

St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1334

Thursday, October 8, 2026

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CANDIDATES SET STAGE FOR ELECTION

(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

From left to right, mayoral candidates Brogan Aylward and Don Van Galen, councillor candidates Jim Craigmile, Marg Luna, Andrea Macko, Ryan Lush, Ryan Leaman and Bill Pickering, and moderator Aaron Martin from the Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce. Unable to participate due to prior travel commitments were councillor candidates Stephen V. Hearn and Fern Pridham.

Happiness is seeing SMCP's *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown*

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

The St. Marys Community Players (SMCP) will bring a beloved and iconic comic strip series to life with the musical, *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown*.

SMCP's *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* will run from Oct. 22 to Nov. 7 at the St. Marys Town Hall Theatre. With songs like "Happiness," "The Kite," "Suppertime" and "My Blanket and Me," the production based on Charles Schulz's Peanuts comics will touch on the desire to be understood, childhood worries and quiet hopes.

"There's plenty of laughter and great music,

but also a lot of heart. At its core, the show is about friendship, disappointment, hope and finding happiness in the little things," said Gregory George, SMCP board president and marketing, communications and promotions coordinator.

So far, rehearsals for *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* are going well as the cast prepares to present a show with lots of nostalgia, humour and vibrancy.

"Our six actors have worked incredibly hard to make Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus, Sally, Schroeder and Snoopy their own while staying true to the characters generations have loved," said George.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 10

Candidates outline priorities for St. Marys at municipal election forum

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

Stonetown voters had the opportunity to hear directly from both of this year's mayoral candidates and six of eight councillor candidates for St. Marys town council during the municipal election candidates Question-and-Answer session held Saturday night, Oct. 3.

The event, held at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC), was organized by the Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce, Perth-Huron Builders Association and Grant Haven Media. Aaron Martin, general manager of the chamber of commerce, served as moderator.

Mayoral candidates Brogan Aylward and Don Van Galen were joined by councillor candidates Jim Craigmile, Marg Luna, Andrea Macko, Ryan Lush, Ryan Leaman and Bill Pickering. Councillor candidates Stephen V. Hearn and Fern Pridham were unable to attend due to prior travel commitments.

The event began at 6 p.m. with an hour-long meet and greet where voters could informally engage with candidates who were stationed throughout the two-thirds hall at the PRC. At 7 p.m., candidates were called to the front by Martin for the formal question-and-answer session.

With candidates given limited time to respond, the evening touched on a wide range of municipal issues, including development charges, housing, health care, child care, social programs, downtown vacancies, parking, taxation and the powers of the mayor.

Strong mayor powers

While all other questions were directed to both

CONTINUED TO PAGE 8

STK
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COMMUNITY

YOLO Cannabis brings a new option to town

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

A new cannabis retailer has opened its doors in downtown St. Marys, with YOLO Cannabis welcoming customers to 116 Queen St. E, in the former location of Nail Effects.

The store officially opened Thursday, Oct. 1, and is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Customers must be 19 or older to enter.

Owner Akhil Bhasin said St. Marys is the fourth small-town community in which he has opened a YOLO Cannabis location. His other stores are in Dutton, Port Stanley and Ayr.

Bhasin, who grew up in Kincardine, said he has always enjoyed smaller communities and wanted to bring the convenience of a well-stocked cannabis retailer to towns that might otherwise have fewer options.

He describes YOLO's selection as one of its biggest advantages, with a wide range of cannabis products and formats available. The store carries products including cannabis flower, beverages, gummies, chocolates, capsules, oils and topical products.

"If you're not going to find it here, you're not going to find it anywhere," is the motto Bhasin uses to describe the store's approach to inventory.

Further to that, if a customer is looking for a particular product that isn't currently stocked, Bhasin said staff will try to bring it in.

"We take our customers' requests very



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Akhil Bhasin is owner of YOLO Cannabis, which recently opened at 116 Queen St. E.

seriously," he said.

For Bhasin, the business is also about sharing knowledge and providing a comfortable environment for customers to ask questions.

"Everybody sells weed. We sell customer service," he said.

That emphasis reflects Bhasin's previ-

ous career in hospitality. He spent four years in Australia studying hospitality and later completed a bachelor's degree in travel and tourism in Canada. He worked in the hotel industry until the COVID-19 pandemic brought much of the hospitality sector to a standstill.

Bhasin said his personal experienc-

es have also influenced the name of the business. YOLO stands for "you only live once," a philosophy that became particularly meaningful to him after he was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and went through treatment.

He said the experience changed his perspective and strengthened his desire to make the most of life and give back to the communities where he does business.

That community focus includes hiring locally. Bhasin said YOLO is currently hiring and that he prefers to employ people from the communities where his stores are located.

"I always hire local people," he said. "It's also good for me," since it is due to his excellent staff that he has been able to open four small-town stores.

After its first few days in St. Marys, Bhasin said the response from local residents has been positive.

He sees competition as healthy for consumers and said he wants YOLO to remain a smaller, boutique-style store focused on giving customers what they want rather than simply promoting what the business wants to sell.

"We don't want a big store," he said. "We always keep smaller stores, make it nice boutique stores, make sure that the customers are getting what they want, not what we're trying to sell to them."

For more information on YOLO Cannabis, stop by their location at 116 Queen St. E, call 548-585-0445, or visit them online at <https://yolocan.ca/shop-st-marys-ontario/>.

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St. Marys Independent



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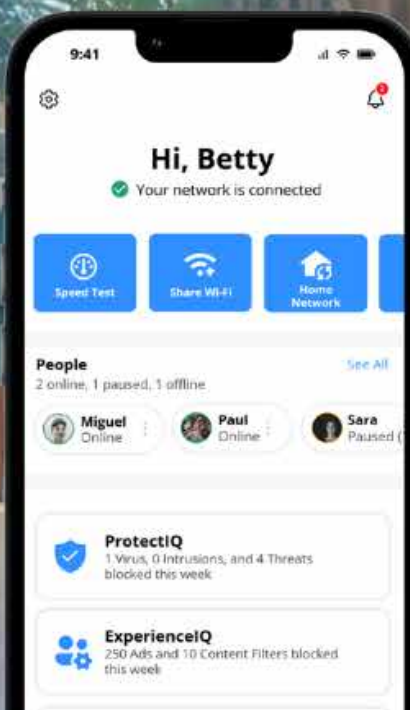
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EDITORIAL

I’m back at my desk after a whirlwind wedding and honeymoon



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Some of you may have noticed my name has been missing from the paper in recent weeks – for most of September actually. No, I haven’t abandoned you, my faithful readers, and I haven’t hung up my editor’s hat for

another job elsewhere. Julia and I were just off getting married and touring Quebec and the East Coast on our honeymoon. On Sept. 5, Julia and I hosted our wedding with roughly 50 of our closest family and friends. We wed under sunny skies with Georgian Bay as our backdrop and the sound of waves lapping on the shore as our music. We enjoyed a wonderful meal catered by Athens Greek Souvlaki here in Stratford, delivered to our wedding venue by Grant Haven’s own Gary West – who also attended our wedding and delivered a very heartfelt toast. The evening was perfect with speeches, cake cutting and dancing under the stars.

Then, a short time later, on Sept. 17 after returning home for a week, Julia and I departed on a whirlwind honeymoon tour of Quebec and the East Coast, with a quick trip down into Maine, before returning home on Oct. 4. The trip was everything we’d hoped it would be and more. Highlights included eating at two Michelin Star restaurants – one in Montreal and the other in Quebec City – spending two nights in Victoria by the Sea on P.E.I., driving the Cabot Trail and spending time near Baddeck on Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, spending a night at the Hollywood Casino and Hotel in Bangor, Maine, learning about the resilience of the residents of Lac

Mégantic, Que., in the 13 years following the 2013 rail disaster, and revelling in the natural beauty of the changing leaves atop Mont-Tremblant. Though we only spent one or two nights in each location, we did our best to experience as much culture, food, history and art as possible, and we promised ourselves we’d return to experience those things we didn’t have time for. We also recorded much of our trip for our online publication, Northern Arts Perspective, where I review and write about people and places that inspire me. I’ve already written about several of our experiences in Quebec, New Brunswick and

P.E.I, but I have a lot more stories and photos to share from our trip, so if you’re interested in reading more, check us out at northernartsperspective.ca and follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Julia and I are planning to experience, photograph and write about future travels and destinations across this wonderful country and beyond, so we hope you’ll follow along. For now, however, we’re both just happy to back home with the dogs. Being away from them for 17 days was probably the hardest part of our trip, so we’re looking at ways to bring them with us on our future travels.

Bravo	Boo
We have 5 Bravos this week 1) Bravo and thank you, St. Marys, for the Milt Dunhill Field park. It's a pleasure to stop and park along the river, having a treat and coffee, just to gaze and admire the river. I've met people from Mitchell, Stratford and even Toronto who enjoy this great little park. 2) Bravo to the young man who assisted me out of the Dollarama on Tuesday, Sept. 29 with my bags. He was on his lunch break from school and took the time to stop and help me. So nice to see this degree of courtesy. 3) Bravo to the organizers and participants of the panel discussion with prospective councillors and mayors at the PRC on Saturday evening. Great questions that were relevant and responses were informed and informative. 4) Bravo to Graham's Sweet Corn. So nice to see you in our usual location this summer. 5) Bravo to the Kirkton-Woodham pool for another successful season this year.	We have 1 Boo this week 1) Boo to the organizers of the all-candidates meeting Saturday evening for not inviting trustee candidates to the meet-and-greet portion of the evening. Nothing is better than face-to-face interactions in helping us choose who we feel is the person who will best advocate for the educational experience of our children.
*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.	

Overheard

AT THE COFFEE SHOP

Sponsored by: *Tim Hortons.*

201 Queen St. E, St. Marys, ON 519.284.4555

May the wishbone snap in your favour this weekend.

I can't eat another bite... Oh look, pie!

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others?

Either email them to us at info@stmarysindependent.com with the title "Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519.284.0041 or drop by the office to let us know!

Quote of the Week

"Remember, with the war, it's just artificial. It's a little bit high. It's a small price to pay for keeping the world safe, keeping our country safe. They can take out a city. Let 'em take out Los Angeles. Let 'em take out San Diego. It's a very small price to pay, and its going to be over with very soon."

- U.S. President Donald Trump on Oct. 5 at a rally in Nebraska, attempting to justify high gas prices and the Iran War

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

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

St. Marys Independent

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Thoughts OF THE WEEK

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We should count our blessings but also let our blessings count.

Be thankful for what you have and you will end up having more.

The best times are always found when friends and family gather around a table.

You're closer to the life you want than you think.

Town hosting conversations with the community outreach worker event on Oct. 17

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys is excited to announce another "Conversations with the Community Outreach Worker" event.

This event offers details and a chance for residents to ask questions about available community support resources.

Taking place on Saturday, Oct. 17, attendees are welcome to drop in from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. (noon) at Snapping Turtle Coffee Roasters (145 Queen St. E). Anyone is welcome to attend.

Attendees will have the chance to meet and chat with the town's community outreach worker, Jade Orquin, who earned her undergrad in sociology and political science and her masters in political science with a focus on policy development and analysis.

This event is part of the town's ongoing efforts to enhance community engagement and ensure residents are well-informed about the support systems that are available and how they can be accessed. Topics include the role of the communi-



ty outreach worker, connections to life stability services, financial aid and other social services.

"This is a great chance to connect people with the services and supports available in our community," said Orquin in a press release. "Whether you're looking for information for yourself or a loved one, we're here to answer questions and help people find the resources they need."

For a list of social services available in St. Marys, visit the Stonetown Supports page on the town's website at townofstmarys.com/stonetownsupports.

For more information on the Conversations with the Community Outreach Worker event, contact Orquin at 226-261-0098 or communityoutreach@town.stmarys.on.ca.

STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



ADVANCED VOTING DAYS

October 7, 8, 9, & 10

Visiting the Pyramid Recreation Centre from 10AM-4PM October 7-10 to Vote in the 2026 Municipal Election.

Visit townofstmarys.com/Election

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townofstmarys.com/flushing



COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATION

We can help your community project grow! The Community Grant Program applications are live. This program provides funding for programs, projects, activities and events that enrich the community and advance Council's strategic goals.

www.townofstmarys.com/grants

BUDGET ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

Engage today to help shape tomorrow!

This survey provides the opportunity to give feedback on the 2027 budget, asset management, housing, property taxes and more within the community. Survey closes October 16.

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St. Marys Giving Tuesday 2026

Won't You Be My Neighbour?

Let's Get Ready for Giving Tuesday, the 2026 edition!

Not sure what Giving Tuesday is? It is a worldwide day of generosity with an extremely beneficial impact on local charities and community organizations. This year, **December 1st** is Giving Tuesday!

A lot of good happens in St. Marys year-round, not just on the day itself. This year St. Marys is celebrating its **10th Anniversary** of participating in Giving Tuesday! Congratulate yourselves and our community, together we have accomplished amazing things!

Can't participate on the day? No problem - there are 52 Giving Tuesdays in a year! Do what you can, when you can, for whomever you choose and **be sure to share your plans with us.**

We will publish a list of the initiatives in the Independent Newspaper the week before Giving Tuesday so everyone has the opportunity to show their support. We will need to hear about YOUR plans no later than Tuesday, November 17th to ensure we can share what you are doing. We will also post all of initiatives that we are aware of (be sure to tell us!) in the Meridian Credit Union window and on the St. Marys Giving Tuesday Facebook and Instagram pages.

Questions? Need more info? Contact Julie at jdockerrjohnson@gmail.com.

