decisions based on what you believe is right and just," he said. "And in this case, I felt that that our staff perhaps wasn't being addressed in the proper fashion ... I believe that the courts would see that in my actions and council's actions – and I'll say it's council's actions as well – it wasn't meant to defame anybody."

Ritsma and Hunter are both running to be mayor during this year's municipal election, a fact which makes Hunter more skeptical of Sullivan's prerogative.

"I believe the claim is entirely without merit," Hunter wrote in a letter to the editor to the Times. "As a lawyer, I would never advise a client that their success in litigation is guaranteed. Courts are unpredictable, and outcomes can never be known with certainty. That said, I am extremely confident in my defence. It is the timing of the service of this claim that is suspect ..."

"... While the courts will determine the merits of Mike Sullivan's claim, there is a separate and equally important principle at stake: the integrity of the electoral process. The commencement of litigation is a lawful right. The strategic deployment of litigation as a campaign tool is an entirely different matter. If evidence establishes that lawsuits, media outreach, public communications or other activities were coordinated for the purpose of influencing the outcome of a municipal election or disadvantaging particular candidates, those actions may warrant scrutiny under applicable election legislation and the common law."

Sullivan, however, argues that now was the most fitting time to file.

"If an election campaign is not the time to raise issues of a person's integrity, when is?" Sullivan said. "I don't apologize for the fact that it happened during an election. It wasn't the foremost in my mind that I should wait until the election campaign starts before I do this. I'd waited long enough, and it was just circumstance that prevented me from giving him his lawsuit sooner ... I'm hoping that the lawsuits speak for themselves."

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MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES Q&A

There are 26 candidates vying for a seat on Stratford city council this election – though Stratford voters will ultimately only choose 10 on Oct. 26, municipal election day in Ontario. Below is a Q-and-A with five of this year's candidates, with more to follow in the coming weeks.

Council candidates: Bonnie Henderson



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I'm Bonnie Henderson and have served on council since 2006 and have worked making

our community a better place to live, work and play. I currently sit on the social services and community services committee, AAC (accessibility committee), parks board and CIB (Community in Bloom). I also am on the AAC site plan review so review site plans to make sure they are accessible we make lots of changes.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My core issues are making our city more accessible and affordable to live here. I believe its important people can get around our city, can afford to live here, ensuring we reduce our greenhouse gases, have more child

care spaces and get the grand trunk project moving along as it is now with the Y and the library starting their part.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

I will work towards making our city go forward without increasing our taxes more then the C.P.I. (Consumer Price Index). We need to ensure we keep the services we offer and at the same time try to run them at low increase to the tax levy.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opin-

ion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

I believe we need to get the provincial government to put rent controls back on. This changed in 2018 and we are certainly seeing the results of rent increasing in our city as people move out. We need to continue working with landlords so more affordable units are added to the stock in Stratford. Continue to work with the government to get grants to help us build more affordable units for residents to live in.

The Grand Trunk renewal project is underway, yet still far from any concrete changes

to the grounds or superstructure. Are you in favour of the current council's direction? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

I think the idea of starting this next stage of working with the Y and the library who provide monetary towards their builds and at the same time getting more partners. The senior centre is an important part of this development once we get the partners who can contribute to this build. We need to get more partners that can bring monetary plans to the build so in the future non-profits, etc. can also benefit from this new community hub idea.

Council candidates: Brad Beatty



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I'm Brad Beatty, and for 16 years I have had the privilege of serving Stratford on city council. I'm a husband, father and long-time resident who believes public service means contributing both inside and outside the council chamber. My experience has taught me that good decisions begin with listening, understanding the facts and treating people with respect. I am seeking re-election because I believe Stratford has

tremendous opportunities ahead, and experienced, thoughtful leadership matters. I remain committed to serving with integrity, being accessible to residents and helping Stratford move forward together.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My focus is on building upon Stratford's strong foundation while continually looking for ways to improve. Economic growth is a priority: supporting our existing businesses and manufacturing sector, attracting new investment and building out Stratford's next industrial park. I also want responsible progress on the Grand Trunk development, creating opportunities for housing, community services and private investment. These priorities must be supported by responsible budgeting, practical solutions to deliver more attainable housing, dependable services and well-maintained infrastructure. As Stratford grows, we must also continue investing in our parks,

trails and public spaces while preserving what makes our community special.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

Having worked through Stratford's first mayor-led budget process this year, I understand council's responsibility within the process. Long-term planning is essential: deferring necessary work may lower one year's levy but often creates higher costs later. As a councillor, I will carefully review spending, ask thoughtful questions, seek efficiencies and ensure new initiatives demonstrate clear value and sustainable funding. I will support partnerships and other revenue opportunities that reduce pressure on property taxes while protecting reserves from short-term fixes. My goal is a disciplined, transparent budget that respects taxpayers today without creating greater financial pressures tomorrow.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

Building more housing and improving affordability are complex challenges without a quick or single solution. Stratford has been taking action, and we must continue building on that work through efficient approvals, appropriate density, strategic use of municipal land and strong partnerships with non-profit housing providers, private developers and other levels of government. Affordability also requires attainable and supportive housing, with mental-health, addiction and outreach supports for those experiencing homelessness. Municipal action alone will not be enough; we must continue advocating for sustained provincial and federal investment. Our objective should be stable housing and greater supply across the entire housing continuum.

The Grand Trunk renewal project is underway, yet still far from any concrete changes to the grounds or superstructure. Are you in favour of the current council's direction? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

The current direction reflects years of planning, public input and careful consideration of community needs and financial realities ... The proposed shared community facility, anchored by the YMCA and Stratford Public Library, addresses real needs while limiting the city's capital contribution to \$15 million and seeking partner, grant, fundraising and development-charge support. Market sounding will test interest in housing and mixed-use development before major commitments, while the downtown parking study addresses parking comprehensively. Future decisions must be guided by sound financial planning, sustainable operations, clear public communication and respect for the site's heritage.

Council candidates: Ryan Dole



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

Born in '83 and raised in Stratford, I've lived in neighbourhoods across the city – Devon Street, Elgin Crescent, McQueen Court in Queensland and now Avonwood – giving me a lifelong connection to the people and places that make Stratford home. For more than 10 years, I've served as president of my condominium corporation, overseeing 30year reserve fund plans, capital projects and

financial forecasting. People who know me describe me as honest, forwardthinking, empathetic and realistic. I'm a team player who listens first, solves problems with a level head. A fun fact: I am a Toronto Maple Leafs Fan. GO LEAFS GO!

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

What the citizens of Stratford are telling me, which are affordability (lower taxes), roads (asphalt repaving, snow removal),

finish the Grand Trunk site and reduce homelessness with a caring and compassionate approach.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

I would defer the City of Stratford Capital Project A.2.3 Enterprise ERP Enhancements. \$1 million is allocated for 2027 and there is no project plan available to evaluate if the money is re-

quired and justified to move to a new financial system from existing.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

The citizens of Stratford want a companionate approach to reducing homelessness. We need

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MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES Q&A

Council candidates: Ryan Dole

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

to create more beds with wrap around supports that give pathways for people who are homeless a chance to recover and overcome the challenges they are facing. The city needs to work with the Canadian Mental Health Association and increase investment

into the Connection Centre. Our citizens are looking to the city for tax relief and it is time for the city to “pull up a chair at the kitchen table” and look at our budget and make decisions on what is best for Stratford citizens.

The Grand Trunk renewal

project is underway, yet still far from any concrete changes to the grounds or superstructure. Are you in favour of the current council’s direction? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

The Grand Trunk site should

become the new home for our YMCA and library. Our tax dollars have paid for lawyers, committees and consultants and contractors maintaining the site since we acquired the property in June 2009. A Master Plan for the site was published in 2018. It has

been 17 years of debate of what to do with the Grand Trunk property. Let’s stop wasting tax dollars and choose to make the Grand Trunk the new home for our YMCA and library. I would like to have the ribbon cutting scheduled to occur by Oct. 1, 2030.

Council candidates: Christopher Giannakopoulos



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

My name is Dr. Christopher Giannakopoulos – I’m a father, husband and Stratford resident, born and raised. I’ve worked in Stratford’s restaurant and hospitality industry for roughly 20 years; in parallel, I completed my PhD at the University of Waterloo. People will recognize me from Pizza Bistro, Cafe Ten, Foster’s Inn and the Bruce Hotel. Although entre-

preneurship runs in my family, I’ve found success as an instructor at the University of Waterloo, where I teach engineering communication to some of the best undergraduates in Canada. I’m running for council because I believe in Stratford, its residents and our future here together.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

I am running on three “pillars” for Stratford: protecting our downtown vitality, ensuring smart spending for maintenance and new projects and supporting young families through increased child care and services. Stratford’s makeup is more complex, however, and a good councillor knows that decision-making in one area – eg. preserving agricultural land – will have connected effects – eg. increased intensification. My goal this election is to focus on core issues while bringing a deep knowledge of how Stratford’s organizations, demographics and infrastructures affect one another.

This awareness will ensure that decision-making is sound in the short-term and structurally effective in the long-term.

Next year’s budget, like last year’s, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

The popular phrases are “reduce” or “freeze” taxes; “watch the money” is a more realistic action, since controlling spending through budget decisions is the lever that councillors handle. Drumming up new business is another. My goal would be to keep the annual levy below the rate of inflation by redeveloping, intensifying and using land and infrastructure we already own. Stratford punches above its weight, year in, year out; I’d like to see more responsible spending and levies, especially if we’re serious about affordability and keeping families here. Tomorrow’s taxes are determined by today’s spending.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

People who are unhoused cannot simply be placed into apartments and asked to figure it out; in the short-term, they need protection from the elements and access to family, medical and social services; in the long-term, Stratford needs a safe community where people can regain control of their lives at their pace. Stratford needs to work with its not-for-profit partners, use city-owned land, and provide access to health professionals so that supportive housing can be developed. Not every development should be low-density housing; new developments should include a higher ratio of affordable and well-sized apartments ...

