

STRATFORD TIMES

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Stratford has a new year shuttle bus shuffle

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Just days after popular bus service Onexbus announced the ceasing of its Stratford line, another private organization announced a new stop for the Festival City, filling in a gap that had just erupted.

FlixBus, a fast-growing intercity bus service, announced a new stop in Stratford on Feb. 3. The new line connects Stratford to Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph and Kitchener, offering access to the Greater Toronto Area.

In an announcement from the company, Stratford's position as an educational hub (with Conestoga College, UWaterloo and the Stratford Chefs School) as well as its arts and tourism draws were highlighted as the onus for expansion.

"This launch marks just the start of our continued expansion across Canada in 2026," said Karina Frayter, head of communications for Flix North America, in a media release. "By adding Stratford into (our growing) network, we're improving year-round, car-free access to a major cultural and education hub while creating more convenient travel options for both residents and visitors."

Onexbus had been offering a similar service for about two years, first announcing its service in late 2023. At the time it was meant to fill the gap left by the ending of the pilot Go Train service that same year. When asked

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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Protesters listen as members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)'s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) decry the funding deficits of Ontario's hospitals.

Unions seeks \$3.2 billion to fix health-care deficits, secure long-term funding

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As snow began to blanket Stratford and area, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)'s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) held a rally outside of Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae's office. Kevin Cook, first vice-president of OCHU-CUPE, said they were there for one simple reason.

"We care," Cook told the rally members, who numbered just over a dozen. "We care about our patients, we care about our co-workers and we care about the future of pub-

lic health care."

More specifically, the Feb. 3 rally was in opposition to media reports that hospitals should expect annual funding increases of two per cent, half of what the sector has received in recent years and a third of what is needed to cover rising costs.

In a mid-January release, Anthony Dale, president and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), warned its members that "there are no easy choices ahead."

"Unfortunately, many hospitals are also grappling with significant challenges," said Dale. "Many are projecting

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Union members ask for \$3.2 billion to clear health-care deficits, multi-year funding commitment

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

year-end deficits, have eroded their working capital, and in the absence of certainty about their revenues, cannot properly plan for the future. Costs for the sector have been rising by about six per cent per year, primarily due to Ontario's growing population, its aging population and inflation, in general. In recent years, the sector

has received annual increases of approximately four per cent, leaving the sector with a persistent and deepening structural deficit of approximately \$1 billion."

As Michael Hurley, president of OCHU-CUPE, said, the status quo is not enough.

"Six per cent a year just to do what we're doing now," he said to gathering members on Feb. 3. "Six per cent

keeps 2,000 people on stretchers, 75,000 people waiting for surgeries. We're saying none of that is good enough. Clear the backlog of surgeries, get people into hospital beds, open the ERs, add staff. That's what we're here for."

OCHU-CUPE is asking the provincial government to add 6,200 staffed beds, an increase of \$3.2 billion for core hospital funding to clear deficits and hire additional staff, to increase funding for hospitals at the predicted six per cent annual growth and to institute a multi-year funding commitment.

In response to the rally, MPP Rae said that local health care is a priority.

"Rural hospitals and healthcare workers are essential to keeping our communities safe and healthy, and I continue to support the important work they do," said Rae in an emailed statement. "Through Budget 2025, Ontario increased base hospital funding by four per cent, and locally, since 2022 we've secured more than \$181 million in net new healthcare funding for Perth-Wellington. I will continue to advocate for Perth-Wellington's fair share of provincial healthcare funding."

The 2026 Ontario budget has not been released and is expected to be tabled this spring. Last year's budget came mid-May.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)'s Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) stand outside of Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae's Stratford office, protesting rumored cuts to funding.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Michael Hurley, president of CUPE-OCHU, tells the crowd why they are there: to demand more from the province.

Stratford has a new year shuttle bus shuffle

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

about Onexbus' closure, representatives of the company said the Stratford trips have been suspended due to "operational requirements," but did not further elaborate when asked.

Mayor Martin Ritsma informed the Times the problem came down to ridership. From his conversations with Onexbus' ownership, there just weren't enough riders to justify the fuel, insurance and maintenance costs.

"I'm disappointed that Onex can't continue because they were good," Ritsma said. "They were a small company, a family company, trying to make it go, but (I'm) pleased that there is another bus service that's looking to pick up where Onex left off."

Ritsma has long been an advocate for interregional transit. The City of Stratford continues to operate the PC Connect service though municipal and provincial funding (even when Perth County ended the rural route due to growing costs) and he has personally delegated at various governmental levels for more rural public transport.

Reflecting on the balance between public needs and private markets, Ritsma said that tension was a priority during this year's Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA)'s annual conference, where he and other Perth County municipalities advocated for more funding for PC Connect. In his words, public and private transit are needed for a robust service for residents.

"Our ridership was 22,500 individuals, and that's continuing to grow," Ritsma said. "And that was our message loud and clear to the Minister of Transportation when we were at ROMA, saying this is something our residents are saying we need, but we can't float that totally on our tax levy, neither."

The new service from FlixBus launches Feb. 9 with two daily departures in each direction. Like all of Stratford's public transit, it will arrive and depart from the Cooper Terminal.

For more information, or to book a ticket, visit <https://www.flixbus.com/>.

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Editorial

A Taste of Argentina: A mother-daughter evening at Café Bouffon



AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Café Bouffon hosted one of its latest pop-up dinners on Thursday, January 29: A Study of Argentina: Cocina y Vin. My youngest daughter, Hailey Modaragamage, and I were thrilled to attend the evening.

Upon arrival, we were greeted warmly by the staff and seated in one of Café Bouffon's cozy booths – a perfect refuge from the -20° Celsius winter night.

Since Hailey is only 17, she was treated to dealcoholized wine pairings and creative mocktails throughout the evening, while I enjoyed the wine pairings carefully selected to complement each of the five courses.

The first course, Chimichur-

ri-spiced carpaccio with a fresh herb and arugula salad topped with shaved parmesan, was beautifully plated. I savoured a glass of Carlos Basso Dos Fincas 2023 Torrontés from Cafayate, Salta, while Hailey enjoyed the dealcoholized version, which she described as fabulous. This light, fresh start set the tone for our culinary journey through Argentina.

Next came a tomato toast with burnt tomato, goat cheese, anchovy and chili oil. I initially wondered if Hailey would enjoy the salty anchovies, but she loved it as much as I did. This course was paired with Cateña 2023 High Mountain Vines Chardonnay from Mendoza.

Our favourite course of the evening was the empanada mendocina: crispy pastry filled with ground meat, onions, butter, scallions, egg, green olives and raisins, served with aji molido mayo. I paired mine with Susana Balbo Crios 2022 Cabernet Franc from Valle de Uco, Mendoza.

The main course – a perfectly cooked skirt steak with squash and beet purée, and a side of papas fritas provenzales – was served with Versado 2019 'Co-

bos Road' Old Vines Malbec from Luján de Cuyo. Hailey opted for a fancy mojito mocktail, which she thoroughly enjoyed alongside her meal.

Dessert was an indulgent Argentinian rogel: thin, crunchy pastry layered with dulce de leche and topped with meringue. I paired it with Stratus 2023 Botrytis Sémillon, a crisp, sweet wine that pleasantly surprised me, as I am normally not a dessert wine lover.

The evening, inspired by traditional Argentinian home cooking from sous chef Joaquin Garcia and his father, Gus Garcia, was unforgettable. Alongside sommelier Steve Doyle and the restaurant's attentive staff, we enjoyed a truly unique dining experience. The availability of non-alcoholic pairings made the evening inclusive and even more enjoyable.

Café Bouffon's pop-up dinner series is a rotating culinary event featuring seasonal menus, regional wines and guest chefs. Each one-night-only event offers diners a new and memorable experience.

For more information and tickets, visit Café Bouffon's pop-up events page.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Sous chef Joaquin Garcia, head chef Isaac McCabe and Gus Garcia created an unforgettable night at the recent pop-up dinner series at Café Bouffon.

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Quote of the Week

"... There'd be five people there. Next year, he'd come and there'd be 15, and the year after that, he'd come and there'd be 50, and the year after that, they would be electing MPs to go to Ottawa. That's how you build a grassroots movement."

– Ontario Green Party leader Mike Schreiner, on advice Preston Manning once gave him about growing political movements.

STRATFORDTIMES

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1. Everyone has a story
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3. Good news beats bad news
4. A Newspaper should be a community effort (contribute to your local paper!)
5. Newspapers document history
6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Police on the hunt for suspect wanted in credit card fraud

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Stratford Police Service is asking anyone with information about a recent credit card fraud to come forward.

On Jan. 13, police responded to a late-night theft of a wallet on Home Street in the city. The wallet contained personal identity and financial cards, the latter of which were used at the Erie Street 7-11 just shortly after the theft.

Anyone with information is being asked to call 519-271-4141 ext. 2, or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or www.p3tips.com.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO) Surveillance footage of the suspect police believe is involved in a January theft and credit card fraud has been released to help identify the suspect.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The City of Stratford has continued to plow through the snow continually falling over the region. In a Jan. 30 social media post, the city thanked public works employees for their hard work, highlighting that more than 1,000 truckloads and 12,000 cubic metres of snow have been removed from city streets.

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Salvation Army raises money and spirits with annual lunch



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The Salvation Army staff that makes sure the annual Kettle Campaign runs smoothly includes Raelyn Marshall, Elaine Honcharsky, Rick Honcharsky, Jennifer Morris, Nancy Argyle and Michael Tigani.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A large crowd gathered on Friday at the Salvation Army in Stratford to celebrate over coffee and lunch the incredible total that was taken in as part of the Christmas Kettle Campaign this past December – about \$440,000.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

These are five very dedicated volunteers who share the duties for many hours throughout December as keepers of local Salvation Army Kettles. They include Wayne Faulhafer, Harold Switzer, Murray Schlotzhauer, Bob and Clare Schlotzhauer.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

From left: Catherine Higenell, Mike Dunn and Wayne Faulhafer



Community newspapers are NOT junk mail.

Community newspapers are trusted local voices that keep Canadians informed, connected and engaged. They are local businesses that report news that matters most to the communities they serve. CUPW and Canada Post need to ensure that the processing/delivery of unaddressed community newspapers resumes immediately.

Local Salvation Army campaign raises more than \$440,000 for community support

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Salvation Army in Stratford recently celebrated local volunteers at its volunteer appreciation luncheon, where kettle volunteers gathered to share lunch, stories and learn about the impact of the 2025 Christmas kettle campaign.

This year, the Salvation Army surpassed its goal of \$385,000, raising more than \$440,000 for local programs and services. Funds were directed toward the operating budget, including food purchases and programs such as the food bank and an income tax clinic.

“Surpassing our goal was not expected, but a pleasant surprise,” said Jennifer Morris, community and family services manager. “We had lots of community partners step up and make sure everyone had a Christmas, whether that was food, toys or hygiene items. We even had pet toys this year.”

Morris said the demographic of people needing support continues to shift.

“We’re seeing more people who are in retirement accessing support,” she said. “The money they have through their pension isn’t covering everything anymore. We also see people who are working, but even their income isn’t enough to cover

their needs.”

The Salvation Army raises its entire annual budget during the Christmas season. This year, across Stratford, St. Marys and Mitchell, the campaign raised a total of \$440,968.48.

Stratford

In Stratford, Canadian Tire raised \$12,446, Food Basics raised \$19,903, the downtown LCBO raised \$16,839, the Stratford Mall raised \$10,748, No Frills raised \$10,600, Sobeys raised \$18,212, Walmart raised \$25,234, Zehrs raised \$28,378, and other donations – including mail-in and online contributions – totalled \$99,179. The Stratford campaign raised \$242,283.

An average of 123 households per month accessed Salvation Army services in Stratford, with more than 55,125 pounds of food distributed. Volunteer hours totalled 2,426. In 2025, the Stratford Salvation Army provided 12 feline-friend vouchers for spay and neuter services, completed 313 income tax returns, distributed 65 bags of diapers, sent one child to camp, provided 17 backpacks filled with school supplies, distributed 184 Christmas hampers and 1,000 food hampers and issued five emergency food hampers.