Sharing the good is contagious - we hope you will take part so we can say we... "Caught You Giving".

Thank you for participating, it matters!
Better Together,
The St. Marys Giving Tuesday Committee

GIVING
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1
2026



For more info contact jdockerrjohnson@gmail.com
Follow us on Facebook & Instagram - St. Marys Giving Tuesday



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Senior of the Week



Our Senior of the Week is Bill Hodgson who will celebrate his 64th birthday on Oct. 8. Bill was born and raised in St. Marys and worked at Domtar, now called Cascade Containerboard, for 33 years. He loves the outdoors and his passion is fishing and bow hunting for deer. Bill and his wife Heather have three children and three grandchildren. Happy Birthday, Bill.

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

St. Marys Lions Executives installed for 2026/27



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The new executive for the St. Marys Lions Club were installed at their most recent meeting. From left to right, Lion Bill Robinson of Stratford Lions; Lion Ron Annett – Director; Lion President Evelyn Albers; Lion Bruce Shantz – Director; Lion Georgina McGregor - Assistant Treasurer; Lion Gerry Haliburton - Membership Chair; Lion Tony Reynen - Social Media/Marketing; Lion Rob Stuart – Treasurer; Lion Raymond Taylor – Secretary; PDG Lion Tracey Robinson of Stratford Lions; Lion Dawn Reynen - Social Media/Marketing. Absent were Lion Ernie Monk - Tail Twister; and Past President Lion Gwendolen Boyle. PDG Lion Tracey Robinson did the honours of installing the club's 2026/2027 Executive members.



St. Marys Independent

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WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

1. What is the capital city of New Zealand?
2. Which element has the chemical symbol, Fe?
3. Who painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel?
4. Which country is credited with inventing paper?
5. Which boxer was nicknamed Smokin' Joe?
6. In a standard deck of 52 playing cards, how many face cards are there?
7. Which everyday product was originally marketed in the 1890s as a wallpaper cleaner?
8. True or False. Bananas are botanically classified as berries, while strawberries are not.
9. Which famous novel begins with the line "Call me Ishmael"?
10. Which Canadian province is the smallest by land area?

This week's answers are found on pg. 39



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COMMUNITY CARE – IT'S WHAT WE BELIEVE IN.

Textile art the focus of St. Marys Creative Retreat workshops

SHARON BARFOOT
St. Marys Creative Retreat

Textile art is back at the centre of contemporary culture. After decades of being sidelined as “craft,” fibre-based practices have surged into museums, galleries and major international exhibitions.

Landmark shows such as “Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art” at the Barbican in 2024 and MoMA’s sweeping “Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction” have made it unmistakably clear; textiles are no longer peripheral, they are shaping the future of art. This resurgence isn’t sudden. It’s the result of long-term advocacy and experimentation by artists who challenged the hierarchy that once placed painting and sculpture above fibre.

Textile art is having a moment, and St. Marys Creative Retreat is ready for it. This October, our hands-on workshops invite participants to dive into the renewed excitement around fibre, stitch and cloth. Across the art world, textiles are being celebrated for their tactility,

sustainability and storytelling power. At St. Marys, you’ll experience that energy directly – slow processes, rich materials and contemporary techniques that turn fibre into expressive, personal art.

Whether you’re a seasoned maker or newly curious, these workshops offer a welcoming space to explore texture, pattern and meaning — all within the quiet beauty of St. Marys.

Join the resurgence. Let your hands lead.

Workshops offered at St. Marys Creative Retreat with a focus on textiles:

- Scrapping Your Story – textile collage
- Second Spin – slow stitching
- Intuitive Kawandi Quilting
- Eco Dyeing Wool
- Embroidered Fabric Vessels
- Wet Felted Lanterns

For more information, visit stmaryscreative retreat.ca.

Sharon Barfoot is a local artist and organizing committee member for the St. Marys Creative Retreat (coming to downtown St. Marys Oct. 20-22).

No serious injuries following crash at James Street curve



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

A vehicle failed to make the right-hand turn from James Street North to Station Street just before 7 a.m. on Oct. 1. The car crashed through the guardrail and came to a stop shortly afterwards. No one was seriously injured, and the affected section of the road was reopened later in the morning.

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LONG WEEKEND

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Candidates outline priorities for St. Marys at municipal election forum



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Close to 200 people filled the two-thirds hall at the Pyramid Recreation Centre on Saturday night to listen to the municipal candidates Q&A while many more watched the livestream of the event. A recording of the session can be seen on the Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce's YouTube page.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

mayoral and councillor candidates, one question that was designed specifically for Aylward and Van Galen had to do with Ontario's strong-mayor legislation and whether St. Marys' mayor should use the additional powers available under the legislation.

Van Galen said he believes the legislation is poorly worded and that the mayor should not use the powers to undermine council.

He said he would use the powers rarely and would first bring the issue to council.

"If their answer is no, it'll be a no," Van Galen said, adding that if council agreed, the municipality could be stronger for using the powers when appropriate.

Aylward, currently a councillor, said there are circumstances where the legislation requires the mayor to use the powers, including the final approval of the municipal budget.

However, he said his approach would be collaborative and that he would not use the powers to override the voices of other members of council.

"I don't want to see anybody's voice at the table diminished or overridden in any way," Aylward said.

He also said he would not use the mayor's authority to reshape municipal departments or hire and fire staff, arguing those decisions should continue to be made collaboratively.

Growth and housing

Development charges and the municipality's approach to growth also generated discussion.

Aylward said a 2024 development-charges study found St. Marys' charges were on the low end compared with municipalities in its comparator group. He argued development should pay for the infrastructure it requires, while also supporting efforts to make the approval process more predictable and efficient.

Van Galen said he would like St. Marys to be recognized as one of the lower-cost communities in southwestern Ontario for development, arguing the municipality needs to attract growth to help pay for services.

Craigmile and Luna opposed lowering development charges, noting development needs to contribute toward the infrastructure required to support it.

Leaman suggested there may be opportunities to reduce charges for infill development, such as multiplexes, where existing infrastructure is already available.

Pickering also cautioned that reducing development charges without another source of revenue could shift costs to existing taxpayers.

The candidates also discussed the need for a wider range of housing choices.

Aylward said St. Marys needs more housing options for young people, seniors and families, but stressed that higher-density development needs to be located appropriately.

"We need to create more units all over the province, and St. Marys does have to play its part in that," he said.

Leaman advocated for clearly identified areas where pre-approved designs for duplexes, row houses and townhouses could be used to reduce red tape and speed up construction.

Lush took a more cautious approach, saying he would support faster approvals only where affordable housing was part of the equation. He cited the cost of a two-bedroom apartment in St. Marys and suggested developers receiving easier approvals could be required to include affordable units.

Downtown vacancies

The candidates were largely united in identifying downtown vacancies as a concern, though they proposed different solutions.

Leaman proposed a vacant-building

registry that would require owners of long-term vacant properties to conduct regular inspections and pay escalating fees. He suggested some of the revenue could support the town's Community Improvement Plan.

Lush said downtown business owners had identified safety, parking and foot traffic as major concerns. He proposed additional inspections of long-term vacant properties and suggested events or attractions could help increase winter traffic.

Macko proposed exploring a tax levy on long-term vacancies if legally permitted, as well as increased fire inspections. She also suggested the BIA could help identify the types of businesses needed downtown, facilitate pop-up businesses and connect prospective entrepreneurs with vacant properties.

Luna said she would like to explore whether a vacant-unit tax could be effective, while ensuring that vacant properties are regularly inspected for fire safety.

Craigmile noted council had already investigated options such as higher taxes on vacant buildings and found there are legislative limitations in Ontario. He questioned whether an enforcement program would cost more than it recovered.

Van Galen called for stronger enforcement of property-maintenance standards, arguing that commercial properties should not be allowed to deteriorate simply because they are vacant.

Aylward distinguished between chronic vacancies and properties that are simply vacant because of market conditions. He said council needs to consider whether money would be better spent penalizing vacant-property owners or strengthening programs that help improve storefronts and attract businesses.

He also pointed to parking as an important piece of the downtown puzzle, noting the town is investigating town-owned

land that could potentially provide additional parking.

Health care and child care

Health care was another major concern, with candidates acknowledging the difficulty in attracting family physicians to smaller communities.

Aylward said the town already contributes to physician recruitment through its support of the hospital and that St. Marys should continue making the community attractive to doctors.

Van Galen said municipal funding to health care should be specifically targeted toward physician recruitment.

Macko, who has served with the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation, said the community has worked hard to create modern health-care facilities but noted St. Marys does not qualify for some rural and remote physician-recruitment funding available to other communities.

Lush suggested looking at innovative incentives, including possible housing arrangements for doctors considering moving to St. Marys.

Leaman said attracting physicians should involve selling the entire community to prospective doctors and their families, including employment opportunities for spouses and schools and recreational opportunities for children.

Child care also emerged as a concern.

Lush cited a figure of more than 500 children on the child-care waiting list and said St. Marys needs to work with Stratford, which manages child-care services, to explore alternatives such as licensed home-based child care and to attract more early childhood educators.

Aylward said creating another large child-care facility could place a significant burden on taxpayers if the municipality could not guarantee that enough staff would be available. He advocated continued pressure on the province to

CONTINUED TO PAGE 9

Candidates outline priorities for St. Marys at municipal election forum

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

support home-based child care.

Looking ahead

In their closing remarks, candidates emphasized different reasons for seeking office.

Pickering highlighted fiscal responsibility, sustainable growth and open communication, saying he wants to build on the work of previous councils.

Leaman said he wants to bring fresh ideas and a younger perspective while working collaboratively with the existing members of council.

Lush emphasized the need to scrutinize next year's budget, protect taxpayers and businesses, maintain infrastructure and ensure growth does not outpace municipal services.

Macko pointed to her 23 years of professional and volunteer experience in St. Marys and said she hopes to provide an experienced voice on a council that will have new faces.

Craigmile emphasized the importance of experience and continuity on council. While acknowledging that change on council is important, he said there is also value in retaining some of the history and experience of previous councils.

Luna, who has served two terms on

council, said she hopes to provide stability and continuity to a new council and mayor. She identified health and safety, attainable housing, responsible budgeting and maintaining existing services while finding efficiencies as her priorities.

Van Galen emphasized his extensive experience in municipal government, saying he has spent 18 years on council and more than 35 years on committees. He said he intends to be a full-time mayor and promote a "Team St. Marys" approach involving council, business leaders, real estate professionals and developers.

Aylward, meanwhile, said the central challenge facing St. Marys is preparing for the future without losing what makes the community special.

"Protect what we love, build what we need," he said, outlining priorities that included protecting neighbourhood and downtown character, maintaining affordability, providing more housing choices, keeping infrastructure ahead of growth and creating a stronger environment for local businesses and industry.

The municipal election will be held Oct. 26 with voting from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., while advance voting will be available at the PRC from Oct. 7-10, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Mayoral candidates Don Van Galen and Brogan Aylward are pictured above participating in the meet-and-greet portion of the Municipal Candidates Question and Answer session which took place on Saturday, Oct. 3, at the Pyramid Recreation Centre.

Mayor Strathdee recognized for years of service

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

Coun. Jim Craigmile was provided the opportunity to reflect on the successful tenure of Mayor Al Strathdee at the beginning of the Municipal Candidates Question and Answer session held Saturday at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC).

Craigmile recalled meeting Strathdee 12 years ago in Milverton at an event called, "So You Want to be a Mayor or Councillor." While the two gentlemen had known each other just as informal acquaintances, they left the meeting feeling that they were on a similar wavelength. Over the next 12 years, this grew into a close friendship with many discussions on how to better the community.

The list of accomplishments under Mayor Strathdee's leadership is lengthy. These include, but are not limited to, the re-opening of the Green Bridge, resolution of senior staff and morale issues, iconic heritage structure maintenance, Queen Street reconstruction, new child-care facilities, official plan updates, Wellington Bridge replacement, policing service agreements, drinking water storage upgrades, a new fire hall, last mile fibre connection throughout town, sewage treatment plant upgrades, numerous builds addressing the supply-and-demand gap for housing, and leadership through the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Al, it's been one hell of a ride I will never forget. On behalf of the community, we thank you," said Craigmile.

St. Marys Independent

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Alzheimer Society offers fall education sessions for Huron, Perth residents

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth is offering several free education and support opportunities this fall for people interested in learning more about brain health, dementia and caregiving.

The society's online Education Hour programs return Oct. 5 with its Dementia Basics Series, offered in both afternoon and evening sessions. Each one-hour session focuses on common questions surrounding brain health and cognitive change. Topics include an overview of dementia, 10 common signs of dementia, types of dementia, mild cognitive impairment and communication tips.

Registration is available at bit.ly/ASHPEducationHour.

The society will also host its annual Fall Dementia Education Night on Thursday, Nov. 5, at 7 p.m. Dr. Heather Keller, professor and Schlegel Research Chair at the University of Waterloo, will present "Diet and Brain Health: How We Should Eat as We Age." The free event will explore the connection between nutrition, aging and brain health.

Registration is available at bit.ly/Dementia-Night2026.

In Stratford, the Alzheimer Society is also partnering with The Local Community Food Centre to offer "I CAN: Better Together," a three-part education and support series for care partners. Sessions will be held Oct. 13, 20 and 27 from 10 a.m. to noon at 612 Erie St., Stratford.

The series will cover caregiving, self-care, advocacy, community resources and nutrition while giving participants an opportunity to connect with others who understand the caregiving experience.

To register for the Stratford sessions, email connector@thelocalcfc.org or visit bit.ly/4z32B0a. More information about the society's fall education programming is available at alzheimer.ca/huronperth. The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth can also be reached at 1-800-561-5012 or jessical@alzhp.ca.