The Grand Trunk renewal project is underway, yet still

far from any concrete changes to the grounds or superstructure. Are you in favour of the current council’s direction? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

The Grand Trunk signals Stratford’s possible transition to a year-round destination. Whether council approves the city’s proposal, a private proposal or a hybrid between them, money needs to be spent according to a milestone-based approach. Development for existing partners needs to happen first, with seed capital from them; the rest progresses in stages, funded by commercial partners who understand Stratford’s local, national and international identity. Despite necessary remediation, housing on site should not be a priority – instead, the Grand Trunk should focus on commercial viability, attracting Canada-wide businesses for job creation, and working with GO Train service for new tourism initiatives.

Council candidates: Larry McCabe



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I grew up on Willow Street in Stratford, playing Rotary and road hockey, and attended Stratford Central before studying anthropology at Carleton. I returned home to open Pazzo in 1998. I am married to Fiona Mongillo, artistic director of Here For Now Theatre, and have three adult children. Hospitality, food, culture and sustainability have shaped my life, as has service on council

and community boards. I support artists, youth sports, our built heritage and Stratford’s parks. I also love reading, the Bruce Peninsula and walking with my dog, Cleo. If you see us, neither of us bites – come say hello.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My focus is managing growth while protecting what makes Stratford a good place to live. That means a clear, economically and environmentally sustainable plan – not growth at any cost. I want the community-hub portion of the Grand Trunk project underway by the end of the next term and supportive housing on Erie Street completed. We also need affordable child care so young families and working parents can build their lives here. The proposed Avondale childcare project is a promising start. With strong new administrative leadership, council must set priorities, make timely decisions and turn long-discussed plans into visible progress.

Next year’s budget, like last year’s, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

Taxpayers are stretched, so every dollar must be tied to a clear priority. I will scrutinize projects whose costs are rising, insist on realistic estimates and contingencies before approval and pace infrastructure renewal according to urgency and affordability. The capital budget should also reduce future operating costs through energy efficiency, fleet modernization and well-planned maintenance – not simply add new obligations. Council must follow the asset-management plan, resist attractive projects we cannot responsibly sustain and examine services for practical efficiencies before asking residents for more. Keeping the levy down requires discipline, long-term thinking and the willingness to say “not yet.”

Housing and homelessness

in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

Stratford is adding housing, but not enough that people with the lowest incomes can afford. Our first priority should be completing the Erie Street supportive-housing project and securing provincial operating funding so it succeeds. We should support United Housing and use the land and equity held by the Perth and Stratford Housing Corporation to create more deeply affordable and mixed-income homes. Over time, permanent supportive housing and rent assistance can reduce reliance on costly emergency shelters. The new Official Plan must also make appropriate infill, density and a wider range of homes easier to build, while preserving thoughtful neighbourhood planning.

The Grand Trunk renewal project is underway, yet still far from any concrete changes to the grounds or superstructure. Are you in favour of the current council’s direction? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

I support the current direction: build the community hub outside the existing superstructure, seek private-sector partners for the balance of the site and add housing and tax-generating development near GO service. We should commemorate the railway structure through retained open-air elements, public art or a virtual experience – but not at unlimited public cost. As I warned at council, “We are a small municipality of 35,000 at a stretch as a population, and we do have a real possibility of toppling the financial structure of this city if we get this wrong.” Our ambition must be matched by financial discipline.

Stratford takes back the night

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Take Back the Night rally and march in Stratford had people of all ages and genders marching around the downtown core advocating against gender-based violence, sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

The Stop Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee of Perth County hosted Take Back the Night on Sept. 18. Take Back the Night is a global movement addressing the right to feel safe walking outside at night without

fear of violence.

"For many of us, our streets feel welcoming and safe, but for survivors of sexual assault, stalking, violence and harassment these same streets can look and feel very different. They can be scary and threatening with too few supports and places of safety too far between," said Julia Church, manager of programs and services at the Emily Murphy Centre. "Tonight, we say it's time for a change. It's time for our city to grow and evolve so that everyone in our community can experience it in the same safe way."

Attendees gathered at Market Square

to make signs and buttons ahead of the protest, as well as learn more about local organizations providing support services including the Emily Murphy Centre, Optimism Place, the Children's Aid Society, Huron Perth Public Health, Family Services Perth Huron, Victim Services Perth Huron and the Stratford Police Service. There was also a set of visual art and poetry created by survivors as part of the No More Silence Art Display.

Those part of Take Back the Night in Stratford marched in solidarity with survivors from Market Square and down St.

Patrick and Downie Streets before heading back.

"We march for everyone who has held their keys between their fingers walking home at night, who has asked their friend to text or call me when you're home safe, or has worried that they will lose a best friend or the support of their community if they share their story," Church said ahead of the march. "Violence grows in silence. When we gather visibly, loudly, together, we break that silence and we start a new narrative. We tell survivors we believe you, we stand with you, and you are not alone."



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

The Take Back the Night community march on Sept. 18 displayed solidarity with survivors of sexual assault, gender-based violence and intimate partner violence and a call for change to ensure safety for all.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Local singer-songwriter Nora Joy performed some songs ahead of the Take Back the Night community march.

House of Blessing aims to raise \$35,000 through Ride for Refuge

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

As food insecurity continues to grow, Stratford House of Blessing's Ride for Refuge fundraiser can help ensure their clients are able to get what they need.

The annual Ride for Refuge will be held on the morning of Oct. 3 and participants can either walk or cycle for the cause. Walkers and cyclists will meet at 382 Britannia St. and spend the morning on their route before enjoying a lunch provided by Taylor's Delicatessen. The Salt Cabin will also provide an oxygen bar on site.

"You get (to) go out and have a nice ride or walk in the fall morning and then we'll come back together, we'll celebrate," said Aaron Balzer, House of Blessing's resource coordinator.

Those walking can either walk on a 2.5 kilometre or five kilometre route and cyclists can ride for either 10 kilometres or 20 kilometres.

Stratford House of Blessing aims to raise \$35,000 to ensure its shelves are well-stocked for the Thanksgiving

and Christmas period – the busiest time of year for the organization. The House of Blessing serves more than 1,600 clients a week and there are more and more people facing food insecurity.

"We're seeing people who have never had to use a food bank before come in. We're seeing more and more people who are employed needing to come in and use the food bank because they're not able to make ends meet," said Balzer.

In addition to participating in the Ride for Refuge as a walker or cyclist, anyone looking to get involved can volunteer as a route marshal, donate to one of the participants and/or teams, or do their own walk or ride.

"Certainly, if people aren't able to actually show up on the day, they can do a walk or ride on their own time or they can donate to one of the teams or one of the walkers or riders. There's lots of ways to get involved," Balzer said.

To learn more information, donate, or sign up for the Ride for Refuge online, visit <https://en.rideforrefuge.org/location/stratford>.

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CFUW hosts Meet the Women Candidates night

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) Stratford invites the community to an information session featuring women candidates running in the upcoming municipal election.

'Meet the Women Candidates for the Municipal Election' will take place on Tuesday, Sept. 29, at 7 p.m. in the auditorium of Stratford Intermediate School, 60 St. Andrew St., Stratford.

This free event is open to everyone and offers an opportunity to hear directly from women seeking municipal office, hear their perspectives and priorities, and ask questions about the issues that matter to them.

Cambria Ravenhill, CFUW member and advocate, says that although things have changed over the years, a gap in gender representation in government remains, and CFUW wants to highlight this and show support for female leaders in the upcoming municipal election.

"We want to support leadership for our political candidates because women are 50 per cent of the population, but on council across Canada, women represent 31 per cent. There are variations; in some of the bigger cities, you will see more women on council, but across Canada, it's only 31 per cent.

"The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has flagged this as a governance gap, and says there is still work to do to achieve gender parity and meaningful participation of women in municipal governance, and CFUW agrees.

"Gender-balanced councils are better councils," said Ravenhill. "In the business world for decades, they've realized through a ton of research that when you have gender-based leadership teams or corporate boards, you

get better results. This is proven over and over again. And at the municipal level, it's similar. Several studies have shown that when you have a 50-50 gender balance on a municipal council, you get better governance, better decision-making, more transparency, and more voices at the table.

"We want to support women in leadership who throw their hat in the ring for the municipal council because studies show that when you do get women on council, you are going to get a better council, and that should be of interest to everybody that supports everybody in Stratford."

In a recent statement, Carole Saab, CEO FCM, noted that while significant progress has been made, women remain under-represented in many leadership positions and sometimes still face backlash.

"There is progress toward gender parity in elected positions, but it is severely threatened by growing attacks and harassment of elected officials," said Saab. "Depriving ourselves of the talents of elected women is not just a disservice; it's an outrage. Going forward, FCM will play a lead role in collaborative efforts to put a stop to these threats."

Ravenhill says this event is not only for community members to hear what local candidates have to say, but also a time for the community to show up for women throughout the city.

"We've seen women leaving politics because of the levels of toxicity and harassment that are sent their way, and I'd really like people to come out simply to support these women who are putting themselves out there to be our elected representatives," she said.