St. Marys

In St. Marys, Foodland raised \$11,025, the Independent grocery store raised



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

From left: Pierre Chateauvert, Jim Hodgins, Lynda Hodgins, Christine Weadick and Ray Weadick

\$23,162, the LCBO raised \$699, Scotiabank raised \$16,149, and mail-in donations totalled \$89,252, for a grand total of \$142,141.

The St. Marys Salvation Army serves an average of 70 households per month and distributes more than 36,025 pounds of food annually. In 2025, volunteers contributed more than 858 hours.

Throughout the year, 694 food hampers were provided to community members in

need, along with 84 bags of diapers, 121 Christmas hampers and nine backpacks filled with school supplies. Four children were sent to camp, eight feline-friend vouchers for spay and neuter services were issued, 49 income tax returns were completed and 22 emergency food hampers were distributed.

For more information or to donate, visit www.salarmycfs.ca Local Salvation Army campaign raises more than \$440,000 for community support

Free tax clinics help residents unlock benefits

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For residents of Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County, filing income taxes can be stressful, confusing and, for some, financially out of reach.

Stratford social services is working to remove those barriers through its annual free income tax clinics, a long-running program that offers low-income residents an opportunity to have their tax returns completed accurately and on time by professionals. Organized by Stratford social services, which coordinates the provision of social services for Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County, the clinics have been operating for many years and continue to be an essential service for people who may otherwise delay or avoid filing their taxes altogether.

“The primary purpose is to connect individuals with a service where they know their taxes are done properly and at the right time,” said Alex Burgess, manager of Ontario Works with Stratford social services. “When taxes are filed accurately, it gives people access to a lot of benefits they may not even realize they qualify for.”

Burgess said cost, access to computers and the complexity of the tax system can dissuade people from filing, especially when documentation piles up or deadlines are missed. By running the clinics early in tax season and partnering with local accounting firms, Stratford social service can help residents avoid those pitfalls.

“Having professionals do it means they can make sure documents are complete and credits are maximized,” Burgess said. “It takes the worry out of it.”

The benefits go far beyond a potential tax refund. Burgess said filing taxes is the precursor to many federal and provincial supports including HST credits, the Ontario Trillium Benefit and the Canada Child Benefit.

“If you don’t file your taxes, your Canada Child Benefit could be delayed or stopped altogether,” he said. “HST credits, one-time government payments; all of those are tied to tax filings. Filing sets people up for the entire year.”

While some people assume those receiving social assistance don’t pay taxes, Burgess said that’s a misconception.

“Everybody pays taxes every day through purchases,” he said. “And once accountants look at things like rent receipts, medical expenses or disability tax credits, people are often surprised by what they’re entitled to.”

The free clinics are available for current-year returns to low-income individuals and couples living in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County. Those receiving Ontario Works or ODSP are eligible with a T5007 slip. Income thresholds apply for others, including seniors.

There is no cost to participants, with services provided by Famme & Co. Professional Corporation and McCutchen & Pearce Professional Corporation.

Burgess said the value of having an expert prepare returns can’t be overstated.

“Instead of hoping you got everything right online, you can go to professionals who will do it correctly and at no cost,” he said. “That’s huge.”

Residents must register in advance by Wednesday, March 18, by calling Stratford social services at 519-271-3773 ext. 6208. Appointment times for document drop-off will be scheduled between March 19 and 27.

“The earlier people call, the better,” Burgess said. “Once you get through it once, it’s much less daunting the next time. That first step is often the hardest.”

For many residents, that first step could make all the difference.

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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the birthstone for February?
2. What is commonly known as the “love hormone”?
3. The Patriots and the Seahawks last met at what Superbowl?
4. Who is Lady Whistledown in Bridgerton?
5. What is the meal called that Muslims eat to break their fast at sunset?
6. How many dots are on a six-sided die?
7. What kind of wool do dogs make?
8. What does CBC stand for?
9. A group of caterpillars is called what?
10. Finish the quote "Shall I compare thee to a _____?"

This week’s answers are found on pg. 31

Schreiner visits Stratford for launch of Ontario Green Party constituency association

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Ontario Green Party leader Mike Schreiner shared some words of wisdom during the party's first ever Perth-Wellington constituency meeting, shared to him by an unlikely source: Preston Manning, founder of the right-wing Reform Party of Canada.

"When he started the Reform Movement, he would show up at meetings like this and there'd be five people there," Schreiner shared with the crowd, who numbered more than just five that evening. "Next year, he'd come and there'd be 15, and the year after that, he'd come and there'd be 50, and the year after that, they would be electing MPs to go to Ottawa. That's how you build a grassroots movement. And I think the Green Party of Ontario is about building that grassroots movement and I think – in particular in rural communities – people are hungry, hungry for an MPP that's going to put their community ahead of their heart. And that's exactly what we stand for. That's exactly what we're going to fight for."

Schreiner fielded questions from attendees that night, went over platform and stances of his party, and thanked everyone for their time, praising them for being open to grassroots movements.

The meeting, held on Feb. 2, saw the election of the party's local executive, as



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner was in Stratford Feb. 2 for the local riding's first constituency association meeting.

well as a space for like-minded supporters to mingle and discuss the issues of the day.

Sandra Drygas was acclaimed president, Brian Noble was acclaimed CFO, and Ian Morton, Peter Varty and Grant Drygas were acclaimed as members-at-large, who will guide the party's strategy in the riding for the foreseeable future.

Morton, who is also the current Green Party candidate, said that the establish-

ment of the office was a long time coming. Originally, there was work being done to establish the association until rumours swirled about a potential election and local Greens pivoted to getting Morton ready for a February election.

With the constituency association, Morton hopes they will have better coordination for volunteers and door knocking,

when the next election comes around, and that they build support over time.

"This is just that next step of being able to get out, reach the members in our riding, and be able to hear what their concerns and issues are," Morton told reporters that night. "And try and make connections with them and hear what their problems are in their life. So yes, this is the next step of many, to be able to continue to campaign and continue to push the Green Party forward."

During the last election on Feb. 28, 2025, Morton received 3,299 votes, about 7.5 per cent of the vote and fourth place in the local race.

When asked about the likelihood of Perth-Wellington, a traditionally conservative riding, moving towards the Greens, Morton was optimistic.

"I'm a realist," Morton said. "I understand where we are, but in order to be able to build that vote, we're going to need multiple election cycles to just continue to mobilize, continue to get the message out, and continue to meet voters in our riding and be able to show them that there is an alternative. So while we're looking for big gains, obviously, as much as we can get in the next election, we're going to be realistic. And if we don't win the riding, which at this point, that's a big task, obviously, we're just going to keep doing the work and keep meeting people and keep giving them this alternative that we feel is better."

Boston Pizza Stratford location raising money for Wellspring

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Whether Valentine's Day involves purchasing paper hearts, digital hearts or heart-shaped pizzas at Boston Pizza, the donations will support the local Wellspring chapter.

The Boston Pizza Stratford location on 729 Erie St. Unit A is raising money for Wellspring Stratford, an organization providing support services to cancer patients, survivors and their families. Customers can either purchase a paper heart in-store or digital heart online for a minimum of \$2 up until Feb. 23.

The restaurant will also donate \$1 from every sale of the salted caramel panookie, a cookie skillet and \$1 for pizzas ordered for dine-in, take out and delivery ordered on Valentine's Day. All small and medium-sized pizzas will be made into a heart for the occasion.

"Those four ways that they can help support would be amazing for us and the community and Wellspring," said Ryan Butler, assistant manager.

The paper and digital hearts, which have been available since early January, have been well-received. As of Jan. 31, the day of the interview with the Times, there are between 20 to 25 paper hearts in the restaurant's front lobby and additional digital hearts.

"A lot of people love to donate and have their name at the front, and the kids love to fill it out," Butler said.

Lisa Stacey, office manager of Wellspring Stratford House, is thrilled that the Stratford Boston Pizza picked the organization for the charity of choice. Wellspring does not receive any funding from the government or the United Way, so it is reliant on fundraising and donations.

"Boston Pizza and different organiza-

tions putting on these things just help us take off that edge of how much we need to raise this year," Stacey said. "Whenever we hear that something like this is happening, we're just so grateful that people are thinking of our organization to help out."

Funds raised from Boston Pizza's initiatives will support a variety of Wellspring's no-cost programming like yoga classes, aquafit classes with the YMCA, creative workshops focusing on crafts like art expression and poetry and in-person support groups.

Stacey added that those battling cancer have additional costs like transportation and gas to and from treatments and appointments, including out-of-town services in London and Kitchener, as well as medications.

"If we're offering programs that are for physical and mental health, we want to make sure that we have covered the

cost for people so that it's one last thing that they to think about," she said.

Boston Pizzas across Canada donate to local charities through the heart-shaped pizza sales on Valentine's Day. Previously, the Stratford location supported Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth and a food bank at one of the local high schools.

The restaurant chain used to split half of the funds raised between the local charities and the BP Foundation. This year, 100 per cent of the donations to Stratford's Boston Pizza will support Wellspring. Butler said giving back to local organizations is important to the team.

"It's very important I believe, especially in Stratford. The community's very tight-knit so where a business can support another business it shows integrity in that community and everyone's involvement in it," he said.

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Shadowboxing auction fundraiser returns ahead of second annual Battle of the Sommeliers

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As Gallery Stratford's lineup of sommeliers prepare to do battle at the nearly sold-out second annual Battle of the Sommeliers fundraiser Feb. 26, gallery staff and supporters are preparing to launch another opportunity to support gallery operations and programming with its second annual Shadowbox(ing) Online Art, Items and Experiences Auction.

Set to launch on Feb. 14 and run until the Battle of the Sommeliers on Feb. 26, the auction will feature works by local and well-known artists created for or incorporating eight-by-eight shadow boxes – enclosed display cases traditionally used to show jewellery, medals and other small collectibles, and sometimes used to display dioramas, scenes or special art works.

"The idea of calling it 'Shadowboxing' really comes as a complement to the Battle of the Sommeliers," Gallery Stratford director/curator Robert Windrum said. "... That's four sommeliers who duke it out for best pairings over the course of the evening. And parallel to that is the Shadowboxing online auction. We call it Shadowboxing because it matches the battle which has a sort of boxing theme.

"Last year, which was the inaugural year for this event, we gave artists eight-by-eight-inch shadow boxes and asked them to do something with the shadow box, whether it's just pop an existing work in or create something that is incorporating the whole frame. We got some amazing stuff last year from artists, and the nice thing about the shadow boxes as an option for the online auction is that they're relatively small scale, they're affordable and ... you don't need a huge investment in order to take home work by significant



Robert Windrum shows off some of the shadow-box and other art by local and national artists that will be up for bid during the Shadowbox(ing) Online Art, Items and Experiences Auction Feb. 14-26.

local and nationally recognized artists."

The shadow-box art, Windrum explained, gives participating artists the opportunity to explore different mediums, textures, dimensions and even the display case itself to create entirely unique works of art that don't take up a lot of real estate in successful bidders' homes or offices.

And it's not just shadow-box art up for bid during the auction. Other works of art donated by their artists as well as experience packages, gift certificates to local restaurants, kitchen utensils, fine housewares and more will be available to bid on online, offering a chance for Gallery Stratford supporters from across the country and around the world to support everything the gallery does.

"This really comes out of the tradition

of the 'I Love My Gallery Auction,' which was our signature fundraiser for close to 50 years, and it was massive, and part of the attraction and the benefit that we want to maintain in this event from the 'I Love My Gallery Auction' is that there are accessible items for everybody to bid on," Windrum said. "It's not just a high-end art auction; there's things that anybody would be interested in, whether you actually care about art or not."

Area residents and gallery supporters are invited to Gallery Stratford on Feb. 14 from 4-6 p.m. to celebrate the opening of the second annual Shadowbox(ing) Online Art, Items and Experiences Auction. Admission is free and all are welcome to enjoy a first look at this year's offerings, meet participating artists, donors and sponsors, and savour a wine and charcuterie spread as they preview the full auction collection.

Bidding takes place online using Auction. All available art and items will be on display at Gallery Stratford throughout

the auction period from Feb. 14-26, with free admission to the gallery during this period.