SMCP's *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown*

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The colourful Peanuts Playground, reminiscent of one found in *Peanuts* media, is also coming along to bring Schulz's imagination to the stage.

"My own memories of being five years old place me at the roundabout in the playground where I met with friends and made new ones and so our set is centred on a playground carousel that creates a focal point for the ensemble to stimulate your memories in this wonderful musical," said director Peter Van Wart in a statement provided to the Independent.

George encourages everyone, whether they're familiar with the characters and stories from *Peanuts* or not, to check out the show.

"These characters and their experiences are wonderfully universal. We've all had Charlie Brown days," he said. "We hope audiences leave the theatre smiling – and perhaps thinking a little differently about the small things that make them happy."

Tickets can either be purchased in person at Troyer's Spices (226-661-8777) at 110 Queen St. E or online via stmaryscommunityplayers.ca.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIE PHILLIPS PHOTOGRAPHY)

Pictured is the cast of St. Marys Community Players' production of *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown*. From left to right are Marc Motiejunas, Dave Humphrey, Matthew Schell, Rachel Lapolitano, Mia Lione and Hannah Bennett, who will perform as the beloved *Peanuts* characters from Oct. 22 to Nov. 7 at the St. Marys Town Hall Theatre.

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2027 community grant applications now open

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys is encouraging local charitable, non-profit, volunteer organizations, sports groups and service clubs to apply for the Community Grant funding to support projects, events, or initiatives that benefit the St. Marys community.

Eligible applicants may receive up to \$5,000 in cash or \$2,000 in in-kind support. Community Grant funded initiatives

are open to the general public and need to align with one or more pillars of the town's strategic plan: culture and recreation, balanced growth, economic development, or housing.

Past grant recipients have included the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys, the Royal Canadian Legion, the Teddy Bear Reunion, Giving Tuesday, the St. Marys Farmers' Market Association, the St. Marys Imagination Library, the St. Marys horticultural Society and many others.

Interested applicants should review the

town's Community Grant Policy and application form at www.townofstmarys.com/grants.

Applicants must be St. Marys based or provide services to the St. Marys community. External applicants will only be considered if they can clearly show that any funding received will have a direct, positive impact on St. Marys. All applicants are required to demonstrate financial need and proof that other funding sources have been considered.

The deadline to apply is Nov. 30. Fund-

ing decisions will be made in early 2027 following the 2027 budget process. Community Grant funds will be allocated based on local needs, strategic priorities and available budget. Previous grant recipients must submit all required documentation in their 2026 applications to be eligible for a 2027 grant.

Questions and/or completed applications should be directed to finance manager/deputy treasurer Jordan Jarrett at 519-284-2340 ext. 217 or jjarrett@town.stmarys.on.ca.

St. Marys Public Library offers entertainment beyond books

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The St. Marys Public Library is helping residents discover a different side of their library card, one that goes far beyond books.

Through a wide variety of entertainment collections Library Plus items, residents can borrow everything from movies and video games to sports equipment, outdoor adventure kits and attraction passes.

A free library card provides access to entertainment and experiences for all

ages. Patrons can borrow DVDs, television series, and video games, but they can also check out unique Library Plus items designed to encourage recreation, learning, wellness and exploration.

"Many people are surprised by the variety of items they can borrow from the library," said Sarah Andrews, CEO of the St. Marys Public Library. "Whether you're planning a family movie night, trying a new hobby, getting active outdoors, or looking for a fun activity to enjoy with friends and family, the library offers opportunities to explore without the cost of

buying equipment or admission."

The Library Plus collection includes items such as snowshoe kits, pickleball and tennis equipment, trekking poles, yoga kits, birdwatching kits and crokinole boards. Residents can also borrow attraction passes for destinations including Ontario Parks, Grand River Parks, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, the Huron County Museum & Gaol, and the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.

For those looking to learn something new or try specialized equipment before making a purchase, the collection also in-

cludes items such as LED projectors and screens, Yoto Players, cognitive kits and other unique resources.

Library staff are available to help residents browse available items, place holds and discover new ways to make the most of their library membership.

Visit the St. Marys Public Library at 15 Church Street North or learn more online at townofstmarys.com/library, call 519-284-2340, or email library@town.stmarys.on.ca. The friendly library team is ready to help you discover everything your free library card can do.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



Local communities mark National Day for Truth and Reconciliation



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

The Municipality of Perth South recognized National Truth and Reconciliation Day on Sept. 30 with a flag raising ceremony. Pictured above, back row (L-R): MPP Matthew Rae, Police Chief Paul Landers, Deputy Police Chief Jason Clarke, Acting Insp. Dan Gray, Clerk Lizet Scott, Const. Tom Lecomte, Coun. Jeff Bell, CPAC Chair John McIntosh, and Mike Brine. Front row (L-R): MP John Nater, Mayor Sue Orr, Patty Brine, and Laura Good.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Perth South Mayor Sue Orr raises the Truth and Reconciliation flag at the Municipal Office in St. Pauls while Councillor Jeff Bell assists.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

The St. Marys Museum is showcasing "Talking About Treaty 29" until Nov. 30. The exhibit provides information about the treaty, also known as Huron Tract Purchase, which was signed in 1827 and resulted in the cessation of about 2,182,049 acres of land in exchange for 1,100 pounds per year. The exhibit also provides background on treaties in general, The Canada Company, and residential schools.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

The Truth and Reconciliation banner was hung at the St. Marys Museum from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sept. 30. The banner was created in 2021 during the first National Truth and Reconciliation Day in St. Marys. Placed in Milt Dunnell Field at the time, community members were invited to show their support by adding an orange handprint. The centre of the banner was completed by Ojibway artist Jeffrey "Red" George.

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First weekend for McCully's Fall Harvest Festival



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

One-year-old Henry Bryan of Stratford enjoyed a visit with his parents to McCully's Hill Farm on Saturday for the first day of their Fall Harvest Festival which runs Saturdays and Sundays during October from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Penelope Baker, 3, fed a couple friendly goats at McCully's Hill Farm on Saturday during the first day of McCully's Fall Harvest Festival.

Did you know? The Wellness Centre is one of the most visited buildings in town

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

If you were asked what one of the most visited buildings in our town is what would you say? Would you say Tim Horton, or the Pyramid Recreation Centre?

Or would the Tradition Mutual Wellness Centre pop into your mind? If you consider that this building, which opened its doors in December of 2003, welcomes people of all ages to visit the Happy Valley

Family Health Team, YMCA, Life Labs, physiotherapy and rehabilitation services, and many other health-care professionals, it is easily one of the most used.

Now, the next question, if you were asked who owns the centre, would you know the answer? Don't feel bad; not many do. The structure was built on Huron-Perth Healthcare Alliance land, but the money raised to build it came from our community. So yes, the community built this busy building.

The late Doug Holliday was very instrumental in getting the building completed and helped raise the \$4 million for the addition to the hospital. When it was completed in 2003, the centre housed the YMCA fitness centre and the medical clinic that had nine family physicians.

In 2014-2015, the centre was officially named the Tradition Mutual Centre for Wellness after Tradition Mutual Insurance gave a generous \$750,000 donation to the "Someone I know capital cam-

paign." In 2018-2019, the centre added on a \$2.9-million expansion increasing the square footage by 7,433 square feet, providing space for the Happy Valley Family Health Team.

We are very lucky to have this building in our town. It is used to compete with other centres to attract new doctors and nurses and keep health-care close to home thanks to our amazing community.

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FALL

in love
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St. Marys, Ontario

Salvation Army food drive fills three vans with donations



The Salvation Army held its October food drive at Foodland and Your Independent Grocer on Saturday, Oct. 3, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Volunteers collected a wide range of non-perishable food and other donated items, filling three vans for the Salvation Army. From left, Elyce and Addie Macdonald visit with Dusty, a police support dog trained to help comfort children, youth and adults during interviews and other situations. Looking on is auxiliary police officer J. Maguire.



From left are Const. R. Willows, auxiliary police officer D. Dotzert and auxiliary police officer Genoure during the Salvation Army's October food drive. Many non-perishable food items and other donations were collected, filling three vans for the Salvation Army.



Salvation Army volunteer Steve Goad collects cash and gift-card donations during the October food drive. Foodland owners Josh and Shauna Baldwin also donated a large number of Foodland gift cards.

(NANCY BICKELL PHOTOS)

MACKO FOR COUNCIL

Dedicated to our healthcare

Every Swing Supports Local Healthcare

Our hospital and healthcare system keep residents strong and our community attractive to businesses. I served on the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation for seven years and know that new physicians want collaborative spaces and quality of life.

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My golf game sure won't solve a provincial physician shortage but my energy and experience can help keep our town healthy.

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This advertisement was paid for by Andrea Macko

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THORNDALE WEEKLY NEWS
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MacEwen gas station and Quickie Convenience a welcome addition for Thorndale

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

MacEwen Petroleum and Quickie Convenience Store opened a new gas station and store early last month.

On Saturday, Oct. 3, company representatives, Thames Centre Mayor Sharron McMillan, property owner Ryan Pope and members of Pope's family celebrated with an official ribbon-cutting ceremony. Many local residents attended to welcome the new business to Thorndale and enjoyed free coffee and a barbecue featuring hot dogs, hamburgers and salads.

Pope, who has direct ties to the Thorndale community, was approached by major petroleum companies including Shell, Esso and Petro-Canada about building a gas station on his property at the south-east corner of Nissouri Road and King Street in Thorndale. Pope believed MacEwen Petroleum was a

better fit for the community because of its independent, small-town approach.

Founded as a small family business in 1976, MacEwen Petroleum is a Canadian company headquartered in the rural community of Maxville, Ont. Reflecting its commitment to understanding its customers and to "local people serving local people," the company hired local contractor Goris Electric to complete the site's wiring and electrical work. The Thorndale location features a gas station, convenience store and car wash and joins MacEwen's network of 124 stations across small-town Ontario and Quebec. In the same local spirit, Pope hired Thorndale Lawns for property maintenance and seasonal snow removal.

Pope echoed MacEwen Petroleum's enthusiasm.

"I am delighted to be part of and contribute to the wonderful, growing community of Thorndale," he said.



(NANCY ABRA PHOTO)

Following a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Oct. 3, pictured from left to right are MacEwen Petroleum director of property management Andrew Fourney, MacEwen senior vice president and general manager of retail Adam Woodward, property owner Ryan Pope's son, Pope, his father-in-law, Ken McCutcheon, and Sangeeta Batra, Quickie Convenience store territory manager.

Thames Centre Heritage Depot working to preserve social history

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

On Jan. 26, Thames Centre council unanimously approved staff's recommendation to establish the Thames Centre Heritage Depot at Dorchester's FlightExec Centre following a proposal from a community-based working group.

The municipality and the committee to establish a Middlesex County archives – Thames Centre working group signed an agreement on March 10. The Heritage Depot opened to the public on May 14.

The Thames Centre Heritage Depot preserves valuable historical documents for eventual transfer to Middlesex County supported archives once such a facility is available. It also raises awareness of local preservation needs and provides staffed temporary storage where historical materials of enduring social value held by community residents can be collected and safeguarded.

The heritage depot working group maintains the Thames Centre History Keepers Facebook page and has been featured in local newspapers and newsletters over the past year. Since opening, the depot has received 73 donations from community groups and family collections, filling 16 banker's boxes, five binders and two archival boxes. Collection days are held at the heritage depot in Dorchester on the second and fourth Thursday of each month, and at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre from 10 a.m. to noon on the third Wednesday.

To support its mission and highlight the importance of preserving social history, the heritage depot is sponsoring a speaker series. The first presentation, "Getting the Vote" by the London Women's History Project, will take place on Thursday, Oct. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Lions Active Living Centre in Dorchester. Admission is free, providing an engaging opportunity to learn more about our social history.

London Women's History Project



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‘Charge into Fire Safety’ is this year’s Fire Prevention Week theme



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

The St. Marys Fire Department kicked off Fire Prevention Week by visiting Tremblett’s Your Independent Grocer on Saturday, Oct. 3, along with Stratford Police Service and the Salvation Army. The Fire Department shared fire safety information while the Salvation Army collected items for their Thanksgiving Food Drive. Pictured from left to right are Raelyn Marshall (representing the Salvation Army) along with firefighters Mike McKone, Mark Manzano, Ethan Brine and Neil Lippert.



(MURRAY GRANT PHOTO)

The St. Marys Fire Department is on call for all types of emergencies, including this fiery dump truck located in the parking lot of St. Marys Golf & Country Club on Tuesday, Sept. 29. The fire department responded quickly, arriving on scene within 10 minutes to get the fire out.

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The annual Fire Prevention Week campaign returned Oct. 4-10, and the St. Marys Fire Department would like to remind residents that safe charging practices can help prevent fires and keep families safe.

This year’s theme, “Charge into Fire

Safety: Safe Charging Is a Superpower,” focuses on the safe use, storage and charging of lithium-ion battery-powered devices.

Lithium-ion batteries power many of the devices people use every day, including phones, tablets, laptops, tools, toys, e-bikes and scooters. While these batteries are safe when used properly, damaged batteries or improper charging can cause

overheating, fires, or explosions.

Fire safety experts recommend using manufacturer-approved chargers, charging devices on hard, flat surfaces, unplugging devices when fully charged and discontinuing use of any device that becomes excessively hot, swells, smokes, or emits unusual odours.