CFUW's support and promotion of women's leadership is deeply rooted in the organization's history. Founded in 1919, CFUW existed before women were

considered persons under Canadian law and at a time when women were excluded and marginalized from business, politics, leadership and many other areas of public life.

This event gives members of the public an opportunity to engage with the women candidates and participate in the democratic process. Attendees are encouraged to bring their questions for the candidates.

Although the event is open to all and is free to attend, CFUW would prefer that people register at <https://tinyurl.com/48dv3fvp>, however, walk-ins are welcome.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. Who was the first emperor of Rome?
2. Which African country is known as the "Rainbow Nation"?
3. How many brains does a leech have?
4. What is the longest-running American sitcom?
5. Where did mahjong originate?
6. What was the first billion-dollar movie?
7. What creature holds the record for the world's largest eyes?
8. Who was the legendary king with the golden touch?
9. What type of acid gives grapefruit its tartness?
10. What is the national animal of New Zealand?

This week's answers are found on pg. 23

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Sep. 6 Kasia Wojcik, London	\$50.00
Sep. 7 Kelly Muddle, St. Marys	\$50.00
Sep. 8 Tony Smith, Mitchell	\$50.00
Sep. 9 Doug Thiel, Mitchell	\$50.00
Sep. 10 Scott Savage, Stratford	\$50.00
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Sep. 12 Luella Sterling, Port Lambton	\$200.00
Sep. 13 Marlene Gibson, St. Marys	\$50.00
Sep. 14 Joyce Fischer, Stratford	\$50.00
Sep. 15 Kevin Miller, Stratford	\$50.00
Sep. 16 Theresa Roth, Sebringville	\$50.00
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Sep. 18 Paul Coates, Mitchell	\$50.00
Sep. 19 Taylor Kells, Dorchester	\$200.00



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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Retired Women's Teachers of Ontario (RWTO) celebrated their 70th anniversary last week at the Stratford Legion. The organization has grown to include not just teachers, but educational assistants, early childhood educators, child and youth care workers, speech and language pathologists, audiologists, social workers, psychologists and office support staff.

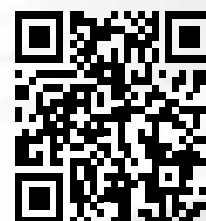
The Stratford and Area branch has over 80 members from across Stratford, Mitchell, St. Marys, Milverton, New Hamburg, Sebringville, Tavistock and beyond.

Pictured are some members who attended last week's event.

STRATFORD TIMES

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FALL 2026 *Bridal* GUIDE

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Rae announces funding for local children's aid society

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Matthew Rae, MPP for Perth-Wellington announced this week that the Government of Ontario will be providing \$831,000 to the Huron Perth Children's Aid Society to replace and repair their roof. This funding is part of the government's \$25 million investment in critical infrastructure repairs this year, helping ensure community agencies across the province can continue delivering essential services to those who rely on them most.

"I appreciate the important work the Huron Perth Children's Aid Society does every day to support children and families in our communities," said Rae in a media release. "This provincial investment will support the physical space they need to continue delivering that support and serving local families. By investing in the right infrastructure, we are helping ensure this important work can continue for years to come."

"Huron-Perth Children's Aid Society plays an important role in supporting children, youth and families across our communities, and ensuring they have the support and resources they need is a priority," said Lisa Thompson, MPP for Huron-Bruce. "This investment will help provide the organization with a safe, reliable and welcoming space to continue its important work. I am pleased to see our government supporting local organizations that make such a meaningful difference in the lives of families throughout Huron and Perth counties."

Funding from the Partner Facility Re-

newal program supports a range of organizations, including shelters for women and children who have experienced or may be at risk of violence, residences that offer day-to-day support for individuals with developmental disabilities, facilities serving survivors of human trafficking, organizations dedicated to supporting Indigenous communities and centres that provide services for children and youth with special needs.

The \$25 million investment will support community agencies across the province in carrying out critical repairs and upgrades, including improvements

to roofing and air conditioning systems, enhanced security features and accessibility retrofits to kitchens and bathrooms.

"Community-based organizations are essential in helping people across Ontario access reliable programs and services," said Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. "Through these investments, our government is supporting hundreds of agencies so they can continue providing children, youth and families with the tools and support they need to succeed in their communities."

"We are deeply grateful for this invest-

ment in our building and in the children, youth, and families we serve. Spaces matter," said Kristian Wilson, executive director for the Huron Perth Children's Aid Society. "They influence how people experience support, connection, and belonging. This funding will help ensure that our facility remains a safe, welcoming, and reliable place where children, youth, and families can access the supports they need. More importantly, it helps us continue creating an environment that reflects the dignity, hope, and well-being we want every person who walks through our doors to experience."



(SYDNEY BOYLE PHOTO)

Organizers gather the morning of Sept. 20 in Upper Queen's Park for the annual Terry Fox Run in Stratford, raising funds for cancer research and honouring Fox's Marathon of Hope decades after it came to an end.

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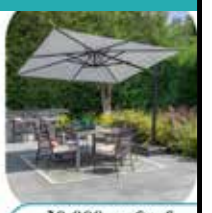


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STRATFORD *TIMES* SPORTS

SDSS senior boys volleyball team takes tournament silver

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) senior boys volleyball team kicked off their season with a silver medal at a tournament held at Fanshawe College in London Sept. 19-20.

Coach Bear Gough told the Times the tournament was a fantastic way to begin their volleyball season.

"I couldn't have been happier," said Gough. "A lot of younger players got to really step up and play some big games, and it was just a great way to start the year. The camaraderie they showed was great. They were playing for each other. They were playing for the guy next to them. They were playing for their school and for their family that came to watch, and they just played with a lot of pride and a lot of energy."

SDSS was playing many of its most important games of the tournament with only seven players available, including several rookies. Juniors Evan Abercrombie, Evan Ehnes and Nate Meadows debuted with excellent performances en route to silver. MJ White set the tone for the team with strong defence, communication and energy. Setters Davis Longston and Yug Patel led the team on and off the court. Opponents had few answers for outside hitters Brody Sinclair and Jordan Diep, who were each named tournament all-stars.

In the quarter-final against London Saunders, SDSS picked up the win in three sets, falling in the first set narrow-

ly by a score of 27-25, before winning the second set 25-23. In the third and deciding set, Stratford's senior boys won 15-11.

Gough said the matchup was a good measuring stick test for the SDSS squad.

"London Saunders is going to be one of the top teams in WOSSAA, so we know we'll be seeing lots of them. I would say that our team just refused to be rattled. At that point, we were down to seven players and a lot of starters, but our guys just weren't afraid to step up to the challenge. No matter what happened in the match, things went back and forth. It was two great teams, and both were playing really well, and there were a ton of lead changes, and our guys just kept with it, kept their trust and belief in each other the entire time, and I think that's why we were able to pull out the victory."

The win set them up to play London Christian High in the semis, and once again, the boys from SDSS were fantastic, winning in straight sets by scores of 25-21 and 25-22.

"I said to the team before that match, 'We're on a wave right now and we've just got to ride it,'" Gough recounted. "They were playing just really tight volleyball, and really scrappy defence. We weren't making mistakes. We were picking every ball up. The boys were just really hard to play against."

Although they came up short in the gold medal game, Gough still said the tournament result puts the group in a great position moving forward.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) senior boys volleyball team earned a silver medal at a tournament Sept 19-20 at Fanshawe College. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Jordan Diep, Nate Meadows, Yug Patel and coach Katey Kneider. In the back row, from left, are coach Bear Gough, MJ White, Evan Abercrombie, Evan Ehnes, Davis Longston, Brody Sinclair and Chahil Patel.

"It's great because it means that we can really hit the ground running," said Gough. "I think, just in practice (Sept. 21), I saw a group with a lot of confidence, and I think we showed not only the region what we can do and what we're capable of, but we also proved it to ourselves so the guys know what they can do. They believe in each other, and it was just a great way

to start the season with such a reaffirming performance."

Gough also relayed a statement made by Diep during the team's Sept. 21 practice, which succinctly encapsulated the team's scrappy and tenacious attitude.

"If this is what seven of us can do," Diep said about the silver medal, "imagine what our whole team can accomplish."

Warriors face Chatham in home opener

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

After opening the regular season with two road games, the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors began their 2026-27 home schedule with a Sept. 18 matchup against the Chatham Maroons at William Allman Memorial Arena.

After practice on Sept. 14, Ethan Bridges and Chase Martin discussed their experiences with the Warriors so far and how they are adapting to Junior 'B' hockey after years of AAA minor hockey with the Times.

"It's a great, great organization, hard work every day. You've got to buy into the system if you want to play. I'm looking forward to a great season with them this year," said Bridges. "It's obviously a big difference with the size and how fast the pace of play is. But if I just stick to the basics, I feel like I can perform."

"It's great. It's a great town, and all the guys are great. Had to get the season started," said Martin. "It's a pretty

big transition. It's a lot more hitting. The guys (are) older. It's faster. It's stronger. You've got to compete higher. More backtracking."

Earlier this week, the Warriors strengthened their roster by bringing back familiar players. Forward Max Wildfong rejoined the team after attending training camp with the Saginaw Spirit of the Ontario Hockey League, while goaltender Noah Bender returned from the Bonnyville Pontiacs of the Alberta Junior Hockey League.

"I'm glad to be back, and I'm hoping we can make a good run for it again this year," Bender said.

"Yeah, it's obviously awesome. Really excited to be back. I got some things to work on, and then hopefully be back in Saginaw next year. But I'm just really excited to be back in Stratford. I think we have a great group, and it's going to be a great year," Wildfong said.