This year's Battle of Sommeliers, which has been expanded to accommodate 90 guests, is nearly sold out, building on the momentum of the event's debut last year. The battleground for the four wine experts to duke it out will be a three-course meal created by Stuart Taylor, owner of Taylor's Delicatessen in downtown Stratford. Different wines will be painstakingly paired with the evening's courses to give guests the ultimate challenge of determining their favourites and selecting this year's winning sommelier.

The sommeliers for the second iteration of the fundraiser event are Waterloo's Rob Milller, known for his work with the Vine Agency, Brix + Mortar and ClearSips; Jonny Kirwin, the owner of Stratford café and wine bar Brch & Wyn; Conor Scully, restaurant manager and sommelier at the Starlight and service instructor at the Stratford Chefs School; and Mike Fish, a certified sommelier with the Stratford Festival and founder of LondonSomm, a private wine experience company.

"That evening is not a stodgy, snooty wine gala," Windrum said. "It's a fun evening. You're voting on who does the best pairing. The sommeliers kind of duke it out and promote themselves and maybe diss their opponents and their choices. And one of the criteria for selecting our sommeliers is they've got to be fun. They've got to be willing to kind of be on stage and put on a show.

"The entertainment of that evening is the sommeliers, so it's a really nice pairing of the dinner on the 26th and the online auction, which opens for bidding the 14th and then closes the night of the dinner."

The Shadowbox(ing) auction will go live on Feb. 14 via the Gallery Stratford website at gallerystratford.on.ca and through the gallery's social media. For more information on The Battle of the Sommeliers and to purchase tickets, visit <https://tinyurl.com/4zfchaxj>.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Tim's Tree Service has been to the rescue many times this winter, as heavy snow and ice persisted over Perth and Huron Counties, weighing on local trees. Pictured here are team members River Chubb, Laura Genkooren, Adrian Rhodes, Emmett Lang and Seth Lang as they worked along Erie Street in Stratford last week.

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Retiring teacher's family sponsoring egg program for Milverton Public School

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The name Mathieson is one well known around Stratford and Perth County. In the Milverton area, the name is probably most recognized for Mrs. Carolyn Mathieson, a teacher at Milverton Public School.

Mathieson, a well-regarded primary teacher, is retiring after a 30-year career across the county – and she and her family are leaving a mark even after she stops working.

While in conversation with her husband Dan (the former mayor of Stratford), he knew of the hard-boiled egg program offered to school students in Perth County, sponsored by county egg farmers. After passing information back and forth, it was decided that the Mathieson family would sponsor the program to students at the Milverton Public School in the future, in honour of Carolyn's time.

When Carolyn heard that's what her husband and two children Kaitlyn and Riley wanted to do, she was thankful, appreciative and happy to have her life of teaching

honoured in "such a way."

Twenty-six of her 30-year career were spent teaching Grade 1 and Grade 2 at the Milverton school, but she also taught at Stratford's Hamlet Public School, Upper Thames and Listowel's Eastdale Collegiate.

Mathieson's path to teaching was natural, following her father's footsteps into the profession. Mr. David Wright spent 30 years teaching, later becoming a school principal at Northwestern Secondary School, Mitchell High School and Central Secondary School. During his long career, he spent time heading up the science and phys-ed departments. He passed away Jan. 16, 2011.

Carolyn told the Times she believes if students are trying to learn what is being taught, they need to have proper nutrition offered by healthy lunches and snacks, and that's what eggs can deliver.

The hard-boiled eggs are delivered regularly to Perth County schools in individual packs (in a box of 48) by local egg farmers.



(DON RAUSER PHOTO)

Times correspondent Gary West poses with Carolyn Mathieson at Milverton Public School, following her retirement from teaching after 30 years.

Local OPP respond to over 100 traffic incidents during severe weather event

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Perth County Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) responded to over 100 traffic related incidents during a severe weather event in Perth County.

Between Jan. 19 and Jan. 25, the county experienced a severe weather event that caused multiple collisions, stranded motorists and road closures including Highway 23 from Palmerston to Elginfield Road and Highway 8 from Stratford to Goderich, as well as numerous side roads throughout the county.

Over the course of the week, OPP officers responded to 45 motor vehicle collisions, 53 traffic hazards and 5 abandoned vehicles.

The OPP would like to extend its appreciation to its emergency services partners, as well as the snow plow and tow truck

operators, for their assistance. These partnerships are essential to maintaining public safety in challenging conditions.

Detachment commander Tyler Stewart noted in a media release, "Last week, Perth County OPP members and our Provincial Communications Centre responded to a severe weather event with professionalism and teamwork, ensuring the continued safety of our roadways."

The OPP also thanked the public for their patience and understanding, as road closures significantly impacted travel and daily routines.

"Road closures are put in place to protect the public and emergency services, please help keep everyone safe and respect all road closures," the release read.

For the most up to date information on road closures please visit Municipal511.ca and follow OPP West Region on Social Media.



(TIMES FILE PHOTO)

Drivers are reminded that there is no overnight parking in the city permitted on any roadway, shoulder or city parking lot between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., unless otherwise designated. Such parking carries a set fine of \$80, or a \$60 voluntary payment if paid within seven days.

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The Split Rail Country Store is a blast from the past – nestled here just on the edge of Stratford

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

If readers have not been to a good old fashioned “country store” in a while, a trip to the northern edge of Stratford on Highway 119 might be an enjoyable stop.

The Split Rail Country Store is a family owned and operated business which got its start in 2008. Owner Amberly Knott explained the store’s name itself came from fencing in past decades, when farmers used cedar rails to line pastures and fields as opposed to wire (sometimes

barbed wire), as they are now.

When walking through the front door, the sweet aroma of molasses used in the store’s horse feed, along with the smell of new leather from the saddles and bridles, brings one’s memory back to the good old days, when every farm had a team of horses and tack hanging on horse stalls.

Here a short list of what you’ll find:

- Western wear that includes cowboy and cowgirl boots and hats, horse feed, horse creams and lineaments that would keep any horse or pony feeling good.
- Many bags of different mixtures of

horse vitamins and minerals, for various sizes and ages of horses, along with western tack, for the serious or occasional rider.

- They also sell wood shavings for animal pens, large or small.

The Split Rail provides locally made goods and products that includes numerous kinds of bird feed and bird feeders at reasonable prices.

They also have a cooler that contains many types of cheddar cheeses made close to home in Millbank, along with locally produced eggs and Wellesley apple

products, including apple butter and apple cider.

Another part of the store contains a corner of products sold by Amberly’s 11-year-old daughter Eva. It’s called “Eva’s Corner,” where she sells all kinds of unique gifts for everyone’s cats, dogs and other animals.

She donates a portion of her sales to the local Sebringville rescue centre called “Out of the Ashes,” where they rescue all sizes and types of animals that haven’t had the care and compassion they continue to need.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Amberly Knott, who owns and manages the Split Rail, will offer advice on the many local products she has in her store. She also continues to help sponsor the Stratford and District Saddle Club, of which her daughter Eva is a member.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Eva shows off her gifts to customers in Eva’s Corner at her mom’s Split Rail Country Store.

Tavistock pharmacy donates \$10,000 to help improve local medical clinic

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

One of the long established and successful businesses in Tavistock is making a large financial donation to Tavistock Community Health Inc. (TCHI), helping in TCHI’s ongoing fundraising efforts to update and improve the offices and examining rooms at the local medical clinic.

A cheque for \$10,000 was presented to two of the board members at the downtown pharmacy on Friday, from owners of the IDA Pharmacy. They included Heather Konstant, Hilary Bald and Cathy Stokes.

All three say they feel it is important to continue to offer their pharmaceutical services and help with the needs of the Tavistock community.

They also want to make sure they strengthen the health care provided by area doctors that include those located in the nearby medical building in Tavistock.

The IDA pharmacy, as it is known now, originated in the 1880s with apothecary and druggist services provided by a Mr.

Zoeliner.

Throughout the years, when the Tavistock medical group’s practice moved to its present location, the pharmacy also moved to 80 Maria St., where the doctors’ office and medical building are located.

There was a very small pharmaceutical dispensary located with the doctors sharing the same facility. It was operated by Sinclair Pharmacy in Stratford at the time.

Readers will remember when the present location, Don’s Grocery Store, became a sports shop in one part and a workwear shop in another.

In 1983 the building was purchased by Sinclair Pharmacy in Stratford, who included John Sinclair and Ray Cornish, and later Lyn Schlotzhauer and Elizabeth Ariss at the Tavistock Store.

Extensive remodeling took place and opened as Tavistock IDA Pharmacy.

In 1995 there was another major renovation in the store with a new merchandising concept and the motto was and continues to be “Care You Can Count On.”

Counselling services are still also provided.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The staff at Tavistock IDA gathered on Friday to celebrate their donation to Tavistock Community Health Inc. (TCHI). Pictured in the front are Dianne Harris, Tammy O’Toole, Darlene Nicholas and Monica Uribe. Pictured in the back are Russ Huber (TCHI president), Heather Konstant, Hilary Bald, Cathy Stokes, Lisa Zehr, Andrea Sproule and Amanda Pavey.

Paws on Patrol Stratford brought their third annual Pet Pantry Drive to Klomps Home and Garden

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

The Winter Paws Holiday Market aimed to meet the growing demand for pet food and supplies over the weekend.

Last weekend, Tyler Jouwsma, owner and founder of Paws on Patrol Stratford, hosted the business' third annual Pet Pantry Drive at Klomps Home and Garden. The event raised food and supplies for pets in need while featuring local vendors selling their wares.

"It's a hybrid between a pet-friendly market and a fundraiser. All donations are shared between Stratford House of Blessing, local churches and the Pet Pantry Drive," said Jouwsma. "Market vendors keep all proceeds from their sales, making it a win-win-win for the community."

Jouwsma said that since starting his mobile pet nail and trimming business three years ago, he noticed a growing need for pet necessities, with the challenge worsening due to current financial pressures.

"We started this drive to raise donations for our pet pantry through my company,



The Paws on Patrol Stratford team, from left to right, includes Julia Rachuk, Drew Scherbarth, Paige Knechtel, Tyler Jouwsma and Andrew Scanlon.

Paws on Patrol Stratford," said Jouwsma. "We saw that a lot of families in the com-

munity were struggling to provide basic pet food and necessities. To help keep animals off the street and out of shelters, this felt like the most sustainable, cost-effective and proactive way to support them."

Jouwsma hopes to expand on the success of the last drive, which raised more than 5,000 pounds of pet food and essentials.

"Every year, we focus on running this market with different local businesses and supporting the community," Jouwsma said. "The first two markets were Christmas-focused, but when Klomps reached out, they couldn't host it in December, so we moved it to January."

Paws on Patrol Stratford is a mobile pet service that works with animals experiencing anxiety, PTSD and fear-based reactivity. Jouwsma tries to reduce those symptoms by serving pets' needs in the comfort of their own homes.

"Pets are a therapy for us too, and it pains me to see animals suffering because they don't have a voice. I'd love to raise more awareness, so people show more compassion for animals. A lot of pets and people are struggling, and often we don't even know it."

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Quadro Communications doubles down on hospice care with February matching donor campaign

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A local telecommunications provider is turning the month of February into a powerful show of community support, pledging to match donations to Rotary Hospice of Stratford Perth dollar for dollar up to \$25,000.

St. Marys-based Quadro Communications Co-operative Inc. is partnering with Rotary Hospice on its February Monthly Giving Challenge, matching all new monthly donations and any increases to existing monthly gifts made between Feb. 1 and Feb. 28. The initiative encourages residents across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County to make a lasting impact by supporting compassionate end-of-life care while doubling the value of their contribution.

“At Quadro Communications, we be-

lieve strong communities are built on care, compassion and connection,” said Chris Ladouceur, general manager of Quadro Communications, in a press release announcing the campaign. “Rotary Hospice provides an essential service to individuals and families during incredibly challenging times, and we’re proud to support their work.”

For Quadro, the partnership is deeply rooted in community connection. Stephannie Metcalfe, marketing administration specialist with the cooperative, said the hospice’s impact is felt far beyond its walls.

“It’s just a very important thing for the community,” Metcalfe said. “We have lots of customers who have gone through the hospice, and there are so many beautiful stories that come out of it. It’s a really meaningful collaboration for us.”

Metcalfe said giving back has always

been central to Quadro’s identity as a business.