“Fire Prevention Week is an important opportunity to educate residents about

the simple steps they can take to reduce fire risks in their homes,” said St. Marys Fire Chief Phil West. “Many of us rely on rechargeable devices every day, but safe charging habits are essential. By following a few preventative measures, residents can help protect themselves, their families and their property from preventable fires.”

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ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

Members of the St. Marys Fire Department have been busy building their rescue skills while continuing to remind residents that fire prevention starts at home.

Fire Chief Phil West said members of the St. Marys department recently joined firefighters from Stratford and Woodstock for an Ontario Fire College surface-water rescue course at the St. Marys Quarry.

It was the first time the course had been held in St. Marys.

The training follows the department's first Ontario Fire College ice-water rescue course last year. St. Marys is also scheduled to host another ice-water rescue course in March 2027.

West said the department has been busy responding to a range of emergencies, including fires, motor-vehicle collisions and gas leaks, while members continue training for whatever call comes next.

That makes prevention and early warning especially important.

Residents are encouraged to test their smoke alarms regularly and make sure alarms are less than 10 years old. If an

alarm does not work, its batteries or the entire unit should be replaced immediately.

West said firefighters have responded to fires where batteries were missing from smoke alarms.

Carbon-monoxide alarms are also required near each sleeping area and on every storey of a home, including levels without bedrooms, when the home has a fuel-burning appliance, fireplace or attached garage.

The department is also reminding residents to charge electronic devices on hard surfaces using certified, manufacturer-approved chargers, avoid overloading power bars and outlets, and plug high-draw appliances directly into wall outlets rather than extension cords.

Those appliances include space heaters, toasters, toaster ovens, microwaves, air fryers, coffee makers and window air conditioners.

Beyond emergency response, the St. Marys Fire Department remains active in public education, inspections and community fundraising. Members regularly support local sports teams, charities and Muscular Dystrophy Canada.

West said the department's firefighters are always training, learning and preparing for the next emergency.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. MARYS FIRE DEPARTMENT)

St. Marys firefighters take part in Ontario Fire College ice-water rescue training. The department hosted its first course last year and is scheduled to host another in March 2027.



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St. Marys Independent **SPORTS**

Part two: Tim O'Connor reflects on formation of St. Marys Minor Basketball

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

Tim O'Connor, founder and longtime lead executive of St. Marys Minor Basketball, is stepping back from his week-to-week involvement with the organization after more than two decades with the association.

O'Connor, reflecting on the formation of the program, said it wasn't something he set out to do when he first came to St. Marys.

"St. Marys Minor Basketball happened somewhat by accident," said O'Connor. "I moved to the area in 2004. I was teaching at St. Mike's (Catholic Secondary School in Stratford), and we bought a house here, and in the first year, my oldest son at the time was in Grade 2, and I drove him along with a couple of other parents, and we drove about five or six kids up to Stratford for their Hoops For Fun, and I got into my head that, 'Why can't we do this over here?'"

That question led O'Connor to contact the town about starting a youth basketball program in St. Marys, which, in turn, led to O'Connor meeting his most pivotal associate in the founding of the organization, Gregg Blackler.

"I called the town at the time, and Stephanie Ische was working at the town at the time in recreation, and she mentioned there was another guy who was interested in something similar," O'Connor recalled. "So, we went up and met at the Friendship Centre, and that was when I met Gregg (Blackler), and what an incredibly amazing win that was for me to have the chance to meet Gregg."

The development of the program coincided with the development of a close bond between O'Connor and Blackler.

"I think Gregg's personality is very much reflected in the program," O'Connor said. "I know he was very proud of the program, and I think it reflects his personality a little bit. I miss him terribly. Gregg was an incredibly selfless, kind-hearted person, and anybody who worked with him in a number of different capacities up at DCVI or in the community or in Kirkton speaks so incredibly highly of him. I won the lottery the day that I met him because he became a really good friend."

The early days of the program, O'Connor admitted, saw him and Blackler still finding their footing as the heads of a newly formed youth sports association.

"We started as a fly-by-the-seat-of-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Tim O'Connor, pictured on the left, along with the late Gregg Blackler, right, formed a deep friendship as co-founders of St. Marys Minor Basketball, which O'Connor will be stepping back from in a day-to-day operational capacity after more than two decades as one of the program's top leaders and ambassadors.

your-pants organization, if there was ever one. When we budgeted, if the whole cost of the program was \$38.50 per kid, we felt guilty asking kids for \$40. We started at Holy Name and up at Arthur Meighan the first year, and it was very much Gregg and I dragging a bag of basketballs and a clipboard and, as disorganized as it was on one level, it was also a very open and inviting atmosphere.

"There's a simplicity to the program that reflects Gregg (Blackler) a little bit and maybe myself too," O'Connor continued. "I've liked the simplicity of the program, and we've been able to keep it affordable. I'm pretty proud of how it's evolved."

Soon enough, O'Connor and Blackler received help from a troop of invaluable volunteers, who helped the two further establish the program within St. Marys.

"Rob Wrigley played a big role for a number of years. Rob's kids were the same age as mine, and he stuck around for a while. He did some coaching, and I actually retired for the first time in 2015 because I was going back to school, but I kept helping, and Rob stayed involved for a number of years," O'Connor said.

"Rob and Gregg (Blackler) played a huge role in the early days. Ken Thorup, Ian Moore and Tom Valke were some other early volunteers who were great to work with and very encouraging. Shelly Weselan did some behind-the-scenes

work for a long time, and they formed our initial board. We didn't know anything about that, but if you're going to run a minor non-profit organization, you should have a board."

Another piece of the puzzle that clicked into place was the day of the week St. Marys Minor Basketball ran their sessions on, with Thursday nights becoming basketball night in St. Marys and staying that way to this day.

"After about two years, we landed on Thursday nights, and Thursdays developed a really nice rhythm, I thought," O'Connor said. "It's a good place to hang out in St. Marys on a Thursday night. I think it's pretty incredible that, for around 20 years now, we have 16 teams in a town this size playing basketball."

The growth of the program to where it is today, enjoying its highest membership and still growing, comes from maintaining a balance between fun, development and healthy competition.

"We've tried to keep a level of instruction and teaching in the program," said O'Connor. "In my opinion, kids do like to learn things, but our approach to that has been very moderate. We teach a skill, and then we have some games. There have been different views on whether we keep score or not. I like keeping score because I think competition is not a bad thing. Competition run amok, when it's win at all costs, can be very harmful in minor

sports, but kids can still play games and learn to compete in a positive way."

That positive atmosphere, in O'Connor's eyes, has been supported by a seemingly never-ending supply of quality parents and kids who sign up for the program.

"Basketball is a fun game. When you go into the gym on a Thursday night, and kids are laughing, kids are trying hard and kids are enjoying being with each other, it's just a great place to go to. The kids in this town are terrific. I don't know if it's a chicken or the egg thing; does the program make them behave, or did we just happen to luck into being in a town where the kids are really good?"

"I have had so few disciplinary type interactions with kids over 20 years," added O'Connor. "The kids have been so non-stressful. That's a real tribute to their parents. We didn't have parents like yelling at the kids or yelling at the refs. I think it's the way the game is taught to the kids. Everybody has a ball, and it's a game that gives you a little bit of success because, eventually, you put the ball in the net."

O'Connor also raved about how having so many quality young people go through the program led to many of those very same kids returning to help as volunteers and creating positive connections for years to come.

"I've met some great kids that I've coached, and they go on and they live their lives, but occasionally you run into them when they come back to visit, or you see them around the town, and they say, 'Hello,' and it's just a warm fuzzy feeling to be involved in their life in some way. The other part of the program that has been a really great thing is having high school kids come back and help. They've all been great, and it's a neat piece of the program that I'm really proud of."

As O'Connor prepares to step back from being a day-to-day hands-on factor in the program's leadership, he is doing so with nothing but positive feelings.

"I've had fun, too," O'Connor said. "I think anybody who coaches or volunteers at any level, whether it's sports or it's other community-type things, when you see kids laughing and having fun and having some success and getting better at something, it's a good feeling. It's a good feeling when you have a sense that you and the other volunteers are part of something that is good for the community, and kids can come and have a good experience and build relationships."

FOR SPORTS TIPS CONTACT SPENCER SEYMOUR

CALL OR TEXT 519.859.1049 OR EMAIL SPENCER.SEYMOUR88@GMAIL.COM

Lincs dominate Strathroy, Komoka; tied for West's top spot



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Ryan Hodkinson scores during the St. Marys Lincolns' 7-3 win over the Strathroy Rockets Oct. 2. The goal was Hodkinson's 150th GOHL point in his 150th career game, with an assist later in the contest the 100th of Hodkinson's career. As of the Independent's press time, Hodkinson leads the GOHL in points with 19.

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys Lincolns picked up wins Oct. 2 against the Strathroy Rockets and Oct. 4 over the Komoka Kings, sending them into their Oct. 7 game in LaSalle tied for the top spot in the Western Conference.

The Lincolns were dominant on home ice against the Rockets, outshooting Strathroy 59-20, including a second period where the shots were 25-6.

Head coach Jeff Bradley raved about the team's showing.

"There wasn't a single part of our game that I didn't like," said Bradley. "It sucks to give up three, especially one late, but I thought the guys played great. Leading up to the first goal, we didn't give them anything at all. I thought we were in complete control of the game. Having our line of Campbell (Lehto), Jack (Taylor) and Chase (McDougall) get us going, that's such a big thing for us. It's a great line for us."

Chase McDougall made it two straight games with a goal when he opened the scoring at the 15:39 mark of the first period, followed three minutes and 15 seconds later by Oliver Lacko also scoring for the second straight game.

The Lincolns extended their lead to four in the second frame with powerplay goals by Camden Kean and Mikey Pope, both of which were assisted by the newly acquired Owen Miniotas.

Miniotas, a London, Ont., native and 2025 third-round pick of his hometown Ontario Hockey League (OHL) squad, the Knights, was traded to St. Marys from the Komoka Kings in exchange for David Heath and Tyson Cartier. Last season, Miniotas scored 12 goals and 24 assists in

45 games with the Kings.

General manager Pat Powers said Miniotas' offensive pedigree makes the Lincolns' forward group stronger.

"As a young player, Owen has already demonstrated that he can produce at this level," Powers said. "His 24 assists also show that he can create offence and make plays for his linemates, rather than relying solely on scoring goals. While David (Heath) and Tyson (Cartier) are excellent young players with good potential, Owen provides a more established offensive track record right now. Overall, this creates more versatility and depth in our group."

Miniotas added a goal and another assist for a four-point night in his Lincs' debut, with coach Bradley crediting Miniotas for his drive to become a more well-rounded player.

"You can tell Owen wants to be an even better hockey player, so when you get ambitious kids with talent, you know you're going to get a good effort and a guy who wants to do what you ask," said Bradley. "They want to get more ice time so they can get better, and they know they have to do what you want to get that ice time. I think he's going to be very coachable, very motivated and very ambitious."

The Lincolns' finished the night two-for-four on the powerplay, which, going into their game in LaSalle Oct. 7, was top in the West at 38.9 percent.

In goal, Brogan Colquhoun earned the win. Two defenders turned in standout showings, including Kean and Cullen Kerslake.

"Being the older guy in the back end, I think there's some pride there for Cam (Kean)," Bradley said. "There's a confidence about him, and he wants to take charge as the older guy back there, and



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

Owen Miniotas releases a bullet of a shot that beats Strathroy Rockets' netminder Nikolai Felin-Henriksen during Miniotas' debut for the St. Marys Lincolns. Miniotas, acquired from the Komoka Kings for David Heath and Tyson Cartier, had a goal and three assists in his first game with the Lincolns.

you can see that in his play. We're really happy with him, obviously."

"I think Cullen (Kerslake) is just such a fantastic player. He's such an underrated player. He does everything right. It's a lot of fun to watch him. It's very rare that you have a fun time watching defencemen play, but he's just so smooth. He's so polished. He works hard. The kid just has everything, and he's only seven games into his junior career."

It was a milestone night for Lincs' captain Ryan Hodkinson, who put up his 150th career Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) point with a goal in the third period. Hodkinson then put up his 100th career assist later in the period on Kean's second goal of the game. The game itself was number 150 in Hodkinson's GOHL tenure.

As of the Independent's press time, Hodkinson's 19 points are first in the GOHL.

Lincs breach castle walls in Komoka in 7-1 blitz

Despite imperfect play, which didn't go unnoticed by the bench boss, the Lincolns still managed to leave Komoka with a 7-1 victory over the Kings.

"You want to make sure you celebrate your wins, but I thought we were a little sloppy at times. I think it's also difficult to have a 4:45 start time. Hockey players are creatures of habit and they're ready for normal game times on normal nights and normal meeting times, and maybe that had something to do with our lack of focus, but I thought we could have definitely been better."

"We can't make excuses for that," added Bradley. "We want to make sure, although we are playing an opponent, we're playing against ourselves too and the standard that we've set, and we want to make sure that's adhered to."

Ethan Weir and Devun Colebrook each scored twice, with Campbell Lehto, James MacGregor and Jack Taylor also chipping in goals.

For Bradley, the trio of Lehto, Taylor and McDougall were standouts once again.

"There's a bit of skill and grit and they do whatever they can to contribute to the team's success. Having that type of mentality is great to push our veteran players and it gives us a boost when we need one. Chase (McDougall) and Jack (Taylor) are obviously very hard to play against, and I find Campbell (Lehto) to be a very intelligent hockey player."

Kobe Nadalin backstopped the Lincolns to the victory in goal. According to Bradley, the strong showing from Nadalin was a big boost for the squad.