Before the game, the team held a pregame ceremony that included the unveiling of the new jersey and logo,

created by local Indigenous artist and leader Maxine Noel.

The Warriors opened the scoring when Francesco Sanita scored his first as a Warrior from Dominic Marshall and Grady Murphy at 4:32 of the first period. Through 20 minutes of play, the Warriors led 1-0 and heavily outshot the Maroons 11-2.

Midway through the second period, the Warriors doubled their lead as Bridges notched his second of the season, with Declan McCotter tallying his first career Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) point on the assist.

Chatham bounced back in the latter half of the period with two goals in over five minutes to tie the game heading into the final frame.

The score remained tied until the Maroons pulled away with 5:32 remaining and added insurance with an empty-net goal with 1:14 remaining as the Warriors dropped to 0-3 with a 4-2 defeat. Stratford netminder Gage Hurst stopped 17 of 20 shots in the loss.

Warriors head coach Dave Williams spoke with the Times saying despite the winless start, the team's atmosphere remains positive.

"I think the mood of the group is still very good and very positive. I think our practices have been good, and you know, obviously, everybody wants to win, and you know we've gotten off to a slower start than we'd like," Williams said.

"But I think we're doing some positive things in the games we've played, and I think it's again just building on the consistency and capitalizing on some of the opportunities we get because I think we're definitely getting opportunities. We're just in the last two games, anyways. I think a little snake biting around the net with, I think a little bit more puck luck, we might have had some better results."

Next up for the Warriors is against the London Nationals at the Allman Arena on Sept. 25, and a trip to Chatham to face the Maroons on Sept. 27.



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Shakespeare Falcons U-15 boys bring home league championship

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The Shakespeare Falcons U-15 boys brought home the league championship to Shakespeare after winning the South Perth U-15 League championship tournament.

The boys finished the season in second place overall, with a 12-3 record heading into the double-elimination tournament, hosted in Shakespeare over two weekends.

The team played three games. In Game 1, they beat Wilmot 1, 7-0. Isaac Brenneman was the winning pitcher, with Nash Follings and Elliott Peters each re-

cording two RBIs.

In Game 2, they beat Wilmot 2, 15-3, with Isaac Brenneman again earning the win as pitcher. Blake Wilhelm and Max Hughes each had three RBIs.

Game 3 was the final, where they beat Wilmot 2 again, 14-4. Isaac Brenneman was the winning pitcher, while Blaine Follings earned the hold in relief. Liam Uniac had three RBIs in the game.

The Shakespeare Community Athletic Association (SCAA) and the community congratulated the U-15 boys on a season well played, saying they had made Shakespeare sports fans proud of their accomplishments this year.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Shakespeare Falcons U-15 league champions: front row from left, Ryson Ramseyer, Nash Wynette, Blake Wilhelm, Blaine Follings and Isaac Brenneman. Back row from left, Kyle Wynette (coach), Fred Follings (coach), Nash Follings, Liam Uniac, Miller Follings, Jake Peters, Elliott Peters, Max Hughes and Dan Brenneman (coach). Missing are Colton Evanski and Jensen Gruber.



Double golden Strikers: U15 and U16 win Nothers Cup Championships

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On Sept. 19, the Stratford U15 and U16 Girls Strikers returned to the Festival City as winners of the Nothers Cup Championships at the University of Guelph, capping an unforgettable 2026 season for the two programs.

In the noon-hour championship contest, the U15 Strikers faced the Puslinch Predators in pursuit of their second straight league double, after winning the regular-season league title back in late August.

The match was scoreless after the first half, but Ruby Munford and a brace from Reese Campbell, along with a clean sheet, gave Stratford the 3-0 gold medal win.

U15 head coach Scott Herman says the team's gold medal win is well earned and

a fitting way to finish off the special season.

"It's a great feeling to win this cup, especially with such a great group of young ladies. They put in the work, and they have earned this title again this year! I'm so happy for them, and they deserve everything they have achieved this year," Herman said.

The Stratford U16 Strikers looked to finish their season with a league double of their own against Oriental SC in the mid-afternoon gold medal matchup.

Stratford took a 2-1 halftime lead and held Oriental SC in check in the second half to claim the gold medal.

U16 head coach Ashley Vito reflected on the team's journey and how it paid off in the team's win in the Nothers Cup.

"At the beginning of the season, we set

goals and intentions as a team, and so many of the girls wrote down that they wanted to win a cup, a league title or a tournament. I'm so thankful and excited to say we accomplished all three," Vito said.

"It's incredibly rewarding to see all of their hard work, effort and energy come together when it matters most. Last year, we finished the Nothers Cup with a silver medal, and while we were proud of that accomplishment, it was also heartbreaking to come so close. This year, the girls came into the final determined to leave everything on the field, and they absolutely did."

Herman and Vito mentioned that preparations for next year's plans are progressing smoothly.

"As far as plans for next year, we will

begin preparation for another run as a U16 team. Tryouts continue this coming week, so it's back to the grind after an exciting weekend," Herman said.

"We're definitely taking a moment to celebrate, but we're already preparing for the 2027 season. Tryouts begin next week, and we're really excited to get back into the gym over the winter and start preparing for a new league and the challenge of playing up an age group as a U17/18 team," Vito said.

"It's a new challenge for this group, but if there's one thing we've learned about these girls this season, it's that they always battle, they always rise to the occasion, and they never shy away from a challenge. We're excited to see what they can accomplish with this next opportunity."



(SCOTT HERMAN/SOUTHWEST SOCCER PHOTO)

The Stratford U15 Strikers after winning the gold medal at the U15 Girls Nothers Youth Cup at the University of Guelph on Sept. 19. Team roster: Grace Elliott, Ava Langis, Edie Murray, Hazel Walsh, Ashley Van Straaten, Elena Hogger, Payton Herman, Peyton Van Straaten, Ruby Munford, Peyton Ward, Lilly Harrigan, Danica Voros, Madison Brisbois, Jessica Blake, Kinsley McIntosh. Head coach: Scott Herman. Assistant Coach: Ian Murray.



(ASHLEY VITO PHOTO)

The 2026 U16 Girls Nothers Youth Cup gold medalists. Team roster: Vittoria Brander, Linley Porter, Mya Meyer, Myra Wood, Olivia Horenberg, Claire Donnelly, Pippa Nyehuis, Niamh Appel, Haley Hummell, Emerie Smith, Edyn Grimwood, Avery Bruinsma, Arabelle Garland, Rosie Sauder, Leighton Nickel, Everly Durst, Tasha Cooley. Head coach: Ashley Vito. Assistant coach: Nicolle Meyer.

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U18 Warriors looking ahead to the season

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

The Stratford U18 AA Warriors began their preparations for the upcoming 2026-2027 season at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

Last season, the Warriors experienced a mix of highs and lows. Their highlight was winning the Ajax Winterlude in December. Stratford ended the season with an overall record of 8-20-4 and a league record of 6-17-4 in the ALLIANCE regular season, finishing eighth in the league before being eliminated in the Bristol Playdowns semifinal series by London.

Head coach Riley Mathieson outlines the team's expectations for the upcoming

ing season but wants a more gradual improvement on offence, beginning in preseason.

"The overall goal for this season would be to obviously compete and make a good run in the playoffs. But with that, it's going to come down to a little bit of a we're going to need to improve our offence from last year," Mathieson said.

"So far, we've worked on a few things in that regard and made an overall improvement in our structure as well. Something we're going to address, and yeah, those are a few things we have on the go right now. We don't really know what we're dealing with until we start."

The U18 Warriors for 2025-26 include returning players Nate Van Bakel, Noah Kaye, Caden Ollson, Jake Schultz, Reid

Morris, Piers Murray and Carter Keating. Mathieson believes that the experienced group will guide the team alongside the new players and continue to develop.

"Yeah, so for a lot of those guys, they've been here for a year. They know how the major league works, and now they get to be the older guys in it. So, what I'm looking to get out of them is a shared sense of experience and to help some of the young guys move through the learning process a little faster. I'd like to see them try to improve on the things they struggled with last year, while also helping the younger guys learn to adapt a little faster," Mathieson said.

"You're playing with guys a year older, and some guys are playing in their last years of hockey. So, with that, I'm

hoping the older guys can lead the way a bit, but also be mindful that our younger guys need some help and are just trying to find their footing and path. So that's kind of what I'm hoping to see out of the older players."

The Warriors will host their first exhibition game at the Rotary Complex against the South Oxford Storm on Sept. 22. They will then take part in the St. Marys Rock 'A' Preseason Showdown from Sept. 25 to 27. After their preseason finale in Tillsonburg against South Oxford on Sept. 28, Stratford will start the regular season at home on Oct. 3 against the St. Thomas Jr. Stars.

Full results of the preseason games and the tournament will be part of next week's edition of the Times.

Aces continue building for the season ahead

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

Fresh off playing in preseason tournaments in Scarborough and Stoney Creek, the Stratford Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Aces played their home preseason slate at the William Allman Memorial Arena over the weekend of Sept. 19 and 20.

Aurelia Aho scored her first goal as a member of the U18 AA Aces in a 4-4

draw with the Mississauga Hurricanes on Sept. 19. On Sept. 20, the Aces hosted the North York Storm in their preseason home finale. The Aces couldn't overcome a tough start, losing 3-1 to the Storm. Meghan Graham scored the lone goal for the Aces on a late power play in the third period.

After the game, Aces head coach Sean Cameron reflected on the team's preseason development.