“The community has been so good to us and our business,” she said. “We want to make sure we’re sharing that success and giving back wherever we can.”

Rotary Hospice provides 24-hour palliative care, 365 days a year, in a home-like setting at no cost to residents or their families. While Ministry of Health funding covers roughly half of its operating costs, the hospice relies on community support to raise more than \$1 million annually to continue its services.

“Monthly donors are essential to the long-term sustainability of Rotary Hospice,” said executive director Louise Lepp. “With Quadro’s matching support, even small monthly gifts can make a lasting difference.”

Throughout February, Quadro will also help promote the campaign through its

retail locations, sharing information and encouraging customers to consider becoming monthly donors.

“We’d love to see at least one new donation every day throughout February,” Metcalfe said. “It’s such a beautiful program, and this is a simple way for people to show their support.”

“We currently have 72 generous monthly donors and are hoping to get one new one for each day in February, rounding us out to 100 monthly donors,” added Rotary Hospice communications and marketing coordinator Pippa Elliott.

Community members interested in participating can start or increase a monthly donation at www.rotaryhospice.ca/monthly-giving. With Quadro’s match, every act of generosity this February goes twice as far, helping ensure hospice care remains available for those who need it most.



(ROTARY HOSPICE STRATFORD PERTH PHOTO)

The Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth lit up with winter lights.



(ROTARY HOSPICE STRATFORD PERTH PHOTO)

The “Hospice Hearts” window display at Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth’s reception area. Each heart on the window represents a monthly donor.

OPP looking for public’s help with break and enter at Shakespeare gas station

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Perth County Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) are requesting the public’s assistance with identifying a vehicle and person of interest in relation to a break and enter that occurred recently in the Township of Perth East.

On Feb. 1, 2026 at 4:30 a.m., OPP responded to a report of a break and enter in progress at a gas station in the Town of Shakespeare. The person of interest left in a vehicle from the scene northbound on Perth Road 107.

The vehicle of interest is described as a

white Dodge Ram 2500 pickup truck with an extended cab. The person of interest is described as wearing black pants, black jacket and hood and black footwear.

This investigation remains ongoing. OPP believe there may be a second person of interest involved in this incident.

Anyone who may have information related to this investigation or who can identify the persons or vehicle of interest is being asked to call 1-888-310-1122. Should you wish to remain anonymous, call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) or ontariocrimestoppers.ca where you may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2,000.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Left: The person of interest in a break and enter at a Shakespeare gas station is described as wearing black pants, black jacket and hood and black footwear. Right: The person of interest left in a white Dodge Ram 2500 pickup truck with an extended cab.



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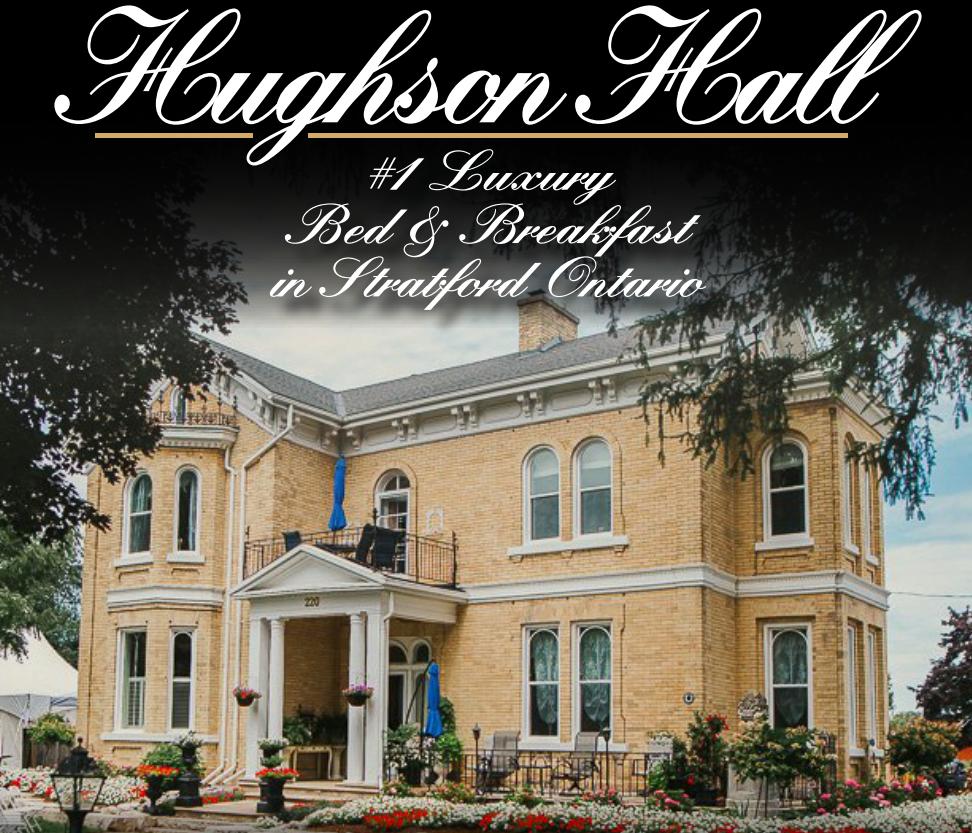
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Why it pays to trust a pro with wedding photography

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

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

• Photographers can get great shots no matter the conditions. There's a difference between snapping great shots of an idyllic setting on a smartphone and taking wedding day photographs couples will look back on for years to come. Experienced photographers have cameras capable of far more than those on a smartphone, and these skilled professionals also possess the knowledge of how to get great shots in settings that might not be so conducive to photography.

al photographers know what to do to get great shots in such settings. Professionals also know how to utilize natural light to their advantage when taking shots outdoors.

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

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

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

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

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Tips For your Wedding Attire

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

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

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

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

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

We are open 7 Days a week and late on Thursdays and Fridays and also available by appointment.

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

How to remember and honour loved ones at a wedding

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

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

- **Save a seat.** Reserve a seat at the ceremony and reception with a small placard that reads something along the lines of "In loving memory of the mother of the bride. She is forever present in our hearts."

- **Include a note.** Include an In Memoriam note in the wedding program with special words about the person who is missed.

- **Light a candle during the ceremony.** The officiant can say a few words and invite someone to light a candle in honor of a late relative or friend.

- **Carry a special memento.** Whether in the bouquet or in the pocket of a tuxedo, carrying a small souvenir that represents the deceased loved one. If there is an item that belonged to the loved one, it can be worn during the

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

- **Toast with a drink.** The atmosphere at a reception is more lively than during a ceremony. Offer a toast to the person who is missed or serve their favorite food at the buffet.

- **Play a special song.** If the deceased loved one would be featured in a signature dance, like the father/daughter, mother/son traditions, play a song that was meaningful to that person and enlist someone to stand in for the absent person.

- **Request donations.** Set up a memorial table and make mention of the person's favorite charity. Ask guests to donate in the loved one's honor.

Remembering a special person who has passed on at a wedding can ensure that individual is honored and included in a couple's big day.



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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Kipfer and Wildfong win Bronze in Aurora, Warriors produce mixed results

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

As they prepared for their week of important contests, the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors knew their goal of having home-ice advantage was still within their sights, and two members of the team participated in the MacPherson Tournament at St. Andrew's College in Aurora.

Quinn Kipfer and Max Wildfong were part of the Team GOHL as they competed in the multi-day competition from Jan. 30 through Feb. 1.

With Kipfer being the captain of Team GOHL, they were placed in the Meagher group during the round robin. The team finished with a 2-1 record, with Kipfer earning game MVP honours in the 2-1 win over Culver Academics in the final game of the preliminary round. After losing the semi-finals to host St. Andrews College Saints, Team GOHL won the bronze medal after beating the Pittsburgh Jr. Penguins 4-3.

Kipfer and Wildfong shared their experience in the tournament.

"It was a huge honour to be named the leader of a group of so many talented players. It was good to showcase my leadership

on the stage like that, and it was good to have some success with the skilled guys we have, and to come home with the bronze medal we're pretty happy with," Kipfer said.

"The league has a lot of young, skilled guys and it's good that they're able to go to a tournament like this to put all those guys together and showcase what the league has and how they can develop players into the next level."

"It was awesome. An excellent group. It was fun meeting the new guys, and we had a hard-working team. It was fun to compete with," Wildfong said. "It was a great showcase, and great to showcase my skills with the guys."

Coming into the week, the Warriors sit in fifth place with one point behind the London Nationals for fourth in the very tight Western Conference, but have no more than four games in hand over the top four teams in the conference.

McQuen Haylock, Dax Vader and head coach Dave Williams know how vital the points are as they head into the final month of the regular season.

"Yeah, it feels like every game's a big game, with the parity and everybody trying to chase teams that are in front of them and keep teams behind them. But there's no doubt, Wednesday's a big game against London. You know, we're right there with each other. We've got a few games in hand. So again, we must look after what we can," Williams said.

"So, it's an opportunity for us to try and steal two points from them and keep those games in hand. With respect to Friday, we've had some pretty competitive games against Komoka so far this year. We talk a lot about how we see teams' best games in here on a Friday night, it's such a special place to play so that I would expect nothing less than a good effort from Komoka."

"Yeah, it's obviously going to be a pretty big, tiring week. But we had a pretty, pretty good state today, systematically focused for Wednesday's game. I think all good for that," Vader said.

"We just keep playing how we're playing. We've been stringing together some excellent games, and we beat most of the top teams, and we just got to catch up on our games, and I think we'll be just right up there with them."

"I'm excited. We got three big games coming up. I think it's big to beat London. I think we got some business we need to handle because they beat us up once or twice. But I think it's good because there's a lot of competition, a lot of games coming off. We got a weekend off, so it's good to get back and have a lot of games and room to get a lot of points," Haylock said.

"I think we have to really narrow down the details and make sure we're doing everything right, because a lot of the points in that matter going into the playoffs, you want to be in private rankings. I think it's big that we win the games that matter, because the rankings are so close in points, and I think it's big that we need to come out of going into the playoffs on a higher rank than everyone else."

Stratford travelled to the Western Fair Sports Complex in London for their key matchup with the Nationals in a battle for the fourth spot in the conference.

London got on the board with 5:05 to go in the first period off the shot that went through a screen in front of Stratford netminder Noah Bender for the opening goal. Stratford responded 90 seconds later on the powerplay as the shot by Aaron Green found the way past the Nationals' netminder for the game-tying goal.

Midway through the second period, the Nationals retook the lead and kept the one-goal lead heading into the third period. In the final frame, London extended their lead 2:45 into the period, but the Warriors responded with a goal from Drew Hodge on a six-on-five advantage with 1:14 left to cut the deficit to 3-2.

Stratford continued to push for the equalizer with the extra attacker but was unable to capitalize in the game's closing seconds.

Bender had a strong performance in net for the Warriors in the loss as he made 32

saves out of 35 shots he faced.

Williams praised the team's performance against London, but credited the performance by the London netminder as the reason for the outcome.

"I mean, there are parts of our game that I liked. I thought. I thought some of the scoring opportunities we generated were pretty well turned away by their goaltender. But, you know, we got to find a way to generate and score goals five on five," Williams said.

"Get that one on the power play that gets us right back to the game. We just seem to have some tough luck around in that five-on-five, scoring goals. And I think a little bit on us, but I think also, you know, you got to give their goalie credit. We thought he had an excellent game."

The Warriors hosted the Komoka Kings at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Jan. 30, and it marked the in-season debuts of Colten Brenzil from Mitchell Hawks of the PJHL and Cody Billings of the Kitchener Jr. Rangers AAA U18.

In his second-ever game in the GOHL, Brenzil scored his first career goal halfway through the opening period from Vader and Jonas Schmidt to give the Warriors a 1-0 lead. With 3:06 remaining in the period, Dominic Marshall scored his 10th of the season from Rhyse Brown and Grady Murphy to put the Warriors ahead 2-0.

The Warriors continued their goal-scoring barrage in the second period when Lucas Minard scored his 12th of the season 7:48 into the period. It was Minard's first goal since Nov. 15 against Caledonia.

Colin Slattery scored his ninth of the season on the powerplay from Hodge and Green at the midway mark of the period to make it 4-0 for the home side before Komoka scored late in the period to make it 4-1 heading into the third period.