"I think it was needed," said Bradley. "In the past four games, we've given up 12 to 15 shots combined in the first two periods in each game, and, as a team, we've given up too many goals. It's difficult to keep your focus when you're not facing shots for 10 or 12 minutes at a time, and (against Komoka) was another one of those games where it's easier to lose focus as a goaltender, but I thought Kobe (Nadalin) held it very well."

The issue of too many turnovers again reared in Komoka where the Lincolns, at times, tried to be a bit too fancy.

"Our puck management is the big thing we have to work on still, for sure," Bradley said. "There are way too many turnovers and bad passes. I think it's one of the good things we've been doing, but it's just one of those things you've got to tweak at times. I think we usually move the puck very well as a team, but some games, not as much, so we want to make sure we're staying on top of things."

U15 A Boys win gold at St. Marys tournament

CHARIS MUHTAR

Independent Sports Reporter

The No Snow U15 A Boys St. Marys Rock won the gold medal at the St. Marys Preseason Showdown tournament Sept. 15-17.

According to head coach Josh Becker, winning the tournament was exactly how the team wanted to kickstart the season.

"We do have some new faces that have joined us this season," said Becker. "We've had a player return home to play here. It's been great. The kids have gelled so far. Things look good. I wanted them to win this tournament to start the season. Looking back, the way we ended last season on a tournament win, and now, to start this way is what we wanted. And, being almost perfect on the weekend, going 5-0, it's a nice way to start the season off."

St. Marys went undefeated through three round-robin games, setting up a semi-final battle against the Kitchener Junior Rangers, which remained scoreless after one period.

With 6:30 left in the second, the Rangers scored. Luckily, a few minutes later, Mark Richardson sent the puck flying into the net. The goal was assisted by Elliott Wilhelm and Mason Soumalias. Kitchener scored again around 40 seconds later. Fighting back, Wilhelm scored another for St. Marys, unassisted.

At the start of the third, Beckham Skillings put a third goal on the board, assisted by Greyson Gillespie and Lukas Francis. Ryan Harding then scored with 9:30 left in the third period, providing the team with a two-goal lead against Kitchener. Despite this lead, Kitchener scored with 3:39 left in the period and again with 12



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

The No Snow U15 A Boys St. Marys Rock captured the gold medal at the St. Marys Preseason Showdown tournament Sept. 15-17. Pictured in the first row, from left to right, are Oliver Strickler and Colton McKinnon. Pictured in the second row, from left, are Ben Becker, Jackson Schoonerwoerd, Logan Broughton, Bryce Blight, Rylan Dobinson, Mark Richardson and Connor Freiter. In the third row, from left, are Brian Barker, Ryan Francis, Greyson Gillespie, Lukas Francis, Mason Soumalias, Louie Turpin, Ryan Harding, Joe Wilhelm, Beckham Skillings, Elliott Wilhelm, Liam Barker, Josh Becker and Dennis Aarts.

seconds remaining.

In the stressful overtime, Francis scored the winning goal for St. Marys. The goalie of the game, Oliver Strickler, got the win in between the pipes.

Becker called the semi-final against Kitchener a challenging battle.

"Kitchener is a great skating club. They come out hard. We played them Saturday night in our final round-robin game, and they got out to an early start then, just like

we did in the semis. We came back with two quick ones, and it was a back-and-forth battle all game. In the last 30 seconds, they pulled their goalie. It worked out for them, and they got one," Becker said.

"We went into overtime, and we had a gameplan going into it. We talked about, before the game, if we got to that point, what we were going to do. We didn't even get to our second line. Our first line did

it right away, so it worked out perfectly. We had the right guys on the ice, and they scored right away."

In the final game against the Strathroy Junior Rockets, with roughly seven minutes left in the first period, Jackson Schoonerwoerd scored for St. Marys, unassisted. Freiter then scored the second goal for St. Marys with 3:54 on the clock. Strathroy pulled two goals, one with 34 seconds left in the first and one with 3:31 left in the second.

Richardson buried St. Marys' third goal of the game, unassisted, with roughly two minutes left in the second period. Strathroy answered back with 40 seconds left in the second. With 9:07 left in the third period, Schoonerwoerd bagged the fourth goal. The goal was assisted by Richardson and Logan Broughton. Five minutes later, Strathroy scored to tie the game and eventually force overtime.

In overtime for their second straight game, Freiter scored the game-winning goal for St. Marys with just under four minutes left. The overtime goal was assisted by Richardson. The goalie, Colton McKinnon, earned the win in net.

According to Becker, the Rock's long-standing rivalry with Strathroy made the finals' win especially satisfying.

"Strathroy is a team we've battled the last couple seasons. The biggest thing is the competition between the two teams. A lot of these guys know each other. They're friends on social media. They talk outside the arena. So, there is a bit of a heated rivalry there. They all want to win. They're all passionate. These guys come to battle every night, and I love it.

"They have a great coaching staff and great kids," Becker continued. "Both

CONTINUED TO PAGE 25

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U16 A Boys capture gold at St. Marys preseason tourney

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The U16 A Boys St. Marys Rock emerged as gold-medal winners from the Preseason Showdown tournament Sept. 25-27 in St. Marys.

Head coach Ryan Hewlett summarized the weekend for his squad in a single word: “resilience.”

“We ran up against a lot of injuries that we came in having, and we came out with a few more,” Hewlett said. “We also battled through some penalty trouble, so, on championship Sunday, we changed how we approached the game. We limited our over-aggressiveness but still played physical and played smart, and that was the difference.”

According to Hewlett, they tightened up their discipline issues by putting a big focus on smarter defensive and physical pressure.

“We were just emphasizing getting the stick blade on the puck, disrupting the puck and following through with the body instead of getting our hands and sticks up and trying not to make an easy call for the ref,” said Hewlett. “That way, we’re disrupting the puck and still being physical, but we’re not getting beat with the puck if we miss a hit.”

The Rock finished their four-game round-robin with three wins and one loss, with their only defeat coming at the hands of their eventual gold-medal-game opponents.

Before getting to the finals, however, St. Marys had to get through the West Niagara Flying Aces in the semi-final, with the first goal, scored by Luke Showers and assisted by Elliott Hudson, coming with 85 seconds left in the opening period.

Landon Hewlett made it 2-0 in favour of the Rock with just over eight-and-a-half minutes to go in the second. Evan Wolfkamp and Luke Simons picked up the assists on the eventual game winner.

West Niagara cut the lead to one with a powerplay goal with under four minutes to play in the third, but goaltender



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)

The U16 A Boys St. Marys Rock took the top prize at the St. Marys Preseason Showdown tournament Sept. 25-27. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Braydon Wheeler and Andrew Bomasuit. In the middle row, from left, are Ryan Hewlett, Ben Graham, Luke Simons, Sean Porter, Grayson Urquhart, Jack Graul, Quinn Porter, Will Richardson, Ashton Elliott and Eric Taylor. In the back row, from left, are Elliott Hudson, Landon Hewlett, Hayden Barker, Evan Wolfkamp, Luka Verkuyi, Landon McDonald, Luke Showers, Evan Sutherland and Greg Wolfkamp.

Andrew Bomasuit and the Rock’s strong defensive prowess managed to close out a 2-1 victory and earn a spot in the finals.

“We came out strong and got off to a lead fairly early and plugged up the neutral zone, so we didn’t give them many chances,” Ryan Hewlett said. “We were tired, but we found our legs, and we outskated them, and just rode our defensive structure all the way to a close win.”

St. Marys squared off against the Tri-Centre Junior Attack in the tournament final, a heated rematch from the Rock’s sole round-robin loss, a result Ryan Hewlett said the team bounced back from and applied what they learned in the final.

“We lost to that team in the round-robin. It’s one of the few round-robin games we’ve lost. That was one where we learned from it. We learned better discipline, looked at some of the film and saw some opportunity areas and looked

at areas we could improve on ourselves. We played a very disciplined game. We were very structured defensively, and we ended up getting two shorthanded goals, which is rare, but it just goes to show you how patient and poised we were in the defensive end.

“While killing a penalty in a 0-0 tie in the third, in our own zone, Landon (Hewlett) pressured the defenceman at the blueline, stole the puck off him and sprinted in for a breakaway goal,” Ryan Hewlett continued. “We maintained the lead all the way to the end.”

The bench boss further credited his team for taking the penalties they did get called for in stride.

“Instead of getting down when penalties were called, our body language stayed optimistic and we stayed confident,” said Ryan Hewlett. “We just took it one shift at a time to kill each penalty off. Just get the puck off the stick hard and get

pucks out, and those really pumped us up when we killed those off, and obviously our goaltending was amazing, giving up one goal on championship Sunday over two games.”

The finals remained scoreless until Landon Hewlett’s shorthanded goal with 12 minutes and 22 seconds left in the third. Wolfkamp, who led the Rock in tournament scoring with nine points, picked up the lone helper.

Ashton Elliott added an insurance marker with two minutes and 11 seconds left in the third. Braydon Wheeler earned the win in between the pipes.

Ryan Hewlett described a complete team effort as one of the biggest highlights for his squad.

“We’ve really emphasized ‘We hockey,’ and that’s the beauty of this weekend; everybody did contribute. You look at not just the stat sheet, but also the video, and everybody was playing their role, and that’s the only way we win a championship is if everybody’s playing a role. We don’t like ‘I,’ we like ‘We,’ and that message came through and really showed itself throughout the whole tournament.”

The gold medal to start the year, said Ryan Hewlett, reinforces the team’s “winning mindset” they forged last year.

“It just shows that we are an elite program in this loop, within our league and across the province, and this tournament verified that. It also showed us that it doesn’t matter how you win, and it just showed us that we’ll be faced with adversity and we can power through. We play our game, we play as a team, and we’ll just take it game-by-game through this season, but it’s a huge launching pad. It’s really something to get momentum from.

“Last year, we got the winning mindset,” added Ryan Hewlett. “We got into a tournament early last year in South Simcoe and we won that championship, and that really catapulted our season, so we expect nothing different this year. We had a lot of success but didn’t quite get to the top of the mountain, and this year, that’s the goal.”

U15 A Boys win gold at St. Marys tournament

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

coaching staffs talk before games about how good our teams are and how comparable they are. There is nothing bad I can say about that group. They work hard. They knew what we were going to bring. We knew what they were going to bring. It was a battle the whole way from start to finish.”

Becker voiced his satisfaction with the rotation of the players, especially during the overtime.

“Again, we got to overtime, and I looked down at my bench, and I was going with the same rotation, and we just

stuck to our game plan, and it worked,” Becker said. “We controlled the whole overtime. We didn’t let them get a chance to get out of the puck and in our end. Mark (Richardson) worked it down low, and Connor (Freiter) was there to put the puck home. It was a great win.”

Becker was also pleased with the team’s positivity and drive leading to the gold medal.

“There were so many great moments led by the offence of Lukas (Francis), Mark (Richardson) and Connor (Freiter), just to name a few. The boys all played well. They did a great job. We went down

a goal early on in the semi-final, and there was no getting down on each other. They didn’t think of it as we were down. We were positive the whole time, and the kids were ready to play hockey.

“We never gave up,” added Becker. “There were leads for our opponents. We were behind a couple times, and nothing fazed them. It just seemed like they wanted to win the whole weekend. The goalies played well, the forwards were getting pucks down low, they cycled it and the defence did their job when they needed to step up.”

Becker added the team’s success mo-

tivates the team to work even harder to improve.

“This win makes us want to push them farther. We want to push them to be the best in this league, which comes down to just continuing to work hard every night, practice like you play and don’t take a shift off. Every shift has to matter, no matter what the score is, and give it everything you’ve got, up and down the ice. The Shamrock league is a tough league to play in. We’ve known that for years, and I think that we can compete every night, and we’ll battle to try to be the top team in the league.”

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Ramus, Flanagan represent Canada in walking soccer festival

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

St. Marys natives and members of the Stratford Sloths walking soccer team, John Flanagan and Martin Ramus, attended the Canada International Walking Soccer Festival Sept. 15-17 in Vaughan as members of Team Canada's Men's Over-60 team.

Flanagan told the Independent the experience was incredibly special.

"This was definitely the high point of my walking soccer experience to date," said Flanagan. "Playing against top teams, marking such a great player in (Spencer) Pratten and playing eight games in three days is a new experience for us both. The highlight was scoring against the world-champion England Over-60 team, who only allowed two goals over eight games. What made it even better was that we were a man short at the time."

For Ramus, being invited to the event in Vaughan was a surprise.

"I was aware of the tournament but did not expect to get an invitation," Ramus admitted. "I received a call from the tournament convenor saying I had been recommended to attend as the Maple Leaf Selects goalkeeper. It was a shock to me as I'm not a lifelong soccer player like John (Flanagan) and most of the other players. I started playing walking soccer three years ago, mainly for the health

benefits and entertainment. Participating at this level was never a consideration."

Walking soccer, which is non-contact, is well established in Europe and starting to get a following in Canada, especially Ontario. The game includes smaller pitches, various age groups and has teams with cancer and Parkinson's Disease survivors, both men and women.

According to Ramus, the game has plethora benefits for those who play it.

"Walking soccer has opened up a whole new avenue to continue to play, at an older age, the game we love," said Ramus. "The friendships, banter and physical and mental health effects are benefits for all the players. There are players in their 80s and 90s playing, which is a testament to the safety of the game."

Arguably the biggest game of the tournament for Ramus and Flanagan, as well as their teammates, was their clash with the English Over-60 team, which includes a top walking soccer player in the world, Spencer Pratten.

"Starting the competition was both exciting and nerve-wracking. Our first game was against the Over-60 English team that won the most recent world championship. Our team had never played together before, so it was a bit of a mismatch, and with me being the keeper, I was kept busy. I was relatively pleased with my play; this level of competition is way above anything I have ever played

at before.

