

STRATFORD *TIMES*

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Hog Jog raises \$30K for Emily Murphy Centre

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Despite the rainy weather, more than 300 runners and walkers were ready to start the Hog Jog route.

The Ontario Pork Industry Council (OPIC) held the Hog Jog at the Stratford Rotary Complex on June 17 in the evening. Participants could either complete the 10 kilometre run, 3.5 kilometre walk/run or the weaner race. Proceeds from the event support the Emily Murphy Centre's Tiny Homes ... Big Impact campaign.

"What a great event, oh my goodness. I can't believe how many people not only came through the Pork Congress but then gathered for the Hog Jog and they knew exactly what they were doing," said Lisa Wilde, executive director of the Emily Murphy Centre. "Nobody complained about the weather. Everybody was enthusiastic. It was just a fantastic event."

The Tiny Homes ... Big Impact campaign is a proposed \$1.2 million capital campaign looking to build five tiny homes as a response to a growing need for second-stage housing for women and children who experienced violence. The Hog Jog fundraiser raised over \$33,000 for the tiny homes. Wilde said the Hog Jog fundraiser "will put a significant dent" in the fundraising goal and that the community support has been quite positive.

"I'm overwhelmed, to be honest. This community is so generous and when they can get behind something very concrete like the installation of five homes, they're on it," she said. "I've had such good

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Walter, Theresa, Maria, Lydia, Clara and Emmett – the fourth generation of Strawberry pickers (and perhaps Strawberry farmers one day) – sit in a patch on the Walch family farm just south of Stratford. For more on the Walchs, see our story on 2.

Want to lend your name to City of Stratford property? Naming rights for certain assets soon to be up for bid

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Advertising with the City of Stratford is set to expand after an updated policy was approved by city council on June 22.

The new policy establishes guiding principles, eligibility criteria, procurement safeguards, agreement requirements and approval authorities to support transparent and strategic decision-making, according to the staff report.

It will also allow for certain assets to be named.

Per an amendment from Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach, staff will bring forward a list of eligible assets to be approved by council ahead of any negotiations with interested parties regarding naming rights. Through the new policy, the city will retain ownership and control of its assets, all arrangements will be documented through fixed-term written agreements, financial obligations for the city will not be created beyond the terms of an agreement, staff and elected officials must comply with City of Stratford code of conduct policies and privacy legislation, benefits pro-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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CONTINUED FROM FRONT

vided to third parties must be proportionate to the size and scope of the agreement and no agreement will imply city endorsement of a product, service or organization, or create an obligation for the city to purchase goods or services unless otherwise specified (official supplier agreements).

There are prohibited sectors barred from advertising with the city, including businesses involved in tobacco, e-cigarettes, vaping, cannabis, pornography, businesses that conflict with human rights protections or any proposals that negatively affect the city's image or operational integrity.

Originally, organizations associated with religious belief-systems were included as an excluded partner within the policy; however, Coun. Lesley Biehn moved to have them allowed when she put forward the motion.

Council approval is required for any agreements beyond an aggregated annual value of \$50,000, agreements longer than five years, agreements that fall outside the policy and any future policy changes.

At this stage the policy does not have a benchmark or expected revenue from

sponsorships or naming rights, though it is set to be open doors to some additional streams.

"I think it just leads to further commercialization," Coun. Cody Sebben said about the policy during a debate amongst councillors. "And for the amount of income it's proposed, potentially going to bring in ... personally I think we could just go further at budget time ... having less expansions and less things that we don't need to necessarily need to burden the taxpayer with – and just be more responsible that way instead of selling naming rights to our municipal facilities."

"When we're talking about the Grand Trunk site and the possible naming rights for those facilities, (it) could be a significant advantage for us in getting that whole thing done," Coun. Larry McCabe rebutted. "So I would disagree with Coun. Sebben on the idea of non-value of naming rights for some of our facilities. It may enable something significant ... to actually get done."

The motion passed with only Sebben and Coun. Geza Wordofa opposing it.

It's strawberry time!

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

It's strawberry time at the Walch family farm just minutes south of Stratford on Highway 119. Watch for the signs and the flag welcoming everyone to their corner of Perth County.