Midway through the final frame, Jaxson Broda notched his second of the season from Schmidt and Joseph Curtin to seal the win with the final score of 5-1.

Brenzil was pleased with scoring his first goal and told the Times his goal for the remainder of the season.

"It feels amazing. Definitely didn't expect it for sure, but felt really nice going in," Brenzil said.

"Definitely, the focus is on the playoffs. With Mitchell, it's coming up soon, and try to go pretty far in the playoffs with them, so that's my main focus right now, and just working hard every practice since every game, trying to get better."

Billings expressed what it means to be part of the Warriors and said he wants to work on his game to earn more opportunities with the team in the future.

"Definitely an honour. It was a great game to play against. The pace is faster than I'm used to, so I was glad I was able

CONTINUED TO PAGE 20

Stratford Warriors 2025-26 Stats (as of February 2, 2026)

Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Jonas Schmidt	F	30	17	17	34
Max Wildfong	F	35	17	11	28
Colin Slattery	F	33	10	18	28
Quinn Kipfer	F	32	11	16	27
Coen Galbraith	F	35	10	17	27
Lucas Minard	F	35	12	11	23
Joseph Curtin	D	36	4	14	18
Evan Arnold	F	28	10	7	17
Dax Vader	F	35	5	12	17
Aaron Green	D	30	7	9	16
Drew Hodge	D	36	3	13	16
Will Coward	D	32	1	15	16
Dominic Marshall	F	37	10	4	14
McQuen Haylock	F	35	3	9	12
Grady Murphy	F	32	6	5	11
Rhyse Brown	F	33	3	8	11
Haden Frayne	D	32	2	9	11
Jaxson Broda	D	10	2	7	9
Cruz Ferguson	F	5	4	2	6
Mateo Craievich	D	26	0	5	5
Colten Brenzil	F	2	1	0	1
Cody Billings	D	1	0	0	0
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	13-8-0-1	2.79	0.901		
Gage Hurst	10-0-1-1	1.95	0.911		

GOHL Western Conference Standings

(as of February 2, 2026)

Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
St. Marys Lincolns	30	6	2	0	62	158	79
Chatham Maroons	28	8	2	3	61	195	125
Elmira Sugar Kings	29	6	2	0	60	174	94
London Nationals	26	12	1	0	53	172	123
Stratford Warriors	24	9	2	2	52	145	101
St. Thomas Stars	19	16	2	1	41	149	141
Waterloo Siskins	17	16	4	2	40	120	116
LaSalle Vipers	18	19	3	0	39	138	152
Strathroy Rockets	18	18	2	0	38	143	146
Listowel Cyclones	16	20	1	1	34	109	122
Komoka Kings	13	24	2	1	29	132	169
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	39	0	0	0	62	264

15 SSC skaters compete at Lucan competiton



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

The Stratford Skating Club (SSC) had 15 skaters compete in the Star One-Four Lucan competition held at the Lucan Community Memorial Centre from Jan. 30-31. Pictured on the left, from left to right, are Danika Lingard, who claimed the silver medal in Star Three Group Four, Reese Manzer, who earned the silver in Star Three Group 15, and Annabelle Stewart, who placed sixth in Star-Four U13 Girls Group Three. Pictured on the right, in the front row from left, are Tatum McCallum Moesker, Samantha Dominguez, Madeleine Milton, Isabelle Pritchard, and Laura Need. In the back row, from left, are Emmy Ford, Olivia Clemmer, Rose Clarke, Hailey Graul, Melanie Milton, and Ellie Stewart. Ford won the gold medal in Star Two Group One. McCallum Moesker took gold in Star One Group Seven. Dominguez finished in first place to win gold in Star One Group Eight. Need earned gold in Star Two Group 18. Ellie was the silver medalist in Star Three Group Nine. Madeleine took the silver in Star Two Group Four. Melanie earned silver in Star Three Group One. Pritchard claimed silver in Star Two Group Three. Clemmer brought home the silver medal in Star Three Group 13. Graul took silver in Star Two Group Nine. Clarke placed third to earn bronze in Star Two Group 17. Not pictured was Gigi Wreford, who captured a silver medal in Star-Two Group 12.

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Irish unleashes offensive downpour in win over the Lakers

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Irish concluded their final homestand of the regular season with a dominant 12-1 win over the Woodstock Lakers at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Jan. 31.

Brett Thorne got things started for the Irish on the powerplay from Nick Giunta and Zach Magwood at 5:47 of the first period. Mathieu Henderson from Giunta and Matt Zebedee, with 2:59 left in the opening frame, followed by Christian Polillo from Stephen Pierog and Ethan Salter, 39 seconds later, gave the Irish a commanding 3-0 lead. Pierog from Polillo and Salter, with 96 seconds remaining, put the home side ahead 4-0 after 20 minutes of play.

Woodstock got on the board on the powerplay midway through the period, but that proved to be the only blemish for Stratford as their offence went into overdrive afterwards. Henderson scored back-to-back goals for the Irish to put them ahead 6-1. 43 seconds after Henderson's hat-trick goal, Brady Hunter joined the scoring barrage from Pierog and Connor Hall to cap off a strong finish to the middle frame.

Stratford continued to pour on the goals in the third period.

Pollio scored his second of the game from Salter and Magwood 3:54 into the period. During the four-minute powerplay, Matthew Montgomery contributed with a goal from Hall at 6:19, followed by Pierog from Hunter and Thorne 33 seconds later. Team Captain Zach Magwood added one of his own midway through the



(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

Stratford Irish F Matthew Montgomery scores his second of the game in the third period against the Woodstock Lakers on Jan. 31, 2026.

final frame from Salter and Polillo, and Zebedee scored one as well from Hall and Matthew Fuller, with under six minutes left to cap off the win.

Polillo, Pierog and Henderson say the team is satisfied with its performance as it heads into the final regular-season game against the potential first-round playoff opponent, the Alvinston Killer Bees, next week on Feb. 7.

"Yeah, 100 per cent. I mean, sometimes it just takes a little time for the guys to gel in the room. And I feel like we're sort of starting to build a brotherhood. So, it's good. It shows on the ice," Polillo said.

"It's just, it's the last game before the

playoffs. So, it's going to be a good test for us, and it's going to be a good look at what playoff hockey is going to be like. So, I'm sure they're going to be playing their hardest as well. They'll have their full lineup as well."

"It's been a rough, rough road for us, but we came together here today. It's nice to see everybody get up and get some points. The guys are working hard to get ice time and paid off today," Pierog said.

"For us, it's definitely just the confidence we have in such good, high-level hockey players here. Today was great because we definitely found our confidence going in and having fun. But we also like the chal-

lenge. We like to work hard. I think today was well-rewarded, but we know what's coming up next. It's going to be a lot different," Henderson said.

"It's nice for guys to get confidence going into the playoffs. You know, that's our mindset that's going to go a whole year, wait till we get into the playoffs and then try to repeat from last year."

Pierog, Salter and Polillo led the Irish with five points each; 12 different Irish players scored at least one point, with seven scoring three or more points.

With the win, the Irish assured themselves a third-place finish in the Metropolitan League's Gateway Division.

Kipfer and Wildfong win Bronze in Aurora, Warriors produce mixed results

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

to contribute and turn that way," Billings said.

"Towards the end of the season, I'm still looking to continue to develop, and hopefully next year I can have some more opportunities for myself at Stratford, possi-

bly being one of them, so it should be good to continue."

Assistant coach Mike Knechtel commended the performances from the team, specifically Brenzil and Billings.

"Yeah, I thought it was a good team effort tonight. Our lineup was a little short,

and we had some call-ups who did an excellent job for us. So, I thought we played well tonight," Knechtel said.

"They gave us some good minutes tonight, Cody on the back end and Colten up front. I thought they did an excellent job for us. That was a big goal for us to start the game off. So, it was awesome."

The Warriors travelled to Elmira for the first time this season against the Sugar Kings at the Dan Snyder Memorial Arena on Feb. 1.

Elmira took a 2-0 lead with both goals coming in a span of over four minutes apart in the first period.

Slattery scored his 10th of the season from Coen Galbraith and Haden Frayne at the 5:12 mark to cut the Elmira lead to 2-1. Less than two minutes later, the Sugar Kings restored their two-goal lead, but a last-minute goal from Haylock, his third goal of the season, from Lucas Minard and Cruz Ferguson, put the visitors within striking distance through 40 minutes.

After Stratford failed to get the equalizer early in the period, Elmira pulled away with a pair of goals in under three minutes.

With the loss, the Warriors fell to 24-9-2-2 in the season.

Stratford netminder Noah Bender stopped 30 of 35 shots in the losing effort.

Head coach Dave Williams says the team's overall performance wasn't on par with that of one of the league's top teams.

"I think there are some things in the game that we like. We couldn't seem to find a couple more goals there. You know, in the margin of error, you get a team like them. We have two rimmed out pucks that we don't get to, one off the base, which makes a difference in the game," Williams said.

"I thought we did some good things. We couldn't seem to find that equalizer, and sometimes you find that the time goal you play a little bit differently, rather than playing from behind."

Stratford is set to open their three-game homestand with two pivotal contests at the Allman Arena this coming weekend.

The Warriors host the Chatham Maroons on Feb. 6 at 7:30 p.m., followed by the renewal of the Battle of Highway 7 with the St. Marys Lincolns on Feb. 8 at 4:30 p.m.

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Two SSC skaters compete at LaSalle, Mississauga competitions



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Pictured on the left is Nicole Verhoef, and on the right is Jaden Thompson. The two members of the Stratford Skating Club (SSC) competed in different competitions on the Jan. 30-Feb. 1 weekend. Verhoef competed at the LaSalle Provincial Series competition in LaSalle, where she placed sixth in Star-Five O13 Women Group Four, and eighth in Star Seven Artistic Group One. Thompson earned silver in Star Two Group 16 at the Star One-Four Mississauga Snowflake Competition held in Mississauga.

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U16 Lakers drop key game to the London Jr. Knights on home ice

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Huron-Perth U16 Lakers AAA hosted the London Jr. Knights at the Stratford Rotary Complex in the battle for top spot in the U16 ALLIANCE league as the regular season heads to its final stretch on Feb. 1.

London opened the scoring with 3:09 left in the first period. Through 30 minutes of play, the Lakers had several powerplay opportunities and pressed on for an equalizer, but were unable to break through.

The visitors extended their lead 3:48 into the third period and put the game out of reach with 5:40 remaining. Declan McCotter scored his 27th of the season from Callum Brooks and Wyatt Finch 19 seconds later, but the offence couldn't muster a late-game comeback as they lost 3-1.

Huron-Perth head coach Jason Brooks says the team struggled to execute its game plan, which contributed to the outcome.

"They have three lines and a very high-power offensive team. They maintain puck possession. They got size, they're physical, they're good skaters, so it was definitely a test and a challenge. I thought we battled, to be going down or going into the third down, when nothing, you know, you're still in the game, you still have a chance," Brooks said.

"Unfortunately, we gave up a couple of those goals in the third that take the wind out of your sails a little bit. But we were

able to get the one back. And unfortunately, we had some possession time after we didn't get the puck to the net and get the balance we needed to, you know, post within one. But I'm not disappointed in the effort. I thought our effort was there. I'll take that kind of effort."

Team captain Sullivan Kipfer says the team missed opportunities to capitalize on the equalizer and needs to improve.

"I think overall, we battled right till the end. We just had a slow start coming out in the first, and it ended up biting us in the back in the end. But I think we had our chances and just needed to learn how to close them out. If we finished a couple of those, chances would have been a different game," Kipfer said.

Despite the loss, Lakers netminder Rylan Da Costa had a solid performance and kept the team in contention. Brooks and Kipfer commended Da Costa's performance in the crease.

"Rylan gives us a chance every time he's in the net, and no question, he did that tonight. He made some big stops, kept us in that game," Brooks said.

"Ry (Rylan) played outstanding. He kept us in the whole time. That was the only reason we kept it so close," Kipfer said.

The Lakers continue their regular-season-closing homestand with two games this coming weekend. They welcome the Sun County Panthers into the Rotary Complex on Feb. 6 at 8:45 p.m. and on Feb. 8 they host the Brantford 99ers in their matinee game at 3:45 p.m.