"We also played against a Parkinson's team, where every member had the disease," Ramus continued. "It was fascinating to see how they played and also a little humbling to see what they could accomplish. The other big thrill was playing against Spencer Pratten. He was the Walking Football Player of the Year last year. His nickname is the 'Lionel' Messi of Walking Football.' That's the best player I have ever played against. I did manage a few saves against him, but he also scored a couple goals on me. Just to play against that level of competition was a thrill."

Flanagan added it was a massive test for the newly formed Canadian squad.

"I have played and coached against some top 11-a-side Ontario teams, so the quality was not unexpected," said Flanagan. "The challenge for my six-a-side team was getting to know each other and getting a system of play established. The English teams were well-organized and coached, so we had a huge hurdle to climb."

The camaraderie of the tournament was also especially noteworthy to Flanagan.

"I also refereed three games and enjoyed the experience. One game was the Cancer Survivors teams from Canada and England, and what stood out is most teams will say, 'Mark your man,' whereas these teams said, 'Mark your friend,' so it

was a nice sportsmanship moment," Flanagan said.

"The fellowship was excellent, and a highlight was an English coach taking time to pass on to our team some Walking Soccer team play and structure. The last day we also mixed up the teams, which was so fun, and it provided the opportunity to play with and against some great players. Marty has mentioned Spencer Pratten, and defending against him was no fun but a joy to see him in action on the pitch."

Flanagan further described the moments he will cherish the most from the experience.

"My favourite game was playing the English Over-70 team as, by that time, our team was familiar with each other and our style of play," Flanagan said. "It ended up 2-2, although they did beat us in the rematch. Also, the Parkinson and Cancer Survivor teams demonstrated the inclusivity and value of Walking Soccer."

"We learned we can play at a high level. However, to achieve that level of success, we have to be better prepared overall. The England teams did very much enjoy the competition and hospitality of the Canadian group and had nothing but positive feedback. It is the start of better things to come and an honour to be in the initial International Walking Soccer between Canada and England. The sportsmanship and fellowship were evident from everyone."



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Happy Thanksgiving 

DCVI senior girls basketball team wins season opener

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys DCVI Senior Girls basketball team picked up a tight 27-24 victory in their first game of the season Sept. 30 against the Mitchell Blue Devils.

Head coach Monica Ryan said she was particularly impressed with the win due to the Salukis entering the game with less time on the court than Mitchell.

"I wasn't sure what to expect because Mitchell had at least one tournament under their belt and we hadn't played even an exhibition game yet, but our girls pulled through," said Ryan. "They were great. The younger girls really shook off the rust and the nerves and played tough, and on the bench, they were loud and really supportive."

Ryan called her team's defensive play the cornerstone of their victory.

"They played outstanding defence," Ryan said. "You can't always control offence. It takes a lot of time and practice to get your shots and create movement, but on defence, you can always play hard. They forced Mitchell into eight shot-clock viola-

tions, which was amazing. Mitchell ran a few plays for their shooter, and we caught on really quickly and chased them out of that."

Charlotte Richardson led the DCVI side with 11 points, while Alanna Saville scored eight. Holly Black and Reagan Stacey each scored three, while Maeve Wheeler chipped in two. Stacey's three points came late in the fourth quarter on a game-winning three-pointer.

"There was tight defence at both ends of the court," Ryan said when discussing Stacey's three-pointer. "We had called a play for Charlotte (Richardson) to shoot. Charlotte didn't get her shot off and passed it to Reagan (Stacey), and Reagan knew that she had to shoot and she only had a couple seconds left on the shot clock."

Ryan added the win gives the team a positive base to build on as their season ramps up quickly.

"It gives us huge momentum. We have a tournament coming up where we can fine-tune some of our strategies, but to have a game like that to start the year and a rookie senior player score the game-winning shot is really exciting. I think we're just learning about what our potential is."



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St. Marys Curling ready to rock for the 2026-27 season

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT
Staff Contribution

The ice is going in, registrations are coming in and another season of curling is about to get underway at the Lind Sportsplex.

St. Marys Curling is preparing to welcome curlers back for the 2026-2027 season, with a full schedule of daytime and evening leagues, Learn to Curl programming, bonspiels and events planned throughout the winter.

The 2026-2027 schedule features a mix of established leagues and new programming, including two additions aimed at creating different ways to play the game.

One of the new additions is the Tuesday Night Rock League, a flexible format divided into three six-week sessions. Rather than playing with a set team for the season, teams are created from the curlers in attendance, allowing participants to play with different people throughout

each session. The league is also open to non-members who already know the basics of the game. A Two-Person Stick League is also being introduced this season, adding another format to the weekly schedule.

For those who have never curled before, St. Marys Curling will once again offer Learn to Curl programming designed to make trying the sport as easy as possible. Equipment is provided, and participants learn the fundamentals of delivery, sweeping, scoring and gameplay while gaining experience on the ice.

The season will get rolling with the Ice-breaker Bonspiel on Saturday, Oct. 17. Featuring separate Social and Competitive draws, teams will play two games with lunch included.

St. Marys will also welcome competitive curlers from across Ontario throughout the winter, with several major events scheduled at the Lind Sportsplex.

The Ontario Mixed Doubles Tour

comes to St. Marys Dec. 11-13, followed by a U20 Provincial Qualifier Jan. 8-12, 2027. Later in the season, St. Marys will host the Two-Person Stick Provincial Championships Feb. 26-27, 2027.

Hosting these events provides an opportunity to showcase competitive curling locally while bringing visiting athletes, coaches, families and spectators into the St. Marys community.

While registration is already well underway, there is still space available in a

number of programs and leagues. Anyone considering curling for the first time is encouraged to give it a try. No previous experience or team is required to get started and Learn to Curl provides an introduction for complete beginners. There will be an Open House on Oct. 8 from 7-9 p.m. for those interested in finding out more about St. Marys Curling.

Registration, league information and details about upcoming events are available at stmaryscurling.ca.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

St. Marys Curling is ready for the 2026-2027 season with new and returning programs, and opportunities for new players to learn the game.

U12 A St. Marys Rock hosts fundraising barbecue



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

The St. Marys Rock U12 A hockey players were busy fundraising for their team on Saturday, Sept. 26. They hosted a barbecue at the Pyramid Recreation Centre from 12-4 p.m. where they served up hamburgers, hotdogs, pop and chips. They were also out and about collecting cans and bottles with all funds going back towards the team. The U12 A team is coached by Mike Johnson. Pictured from left to right are Warren Atwell, Everett Crummer, Jack Anderson, Kyle Johnson, Harlan Atwell, Bode Keller, Myles Avey and Lincoln Jennings.

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Solutions on pg. 39

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MINOR SPORTS

SCRAPBOOK



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)
Danton Millar kicks out the pad for a save during the Core Fuels U11 B Boys St. Marys Rock game last Saturday.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)
Kira Henderson connects with a diving scoring chance during this past Sunday's Core Fuels U11 C Girls St. Marys Rock game.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)
Laura Parkinson backhands the puck towards the net during the Core Fuels U11 HL Girls St. Marys Rock game this past Sunday.



(CHARIS MUHTAR PHOTO)
Harper Hillman sends a wrist shot on target during this past Sunday's McKinley Hatchery U13 B Girls St. Marys Rock game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Everly Graham releases a backhand shot on goal during the McKinley Hatchery FUN3 St. Marys Snipers (Vergeer) game last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)
Savannah de Boer slides the ring on goal during last Saturday's Synterra-Cherry Hill Carpentry FUN3 St. Marys Snipers (Shearer) game.

COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER: A plate full of gratitude (and a few turkey secrets)



Finding warmth in gratitude and joy in local traditions as St. Marys celebrates Thanksgiving.

(PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALONA VASYLIEVA)

ALONA VASYLIEVA

Independent Columnist

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday in Canada. Yes, even more than Christmas! For me, Christmas is about childhood magic, but Thanksgiving is a warm, quiet, adult holiday built on pure appreciation.

Every year, I love learning something new about Canadian traditions. Every new fact I discover makes me feel a little more connected to this country, and hon-

estly, finding out how things work here brings me so much joy.

Thanksgiving offers the perfect moment to pause and take a breath. September with its busy back-to-school rush is behind us, and the crazy pre-Christmas hustle in mid-November hasn't started yet. We've been lucky with the warm fall weather so far. As for this year, I don't have a big plan for Thanksgiving yet, and I haven't even decided what to cook.

But even without big plans, there is a deep sense of gratitude in the air. For

many Ukrainian families who now call St. Marys home, this season brings an extra layer of thankfulness. The waiting process for permanent residency can be long and full of stress, but recently, a few local families finally received their PR approvals! It is a heartwarming milestone that brings real hope and joy to our entire community.

While reading more about the holiday, I stumbled upon some fascinating trivia that completely blew my mind.

First, did you know that not everyone in Canada gets a guaranteed paid day off? In the Atlantic provinces—like Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, PEI, and Newfoundland—Thanksgiving is not a automatic stat holiday by law. Imagine passing the roast turkey at dinner and saying, "Pass the gravy, and see you at the office tomorrow morning!" So if you are enjoying a three-day weekend here in Ontario, that is definitely something extra to be thankful for.

Explorer Martin Frobisher held our first official Canadian Thanksgiving way back in 1578 after surviving a dangerous sea voyage—decades before the Pilgrims landed in America in 1621. And if you go over to French-speaking Quebec, Action de grâce looks quite different. Instead of sitting around a massive family dinner table all day, many locals prefer heading outdoors for apple picking or fall hikes.

While America's Thanksgiving tradition is famous worldwide, Canada was actually celebrating its own humble moments of gratitude decades earlier. Then there are the food traditions themselves.

Have you ever wondered why we eat pumpkin pie or cranberry sauce? Early settlers learned from Indigenous peoples how to use native wild berries and squash to survive the cold winters. Cranberry sauce wasn't just a side dish—cranberries were used for medicine and as a natural preservative!

My absolute favorite discovery, though, is about turkeys. The turkeys we buy at the grocery store were bred to have such massive breasts that they cannot fly and can barely walk! But wild turkeys roaming the woods of North America are real athletes. They can run up to 20 miles per hour and even fly short distances at 55 miles per hour. So while we are happily overeating at dinner, wild turkeys are out there doing high-speed cardio.

And for years, I had this nagging question in the back of my mind: why on earth do the bird and the country Turkey share the exact same name in English? I knew there had to be a story, and I finally got my answer! Long ago, British merchants bought these North American birds from Ottoman Empire (Turkish) traders, so they called them "Turkey coqs." hilariously, in Turkey, the bird is called Hindi because they assumed it came from India!

Every small detail I learn about Canada reminds me how rich and interesting this culture is. No matter what you call the bird, what you cook, or how you spend the long weekend, Thanksgiving is all about pausing to notice the good things around us.

Happy Thanksgiving, St. Marys!

Straight From The Shelves

By Laura McAsh, St. Marys Public Library

Calling all teens, tweens, and everyone in between; challenge your friends on the virtual track at our Mario Kart Tournament! Enjoy pizza, cheer on other players, and play with our iPads between races during this fun night out. The racer with the most wins at the end of the second night will win a cool prize. Night one is Tuesday, October 13, and night two is the following Tuesday. Both nights run from 6-8 p.m. To register for one night or both, visit tinyurl.com/MKT-at-SMPL.

Up This Week

- Fri., Oct. 9: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Sat., Oct. 10: Open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Mon., Oct. 12: CLOSED
- Tues., Oct. 13: Mario Kart Tournament* (6-8 p.m.)
- Wed., Oct. 14: EarlyON Play & Read (9:30 – 10:30 a.m.), Mahjong~ (1-4 p.m.), FOL Social (6:30-8 p.m.)
- Thurs., Oct. 15: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

*Registration Required

~Held at the Friendship Centre (317 James St. S)

^Held at the Lind Sportsplex/The Quarry (425 Water St. S)

HISTORIC ST. MARYS: Jack Sgariglia and Dan Cappa

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

When Jack and Flossie Sgariglia returned from their holiday in Italy in early November 1927, they went back to work in their grocery store. In September 1928, they bought a two-and-a-half storey red brick house on Church Street, just north of the Baptist Church. (In fact, today it is the Baptist Church manse.) The house had been built in 1893 for Edward Long, pioneer merchant in St. Marys who also served for many years as town treasurer. His daughter, Mary Elizabeth (Minnie) Long, had recently died and her executors were glad to make the sale. The Sgariglias had been living in a small apartment over their store, and this move was very timely. Their family was increasing. On October 29, 1928, their first child, Granville, was born. On May 4, 1931, a second son, Maurizio (Maurice,) joined the family. In 1933, the Sgariglias moved their business across the street to 122 Queen Street East. Its new sign, Jack's Fruit Store, was part of the streetscape for the next quarter of a century.

Jack's store was popular, especially with Italians. At Christmas and Easter, he would order supplies of traditional holiday specialties from Italy for these customers. As a break from shopkeeping, Jack enjoyed hunting and fishing, taking expeditions north with his Switzer-in-laws. The Journal Argus of October 3, 1935, contains an account of a trip to Highland Grove near Bancroft. Possibly proofread and edited by Flossie, the description clearly conveys Jack's enthusiasm. He was able to see "bears, deer, moose, and fur-bearing animals of nearly every description and hear the cries of the wolves." Although he always listed his denomination as Baptist, Jack sang with Flossie in the United Church choir. He had a fine tenor voice and was frequently asked to sing solos.