"Well, there were a lot of good things

there. The last couple of weeks, we've had a really good stretch, and we've gotten really lucky because we've been able to play some top U.S. teams. In doing so, we're just taking everything as a stepping stone for us right now, getting us ready for the regular season," Cameron said.

"All the credit to North York. They played a very good game there. They came out flying in the first period. We had a lot of compete in the third, and our

goal in between the second and third was just to go out there and ensure that we got a goal end, and we did. I liked how we played in the third period, so lots of things to build off."

Stratford's preseason continues with a doubleheader on Sept. 26, facing the Waterloo Ravens at Waterloo's RIM Park in the late morning, followed by a game against the Mississauga Chiefs in the evening at Iceland Arena in Mississauga.

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Mike’s Lanes welcomes bowlers back for new season

NICHELE BUTCHER-BONTRUP

Guest Contributor

The pins are set, the lanes are ready, and another exciting season of five-pin bowling is underway at Mike's Bowling Lanes in Stratford.

As bowlers return to the lanes, there is still plenty of opportunity for newcomers to join in on the fun. Leagues are currently recruiting bowlers and you don't need to be an experienced bowler to get involved. Whether you're a seasoned league player or have never bowled competitively before, there's a place for you on the lanes.

Five-pin bowling is about more than knocking down pins; it's about meeting people, making friends, enjoying some friendly competition and becoming part of the local bowling community.

So, grab your bowling shoes, bring a friend, family member, neighbour or co-worker and come see what all the fun is about! Mike's Bowling Lanes is ready for another great season. Come out, join a league, and let's keep five-pin bowling rolling in our community.

Mike’s 5-Pin Bowling Association (M5PBA) High Scores

MEN'S

Kevin McKenna 363-872
Dan Clark 336
Michael Palmby 351-827
Brady Boyles Keating 837 triple
Tim Gagan 813
Jon Gagan 818
Monday Seniors'
Brian Wagler 214

V-ETTES

Bernice Dale 251

UNITED LEAGUE

(200 singles, 600 triples)
Shawn Yampolsky 248
Sydney Smith 216

PIN PALS

Jeremy Rathwell 105
Cody Medeiors 112,109
Gregory Jones 108
Emily Jones 122, 110
Thomas Holland 104

YBC SCORES

Bowlasaurus
Emmy Hvidsten 106
Wren Wybrow 86, 87
Theo Brown 81,99
Huxley Wybrow 82,102

Abbey Bobor 102,83
Audrey Parker 64, 91
Noah Rothwell 96, 91
Levi Hamilton 82
Oscar Smith 65
Cole Casey 118
Bodie Clark 81

PEE-WEE & BANTAM

Lincoln Brown 77, 103, 140
William West 85, 100
Mason Morris 80, 124
Noah Saunders 87, 104, 158-349
Bryanne Finch-Doucette 105, 80
Serenity Robb 79
Issac Rothwell 84
Grey Davidson 90-269
Adrian Klomp 79, 103
Kellar Hvidsten 99, 101
Sierra Stevenson 118,124, 128-370
Spencer Koyle 90
Joey Gethke 86
Oscar Smith 65
Jesse Robinson 95
Kayleigh Mitchell 92
Piper Patey 92
Leo Parker 91
Jacob Murray 87
Stella Hurley St. Pierre 75, 161-332
Lincoln Butcher-Cassidy 96, 116, 130-342
Emmett Martin 119, 110, 140-369

Caleb Luckhardt 124, 145, 146

JUNIOR

Coen Everitt 143
Austin Janmaat 147-388
Brent Louwagie 141, 181-440
Lukas Murray 75, 136
Wesley Adair 103, 104
Ruby Parker 134,136, 140-410
Ruby Parker 156-408
Austin Lingard 113,94
Mckenna Morris 108, 145, 167-420
Mckenna Morris 135, 154-427
Anna Ward 177,162, 197-536
Abby Smith 177,167,176-520
Lauren Furtney 178, 208, 221-607
Hayden Martin 172, 266-581

SENIOR

Sydney Smith 150, 175, 246-571
Alex Ward 163, 165, 213-541
Wiatt Robinson 199, 184, 247
Jocelyn Gethke 212
Owen Martin 226, 240, 288-754
Claire Turner 217
Austin Martin 194
Peyton Boyles Keating 252
Issac Kroesbergen 191
Zachary Clarke 225-570

Only 30 years ago, Canada’s last Indian Residential School closed

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Editorial

Letters to the editor: Hunter responds to lawsuit

I am responding to the recently served lawsuit commenced against me by Mike Sullivan because I have concerns about the possibility that litigation is being used, or timed, in a manner intended to affect the electoral process rather than simply resolve a legal dispute.

As I noted last week, I believe the claim is entirely without merit. As a lawyer, I would never advise a client that their success in litigation is guaranteed. Courts are unpredictable, and outcomes can never be known with certainty. That said, I am extremely confident in my defence.

It is the timing of the service of this claim that is suspect. The claim against me was issued (filed in the Court) on June 17, 2026. Ordinarily, once a claim has been commenced, service follows soon thereafter and promptly. Given the allegations in the claim, it would be reasonable to assume that Mike Sullivan would want the matter dealt with without delay. In litigation, service on the other party is required to begin the lawsuit, and there is a risk that the other party may become more difficult to locate as time passes. In my case, service did not occur in June, July, or August. Mr. Sullivan had many opportunities to serve his claim, as I was regularly present at my office during business hours and attended virtually every council meeting over the summer.

Instead, I was served on September 14, 2026, in council chambers during an election campaign, and the media were immediately alerted by Mike Sullivan. While I initially viewed this as political theatre, it was not particularly troubling on its own.

The following day, however, I learned through media reports that Mayor Martin Ritsma had also been served with a separate lawsuit in council chambers on the same evening and under similar circumstances.

That sequence of events naturally gives rise to many questions:

1. Why were two mayoral candidates served publicly on the same evening after months of apparent delay?
2. Why was service withheld throughout June, July, and August, only to occur during an active municipal election campaign?
3. Who stands to benefit politically from the public dissemination of lawsuits involving multiple mayoral candidates?

4. Was the chosen time for legitimate litigation purposes, or for some other ulterior and unrelated purpose?

5. Is the objective simply to advance legal claims, or an attempt to influence public perception during an election?

I do not purport to know the answers to those questions. However, I believe they are fair questions for the citizens of Stratford to consider.

My concerns about undue political influence have also been heightened by a recent letter to the editor authored by Robert Verdun. Mr. Verdun is entitled to express his views regarding council's decision to challenge strong mayor powers. The decision to challenge strong mayor powers was made by the entire city council, but the only people named in Mr. Verdun's article are the three council members who are currently running for mayor. I invite the people of Stratford to ask why the article focused on the three mayoral candidates instead of council as a whole, and who stands to benefit from that focus.

While the courts will determine the merits of Mike Sullivan's claim, there is a separate and equally important principle at stake: the integrity of the electoral process. The commencement of litigation is a lawful right. The strategic deployment of litigation as a campaign tool is an entirely different matter. If evidence establishes that lawsuits, media outreach, public communications, or other activities were coordinated for the purpose of influencing the outcome of a municipal election or disadvantaging particular candidates, those actions may warrant scrutiny under applicable election legislation and the common law. The voters of Stratford are entitled to an election conducted on a level playing field, free from improper interference, manipulation, or coordinated efforts to distort the democratic process.

The courts will determine the merits of the lawsuit.

The voters will determine who should govern Stratford.

Those are two very different processes, and neither should be used to manipulate the other.

Democracy is best served when elections are decided in the voting booth, when candidates are judged on their ideas, performance, and vision for the community, not on strategically timed allegations. Stratford deserves better than politics by ambush. That is the principle I believe Stratford residents deserve and the one I will continue to defend.

Mark Hunter,
Stratford

City's lawsuit against province a waste of taxpayers money

Stratford city council's lawsuit against the Province of Ontario is a total waste of taxpayers' money, and illegal too.

Ontario's highest court has confirmed that strong mayor powers are an absolute constitutional right of the legislature. City council is merely an administrative agency of the province, and must do what it's told.

In dismissing a lawsuit by cyclists against Doug Ford's policy to remove bike lanes from major streets in Toronto, the Court of Appeal ruled bluntly that councils and courts have no right to challenge the legislature.

The judges said bluntly there's only one legal way to change provincial policy: Change the government. Voters decide, not courts.

This principle was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada when it rejected Toronto city council's lawsuit against Ontario after Ford's government cut in half the number of Toronto city councillors. The Supreme Court said bluntly that councils have absolutely no constitutional status and no right to challenge decisions of the legislature.

Stratford council's lawsuit against Ontario was always doomed to failure. Its strongest proponents, Mayor Martin Ritsma and would-be mayor Mark Hunter are primarily responsible for wasting tax money. Would-be mayor Jo-Dee Burbach also participated in this decision.

Moreover, Stratford council's action is totally illegal because it was decided by secret ballot and without a by-law. The Municipal Act, the provincial legislation that governs all councils, states that any secret vote "is of no effect." The act demands that all council actions must be taken by bylaw in a public meeting – but there is no by-law.

Doug Ford's legislature could respond to our city's illegal lawsuit with a new "Stratford Act" that eliminates our council and appoints an all-powerful individual to administer our city.

Also, did our mayor and council ever consider the damage this rebellious action does to Stratford's requests for money for the Grand Trunk or any other local project?

Our precious tax dollars are being squandered on something not only futile, but also illegal. Mayor Ritsma and councillors Hunter and Burbach should be held personally liable for this unlawful waste.