The Walch family grows seven different varieties so their berry season will last longer and can be picked for a longer duration than ever before.

The recent moisture was welcoming to make this year's strawberries even sweeter.

This year marks their 50th anniversary growing strawberries and if anyone knows how to grow them, Birgit Walch and her family surely does.

In a recent visit to the Walch farm, Birgit explained how the family got started in growing strawberries.

She and her husband Augustin started their strawberry business in Heidelberg, Germany in 1975 with her parents, and in the mid-'80s emigrated to Canada and set-

tled in Downie Township, a short distance south of Stratford.

By studying the extremely fertile land in the area, they knew the soil would be right for strawberries.

Since she and husband Augustin had children, who they wanted to keep busy and learn a great work ethic as they had, and also to help them earn some money for their education, they continued to expand and add even more acres of strawberries.

In 1993, they started some strawberry patches on their farms on Highway 19 (now 119), an ideal location to market directly to area consumers.

Customers can pick their own or buy those that are already picked and ready to eat.

They also have two other locations nearby at 2255 Fisher-Hallman Road in Kitchener and 780 Fountain Street in Cambridge.

With six grandchildren and another on the way, Birgit hopes they will be the fourth generation to grow and sell strawberries in the Perth and Waterloo County areas.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

McKenzie Walch, Birgit Walch and Lisa Ropp with her young baby Noah, not shown, at the Walch family farm on Highway 119, just south of Stratford.

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Hog Jog raises more than \$30K for Emily Murphy Centre's Tiny Homes, Big Impact campaign

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

reception from everybody that I've talked to about this goal."

There was a meat auction further raising funds for the Emily Murphy Centre after the event. Hog Jog participants were treated to a pulled pork dinner provided by Chris' Country Catering and Barbeque after completing their run/walk.

Donations can be made online via CanadaHelps, through e-transfers to info@emilymurphycentre.com, or by mailed cheques to 67 Barron St., Stratford, ON, N4Z 1G9. More information about the Tiny Homes ... Big Impact campaign can be found online via <https://emilymurphycentre.com/campaign>.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

On your mark, get set, go! Runners for the 10 kilometre route of the Hog Jog start their race.

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City set to save \$2.1M in wastewater change, with some risks associated

CONNOR LUCZKA
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The City of Stratford will be taking over its wastewater pollution services in-house, a decision set to save it \$2.1 million over the next ten years.

City council voted to begin that transition at its regular meeting on June 22, following a report from Municipal VU Consulting Inc. (MVU), a consultancy firm retained to analyze a possible transition. The city's contract with the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA), the organization which has operated Stratford's plant since 1993, is set to expire on Dec. 31, 2027. As Jim Harnum, president of MVU, said, there are a few gaps in the current OCWA contract that means a change was preferable.

"There are no ... performance incentives or key performance indicators in this contract," Harnum said. "There's no efficiency benchmarks. There's no energy targets that meet with your corporate environmental and emissions plan. There's no defined service levels. The only defined service level is that it must be in compliance. There's a limited line of sight for the day-to-day operations and the preventative maintenance versus reactive maintenance, and really, what we're getting at there is you really have to trust that they're doing the appropriate maintenance on your facility. There's no line of sight, you can't tell what they're doing, they're solely responsible for operating the plant, and then they tell you annually what maintenance is required on the plant."

By MVU's metrics, not only would bringing those services in-house save the municipality \$2.1 million (and perhaps more if OCWA's prices continue to rise), but it would also have greater flexibility and adaptability and much greater transparency and accountability, an issue that originally spurred the city into retaining MVU.

As noted in the staff report, in 2024 an overpressure event at the pollution control plant permanently damaged equipment.

"Since that time, progress has been made with OCWA's support; however, the event has also brought attention to some challenges associated with the current contracted service model, including limited city visibility into certain operational matters and incident details," the report reads. "Staff recognize that some information-sharing limitations may be inherent in the current arrangement."

There are some risks associated with bringing services in-house, however – though most of those risks are during the transitional period. There are operational risks getting the seven full-time equivalent staff trained and recruited in a competitive market, transition costs that could exceed the estimated \$1 million and the loss of OCWA's established provincial emergency network (although the city would be able to tap into other municipalities in the event of an emergency).