The Sgariglias moved to an apartment over their store and as the boys got older, they worked after school with their parents. But just before Christmas 1944, the Sgariglias' family life was sadly disrupted. First Flossie injured her leg in an accident and became a patient in London's Victoria Hospital. Then Jack fell ill and was unable to work. Family and friends stepped up to help but Granville, now 15, and Maurizio, just 12, had to try to manage the Christmas rush while looking after their father. Jack did not improve and in the New Year, he was admitted to Stratford General Hospital with a heart infection. He died there on the morning of January 22, 1945, in his 55th year. The loss of this kind and genial man was a devastating blow to the family.

However, Flossie was determined to carry on. Granville left school at age 16 and helped manage the store until 1954



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ST. MARYS MUSEUM)

The picture of Dan Cappa (left) with his partner, John Nethercott, standing in front of their Water Street store was first published in the book *Bravi, The History of the Italian Community in St. Marys*, a project in 1996 of the St. Marys Museum.

when he moved away to start a business of his own. In December 1957, Flossie retired and sold the building to Percy Becker, a florist. She moved across the street to an apartment in the three-storey building at 117 Queen Street East. She was thoroughly engaged with her community, including her many friends among the St. Marys Italians. She attended every Switzer family reunion and served as the reunion committee secretary. She loved to travel, always boosting her hometown to people she met along the way. She supported local theatre and loved the St. Marys Lincolns. Many longtime residents remember her from the annual Santa Claus parade, riding on the final float as Mrs. Santa. She had a major setback in July 1975 when she returned from a trip to find that her apartment building had been destroyed by fire. But she relocated to an apartment on the south side of the same block, and for another decade, enjoyed life in St. Marys. She joined the senior citizens club – the original group that started the Friendship Centre. On Christmas Day 1985, Flossie Sgariglia died, age 85, survived by her two sons, both successful businessmen in other communities.

When Jack was starting his business in 1914, he received help and encouragement from Dan Cappa, another Italian-born retailer. Cappa's fruit and grocery store, on Water Street South near the corner with Jones, had been in business since 1910. Its owner's story is also worth telling. Donato (Dan) Cappa (1883-1961) was born in the ancient village of Bisaccia, in southern Italy, east of Naples. When he was 19 years old, Dan travelled to the United States and found work in

Hartford, Connecticut. He only stayed there a year before returning to Italy. During that time, he encountered Baptist missionaries who were working with immigrants from Europe, in some areas specifically targeting the growing numbers of Italian Catholics. They offered English classes and orientation to American society while encouraging them to attend worship services. Dan Cappa was receptive to their message and converted. For the rest of his life, he was a faithful, practising Baptist.

In 1904, Dan Cappa, at 21 years of age, left Italy forever, this time arriving in Montreal. At first, he found work on railway construction, one of the hundreds of Italian immigrants to do so. He worked for the Grand Trunk Railway, first in Northern Ontario, then in Allenford near Barrie, and finally at the railyards in Stratford. As soon as he was able, he became a naturalized Canadian citizen. After six years of backbreaking labour on the railway, Dan found a job on a dairy farm on the edge of St. Marys. He left the farm to work for Frank Rosso who had opened a fruit store in rented premises on Water Street South. When Rosso moved to Stratford, Dan and a partner, John Nethercott, bought the business. Three years later, Nethercott withdrew from the partnership, and the business became Cappa's Fruit Store. By the end of 1917, Dan was able to purchase the commercial building to the north from veterinarian W. B. Stevens. He renovated and opened a larger grocery store. Dan Cappa became a true downtown merchant.

He had a brief setback in 1918 during the final months of World War I. A short item in the St. Marys Journal stated that

the young merchant might have to sell his store because he had been conscripted under the Military Service Act. However, the war ended before he was called up. With this threat behind him, Dan Cappa went courting. Charles Symons, who worked at the St. Marys Cement Company, had previously been employed by the Grand Trunk Railway as had Dan Cappa. Perhaps that was how he was introduced to the Symons family. One of Charles' daughters, Carrie Pearl Symons, was a bookkeeper at a local creamery. She was 15 years younger than Dan, but they fell in love and were married on April 24, 1923, by the minister of First Baptist Church, Charles Waddell.

The Cappas had three children: Jean was born in 1925; a son, Filipo, named after Dan's father in Italy, arrived in 1927; another daughter, Margaret, completed the family in 1930. Dan was anxious for his children to be successful at school. Like the Sgariglia boys, they had an English-speaking mother, and Dan spoke only English at home because he was afraid two languages would confuse them. He himself had little formal education but he read and studied hard to improve his general knowledge and literacy and to understand the mathematics necessary for shopkeeping. After their marriage, Carrie's bookkeeping experience was an asset.

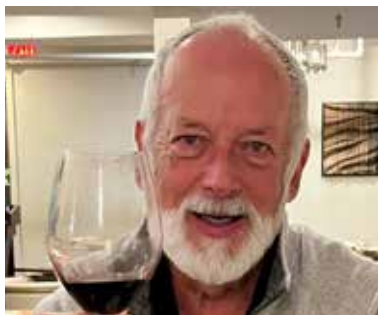
His store continued to be successful and Dan invested in property, owning a storage shed on Water Street and two brick residences in the south ward that provided rental income. Assessment records show that in the 1930s, the Cappa family lived in a second-story apartment in a house they owned on Wellington Street South. Along with his business, his other commitment was to First Baptist Church. He was Sunday School superintendent for many years and willingly served on many church committees. He was well-liked by the local Italian community and was often called to act as a translator/interpreter for newly arrived Italians. He also sponsored several of his own family members to come to Canada and helped them settle into St. Marys life.

Through the 1920s and 1930s, Cappa's and Jack Sgariglia's stores were informal gathering places for the Italian community. On Saturday evenings, when everyone came to town to visit and shop, the men liked to gather at Cappa's to discuss the affairs of the week. The Italian women often dropped in at Jack's Fruit Store on the way home from morning mass, happy to chat with the shopkeeper in their native language. Both Jack and Dan were long remembered for their ready assistance and acts of kindness. In the early years, they were both often at the train station, to welcome new arrivals from Italy, inviting them back to their homes for their first taste of St. Marys hospitality.

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: A superb tour of a sobering institution



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

Kingston Penitentiary sets the standard for guided tours.

If you have visited a fair number of historic sites, you'll know that sometimes you're on your own to wander, reading information panels or not finding any information at all. On other occasions, you may be guided by a well-informed student or an older volunteer.

But at Kingston Penitentiary, you will meet several guides on your way through the foreboding site, and they will all be people who worked at the Pen when it was hosting maximum-security prisoners, not curious tourists. And those former guards, medical staff and other personnel bring an amazing authenticity and personal touch to the tour.

A caution: there is very little that could be called "entertaining" in a tour of the Pen because the stories here are harsh, often violent and tend to reveal the worst side of humanity. But it is one of the most educational and thoughtful tours we have ever taken.

The Kingston Pen opened on June 1, 1835, and finally closed 178 years later, in 2013. In its earliest incarnation, the prison

was enclosed with a cedar fence, which proved dramatically ineffective, as prisoners escaped on a very regular basis.

That problem was solved with the construction of 42-foot limestone walls – replaced in the 1950s with reinforced concrete – which give the Pen its ominous aspect, even though not a single criminal is resident there.

There are several tour options; we took the hour-and-a-half option – we were hosted by Tourism Kingston – which costs \$42.50 and which we would highly recommend. It would be tough to tell the whole story in less than that amount of time.

As you tour the stark site, you learn about the evolution of incarceration, and it will probably strike you that it has taken forever for us to decide to treat prisoners as human beings. We may not be there yet. In 1835, the cells measured two feet wide by seven feet long, or enough room for a cot. In 1907, those measurements were expanded, and cells then measured four feet by eight feet by 10 feet. That was modestly good news for prisoners until the 1980s when overcrowding meant double bunks; two prisoners sharing that space. The maximum number of cells at the jail totalled 620; at one point, there were 1,250 prisoners, some housed three to a cell.

The sheer expanse of the penitentiary stands in sharp contrast to the tiny amount of personal space the prisoners had in their cells. Looming grey stone and concrete buildings abound – cell blocks, dining areas, medical facilities, recreational areas and

workshops.

Prisoners did work in workshops – the goods they produced were then marketed through a federal government agency. The prisoners were paid a few dollars for their work (\$5 a day in the 1990s), money they could then spend for goods in the prison tuck shop.

Prisoners also worked in construction on the site. In fact, most of the buildings that form the penitentiary were built by prisoners, a unique reality at the Kingston Pen.

Kingston housed federal prisoners – men and women whose sentence was two years and a day or more. The average length of incarceration was 18 years; one guide told us the longest stay she knew of was 36 years.

Another guide, Paul, served as a corrections nurse for 27 years. He showed us around the short-term segregation area, where problem prisoners including those on suicide watch were kept. There, prisoners were subject to strip searches and were locked up for 23 hours a day. The other hour could be spent in an open yard that seemed smaller than a small room in your home.

The most graphic part of the tour comes as your tour group is seated in the central section of the cell blocks and you learn about the three riots at Kingston Pen – especially the riot of 1971, when prisoners captured six guards, took complete control of the jail, virtually destroyed the place and took advantage of their several days of control to kill or severely injure prisoners who were confined as sexual



A view of Kingston Penitentiary.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

abuse perpetrators.

Ironically, the riot was caused because of false rumours that had spread among the prisoners – they wrongly believed they were to be transferred to Millhaven Penitentiary, where, they thought, conditions were far more harsh than even Kingston. None of this was accurate, but ironically, when the riot was finally quelled, many of the rioters were sent to Millhaven because Kingston was in no shape to house anyone until extensive repairs were completed.

No visit to the Pen would be complete without crossing King Street and climbing the steps to visit the Penitentiary Museum (once the home of the prison warden). Admission is by donation

and visitors will find all manner of artifacts from the Kingston and other penitentiaries, ranging from the earliest punishment devices (some might say torture) to a drone captured from an attempt to smuggle contraband into Collins Bay Penitentiary in 2022.

These tours are sobering and sometimes shocking, but terrifically worthwhile. We recommend them.

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.



A Kingston Penitentiary tour guide who was a longtime staffer when the jail was in operation.



The entrance to penitentiary workshops; the footprints are where prisoners were compelled to stand.



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Ham/Turkey DRAW



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9
FROM 6-8 PM

EAT AT OUR HOUSE: Pumpkin everything



LAUREN EEDY

Independent Columnist

Looking beyond our usual pumpkin pie, these alternatives still showcase the season's star: pumpkin.

From two vegetable-focused savoury dishes to cheese-cake-like pumpkin bars, these recipes are sure to spark your interest in autumn's favourite squash.

Creamy pumpkin gnocchi

An easy to throw together, seasonal, vegetarian meal.

Ingredients

- 1 lb gnocchi, store-bought or frozen
- 1 c pumpkin purée
- 1 c heavy cream
- 1/2 c grated parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp butter, unsalted
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp dried chives
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp onion powder

- 1/2 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Red pepper flakes (optional)
- Extra parmesan for topping

Method:

- Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and cook gnocchi according to package instructions (2-3 minutes) until they float. Drain and set aside.

- In a large skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add minced garlic and sauté 1-2 minutes until fragrant.

- Stir in heavy cream and pumpkin purée. Add smoked paprika, dried chives, garlic powder, onion powder, Italian seasoning, nutmeg, salt and pepper.

- Add parmesan cheese and nutmeg. Stir until sauce is smooth and starts to thicken, 3-4 minutes.

- Add the cooked gnocchi to the skillet, stirring gently to coat. Season with red pepper flakes (optional).

- Top with extra parmesan and serve immediately.

* If you wanted to add a protein, Italian sausage works wonderfully.

Pumpkin curry

Yields 3-4 servings; Prep: 15 minutes; Total: 1 hour

Pumpkin is a perfect base for a Thai-inspired coconut curry. Roasted pumpkin lends itself to

a caramelization and nuttiness complementary to this curry dish. If you want to keep this recipe purely vegan, substitute the fish sauce for a soy sauce or leave out entirely.

Ingredients

- 1 small pumpkin
- 5 tbsp vegetable oil or peanut oil, divided
- Kosher salt
- 1/4 c Thai red curry paste
- 1 c coconut milk
- 1 small green bell pepper, seeded and sliced into strips
- 1 small red pepper, seeded and sliced into strips
- 1 medium shallot, halved and thinly sliced
- 2-3 Thai bird's eye chilli's, sliced

- 1/3 c canned bamboo shoots, drained and sliced into matchsticks

- 1/2 lime, juiced

- 1 1/2 tbsp fish sauce (or soy, or omit)

- 1/4 c Thai basil, plus more thinly sliced for serving

- Lime wedges for serving

- Steamed rice for serving

Method:

- Preheat oven to 400°F. Halve the pumpkin, scoop out seeds and discard. Cut into 8-10 wedges. Place on parchment-lined baking sheet, drizzle with 3 tbsp of oil and season with salt. Roast until almost completely fork ten-

der, 20-25 minutes. Let cool.

- When cool enough to handle, carefully remove skin from pumpkin. Roughly chop into 2-inch pieces. Find some more tender pieces and mash enough to fill 1/4 cup to set aside.

- In a large Dutch oven, heat 2 tbsp of oil over medium heat. Add red curry paste and cook, stirring often, 2-3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium low, stir in coconut milk and simmer 3 minutes more. Remove from heat and let cool slightly.

- Add mashed pumpkin and 1/4 cup water to coconut mixture, using an immersion blender. Alternatively, you can carefully transfer to a regular blender and return sauce to pot.

- Add green and red bell peppers, shallot and bamboo shoots to the pot. Bring mixture to a boil and reduce heat to a simmer, until tender, about 5 minutes.