Aces get mixed results, the Maceys talk late-season aspirations

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Aces continued to contend for a playoff spot at the West Division of the OWHA-Southern U18 AA league as they hosted the Bluewater Hawks and travelled to London to face the London Devilettes.

On Jan. 31, the Aces lost 3-1 to the Hawks but picked up a big win on Feb. 1, defeating the Devilettes 3-1. With the split results, the Aces are three points clear of the eighth and final spot in the division ahead of the Owen Sound Ice Hawks with a record of 5-10-3-0.

Skylar and Myla Macey shared their thoughts on their experience with the organization, the results from the past weekend, and the upcoming games.

"It's an excellent environment to be a part of. And I really enjoy getting to the rink and hang out with the girls and stuff in the room, and even on the ice, it's really fun to be a part of it, Skylar said.

"I think it's just an excellent group of girls in general, and I feel motivated to motivate each other really well ... When the highs are high, it's really good," Myla said.

"It's just getting more and more wins, especially against the teams that we believe we can really beat, and against the teams that are more higher level, just staying in the game."

On Feb. 7, the Aces will be playing the Kitchener Lady Rangers at the Rotary Complex and are hosting their annual Aces Grad Day event to recognize the graduates of the program.

Adult League bowling high scores

Men's:

Rob Price - 385-839 triple
Matthew Wilker - 800 triple

Ladies:

Brooke Louwagie - 306-796 triple

Monday Senior's:

Steve Van Klooster - 203, 226; 618 triple
Jim Baker - 208
Marija Kelemen - 226

V-Ettes:

Shirley Campbell - 210

United League:

Paul Boyd - 206
Don Haycock - 207
Patty Haycock - 202
Karin Carter - 213
Nichele Butcher - 204, 210
Glenn Rohrer - 247 (106 POA)

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(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Area snowmobilers say that this has been a rare winter, with centimetres of snow continually falling over the region. Pictured here are Calvin Horst, a hog and chicken farmer from near Shakespeare, and his snowmobiling partner, Jason Jantzi, a dairy farmer from near Milverton. The two were out for a relaxing day on the groomed trails near Shakespeare.

Valentine's Day screening of French rom-com sure to hit the heart strings

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Film Festival (SFF) returns with monthly screenings beginning Feb. 14 with the French film *Nouveau Départ* (*New Beginnings*). Directed by Philippe Lefebvre, the film stars Franck Dubosc and Karin Viard as a married couple facing a stale future now that they are empty nesters.

"When you think of love stories, they're usually 20-somethings or 30-somethings, but this is a story about a couple who have been married 30 years and they're going through empty-nest syndrome. Their youngest is leaving and going off on a journey and they find themselves looking at one another and wondering if this is all there is," said Megan Smith-Harris, festival director.

In the script, written by Philippe Lefebvre and Maria Pourchet, they didn't want to follow the typical trope where the husband has a mid-life crisis and chases after younger women. Instead, it is the wife who needs to be relevant again leading to comedic choices and heartfelt circumstances.

The film was inspired by an Argentinian film by Juan Vera released in France and Lefebvre loved the subject matter of empty-nesters but wanted to put his own spin on it and added comedy to it. The script is co-written by Pourchet, a novelist who has published seven books of which one has been short-listed for many awards. They pulled together to bring their inspiration and life experiences into this romantic comedy that is as relatable as it is entertaining.

"Interestingly enough, Karin Viard who plays wife Diane, is a longtime friend of director Philippe. One day she walked into a café and he was there with Maria working on the script and she said, 'What are you doing?' and he said, 'I'm writing something for you!' and they laughed. Then, a year later he sent her the script and she immediately connected with the part, finding the story sharp, funny and full of flavour without shortcuts or clichés," said Smith-Harris.

Expect the film to be well-written and believably acted by the cast with a familiarity of each other before even beginning. Dubosc and Viard had worked in a region-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Franck Dubosc and Karin Viard star as Alain and Diane, a married couple who's latest hilarious adventures stem from empty-nest syndrome.

al theatre troupe together after graduating from theatre school. Being reunited in this film felt to them like coming home for them.

"When I saw the film I found it delightful, because it's grounded in reality. It's not all pratfalls and comedy schtick. The comedy is very real and it comes from our own insecurities, our own desires, our fantasies and curiosity," Smith-Harris said. "It's not a boring couple married for 30 years, it's sexy, it's fun. It's all about how staying in a long-term marriage is hard and it takes work and commitment and reconnect."

This screening will appeal to anyone who loves French films and the setting of Paris in which it was filmed. It will appeal to anyone that can relate to a long-term relationship gone stale.

"You don't have to be married 30 years to identify with this couple. Anybody who's been in a long-term relationship goes through stuff like this and jealousy and won-

dering if your partner is faithful or is there something better out there. That's the other message of this film, which is the grass isn't always greener on the other side," said Smith-Harris.

The audience may also note a better movie going experience now that a new sound system has been installed in the Stratford City Hall auditorium.

"We're incredibly grateful to the City of Stratford for recognizing the importance of investing in a high-quality sound system," says Smith-Harris. "It's a game-changer for film screenings and ensures our audiences experience these films exactly as they were meant to be seen and heard."

For more information and to learn about upcoming screenings, visit www.stratfordfilmfestival.com where tickets are also available. Screenings are at the city hall auditorium at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., Feb. 14. Passes for the 2026 season are also now on sale.

Crystal L. Spicer named new ED of Here For Now Theatre

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Crystal L. Spicer, the executive director of Stratford Summer Music for the last two seasons, has been named as Here For Now Theatre's executive director.

"I am excited to join Here For Now Theatre at such an exciting moment in its evolution," said Spicer in an announcement. "Since returning to Stratford, I have admired the company's remarkable trajectory, growing from the lawn at the Bruce Hotel to its beautiful new home at the Rose McQueen Theatre, a testament to its vision, community support and artistic excellence. I look forward to working closely with Fiona (Mongillo, founder and artistic director of Here For Now) and the team to build on this momentum and support the company's continued artistic and organizational growth."

Spicer brings more than 20 years of leadership and experience in the performing arts across music, dance and theatre to the role. A graduate of Grant MacEwan Uni-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Crystal L. Spicer is Here For Now Theatre's new executive director, bringing a wealth of experience from Stratford and across the nation.

versity, she has built a distinguished career with some of Canada's most respected arts institutions, including Canada's Royal

Winnipeg Ballet and the Stratford Festival. Her leadership roles include serving as technical director at the National Arts Centre and production manager with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. She also played a key role in the commissioning and opening of Queen's University's Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts, a landmark cultural venue.

After returning to Stratford with her family in 2023, Spicer most recently served as executive director of Stratford Summer Music, where she was instrumental in guiding the organization through post-pandemic recovery. During her two seasons in the role, she helped secure new funding opportunities, strengthen organizational stability and achieve a budget surplus.

Susan Moffat, on behalf of the board of directors, said, "We are delighted that Crystal has agreed to accept this role and reflects on the ongoing growth and success of Here For Now. Crystal brings a wealth of expertise in administration and production to this newly created position."

Spicer brings a deep understanding of

artistic production, administration and the importance of strong community roots. This appointment marks a meaningful return to theatre, the discipline at the heart of her artistic journey, where her passion for the arts will continue to thrive, grow and contribute to the cultural life of Stratford.

"I'm thrilled to welcome Crystal to the Here For Now team at what I believe is the perfect moment," said Mongillo. "We are not yet a year into running our own building and so we're still figuring things out – what the space can be, how it can best serve artists and the community and how we sustain it – and Crystal's extraordinary leadership skills and vast technical knowledge will be essential as we keep refining this vision."

"She brings a deep love of theatre, a serious commitment and work ethic and a generosity that inspires people to do their best work. I can't wait to work alongside her and to see how her care and expertise help Here For Now grow into a lasting, artist-driven home for independent theatre in Stratford."

Panel discussion on IPV addresses actions to take amid epidemic declarations

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Following the declaration of an intimate partner violence (IPV) epidemic by Stratford, North Perth and West Perth over the past few years, the Stratford chapter of Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) held a panel discussion on how to address IPV.

A panel discussion about addressing the IPV epidemic run by CFUW Stratford took place at Stratford City Hall on Jan. 29. The event focused on addressing IPV as a bystander and highlighted ways to support someone who may be going through IPV.

Emily Murphy Centre's executive director Lisa Wilde, lawyer and co-chair of Shelterlink Youth Services' board Alix Grice and author Gwen Lamont participated in the panel discussion.

Wilde listed symptoms that someone may be experiencing IPV in their relationship such as their partner dominating the conversation, threatening to cause harm to the person affected, their children, and/or their pets and farm animals and constantly checking in – even at work or while socializing.

"If they're allowed to be with others, their phones are always going off," she said.

She also talked about ways to help someone who is experiencing IPV, though noted that the danger increases when someone experiencing IPV leaves their abuser. Still, anyone can step in and support someone experiencing IPV even if they are not a professional like a counselor or a police officer.

"If I learned anything along the way, it's that IPV is a community issue. Not a family issue, not a women's issue, it's a community issue and the solution lies somewhere with all of us," Wilde said.

Those concerned that someone is experiencing IPV can tell the person what they are witnessing, believe someone who discloses IPV, encourage to make a communications and safety plan, offer child and/or pet care and prepare an emergency bag including important documents. Wilde said that offering your place is another option but only if it's safe to do so.

Grice said that while supporting someone experiencing IPV, it's still important to practice self-care like keeping your own emotional well-being and safety in check, making a plan to ensure well-being and safety, checking physical symptoms like heart rate, eating and sleeping habits, reaching out to family and friends and asking for support if needed such as counselling.

"It may seem obvious, but if you don't



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Lisa Wilde, executive director of the Emily Murphy Centre, with moderator Leanne Perreault, author Gwen Lamont and lawyer and Shelterlink's board co-chair Alix Grice at a panel discussion addressing the intimate partner violence (IPV) epidemic.

remember to take care of yourself in a difficult situation, you risk being less effective at helping others with potentially negative consequences," Grice said.

Lamont, author of *The View from Coffin Ridge: A Childhood Exhumed*, is an advocate for women who experienced IPV, both survivors and those who were killed by their partners. She addresses her own experience with IPV in her novel and also wrote her thesis for her master's in social work on femicide.

The author read bits of her piece *Survivor's Guilt*, which was longlisted for the

CBC Non-Fiction prize in 2023 and emphasized that change must happen to end femicide and IPV. Sharing personal stories can be one way towards change.

"I believe telling our stories is one of the most powerful tools we have in the fight for change. Many women have told me that when they heard my story, they were able to tell theirs," she said.

A Q-and-A and introduction of Stratford Police Service's first national service dog, Dusty, followed the discussion.

North Perth declared an IPV epidemic in late January, following the declaration by West Perth in 2025 and Stratford in 2023.

Awards keep coming for champion rodeo rider Cody McGonigle

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

North Easthope Township's Cody McGonigle has been riding ponies and, as he got bigger, quarter horses, since he was six years old – after his maternal grandfather Barry Cole-Poppa bought him his first pony.

Since then, according to his mom and dad Susan and Dave McGonigle, you could hardly keep him off his horses that he continues to work with, almost day and night.

He has spent many nights on the road with his western saddle and bridle for company, along with his many experienced rodeo friends he leans on for advice.

He is not home for long stretches, as there are rodeos occurring the year round, inside large arenas and outdoors in summertime weather.

His employer, Ed's Concrete, works with Cody, and knows he will be gone for over 100 days a year and respects how good at rodeo and steer wrestling he has become, beating some of the best rodeo riders in the world.

His paternal grandfather, Murray McGonigle, who also was, and still is, a horse lover, and competes with carriage horses of his own at local fairs, has always encouraged Cody every step of the way (even though he says he didn't need a whole lot of encouragement).

Cody now travels throughout Cana-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Cody McGonigle with his quarter horse named Diesel, shows his strength in this steer wrestling competition, by taking down this steer in an outdoor Rodeo Event last summer.

da and North America, taking top prize money and trophies, at every Rodeo he attends. He still contends that a well-trained horse, with the will to compete, is worth 90 per cent of the top awards that he has been able to bring home.