Robert Verdun,
Stratford

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Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada



STRATFORDTIMES

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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Opinion

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL: THE TABLE or IN PRAISE OF THE CAFÉ



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

The table sits in the centre of the room with the unmatched chairs flanking every side. I've frequented this space for the better part of 10 years and seen those chairs shift around the café amongst the other smaller tables, back and forth in puzzle-piece clusters, to continually come to rest again each morning at its shining and beveled edges.

It's the focal point of the café. It has welcomed strangers and locals to throw down their pur-

chased wares, bags and books, and find a moment of respite in their tourist-laden activities. It has invited townspeople to work on their manuscripts, school reports and company ledgers.

There are more "private" corners of the café in which to commune, smaller surfaces upon which to settle and share conversation, and most often that's where you'll find me, but the table reigns supreme like a grand centrepiece in an entryway.

You can sit apart at a busier time in one of those more intimate corners and observe the interactions – how folks ingratiate themselves into a space at the table or how they greet friends with open arms like long-lost family members. I've seen strangers exchanging contact information and leave as acquaintances; blind date meetings come and go, interviews carried out and friendship grow around its nine-foot span.

And this is part of the lure of any café – is it not? Being in

the world, the cacophony of activity, but also being apart from it, in the temple of one's own thoughts, with one's beverage of choice – turning your attention to your surroundings, on and off, intermittently, as you would perhaps open and close the novel you brought along to enjoy.

These kinds of places can be more than distractions in a day. They are a refuge to focus in on the thought that prevails, the work at hand, or to immerse oneself in the temporary escape from reality. And the table, at least in this particular café, welcomes all to sit and do so. It speaks of community, but it offers quiet seclusion through the unwritten rule of sanctuary.

There have been busier times at the café – while working on a bit of writing or reading a book in which I was engrossed – where I have invited others to sit across from me at my two-person space, in the spirit of community and comfort, and because there were no addition-

al chairs unoccupied. Thus far in my numerous years of frequenting the café, two strangers have taken me up on it. If I had writing to do, I did it. If I was lost in a book I read it. Me in my world and them in theirs. And sometimes, a conversation grew organically, and we found ourselves in a discussion that proved more interesting than either of those other options. A friend was born.

The beautiful thing about what they call "café-culture" is the ability of a space to offer work-life-balance in one locale. The café is a mini vacation to many who create community within its walls and I know firsthand that some of those chance meetings have produced lasting friendships for others.

Back home, where my dining table stands, the chairs are empty. They'll be filled if invites go out, or if my partner and I share a meal together when our erratic schedules are synchronous. In the café there are chance

encounters, unexpected interactions and mini movies being played out if one cares to pay attention. The comparison makes me ponder my privilege in even having a place to share food or an intimacy with friends, if I choose to do so. Controlled. Anticipatory.

Outside of it, in the hustle-bustle day, there's unpredictability. After visiting the café, I am reminded, as I stand quiet in the dining room of my house afterward, in the cushioned silence of my carefully controlled life, filled with the thought of the infinite array of strangers that I'd seen a mere two hours beforehand – how "strange" are strangers to each other, after all – when a mere half hour at a table, might dispel all assumptions?

Stuart is a celebrant and the manager of Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. It is his privilege to serve, dispel myths, and give information concerning his field of compassionate service.

Want to make Stratford better? Start small – and speak up



BRUCE WHITAKER

Times Columnist

It's easy to imagine that changing a city begins with million-dollar contracts, city council approvals, cranes and construction crews. That vision can be so intimidating that as residents we don't bother taking the first step.

But meaningful change often starts with something much simpler: a few curious people asking why things are the way they are and wondering what else might be possible.

Sometimes, transforming a place begins with civic power.

That's what happens when ordinary people pay attention to their surroundings, open their eyes and ears to what's happening around them and decide to help shape the community they call home.

We can make Stratford better through everyday actions: walking or biking, taking public transit, supporting neighbourhood businesses, picking up a piece of litter, planting trees or native gardens, attending civic meetings and getting involved in community-led improvement projects.

None of these actions will produce an instant citywide makeover. But collectively, these small acts add up. They build pride, connection and the sense that we are all responsible for the place we share.

It's also important to speak up especially when something concerns us.

Recently, a Stratford downtown resident shared that she no longer feels safe walking around the city. She is particularly con-

cerned about the growing number of unhoused people in the downtown core, some of whom are living with mental health challenges. She told me that she rarely goes out without her husband and is even considering moving away.

It is a serious concern, and it deserves a compassionate and constructive conversation. Feeling unsafe is not something to dismiss, but neither is the need to support vulnerable people in our community. These issues are complicated, and they won't be solved by slogans, blame or wishful thinking.

It was suggested to her to bring together a group of residents and business owners to discuss possible solutions. As it turns out, that was all the encouragement she needed. She has already started planning a group discussion.

That's civic power in action: noticing a problem, finding others who care and creating a space to work toward solutions.

A young man preparing to start Stratford Intermediate School

this fall was concerned about the safety of street crossings, especially for fellow students, so he approached Mayor Ritsma with his idea. He suggested adding a crosswalk at York and Huron Streets to make it safer for students crossing during lunch head popular lunch spots; Mr Kim's, the Little Kitchen and Jenn and Larry's. As well the crosswalk would make it safer for the many headed to the Shakespearean Gardens, as well as residents going to the bus stop.

The suggested solution of going under the bridge doesn't work for the elderly and those with accessibility issues. As well, the route isn't well maintained in the winter.

Noting that drivers often rush around the corner, he also suggested a flashing light on Ontario Street to alert drivers to the upcoming pedestrian crossing.

Here's another idea for making Stratford better. Cities always seem to be short of money, especially for transformative projects that don't fit the mandate of cit-

ies. For with the financial means why not set aside a portion of your estate to benefit Stratford for years to come? Think of it as your legacy to the community.

The Community Foundation works thoughtfully with donors to create funds tailored to their wishes. Donors can determine the fund's total value, decide whether only the interest will be distributed annually, or allocate the money equally over a set number of years. Donors can even specify which areas of the city or which community priorities should benefit.

Changing a city isn't about pointing fingers at politicians. Yes, we do need to ensure that they are accountable but it's also about becoming engaged, staying active and making steady contributions to the kind of city we want Stratford to be. Big projects have their place, yet the future of a city begins with something much less dramatic: a conversation, a garden, a public meeting, a helping hand – or one person deciding to get involved.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US

CALL 519.622.2341 OR EMAIL STRATFORDTIMES@GMAIL.COM

Opinion

You don't have to earn your good days



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

When you live with chronic illness, a good day can feel like a gift.

You wake up and perhaps the pain is a little quieter. Your energy is better than usual. Your mind feels clearer. Maybe you slept reasonably well, or your body simply seems more cooperative. Whatever the reason, you realize with relief: Today might be a good day.

Then something interesting happens.

Instead of enjoying it, we start making a list.

We think about the laundry

that has piled up, the groceries we haven't bought, the emails waiting for replies, the rooms that need cleaning and the errands we've postponed. Suddenly, this precious good day becomes an opportunity to catch up on everything our illness prevented us from doing earlier.

Before long, we're racing against our own bodies.

Those of us living with chronic illness can easily fall into this pattern. On difficult days, we may have no choice but to postpone things. Then guilt creeps in. We look around at everything that hasn't been accomplished and promise ourselves that we'll take care of it as soon as we feel better.

So when that better day finally arrives, we feel we have to earn it by being productive.

But what if we don't?

What if a good day is allowed to be simply a good day?

This can be surprisingly difficult. Many of us were taught to value productivity. Getting things done feels responsible. Resting when we are capable of doing something can feel waste-

ful, particularly when chronic illness already requires so much rest.

Yet there is an important difference between using our energy and using all of it.

Having more energy today doesn't necessarily mean we need to spend every bit of it. Feeling better doesn't create an obligation to make up for yesterday. Nor do we have to prove – to ourselves or anyone else – that we're making good use of the hours when our symptoms ease.

Perhaps we can approach good days differently.

Instead of immediately asking, "What can I get done today?" we might ask, "What would make today feel good?"

Maybe that means accomplishing one task that has been bothering us and then stopping. Perhaps it means sitting outside with a cup of tea, taking a gentle walk, reading, listening to music, working on a hobby, or spending time with someone we love.

It may even mean doing absolutely nothing remarkable.

For someone living with

chronic illness, an ordinary pleasant day can be extraordinary enough.

There is another reason to resist turning better days into productivity marathons. Many of us know what can happen afterward. We accomplish far more than our bodies are accustomed to, feel pleased with everything we've managed to do, and then discover that we've overextended ourselves. The following day – or several days – may become much harder.

That can create a frustrating cycle: difficult day, better day, overdoing it, difficult day again.

We may not always be able to prevent symptom fluctuations. Chronic illness is unpredictable, and even careful pacing cannot guarantee how we'll feel tomorrow. But we can choose not to deliberately empty the tank simply because it happens to be fuller today.

Perhaps a better day can include a little productivity and a little pleasure.

Fold some laundry, but leave the rest. Answer two emails instead of ten. Do one errand rath-

er than trying to complete the entire list. Then use some of that remaining energy for something that reminds you that your life is about more than managing an illness and maintaining a household.

Good days deserve memories, too.

They deserve laughter, fresh air, conversations, books, music, creativity, quiet afternoons and whatever else brings you contentment. We don't have to save those things until everything else is finished.

Most importantly, we don't have to feel guilty about enjoying ourselves when we feel well enough to do so.