- Just before serving, stir in lime juice, fish sauce (or soy or omit), and Thai basil leaves. Ladle curry over white rice and top with sliced basil and lime wedges. Peanuts would be a nice garnish too.

Pumpkin spice gooey bars

Yields: 20; Prep: 10 minutes; Total: 1 hour

A very approachable pumpkin gooey pumpkin cake recipe. If you cannot find boxed spice

cake, try vanilla.

Ingredients:

Crust:

- Cooking spray
- 1 box spice cake mix
- 1 large egg
- 1/2 c unsalted butter

Filling:

- 8 oz cream cheese, softened
- 1 c pumpkin purée
- 1/2 c unsalted butter
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1 c confectioners' sugar
- 1 tsp pumpkin pie spice

Method:

- Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease 13x9-inch baking pan with cooking spray.

- In a large bowl, using a rubber spatula; mix cake mix, egg and butter until combined. Press into bottom of prepared pan.

- In a separate large bowl, whisk cream cheese, pumpkin purée and butter until smooth. Add eggs and vanilla and whisk until incorporated. Add sugar and pumpkin pie spice and whisk until combined. Pour over crust.

- Bake until edges are set and centre is slightly jiggly, 40-45 minutes. Let cool.

- Dust with confectioners' sugar and cut into squares.

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Riddles

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All of them.
- I have many teeth, but I can't bite. What am I?
A comb.
- There's only one word in the dictionary that's spelled wrong. What is it?
The word "wrong"
- What has a thumb and four fingers, but is not a hand?
A glove.
- What kind of band never makes music?
A rubber band.
- What can fill a room but takes up no space?
Light.
- What two things can you never eat for breakfast?
Lunch and dinner.
- What kind of lion never roars?
A dandelion.
- What has a thousand needles but cannot sew?
A porcupine.
- How do you catch a school of fish?
With a bookworm.
- What is the wealthiest nut?
A cash-ew.

- Word Search -



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The Riddle Kid OF THE WEEK

What is a tree's favorite drink?



Root beer!

Osbourne Goldie Carr (4)

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

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

PET OF THE WEEK



Leaf piles may be fun to play in, but they can hide risks for pets, including ticks, mould, and sharp debris. Keep play areas clean and check your pet after outdoor adventures. Enjoy the fall season safely with your furry family members!



LUCIFER

Our Pet of the Week is Lucifer, a nine-month-old ball python. Lucifer's favorite meal is small frozen rats. He is approximately three feet long and can live to be 30 years old! Lucifer belongs to Clayton Dale.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are that of their authors and do not reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent or Grant Haven Media.

Voters beware of Strong Mayor Powers

Strong Mayor Powers allow mayors across the province to propose specific bylaws, hire and fire the CAO as well as reorganize the municipal administration and veto standard council decisions or bylaws. The Strong Mayor Powers were first introduced in 2022 to streamline local governance. The provincial government introduced the Strong Mayor Powers legislation so that large city councils could address the housing shortage in their cities.

While there are some restrictions, the Strong Mayor Powers change the face of democracy in municipal governments, basically eliminating the due processes that have existed for generations. This legislation was introduced during the last term for mayors and councillors and many municipalities – including St. Marys and Perth South, which basically ignored that legislation and carried on as normal, relying on the usual debate and “majority rules” system. However, with a new election, new mayors and councillors unaccustomed to the “old” way will be tempted to use powers given by the new legislation.

With this new legislation, mayors and councillors will be tempted to bypass democracy and push through by-

laws and decisions that might not be in the best interests of the community. The beauty of the old democratic system meant that controversial topics and bylaws would have more thorough discussions and investigations in order to reach a collaborative decision.

Voters need to understand that they must be much more vigilant about their choices for mayor and councillors.

First and foremost, voters should ask candidates for both mayor and council if they believe in or support Strong Mayor Powers. Any who indicate they would use them should not receive your support. This should apply not only to potential mayors, but also to potential councillors because councillors could easily be tempted to form an alliance with the mayor to push through their own agendas.

Second, you should only vote for people you know and trust. This means voters must be much more diligent in learning about and getting to know the various candidates. Read any brochures, articles and interviews candidates provide. Attend the all-candidates meetings and ask questions.

Third, candidates need to have certain skills and quali-

ties that all good leaders should have. Mayors and councillors now need – more than ever before – to be extremely good at achieving collaborative decisions. They must be constructive participants, effective listeners and willing and able to be good team players. Such skills will reduce the temptation of leaders to use the Strong Mayor Powers.

Finally, we need to be vigilant after the election. The Independent must report to the people whenever the Strong Mayor Powers have been used. Every time they are used, we must all voice our objections to elected officials sidestepping democracy to achieve their own agenda – whether we agree with the decisions or not. Every time Strong Mayor Powers are used, it means that the majority of the elected officials were not convinced that the decision was the right one.

In the past, we could ignore municipal elections and rely on the democratic process of debate and majority rules to guide the governance of our municipalities, but no longer.

*Allan Stewart,
St. Marys*

Sebringville housing development lacks ‘heart’

The proposed description and details of the housing development in the little village of Sebringville, fondly called “The Hamlet with Heart,” which was outlined in the Sept. 24 edition of the St. Marys Independent lacks a great deal of “heart” at many levels.

Reviewing the proposed plan, it only suggests a perfect picture of high-density living at its best! An environment of congested people, numerous cars for the space provided, increased traffic congestion on local roads and into outlying cities/towns, not to mention the environmental impact – the list goes on!

This is yet another example of major decisions, such as approving housing projects in communities, being made by a very small group of individuals, often negating or minimizing the many legitimate concerns brought forward by its residents. Core community concerns highlighted the scale of the project, the impact on water and infrastructure, traffic concerns and the large influx of people nearly doubling the size of this small hamlet, which contradicts the official county plans that limit villages like Sebringville to low-density, incremental growth only.

These issues raised are huge concerns; is anyone listening? This process of not hearing the informed concerns of its residents, who have generational families in this area, is unfortunately being played out across this province as developers and small groups of councillors fuelled by the rules of big government have decision-making powers for such a short time, yet, make impactful decisions for generations to come!

It is also unfortunate, in a time in which there should be greater consciousness towards environmental concerns, this seems to be minimized as housing developments like this are using up arable farmland. Farmland that was designated years ago could have instead been repurposed in this community into lovely green space that we know helps to benefit the mental health of individuals and provides a “home” for the wildlife that is well-known to be displaced by these projects.

It is apparent with this housing development that density living style is at the “heart” of this development group. Short of seeing the actual designs of these units, I think it is fair to say that in appearance, they will be

the standard, mediocre new builds with prominent garages, “postage stamp” lawns and black asphalt roofs, which we know to have a notable negative environmental impact. Housing developments like this should have a consciousness to create aesthetic appeal for any community!

It is so evident that this proposed housing develop-

ment in Sebringville lacks so many key considerations – truly unfortunate! Will the process of approving housing developments change to make some sincere improvements for everyone, especially the communities that will exist long after we are gone?

*Teresa Barresi,
St. Marys*

THANK YOU



As the 40th Anniversary of “The Chocolate Factory” approaches this October, we as creators and owners for the first 30 years, would like to thank our many great customers and employees for their continued support and loyalty. Over the years, “The Chocolate Factory” has employed three generations of our family and it makes us so proud to have been a part of this “sweet” success story.

Thank you everyone & Happy Thanksgiving!
Ron and Pat Cottrell

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LETTERS

Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are that of their authors and do not reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent or Grant Haven Media.

Trustees are important!

Thank you to the Independent for the excellent article, "Local trustee candidates make their case to St. Marys-area voters" Sept. 17. However, unfortunately, that effort was not carried into the All-Candidates meeting on Saturday, Oct. 3, where trustee candidates could have been invited – and advertised – to be present and available at the pre-panel meet-and-greet from 6-7 p.m.

A written interview is informative but there is no substitute for a face-to-face chat to get a sense of the people running. That opportunity was lost and I find that very sad. How do voters decide who they feel offers the better vision?

I know that the role of trustee can be largely invisible to most people and that is unfortunate. Trustees are an important bridge for parents and community members to interact with the organizations who educate our children. From the age of four through 18, the majority of our children's waking hours are spent under the influence of the education system.

And it is a system. I have huge respect and admiration for all the people who dedicate their careers to educating our young. However, families and educators do not always agree on the best path to do that. Trustees are the bridge, helping to guide families and their community through the system and bringing insight and a different perspective to the administrators and decision makers.

In my 12 years as a trustee, I saw several situations where well-meaning and very smart administrators were shown a community-led, innovative, alternative solution to an issue and where parents and community were helped to under-

stand why the administrators might have made difficult decisions. Communication and dialogue may not lead to agreement, but it is the only path to at least some degree of understanding and acceptance.

Finally, the current provincial government has been floating the idea of eliminating trustees completely and replacing them with "departments" – i.e. staff – to address family and community concerns. Trustees already point individual concerns to the chain of teacher, then principal, then superintendent before getting involved. Does the government really believe employees can reasonably challenge their bosses over difficult issues?

And if the concern is the cost of trustees, last year the total cost of all the trustees at the Avon Maitland board was approximately \$150,000 in a budget of approximately \$260 million – probably far less than devoting valuable staff time to these issues. I have no doubt that the government will look at low voter participation as a justification for their cause. If we don't value local trustee input, why should they?

But if this non-partisan voice is lost, it will not be recoverable.

If anyone can make the trek, West Perth will be holding an all-candidates meeting on Oct. 15 at 7 p.m. at the West Perth Community Centre in Mitchell. And trustees are included in that. Each local trustee represents three municipalities: St. Marys, West Perth and Perth South, so this will be your opportunity to meet your local prospective trustees.

Sincerely,
Lynette Geddes, former AMDSB trustee, St. Marys

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TOUGH DUCK

OBITUARY

Ellison



Michelle Ruby Clarke Ellison passed from our world and into the next on Wednesday, September 30, 2026. While cancer may have consumed her body, it did not conquer her spirit, her heart or her soul. She was warmly welcomed in the beyond by a multitude, including her mother and father, Donna and Gerald Clarke, and Bill and Grace Ellison, her loving in-laws. Among those that are left to grieve her passing are her brother Glenn and her sister-in-law Wendi; sister Christine Post and her brother in-law Andy; Alex and Sarah, Caitlin and Michael, her children, by more than just marriage; nieces and nephews CJ, Sierra, Logan, Francis, Hannah and Sophia; and grandchildren Ada and Porter.

Michelle was an exemplary educator who touched the lives of many in her 30 year career spanning three schools, Stratford Central SS, St. Marys DCVI and Mitchell DHS. She will be sorrowfully missed and fondly remembered. Bob Ellison, her husband of 15 years, her best friend and soulmate, will hold her in his heart forever. He looks forward to when they are together again, to continue their journey, together, into forever, happily ever after.

A Graveside Service will be conducted at the St. Marys Cemetery, 150 Cain St. St. Marys, on October 17, 2026 at 11 am. Those attending are invited to bring a lawn chair. A Celebration of Life Open House will be held in the Community Hall at the Pyramid Recreation Centre, 317 James St. S. St. Marys on November 8, 2026 from 1 to 4 pm with Words of Remembrance at 2 pm.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in Michelle's honour to St. Marys Healthcare Foundation, Stratford General Hospital Foundation, Verspeeten Family Cancer Centre (formerly London Regional Cancer Program) or to a charity of your choice.

Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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OBITUARY

Ross



David "Barney" Ross
David Ross passed away peacefully at Stratford General Hospital on September 28, 2026, at the age of 82, following a battle with congestive heart failure. Dave is survived by his loving wife, Karen Ross, and his children, Michele Ross-Miller; J.D. Ross (Tina); Ron Murray (Brenda); Craig Murray (Leanne); and Jodi Shackleton. He will also be lovingly remembered by his sister, Wendy Ross, as well as many extended family members.

Dave was predeceased by his parents, Betty and Jack Ross, and his daughter, Melanie Ross.

A proud grandfather, Dave will be lovingly remembered by his nine grandchildren: Ashley, Rebecca (Tyler), Nolan (Julia), Jessica (Ben), Emma, Ellen, Bailey, Gracie, and Caden; and his great-granddaughter, Lenna.

Dave also leaves behind his faithful companion and best friend, Elmo, his beloved Golden Retriever, who brought him much love and companionship.

Dave was a longtime employee of Bell Canada and, more recently, a resident of Spruce Lodge. He was an avid sports fan who enjoyed watching hockey, football, baseball and golf—or really, just about any sport that was on. When there wasn't a game to watch, there was a good chance Willie Nelson or Waylon Jennings could be heard playing nearby. Dave loved his country music, and those familiar songs were part of the soundtrack of his life.

Dave will be deeply missed by his family and all those who knew and loved him. While our hearts are heavy, we find comfort in knowing that he is now at peace.

In keeping with Dave's wishes, cremation has taken place. A Celebration of Life will be held at a later date, where family and friends can come together to share memories and celebrate Dave's life. Details will be announced once arrangements have been finalized.

Dave's family would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Spruce Lodge for the kindness, compassion and care they provided to Dave over the past seven months. We are also deeply grateful to the doctors, nurses and staff at Stratford General Hospital for the exceptional care and compassion shown to Dave and our family during his final days. Your kindness and support brought us great comfort during a very difficult time.

For those wishing to honour Dave's memory, memorial donations may be made to Golden Rescue at GoldenRescue.ca, a fitting tribute to his love for his four-legged best friend, Elmo. We will miss you dearly, Dave. Rest peacefully.

www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com



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