At the start of his career, he competed locally with the Stratford and District Saddle Club. Before he was even a teenager, he had the thrill of competing on his horse, throughout various classes, and started roping with his first roping horse bought and given to him by his Grampa McGonigle, who was also a Master Holstein Breeder and milk producer from Almulree.

Names like local horsemen John Thomson and Ed DeWettering have helped and encouraged this 27-year-old along his way. They know Cody has the talent, work and determination to be a world rodeo champion.

In Grade 11 at Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School, near Baden, he competed on the high school team, but kept honing his craft, and obtained a rodeo scholarship to Olds College in Alberta.

There he also worked on the ranch of Sid Cook, formerly of North Easthope, south of Calgary.

They were breaking horses and roping steers, and the young and energetic Mc-

Gonigle, gained more experience and the confidence he needed to compete.

Cody also competed with the college rodeo team and loved the competition and that feeling of winning.

After returning home, he continued on the amateur rodeo team and circuit.

Feeling confident, the young cowboy bought his first International Professional Rodeo Association (IPRA) world card and elevated his talent and travelled to 50+ rodeos per year across North America, adding important points as he went.

He competed in multiple events and was named the festival's "Western Cup Champion" for 2025. The awards don't stop there. Cody holds the steer wrestling record in Illinois of 3.2 seconds, and that state record still stands to this day.

The young rider was also named the IPRA Steer Wrestling Champion for 2025 and just recently competed in the IFR Qualifier in Guthrie, Okla.

Cody says he has now qualified for the International Rodeo Finals again, for the second year in a row.

Cody gives his parents and grandparents all the credit for encouraging him to reach for the stars with his rodeo ambitions, as he heads for the top of the podium.

He also says he couldn't have done what he has without his number one cheerleader and promoter, his sister Ally, who kept him on the right track all his rodeo life so far.

Opinions

Tech overlords be banned or damned

LOREENA MCKENNITT

Guest Columnist

Our prime minister offered the world a moment of liberation in Davos recently when he put into words what many have been fearing, that the rules-based order is over and to pretend otherwise is to perpetuate a lie. Our neighbour to the south has caused a rupture and we must tack a new course.

Anyone who has endured a toxic relationship will keenly relate to the sentiment of the prime minister's words. Particularly if their partner has become unpredictable, unreliable, abusive, dishonest, manipulative or predatory. But like any bad relationship, one cannot always leave without first making an exit plan. No doubt this is the determined focus of our prime minister, his cabinet and now the premiers.

Citing an essay by Czech dissident Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," Prime Minister Carney shared that a corrupt "systems" power comes not from its truth, but from everyone's willingness to perform as if it were true". One day you have to muster-up the courage, call it what it is and move on.

Our prime minister is asking us to forge a new path with allies we can rely on and who share our values.

It is with great alarm that we watch the relationship with our closest neighbour and ally decay and fall sway to a cult-like mindset led by high-level tech influencers. Indeed, we all saw them at the president's inauguration.

It should concern us even more that these tech overlords are leading us into a dystopian future while dismantling our democracies before our very eyes.

Justin Ling's column in the Jan. 26th edition of the Toronto Star, "In Minne-

apolis, Trump is making terror a reality," offers a deeper glimpse into the forces shaping the mindset of the U.S. administration. Ling suggests the foundations of the administration's radical behaviour is a "house political philosopher," a former software engineer named Curtis Yarvin. A darling of such tech CEOs as Peter Thiel (PayPal's founder and long-time Trump supporter), Yarvin's influence is conjoining the political and tech-based oligarchal worlds to form a formidable power which will be difficult to stop.

In his column Ling writes, "Yarvin believes that the inevitable and desirable future for America is one with no democracy, no courts, no political freedoms to speak of. He imagines a state by and for the whole race, run like a business. Citizens in this oligarch republic can quit or be fired, but not much else... He has dressed up old ideas of fascism in a way to appeal and flatter tech CEOs... painting them as the kings of a new world order... Yarvin is really describing a very old idea: Terror."

One thinks of the terror on the streets of Minneapolis, or in the minds of the citizens of Greenland when the U.S. administration threatens to take over their land.

A 2025 Reuters article suggested there could actually be more than security or rare minerals on the minds of those who covet Greenland. The autonomous Arctic territory could be promoted as a "freedom city," a "libertarian utopia with minimal corporate regulation." This dystopian agenda is reportedly an idea considered by the president's choice for his Danish ambassador, Ken Howery, as well as by Howery's long-time friends Elon Musk and Peter Thiel.

This sentiment is further echoed in the

sobering 1997 book, *The Sovereign Individual* by James Dale Davidson and William Rees-Mogg, a favourite among libertarians in Silicon Valley. In it, we see the long evolution of this kind of thinking which has been percolating inside the bubbles of Meta (Facebook), Google, Twitter/X, PayPal and Amazon for quite some time, unbeknownst to citizens.

Davidson and Rees-Mogg predict a world of unfathomably wealthy tech leaders who will become wealthier than most nations, hence "sovereign" individuals. Many are already financial backers of the current president, seizing upon this rare opportunity to advance their sci-fi vision.

In a deadly symbiotic relationship, the unregulated tech sector has become the enabler of the current U.S. administration. In turn, that administration is only too happy to be accommodating, rejecting any regulation over the industry. Only a handful of governments – think Australia and the European Union – have dared to defy them.

We must acknowledge the complicit role this behemoth sector is playing in the current state of the U.S. government, in geopolitics and rules-based order. We need to make even harder choices now.

If a toxic relationship is unpredictable, unreliable, abusive, dishonest, manipulative or predatory, then after 20 odd years of this experiment could our relationship with technology also be considered toxic?

The path forward will require bold efforts if we're to rebuild in a better way. Just as we're pivoting towards new trade partners with the help of middle powers, so must we build a better technological future, one that is based on our own morals and values.

There are many things we can do as

citizens to set those wheels in motion. We can abandon these technological giants who pay low or no taxes and instead build an industry of technology for Canadians by Canadians that is transparent and accountable.

It starts by banishing Meta (Facebook), Google, Twitter/X, from our everyday lives and replacing Amazon with Canadian producers, suppliers and delivery systems, including Canada Post.

It starts with serious politicians who have the courage to stand up to these technology companies and bring about the protective legislation we urgently need.

For too long these companies have manipulated us with their algorithms, flooded social media with disinformation, consciously built addiction and dependency into their design, and held us hostage so that we are only as good as our next "update." In so doing, they have stripped us of our self agency to understand what is happening to us much less defend ourselves from becoming the 51st state.

For too long these overlords have played on our weakness toward convenience and efficiencies at the expense of our security and privacy, our jobs and self agency, our children's lives, and now our very democracies.

No longer are we going to give them the power to indenture us like feudal slaves. Nor will we enable a weak, narcissistic and self-centred president to reign like a king.

The price is too high. We will find another way.

I believe most profoundly that Canadians value democracy, human rights and the rule of law and defending them begins at home.

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Queer Book of the Month: *Hopeless Aromantic*

SYDNEY GOODWIN

Times Columnist

Hopeless Aromantic: An Affirmative Guide to Aromanticism, written by Samantha Rendle, is an educational, humorous and thought-provoking book going into the nuances of what it means to be aromantic, and the existential dread that can come with realizing you may be on the aromantic spectrum.

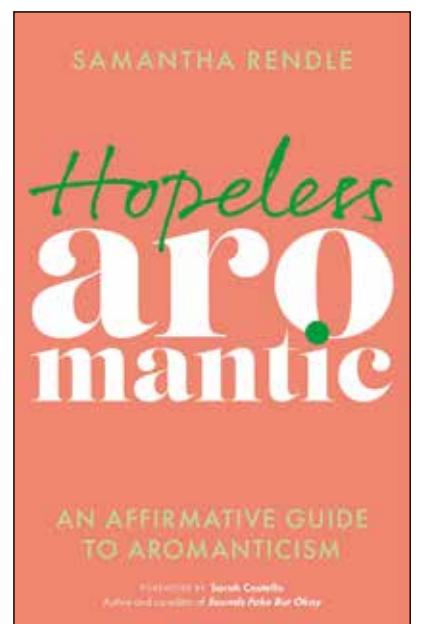
Broken up into eight chapters, Rendle adds her own personal experiences along with cited research on the experience of being aromantic in an alloromantic world. Ranging from definitions of the different types of relationships, the overlap of aromanticism and mental health and how to be a good ally if someone you know/love comes out as aromantic.

Rendle opens her book with a short foreword by Sarah Costello, the co-author of *Sounds Fake But Okay*. Costello explains how within the conversation of asexuality, there needs to be equal talk about aromanticism, but at

the same time, the two are not mutually exclusive, they are not one in the same and how books much like Rendle's are so vital for the aromantic community. In many discussions of aromanticism, it is often combined with the orientation asexual, getting overshadowed by the latter or entirely ignored; even within the orientation Aro-Ace (aromantic asexual), most of the attention is on the asexual aspect, even though aromantic is the first half of it.

Rendle has a section of her book which covers arophobia and how to tackle it; many mistake their arophobia as concerns for someone's future. It is considered normal in society to view being in a romantic relationship as something that is universally desired and that there is no other way to fulfill your life. Rendle reassures readers that no matter how you feel, or where on the aromantic spectrum you suspect you fall on, you are valid and no one can tell you that the way you're living is wrong.

Hopeless Aromantic can be purchased at local bookstores, from Amazon or can be borrowed from the Stratford-Perth Pride's library.



Opinions

WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH GREEN FOOD



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

So, what's for lunch? Good stuff? The news has been full of empty calories lately, especially among young folk. What does that mean? Often it means super-processed food – lots of salt, seasoning, preservatives, colouring, artificial flavours – and not much nutrition. Where does it come from? Just pause for a minute in a grocery store – a big box store, where it's cheaper, right? I'll bet you see row after row of boxes or plastic containers with lots of instant meals. They're sure to taste good and last forever on the shelf. Cheaper isn't altogether true. In the

long run the cost is pretty high – in health.

We have lots of studies to ignore. For some time alarms have been sounding over obesity and diabetes in children and teens, and seriously lacking vitamins, fiber and protein. At the same time, we're pouring in chemicals and preservatives that really aren't helping. Just last week a French study was released linking preservatives to cancer and diabetes, as reported by the Globe and Mail. It was preliminary and needs to be repeated by other scientists, but the amount of people in the study and the length of time involved in comparing diets to health outcomes were impressive. Several preservatives stood out. Hands up, if you like sausage and bacon! As one person commented in response to the study, "I don't know anyone who doesn't like bacon." The main chemical in preserved meats such as sausage, sandwich meat, hot dogs and bacon is sodium nitrite. There have long been warning bells about the connection of this preservative to cancer, and this study

supported that.

Okay, but the boxes tell me the food is healthy, sustainable, eco-friendly and green! Let me tell you a story. My husband and I attended a lecture recently. The speaker was an agriculture specialist, well-versed in food economics. The lecture was fascinating, all about global food supplies, tariffs and the future of agriculture. At the end of the lecture, the moderator asked a question: "Those labels that say healthy, natural and sustainable, are they true?" The speaker hesitated for just a minute, and then said a firm, unembellished, "No." He went on to explain that there are no standards or evaluations applied to any of those terms.

Here are a few items that may help. Wednesday, April 8 from 7-9 p.m. at the Local Community Food Centre, join the Stratford District Secondary School Eco-Club and culinary arts teacher/ chef Andrew Mavor for an evening of delicious food and lessons on sustainability and diet. Yum!

Cooking from fresh avoids processed foods and preser-

vatives, but that's a tall order when life is busy. There are ways. Check into the CFUW resource for reducing food waste at <https://cfuwstratford.ca/advocacy-climate-action/>. It's a useful 10-week plan for using your fresh food up – right to the last drop. There are also great free or low-cost cooking programs at the Local, emphasizing healthy eating and food access. Lastly, I have to mention my favourite cookbook: it's called Google. After shopping I have veggies and protein in the fridge, potatoes, pasta and rice on hand. Now what? I put the ingredients that need to be used into Google, with the word recipe. I love what comes up! Tasty dishes from other countries, new spices I haven't used and new adventures! Try it! And when you're shopping, watch out for those labels that want your money, but not your health.