After MVU's report was presented and Harnum answered a few clarifying questions, council voted unanimously to further explore the water pollution control plant services in-house.

OCWA will have the opportunity to submit a draft contract renewal by July 10, to be reviewed by council at its July 27 meeting where it will debate the services future delivery model.

To read the full report on the services, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yx3ybya2>.

Submit your letter to the editor to us!
Call 519-655-2341 or
Email stratfordtimes@gmail.com

School boards post balanced budgets for 2026/27 school year

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The local English-speaking school boards have both posted balanced budgets for next school year.

Every year, per provincial law, school boards are required to prepare and adopt estimates of revenues and expenditures, with the deadline for the 2026-2027 budgets set by June 30, 2026.

The Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) was the first to do so, with a media release on June 23.

CEO Karen Tigani and Mary Helen Van Loon, chair of the board of trustees, expressed their gratitude for the board's talented and dedicated finance team:

"Despite ongoing challenges and budget pressures, the board recognizes and commends the hard work of our newly appointed superintendent of business, Sarah Devereaux, and her talented team. Their vision, diligence and competence are truly exceptional, enabling us to continue our consistent approach to presenting a balanced budget, year after year."

The 2026-2027 budget is strategically aligned with the board's goals and supports our overarching 2024-2027 strategic plan, focusing on key areas:

Catholic faith development of staff and students

Promoting experiential learning opportunities for students and maximizing faith formation opportunities for students and staff.

Engagement with families of parishes and bolstering school pastoral plans.

Student-centered learning focusing on mathematics and literacy

Monitoring of student achievement.

Multi-tiered systems of support to nurture success for all students.

Focus on student success

Continued focus on preparing students for post-secondary pathways.

Systems of support to improve student attendance and school engagement

With 3,392 in elementary enrollment and 1,330 (plus 15 high credit), the revenue and expenditures for the year is expected to be \$87,861,791.

"Our budget reflects the Board's unwavering dedication to presenting a financially re-

sponsible budget in a time of increasing cost pressures," said Devereaux. "With a focus on compliance, we are submitting a budget that champions student achievement and upholds the rich tradition of Catholic education."

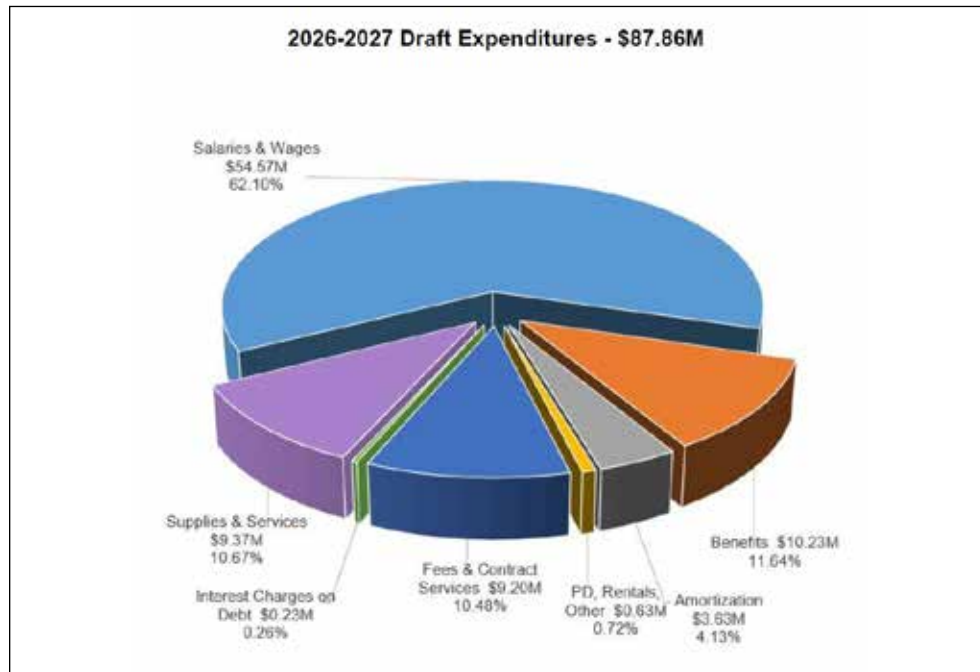
The Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) likewise posted a balanced budget for the 2026/27 school year, following its board of trustees meeting on June 23.