The next time you wake up and realize your body is giving you a little more room to live, resist the urge to immediately fill that room with chores.

Do what truly needs doing. Leave something for another day. Keep a little energy for yourself.

You don't have to earn a good day. Sometimes the best thing you can do with one is simply enjoy it.

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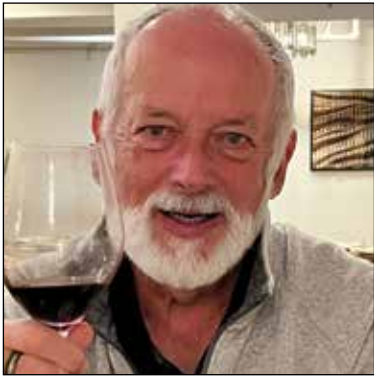
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Mr.Sub
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Shell - Downie St
Shell - Erie St
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: "Living in the border": a museum captures the new reality



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

Those of us who live in southern Ontario have become very aware of our proximity to a country that was once our friend, but now, we're not so sure. We are familiar with the border between Canada and the United States, and with the new-found stress of crossing that border... or choosing not to.

But even living this close to our American neighbours, we Ontarians all share one reality – the United States is removed from us by bodies of water... Great Lakes, or the rivers that connect them, or the St. Lawrence. This may provide a certain sense of safe separation.

This is not the case in the communities in Québec's Eastern Townships, where the U.S. state of Vermont is, well... right there. A footstep away. But a footstep that is increasingly fraught with stress.

We learned a lot about this during a recent visit to the town of Stanstead. Stanstead is as far south as you can go in Québec, and still be in Canada. It abuts the American community of Derby Line. There are properties that straddle the border.

Once upon a time – in fact, for most of the history of these communities – they were truly neighbours, able to walk next door for a coffee, shop in stores regardless of



The Colby-Curtis Museum in Stanstead, Québec – a border town striving to maintain neighbourly connections across an increasingly challenging border.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

border, join together in community organizations, have international family dinners.

Today, it is not so easy.

The story of the not-so-undefended border is told well in an exhibit on the second floor of Stanstead's Colby-Curtis Museum.

Ironically, the first-floor exhibits are all about the Colbys – an American family that moved to Canada in 1869, not out of any protest against the U.S., but because business prospects looked better here. They happily lived with a foot in both countries. Several generations of the family owned the house for 140 years, and eventually, the home was donated to the community to be used as a museum.

The exhibits on the first floor are interesting, documenting the changing times experienced by the Colbys through the decades.

But it was the "Living on the Border" temporary exhibit on the second floor that really caught

our attention. There, we encountered the contemporary stories of local residents trying to maintain cross-border friendships in an environment clearly designed to discourage such international conviviality.

Perhaps the best-known example in Stanstead is the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. The library, which straddles the Canada-U.S. border, was opened in 1908, with the expressed intention of providing the border communities with a centre for learning and cultural enrichment. The entrance was in Vermont, used freely by Stanstead's Canadian residents for 117 years... until the U.S. President changed the rules in 2025, insisting that Canadians had to clear customs each time they wanted to enter the library.

Clearing customs is no longer simple – local Canadian residents often find themselves being searched during their crossing.

There has long been a painted line on the floor of the library, marking the international border. It was intended as a symbol of cooperation, but we learned during our visit to the Colby-Curtis Museum that in October 2025, when the new rules came into effect, officers of U.S. Homeland Security stood with one foot in each country and chanted "51st State!"

But the Canadians refuse to abandon the long history of neighbourly cooperation. This summer, a new entrance to the library was opened on the Canadian side, and once again, residents from both countries can use the library without enduring a border crossing. Once inside, visitors can access the entire building. For now, at least.

You can tell that, even as they strive for community togetherness, the residents on both sides of the border are nervous. One group featured in the exhibit is the Choromondo women's choir, which in-

cludes singers from Québec and Vermont. They continue to meet and sing, but it is not always easy. Invited to do a concert in the Opera House that is the second floor of the library, some of the Canadian members were reluctant to set foot in the U.S., and their American colleagues understood.

But the concert proceeded. Choir member Abigail Stockman, an American, is quoted in the exhibit: "We were standing on the stage, because the stage is in Canada... The audience is in the U.S.... we were singing together in defiance of Trump's words, and of the international disrespect that he has paid to our Canadian friends and neighbours."

The exhibit includes a number of examples of ongoing connections, including an international curling club, and mutual cooperation between the fire departments of Stanstead and Derby Line. But concern remains. Museum Director Samuel Gaudreau-Lalande says it is never certain that such mutual efforts will be able to continue. But he expressed hope. "Members of the community say, 'No, we are united, we stand together'... In a time of struggle, you realize what is important to you."

As we left the museum, we drove a couple of blocks south, to an ominous border crossing. We u-turned, and followed our GPS instructions to our next stop. It took us through the village of Beebe, officially part of Stanstead, where on the left side of an intersection there were crossing gates, warning signs, and people in uniform. We turned right.

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 museum was created to tell the story of international cooperation over the decades. The first floor exhibits continue to do so; the second floor deals with the current, stressful challenges.



This photo of the Choromondo women's choir, part of the "Living on the Border" exhibition, shows the members of the choir who live in Stanstead, Québec, and Derby Line, Vermont.

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

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

JOIN US FOR SUMMER AT KNOX

**Knox Presbyterian Church
142 Ontario St., Stratford**

August events include Book Club on Tuesdays, drop in watercolour painting on Wednesdays, Stained Glass Tours on Thursday - all starting at 10:30 a.m. Free community dinner on August 19 at 5 p.m! Visit <https://pccweb.ca/knoxstratford/> or call 519-271-0373 for more details! Everyone welcome!

STEPS FOR SUPPORT

Every Tuesday morning and once a month on a Monday afternoon. Hosted by Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth www.rotaryhospice.ca Stratford Location

This walking group is an opportunity for people who are grieving to connect while walking alongside others who are bereaved. Contact Jaclyn at sw@rotaryhospice.ca to learn more and register. This is a free program.

CAREGIVER CONNECTION

2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month at 1-2:30 p.m.

Arden Park Hotel

Caregiver Connection is a group for caregivers supporting someone with a life-limiting illness or decline due to aging. Learn about community resources, caregiver tools, and talk with others on a similar journey. All caregivers welcome whether you're a spouse, family member, friend, etc. supporting someone from near or far. Contact 226-921-7314 or referrals@rotaryhospice.ca to register. Free program. Hosted by Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth - www.rotaryhospice.ca

YOUTH AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Mondays, 3:00-4:45 p.m., September 14/26-June 21/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free drop-in for students aged 11-18. Join us for snacks, board games, video games, and connection! Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

GRIEF SHARE

Stratford Christian Reformed Church, 190 Athone Crescent (parking on the upper level)

September 14 - December 14

Monday 1:00-2:30pm

When a loved one dies, it can feel like you're alone. Few people understand how painful & isolating your grief can be. At GriefShare, you'll find a safe, comforting place where you can talk with others about your grief. Contact: griefstratfordcrgroup2627@gmail.com Register: griefshare.org/findagroup

STRATFORD SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING

Monday, Sept. 28; 7:30-9:15 p.m.

St. Paul's Anglican Church 9 Douro St. (at Waterloo)

Free Open House class

For information contact stratfordscd@gmail.com or (519) 272-1398

CFUW: MEET THE WOMEN CANDIDATES FOR THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Tuesday, Sept. 29; 7pm

Stratford Intermediate School, 60 St Andrews St.

Moderated panel - everyone welcome!

YOUTH LUNCH PERIOD PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., September 30/26-June 16/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free drop-in for high school students. Join us for snacks, games, connection (and occasional pizza parties!).

Questions?

www.yfcstratford.com

info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

PURE HEART PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Wednesdays, 3:00-4:30 p.m., September 30/26-June 16/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free art program for students aged 11-18. Join us for discussions, guest artists, art instruction, and more! Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

AUTUMN IN THE WOODLOT

Saturday, October 3 from 3:00-4:00 pm

Raindate: Sunday, October 4

Sawyer Woodlot: 6100 Line 12, West Perth (Just North of Kirkton)

Hosted by Sawyer Preservation Woodlot Association

Join a local naturalist Denise Iszczuk from C.O.R.E Nature Experiences for a free, fun, family-friendly walk to discover the sights and sounds of the woodlot in autumn. Along the way, learn how to identify common trees and discover why trees are so important to a healthy forest. Come ready to explore, ask questions, and enjoy the beauty of the woodlot as it comes alive with the colours, sounds and surprises of fall!

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday October 5; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: “The Four-Season Gardener – Getting Ahead for Spring”, Kim Hutten and Marilyn Park, Grand Erie Master

Gardeners. Learn about winter sowing, early seed starting, and seasonal planning. Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, October 6, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

93 Morgan St., Stratford

Speaker – Jaci Sinclair, of Gentle Awakenings.

Learn about Chair Yoga and it's healing supports

Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

ANNUAL PUMPKINFEST

Morningside Adult Community,

10 Homestead Place, New Hamburg

Saturday, October 10; 9-12 p.m.

Free admission and hot cider.

Live music, no crowds, pumpkins, bake table, fresh flower centerpieces, small & bulk root veg, apples, kale, squash.

LONDON ORCHID SOCIETY

Sunday, October 18; 2 to 4 pm

Richards Memorial Church, 360 Edgeworth Avenue, London

Meeting Topic: Deb Boersma from Windsor, An Orchid Expedition on the Rio Negro, Brazil

The London Orchid Society meets the third Sunday of each month. Join us October 18, 2026 at 2:00pm for Deb Boersma from Windsor, ON. Her presentation is An Orchid Expedition on the Rio Negro, Brazil deep into the Amazon Rainforest. Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting for more information at www.londonorchidsociety.com; contact Daryl at 519-666-2927.