UPDATES:

1) Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of Feb. 1, 2026: 427.49 ppm. Levels are more than 50 per cent higher than pre-industrial lev-

els, which were consistently around 280 ppm for thousands of years before the Industrial Revolution.

2) The Xerces Society, promoting invertebrates (insects) has come up with a list of New Year's Resolutions. I'll be sharing them in UPDATES in 2026.

Fill any seasonal bloom gaps in your garden. Pollinators and other flower visitors need pollen and nectar throughout their annual active period. Identify the plants in your space, map bloom periods and note any gaps. Plant a spread of native plants that bloom from early spring all the way through fall.

Create and utilize a compost pile. A compost pile reduces waste, recycles organic materials and provides habitat for many invertebrates all at the same time. Create a space for compost and commit to using it.

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

Buy Canadian should fund Canadian jobs and news, not U.S. Big Tech

A Message from Canada's news publishers

To the Government of Canada,

We applaud the Government of Canada's ambition to build Canada strong, and commitment in the forthcoming Budget to Buy Canadian.

Last year, the federal government including agencies and Crown corporations spent over \$100 million on advertising. Most of it went to U.S. Big Tech.¹

Why are we funding American tech monopolies that extract tens of billions a year out of Canada -- largely untaxed -- at the expense of local journalism and culture, and whose platforms have become vectors for division and disinformation?

Let's reinvest our ad dollars in Canada. In Budget 2025, the Government of Canada should follow Ontario's lead and set aside a minimum of 25% of its advertising budgets for Canadian news media.

At no additional cost to taxpayers, the government can support local jobs while getting its message out in a brand safe environment. Far fewer Canadians trust ads on Facebook and Instagram than those published by Canadian news media.²

Buying Canadian advertising in Canadian news media is both the right and smart thing to do.

Respectfully,
Canada's news publishers



SOURCES

¹ Annual Report on Government of Canada Advertising Activities 2023-2024, combined with proprietary industry data.

² Totum Research Canada, January 2025. Canadians 18+, n=2418.; Pollara for the Dais. 2025 Survey of Online Harms, Canadians 16+, n=2502.

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

CROCKINOLE

Every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1-4 p.m. No cost. Ladies and gentlemen, fingers or sticks.
For more information call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford
Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

PANCAKE SUPPER

Tavistock Memorial Legion, 223 Hope Street West Tavistock,
Tuesday, February 17; serving from 4:30-7:00 pm.
For more information call Mary at 519-655-2992.

BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Thursday, February 19; 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Royal Canadian Legion, 804 Ontario St.
\$13 or 2 for \$25. Reservations not required. Show up for a burger & fries and support the Branch. TAKEOUT
Call by: Tues. Feb. 17th 519-271-4540 or 519-703-6544
Pickup: 5:00 - 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 19

ALL YOU CAN EAT SPAGHETTI DINNER FUNDRAISER FOR CARTER

Thursday, February 19; 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.
Shakespeare Optimist Hall
Dine in or take out, Adults \$20, Kids 10 and under \$10.
Tickets must be purchased in advance at Sprucedale Public School. All proceeds go to the Kuchma family.

EUCHRE NIGHT

Friday, February 20; 6:00 p.m.
Royal Canadian Legion, 804 Ontario St.
Enter your 2-person team for \$20 by calling Anne at 519-301-0914, Dave at 519-703-6544, or the Legion at 519-271-4540. Prizes for 1st to 3rd place.
Come out for some fun and support your local legion.

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly starting Sunday, February 22; 2 - 4 p.m.
Infinity Dance 451 Erie St.
Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/person, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more.
www.mckinnamangement.com

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday March 2; 7:15 - 9:00 p.m.
Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford
Featured Presentation: "Building and Maintaining Ponds and Water Features", Johnathan Riehl, Owner, Passion Pool and Ponds, Lakeside
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

March 21; 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
St. Mary's Catholic High School, 431 Juliana Drive, Woodstock, ON, N4V 1E8
Free admission and parking.
Framed and Judged exhibits, Stamp dealers, youth gift bags, Sales Circuit, draw prizes.
Contact: dhfe@silomail.com
Web: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

STRATFORD TIMES

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

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

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

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STRATFORD TIMES

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Tim Hortons - Erie St
Stratford Mazda
7-Eleven - Erie St
Joe's Diner
The Urban Barber
Erie Convenience
Mr. Sub
Balzacs Coffee
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario
New Orleans Pizza

Zehrs
Food Basics
Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier
Festival Marketplace
Stratford Nissan
Stratford Subaru
Stratford Honda
Quality Festival Inn
McDonald's - Ontario St.
Papa Johns
Fore Everyone Golf
WalMart
Stratford Motor Products
A&W
Toner & Ink Shop
Rutherford Funeral Home

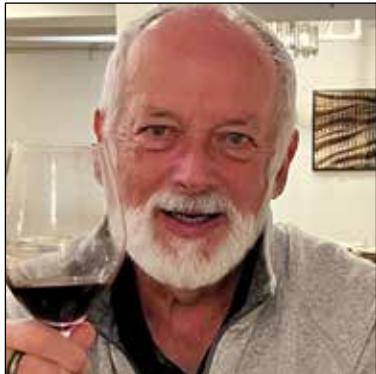
Athens Greek Restaurant
Stratford Legion
Gino's Pizza
Rosso's
Buzz Stop
Union Barber
Mornington Variety
Split Rail
Stratford Rotary Complex
Agriplex
No Frills
Cozyn's
Sebringville Esso
Dave's Diner - Sebringville
Stratford-Perth Museum
Sobey's

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron
Circle K - Huron
West End Pharmacy
Tim Hortons - Huron
Stratford Hospital
Video 99 - Erie St
Jenny Trout
Stratford Medical Pharmacy
Stratford Chamber of Commerce
A.N.A.F.
Stratford Hyundai
Daisy Mart
Foodland
Stratford Variety
Brch & Wyn
Stratford Place

Stratford Chefs School
HH Delea
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United Way Perth Huron
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Blowes Stationery
Stratford Tourism
Coffee Culture
Stratford Public Library
The Parlour Restaurant & Inn
Dick's Barber Shop
The Livery Yard
Town Crier Marketing
North End Pharmacy
Annie's Seafood Restaurant
Avon Pharmacy

Pick Up Locations

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: In the midst of history



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

One of the many things I love about travel is that sometimes, out of the blue, you find yourself in the middle of an historic moment.

Perhaps my oddest moment came in 2004 when I was staying at a National Trust moated manor house in England. The owners were passionate fans of fox hunting, which was about to become illegal in the United Kingdom. There was one hunt left – would I like to come along?

I did. I was cheering for the fox, especially when I learned that the hunters, mounted on horses and following hounds, were using cell phones to report the fox's location. That seemed rather unfair. The good news for me and the fox, if not the hunters and hounds, was the fox escaped and I added an odd but genuine historic experience to my travel-writing resumé.

I've been in the U.K. for more significant events. Way back in 1995, we happened to be staying in the village of Stadhampton, just outside Oxford. We were there on May 8, the 50th anniversary of VE Day – the end of the Second World War in Europe. We were invited by our B and B hosts to join a community event on the village common.



Stadhampton celebrated the 50th anniversary of VE Day with a huge bonfire in the village square.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

I remember music, lamb stew, a world-class bonfire (a tribute repeated across the U.K.) and the apparently unscheduled appearance of a dark-suited man with a cigar, a doppelganger for Winston Churchill. It was a remarkable evening of nostalgic joy and sad reflection.

Two years later, I led a group of good friends on the "Grand Tour" of the U.K. We were there in the first week of September 1997 – the week following the death of Princess Diana on Aug. 31.

Throughout our two-plus weeks in the U.K., the tragedy was top of mind. We saw the forest of floral arrangements in front of Buckingham Palace. We purchased Elton John's "Candle in the Wind" CD in Harrod's. We adjusted our itinerary to account for the closure of everything on Sept. 6, the day of her funeral.

And during our tour of Canterbury Cathedral, I noted that the personal speakers they then used for tours had a different program from my most recent visit. The tour was avoiding the beautiful Chapter House. "Come with me," I said, and led my friends to the Chapter House. The doors were open and, inside, there were tall candles burning and a number of "Books of Remembrance" open on tables, ready to be signed. And, in all sincerity, keenly aware of the mourning of a nation, we each sat and signed the books that were eventually to be given to Diana's family.

These kinds of moments, when as a traveller I was dropped straight into history, have happened in other parts of the world as well. A few years ago, I had the amazing fortune to be part of

a small group of travel journalists invited to witness – and dive – at the installation of a huge number of statues at Grenada's Underwater Sculpture Garden. Joining us was the sculptor, Jason deCaires Taylor, an artist who is making vital and dramatic artistic statements about our environment all over the world.

There have been other such moments such as a free, pop-up concert by Jimmy Buffett in Key West; or the celebration of the Hungry Ghost Festival in Hong Kong. But what actually sparked today's feature were two events in the United States, a country I currently am not visiting, though I deeply regret the need for such a decision. And these two moments, to which I was a silent witness, capture for me the entire recent history of our neighbour to the

south.

The first happened on Jan. 20, 2009. I was with a buddy in a waterfront bar on the Intracoastal Waterway in Pompano Beach. We couldn't help but notice that all service had completely ceased. Everyone – bartenders, wait staff, cooks, hostesses – had abandoned their posts and were glued to the TVs mounted behind the bar.

This was a moment no one had dared to hope for – the inauguration of Barak Obama, the first Black president of the United States. There were cheers and tears, and no one minded that it took an extra hour to get a drink or dinner. It was a time of enormous hope.

In contrast, I was back in the state of Florida, this time in my beloved Key West, on the morning of Nov. 9, 2016. I came down to breakfast at the B and B to find the gay couple who owned the place sitting in shock while their Latino cook sobbed in the kitchen. The reality was sinking in; Donald Trump had won the election and all three of these folks were terrified that their lives had changed for the worse and forever.

So today, as I have considered the question, "Should I travel to and write about the United States," those two moments are front and centre in my thoughts. And for now, I stand with my Key West friends against what is happening in the U.S. while hoping the spirit of 2009 may again become the dominant reality, and soon.

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 Chapter House in Canterbury Cathedral where, in 1997, the author and friends signed books of condolence following the death of Princess Diana.



Canterbury Cathedral.

Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Breezed through
- 5. Consumer protection agency
- 8. Criminal syndicate
- 11. Moves back from
- 13. Satisfaction
- 14. Feel concern or interest
- 15. Monetary units
- 16. Congressman (abbr.)
- 17. Israeli city
- 18. Restaurants
- 20. 2,000 lbs.
- 21. Grandmother
- 22. North, South and Central
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Foes
- 31. Social networking platform
- 32. Early term for basketball player
- 33. Another name for sesame plant
- 38. Disallow
- 41. Provide greater detail
- 43. Inaccessible
- 45. Evoke emotions
- 47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- 49. Celtic punk rockers
- 50. A fencing sword
- 55. Actor Idris
- 56. Affirmative (slang)
- 57. Afflicted in mind or body
- 59. One point north of northeast
- 60. Born of
- 61. Social media hand gesture
- 62. Hong Kong food stall ___ pai dong
- 63. Opposite of beginning
- 64. Email function

- 4. Inability to hear
- 5. More quickly
- 6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
- 7. Shrewdly
- 8. Rooney and Kate are two
- 9. Mediterranean port
- 10. Benedictine monk
- 12. Midway between south and south-east
- 14. Town in Galilee
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. Mice genus
- 24. Brass instrument
- 25. Chest muscle (slang)
- 26. Transmits genetic information from DNA
- 27. Records electric currents generated by the brain
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Short route aircraft
- 34. Pitching statistic
- 35. Pointed end of a pen
- 36. Popular sports league
- 37. Body part
- 39. Inoffensive
- 40. Yellowish cotton cloth
- 41. Feline
- 42. Does not tell the truth
- 44. Seduced
- 45. Spiritual leader
- 46. Abba ___, Israeli politician
- 47. Repair
- 48. Olive genus
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. C. European river
- 54. Keep under control
- 58. Father

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Sign language
- 2. Fashionable
- 3. Borough in Helsinki

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

Solutions on page 31

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DATED at Stratford, Ontario, this 2nd day of February, 2026.

A. Paul Parlee
Personal Representative
by his Solicitors,
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