"Again, for the 2026/2027 year, the Ministry of Education has set priorities for the Ontario education sector with an emphasis on literacy and math instruction, supporting students with special education needs and ensuring students have access to mental health supports," Graham Shantz, CEO of the AMDSB wrote in his message included in the budget package. "The Ministry has shared their ongoing expectation that boards are accountable and transparent, in the allocation of funds to support these priorities."

"As initially shared in the prior year budget release, we have continued our internally imposed fiscal review process, to ensure we are well positioned to continue to make data driven decisions that maximize our student's learning experience," Shantz continued. "This work continued as we built

the 2026/2027 budget, with a deeper examination of past spending decisions and the right-sizing of spending plans where necessary. This ongoing review allows us to be responsive to student enrolment fluctuations, changes in revenues and increasing expenses, while continuing to increase support for student achievement and well-being."

AMDSB's budget is presented on a modified Public Sector Accounting Board (PSAB) basis. It includes projected revenues of \$277,905,517, operating expenses of \$264,040,793 and transfers to the capital budget of \$16,421,833. The result, as detailed below, is a PSAB basis deficit of \$2,557,109. However, under the ministry's budget compliance calculation, the budget reflects a balanced position (net operating surplus of \$0).



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A graph provided by the HPCDSB, detailing the 2026/27 budget's draft expenditures, totaling \$87.86 million.



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Five years of Wild Hog Country Market

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

After five years, Wild Hog Country Market owners are confident their store is unmatched when it comes to quality.

Owners Marvin and Wendy Bachert, along with their son Devin, feel its patrons will find the meats, fruits and high quality produce they sell can go toe-to-toe with most other country markets in southwestern Ontario and are unmatched.

All three owners say it is hard to believe that this week was their fifth anniversary of starting the market.

To give a little history, the family has been in the meat butchering business since 1975, when Marvin's father and mother, Keith and Janet Bachert, started their own butcher shop on their farm. Janet was a Bender and raised and has family roots near Tavistock.

The Bacherts' oldest son Derick and

his wife Kaitlynn now own the original farm's butcher shop, in fact, named Bachert Meats Inc. near Walton.

Marvin said that since they always had their own livestock and meat processing facility, the missing piece was a retail store, hence the building of the Wild Hog Country Market near Stratford.

Now five years later, the Bacherts are sincerely thanking all their patrons for the support, loyalty and encouragement that have made the Wild Hog what it is today.

As a token of their appreciation, they invited the community to join them this past week, celebrating the milestones with huge storewide savings, daily prize draws, ice cream, samples of their favourite products and plenty of surprises besides.

Whether you've been shopping with them since the beginning or only recently discovering them, the Bacherts are thanking you for being part of their journey.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

An over-head look at the spacious Wild Hog Country Market, where fresh produce, meats, milk, eggs, fresh baked goods and specialty products are available from Tuesday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Wendy and Marvin Bachert and their families hope everyone will stop by their Wild Hog Country Market, just east of Stratford, to help them celebrate their fifth anniversary.

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Input wanted to help celebrate the Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts centenary