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY CIRCUIT BOOK (STAMP) FAIR

Saturday, October 24, 2026

Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street, Woodstock

10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Free Admission & Parking

Stop in and buy some stamps and meet fellow stamp collectors.

About 8 participating stamp clubs. Contact: dheaton3e3@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB [L2S]

Monthly on Sundays, 2-4 p.m.

First meeting Oct. 25 at Griffith Auditorium, Woodland Towers.

Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/hour, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamanagement.com/l2s

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRES

Friday, November 13; 6 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

November 13 – The next Stratford Legion Friday Night Euchre is Friday Nov. 13th. Sign up your team of 2 for \$20 by calling the Legion at 519-271-4540, Dave at 519-703-6544 or Anne at 519-301-0914. Doors open at 6 p.m., games start at 6:30 p.m.

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

Crossword

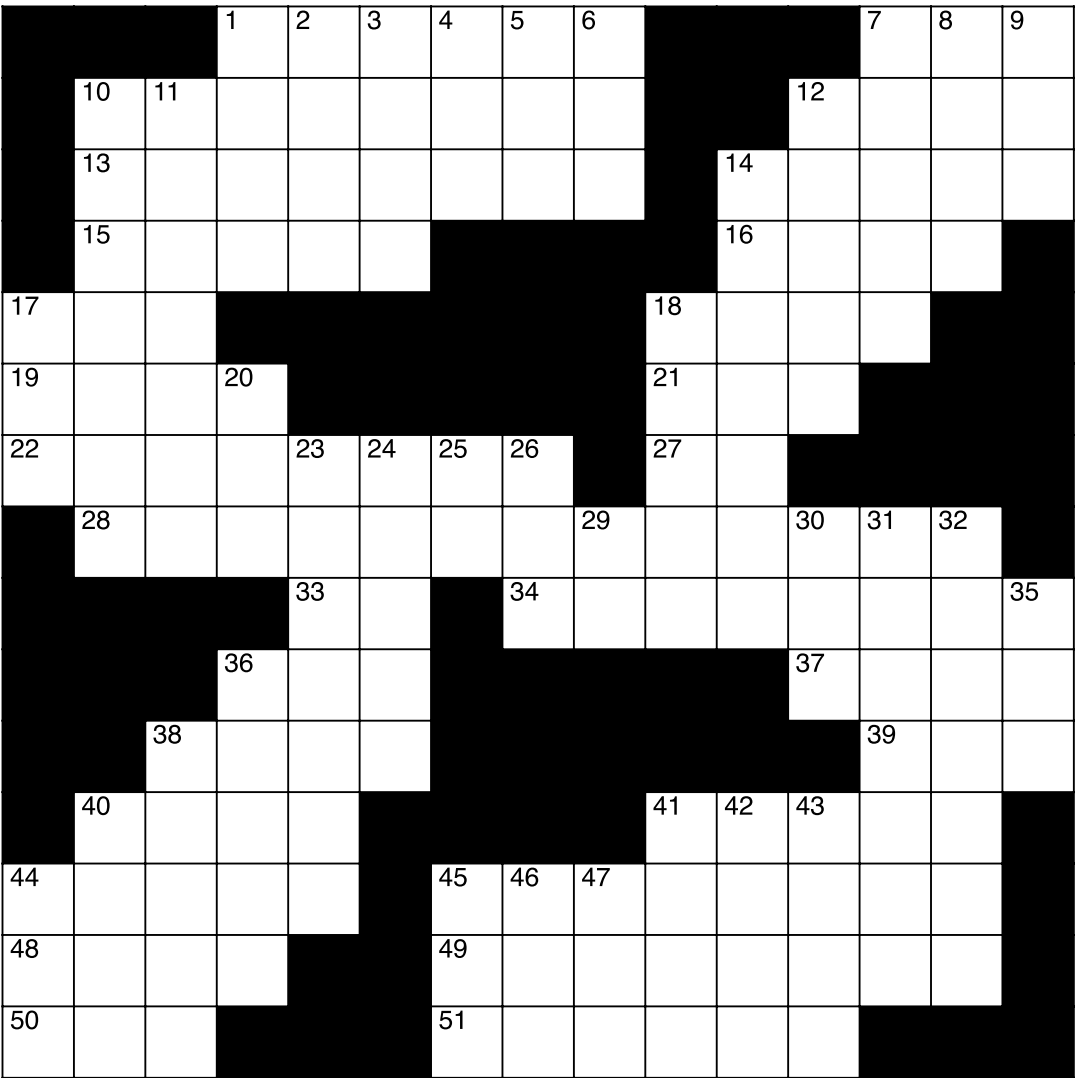
CLUES ACROSS

- 1. A place for worship
- 7. Referee declaration
- 10. Torsos
- 12. Used to introduce something
- 13. Healing method
- 14. Takes to the sea
- 15. Make law
- 16. French coastal city
- 17. Hawaiian dish
- 18. Young of domestic cattle
- 19. Women's undergarments
- 21. 60-minute intervals (abbr.)
- 22. One after another
- 27. It's a hot topic these days
- 28. Folk band frontman
- 33. They precede C
- 34. Heavenly
- 36. Fiddler crabs
- 37. Major Hindu deity
- 38. Hebrew given name
- 39. Cost per mile
- 40. ___ Romeo, car
- 41. Rural municipality in Manitoba
- 44. Narratives
- 45. "A tragedy had ___ him"
- 48. Iranian city
- 49. Praises publicly
- 50. Founding Father Franklin
- 51. Herbal tea

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Indian unit of mass
- 2. "Tears in Heaven" singer Clapton

- 3. Part of a sailing vessel
- 4. Part of (abbr.)
- 5. Polynesian garland of flowers
- 6. Keyboard key
- 7. One who steals
- 8. Large oven
- 9. Former CIA
- 10. Idea
- 11. Solomon Islands capital
- 12. Afrikaans
- 14. Remove thatch
- 17. Television network
- 18. Jalen Brunson is one
- 20. Title of respect
- 23. Flowering trees
- 24. Occurring in a tube
- 25. Exists
- 26. Woman (French)
- 29. Expression of doubt
- 30. NHL legend Bobby
- 31. Accomplished
- 32. Makes slightly wet
- 35. National Assn. of Manufacturers
- 36. Not sated
- 38. Poe's middle name
- 40. Swiss river
- 41. Rhythmic pattern in Indian music
- 42. "Shane" actor Ladd
- 43. Popular whodunit board game
- 44. Bar bill
- 45. Ballplayer's tool
- 46. Indicates near
- 47. Feet per second



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Here For Now Theatre review: *Hypothetical Baby* is an anxiety inducing trip down the abortion rabbit hole

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Rachel Cairns' one-woman play, *Hypothetical Baby*, is an uncomfortable and disorganized look inside Cairns' mind as she recounts her experience seeking out an abortion to terminate an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy.

It is uncomfortable because abortion is still one of those subjects most of us don't speak openly about, despite it being legal in Canada since 1969. It is disorganized because Cairns is still seeking a suitable beginning and a satisfying conclusion to a story that has neither.

Yet this play, the latest rendition of which was presented at Here For Now Theatre in Stratford from Sept. 2-13, is an unflinching and unwavering retelling of a time in the playwright's life during which the polarizing opinions of doctors, her boyfriend, her mother, strangers on the internet, abortion clinic staff and Cairns herself spiral into a ball of moral ambiguity centred on questions about what it means to be alive and whether the life of an unborn fetus is worth more than that of a pregnant person.

Cairns returns again and again to the question of why she decided to terminate her pregnancy, which boils down to a lack of financial stability, the desire to estab-

lish herself as an actor and an insecurity in her relationship. She defends that decision from a doctor who openly advocates against abortion, a boyfriend who struggles to understand why she doesn't want a baby with him and distances himself from her, and strangers on the internet who respond to her anger and heightened anxiety with calm coolness, making arguments against abortion that sometimes ring true on a purely emotional level.

At the same time, Cairns re-enacts conversations with her mother about her own abortions in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when abortion was legalized in Canada but was still very much carried out in secret and in unsafe conditions.

While the moments of anxiety, confusion, anger and uncertainty around her decision to have an abortion were underscored by changes in lighting, soundscape and projected news articles on the sparse set's backdrop, Cairns' portrayal of the physical pain and extreme discomfort associated with medical abortion – a pain her mother tells her is similar to labour – is very real and very hard to watch.

Because this story is a personal retelling of her own experiences, Cairns is clearly able to harness the emotions and physical pain she felt before, during and after her abortion – and perhaps still to this day – making this play one of the most believ-



(HERE FOR NOW THEATRE PHOTO)

Rachel Cairns in her one-woman show, *Hypothetical Baby*, at Here For Now Theatre in Stratford.

able and uncomfortably real performances I've seen this year.

Though we in the audience are left to confront our own personal opinions about abortion, the play leaves us with one clear message: if we create a society where prospective parents have the resources and support they need to raise their children,

regardless of socio-economic status, the need for abortion wouldn't be as great as it is today.

A little food for thought from a play that has, in my opinion, cemented itself as an important piece of the conversation around abortion.

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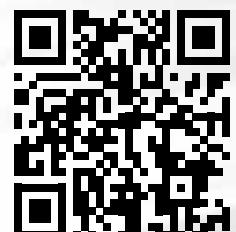
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