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

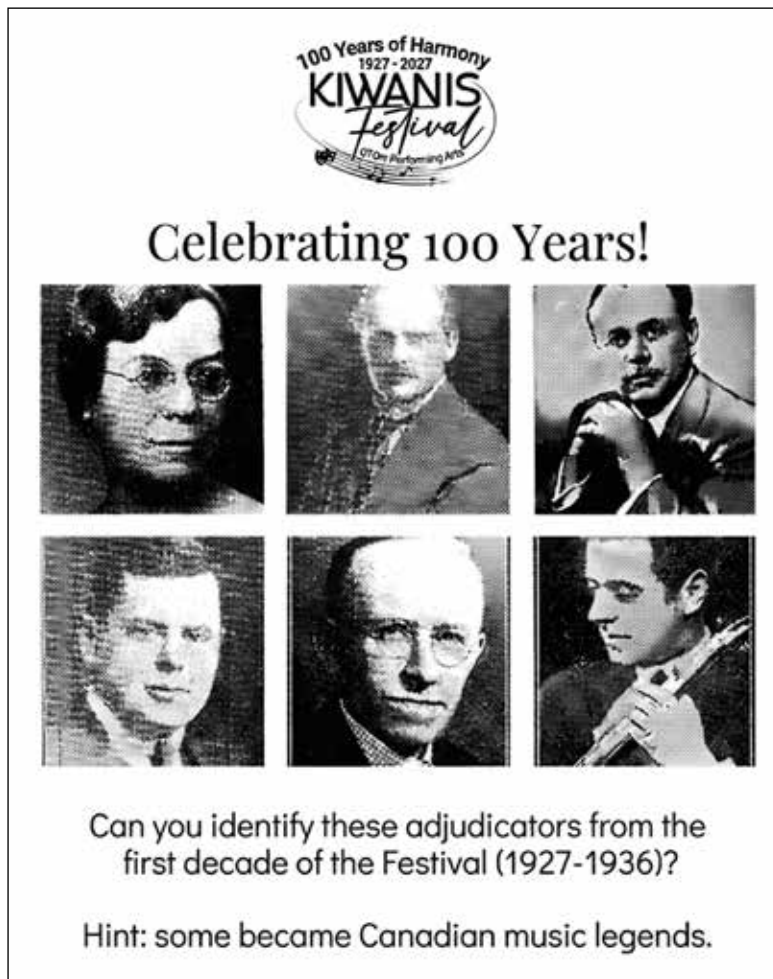
The Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts (KFPA) has been hard at work planning for next year's 100th anniversary of the festival. Since 1927, the festival has provided a safe place for non-professionals to come together and perform before adjudicators and an audience. For many, the opportunity with KFPA was often the only time participants get to perform before an audience.

In the beginning the adjudicators were from England. One such man was world famous musician and educator Norman Wilks who adjudicated in 1930, 1935 and 1936. His contribution to the festival was so significant that he donated the Norman Wilks challenge trophy. It was first awarded in 1936 for a piano soloist playing Beethoven and is still to this day awarded to the pianist with the best piano solo of a Canadian composer.

Now that this very important anniversary is approaching, thoughts are with what to do to celebrate this auspicious occasion. This is where the public comes in.

Have you participated in KFPA as an aspiring musician, singer or dancer? Have you been an adjudicator giving feedback to participants? Were you in the audience and have a particular memory to share? Pat McKinna, executive director of KFPA wants to hear from you.

"Even at the beginning, this music festival has drawn participants from as far away as Ham-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Share memories about the Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts celebrating the centenary in 2027.

ilton and even Peterborough. So, we are calling out on all alumni for their input wherever they may be but, especially within the London-KW-Goderich triangle," said McKinna.

A social media campaign has begun and each month from June to April 2027 will celebrate a decade at a time with pictures and memories that correspond. June was the beginning years and July celebrates the music of wartime

years. It is important to note that during the war years the festival persevered unlike others at the time.

As a community festival, the celebration of the centenary will be a community collaboration using suggestions from the public to assist in curating something that incorporates what the festival has meant in the past, present and future.

"This festival has always em-

phasized offering a constructive opportunity for non-professional performers, especially beginners, more than competitive success. This earned it the reputation as 'the friendly festival'. The collegiality that fosters made it the go-to or must-attend event for many years, and kept it going even through (the Second World War) when many other festivals paused operation or closed, much like the pandemic. Canadian music legend Sir Ernest MacMillan, one of the first adjudicators at this festival, noted that 'Art matters – especially in hard times.' KFPA was one of the few festivals who pivoted to offer a digital version of the traditional live format during the pandemic, which probably makes it the longest-running festival in Ontario as most festivals of a similar age have had interruptions in their history," shared McKinna.

The public can contribute in the short term by going onto the website kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/about and clicking on the button "Click here to let us know" to add your own memories of the festival and what it has meant. It is intended for anyone that had anything to do with the festival, as a participant, an accompanist, an adjudicator, a volunteer, a donor or in other ways.

The benefit concert scheduled for April 2, 2027 will incorporate potential suggestions from the pub-

lic. Would you like to perform again? Have you pictures to share? Memorabilia from past performances? All helps to paint a picture of how KFPA fed into the fabric of the arts and culture scene for three weeks every April over 100 years.

"The benefit concert could pay tribute to each decade with the choice of music from that era. There are many families that participated in the festival so perhaps we could reunite some of them to perform. We could re-enact popular entries from the past, like a kazoo orchestra. We could commission a song and invite a school choir to perform it. So many thoughts," said McKinna.

There will also be a special edition of the Stratford Times celebrating the centenary to be published the same day as the benefit concert. This will include pictures, stories and interviews with past participants. Contributions from the public will make this a fulsome keepsake highlighting the past, present and what the future of KFPA could bring.

Be a part of this invitation to contribute in a personal way to the KFPA centenary and look forward to next year's celebration by the community, for the community. Visit kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/about to share.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. How old is Canada turning this Canada Day?
2. What is the national animal of Canada?
3. Who was Canada's first prime minister?
4. What landform sits between British Columbia and Alberta?
5. Charlottetown is claimed to be "the birthplace of _____".
6. What are Canada's two official national sports?
7. The four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together for the first time at what battle?
8. In what year was Nunavut established?
9. Who was the lead singer of the Tragically Hip?
10. Who ran across Canada to raise awareness for cancer?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

STRATFORD TIMES

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Illuminating Passion showcases local talent, supports year-round programming

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Earlier this week, the Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF) hosted its Illuminating Passion Benefit, an intimate evening of performances and a live auction at Bijou at the Church, formerly Revival House.

"At its heart, Illuminating Passion is about the joy of creative reinvention," said Mark Rosenfeld, founding director of PIF. "It's also a vital fundraiser that helps us continue to present bold, accessible programming – creating a public space where ideas, art and community come together in meaningful ways."

Curated and produced by Canadian stage director Don Shipley, Illuminating Passion was shaped by a veteran arts leader whose career has included leadership roles at the Stratford Festival, Harbourfront Centre and the Grand Theatre, as well as work with CBC and the National Film Board of Canada.

"This is an evening about artistic risk and discovery," said Shipley. "We're inviting performers – and audiences – into a space where the unexpected can happen. It's about revealing the creative impulses that often remain hidden, and celebrating the courage it takes to share them."

Hosted by Sheila McCarthy and Chris Blake, the event kept audience members laughing and engaged as the pair introduced a lineup of local performers, including Paul Gross, David Keeley, Marcus Nance, Laura Condlin, Ann Baggeley and Lucinda Jones. Each performer stepped outside the roles they are typically known for, offering audiences a unique glimpse of their talents.

"In a world that often feels fractured, hurried and discordant, spaces like the one created by Illuminating Passion matter – spaces where people gather, where they listen, where they laugh, where they're surprised and where they're moved," said Rosenfeld. "The evening



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Sheila McCarthy and Chris Blake co-hosted the Provocation Ideas Festival's Illuminating Passion Benefit at Bijou at the Church earlier this week. The evening featured live performances and an auction supporting the festival's year-round programming.

of June 22 at Bijou at the Church was one of those spaces."

McCarthy, an actor, singer and dancer, was described as "one of the most sought-after performers in Canadian film, television and theatre," with a career spanning stages at the Stratford Festival and Shaw Festival, as well as theatres across Canada. Her screen credits include *I've Heard the Mermaids*

Singing, *Lotus Eaters* and *Emily of New Moon*.

Over the last four decades, Blake has "reinvented himself countless times," from serving as a ringmaster in a Chinese circus to performing with the Stratford Festival and Shaw Festival. He has also held leadership roles with the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards and Music Niagara, served as board

chair of Gallery Stratford and organized the Monday Movies Film Festival.

The pair brought the evening to life with humorous introductions to the live auction items, including "A Stratford Tune-Up," which featured a pedicure at Junve Day Spa, a tour with the Boat-house and concert tickets to the Stratford Symphony Orchestra.

One of the featured auction items was No. 7, "A Wilde Garden Affair," an Oscar Wilde-themed high tea for six hosted in the gardens of artisan baker Leora Rissin. The package sold for \$650.

The evening's top-selling item was the final package, "A Culinary Odyssey." The experience included a private dinner with Neil Baxter, former chef de cuisine at Rundles Restaurant, featuring a curated menu with wine pairings. Originally offered for six guests, the package expanded to accommodate 10 diners after some encouragement from Blake. McCarthy also agreed to attend the dinner. The package sold for \$3,000.

By the end of the evening, PIF had raised a total of \$18,000, which will support the organization's goal of creating bold, accessible and innovative community-based programming that invites people to gather, engage and imagine new possibilities through art, conversation, performance and ideas.

"I'm deeply grateful to everyone who made Illuminating Passion possible – our hosts, performers, auction donors, technical crew, volunteers and audience members, all of whom gave so generously of their time, talent and support," said Rosenfeld. "And above all, a huge thank you to Don Shipley, whose vision and artistry brought this event into being. Without Don, there would have been no Illuminating Passion."

PIF is a community-focused, multidisciplinary festival dedicated to exploring big ideas through performance, dialogue, storytelling and creative collaboration, bringing those experiences to community members of all ages.

Betty's Wine Bar offering 'fun and funky and a little mischievous' lounge for wine and snacks

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Bruce Hotel team would like to introduce Betty to Stratford.

Betty's Wine Bar on 27 George St. opened on May 15 and offers a selection of unique wines made from local and global producers, as well as sharable snacks. So far, the new wine bar is a hit with guests.

"It's been good," said Michelle Baril, the Bruce Hotel's director of revenue and guest experience. "The theatre and the festival season helped us huge with open-

ing week but we've had a steady crew over the weekends come in for a glass of wine pre-show so it's up and down but definitely going in the right direction."

Jennifer Birmingham, owner of the Bruce Hotel, had the space on 27 George St. E for a while and contemplated what to do with it. The hotel is named after her father, so Betty's is named after her mother.

"We were looking to do something different from what the Bruce is, so something a bit more casual but still kind of fun and funky and a little mischievous as

a nod to her mom," Baril said.

She added that the team at the Bruce Hotel wanted to offer a casual dining space that sets itself apart from other places in Stratford's well-established hospitality scene.

"There's a huge coffee scene, there's a huge beer scene, there's a huge cocktail scene, so we were really looking at 'Hey, what can we do that not everybody is doing?'" she said.

The white wine selection at Betty's has been popular amid the sunny weather and 3XP chardonnay and skin-contact pinot

grigio are two big hits among customers. Out of the sharable snacks, the baked brie served with focaccia and apple walnut compote is the most popular so far.

"It's gooey and yummy and just what brie should be," Baril said.

Betty's is open between 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and from 11:30 a.m. to late from Thursdays to Saturdays. More information can be found online by either visiting <https://www.bettysongorge.ca/> or by following Betty's Wine Bar on Facebook and Instagram.

Networking Heritage highlights Hollingsworth's tap-dancing career, family photos exhibit and connections between municipalities

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Networking Heritage panel discussion, part of the Black History Project Series at the Stratford-Perth Museum, connected stories of London, Stratford and beyond together.

The Stratford-Perth Museum held the Networking Heritage event, the third in the Black History project on June 20. Curator and CBC broadcaster Garvia Bailey hosted a panel discussion with Canadian tap-dancing icon Joey Hollingsworth and Museum London TD curator of Collections Zahra McDoom, who curated the Black Lives Lived Here London Family Photos exhibit. The Black Lives Lived Here exhibit, which ran from 2025 up until April 2026, featured more than 50 family photos from the 1910s to the 1960s of African Canadians with a connection to London, Ont., including photos of Hollingsworth's parents.

"It felt very comforting to be here and just being able to link all of Joey's personal life story to lived history and also museums and archives and keeping the story going, so it was fantastic," said McDoom.



Garvia Bailey, Joey Hollingsworth and Zahra McDoom at the Networking Heritage panel discussion on June 20.

"To have such esteemed guests here, one of the parts of what we're doing at the museum is knocking down those silos so that folks like Zahra can speak with folks here and we can all help each other to get these stories like that of Joey out into the world," Bailey said.

During the panel discussion, Hollingsworth talked about his career highlights and memories, including dancing on Mr. Rogers and Mr. Dressup's shows, dancing

at clubs where he was invited to turn the venue from segregated to integrated, and visiting his aunt, uncle and cousins every Sunday in their Stratford home.

The event also talked about close connections such as how the Dawn of Tomorrow Black press newspaper connected freedom seekers from Windsor to Brantford to Owen Sound and how the renowned tap dancer Joey is related to Stratford pioneering architect Anthony Hollingsworth.

"All these stories are connected, you know? We're all connected in that way," Bailey said. "I mean, the story that we talked about Anthony Hollingsworth having such a huge part in being a city builder here in Stratford being an entrepreneur here in Stratford, it's all connected. How wonderful is that that we're not as far apart as one might think?"

The Stratford-Perth Museum is working towards a permanent Black History Project exhibition to be launched in either late 2026 or in 2027.

"It's really important to keep building on our stories as a community and to fill in those gaps and I think the Black community especially has had a lot of gaps in their stories, huge gaps, and so to be able to be a part of in any way filling in those some of those gaps so that we have a complete or starting to create a complete story of who we are as a community, I think that's important," Bailey said. "I'm really, really, super excited about what the next year, what the next two years, the next three years pushing forward looks like."

Anyone looking to contribute to the Black History Project Series can send an email to yourstory@stratfordperthmuseum.ca.

Giant Tiger gives back for 65th birthday with more than \$1K raised for Rotary Hospice

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth is grateful for the support of the Giant Tiger Stratford location team, most recently with a monetary donation.

The hospice thanked Giant Tiger Stratford on their Facebook page on June 18 for Thank You Thursday. To celebrate Giant Tiger's 65th birthday, the Stratford location collected donations on May 2 and 3 for Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth.

"When they chose to celebrate Giant Tiger's 65th birthday by collecting donations for Rotary Hospice, we were really honoured," said Pippa Elliott, communications and marketing coordinator for Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth. "It's really nice that they thought of us and wanted to support us and include us in their celebrations."

Giant Tiger Stratford raised \$1,005.75 for Rotary Hospice. Volunteers and staff from the hospice were serving a barbecue during the donation weekend in the Giant Tiger parking lot.

"It was also a lovely opportunity for our staff and volunteers to connect directly



Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth received \$1,005.75 in donations from Giant Tiger's Stratford location, as a way to celebrate the chain's 65th birthday.

with the community to be visible to them and help spread the message that hospice care is available at no cost to anyone who needs it in the community," Elliott said.

"We have a message that we want to get out there that we're here for everyone and a lot of people still don't know that there's a hospice in the community."

Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth must raise \$1 million each year to cover operating costs. The organization receives 50 per cent of funding from the Ministry of Health to cover nursing care, and the rest of the expenses are covered by fundraising.

"Things like keeping the lights on, paying for staff salaries, Wi-Fi, food in the kitchen, all of those things that make the hospice a home and make it comfortable and welcoming for people to be there," Elliott said.

Giant Tiger Stratford also provided the supplies for the barbecue lunch offered to Hike for Hospice participants in 2025 and 2026.

"By them providing those supplies for us, it meant that all the money that was raised for Hike for Hospice could directly support hospice care," Elliott said.

Elliott is grateful for the support from Giant Tiger Stratford and encourages those who support the hospice to support the store on 477 Huron St.

"It's a really nice and welcoming store and anytime local businesses support us we always ask people to support them; support those who support us," she said.

SDSS engineering students leveraging artificial intelligence in class projects

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) engineering students of Mr. Bradshaw's class are among the most enthusiastic in their studies – and their creative solutions to problem solving projects demonstrates that engagement.

In a combined Grade 11/12 class, the students were challenged to leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to context-engineer professional level computer games. In simple terms, context engineering is the practice of designing systems that decide what information an AI model sees before it generates a response. Context engineering is best used for conversational AI, document analysis tools or coding assistants.

"The science has historically been, obviously, to learn how to program, but AI has irrevocably changed that industry, and one

of the things that everyone is struggling with, and what I want the students to learn is, not to just offload, but to learn how to leverage it too," said teacher Andrew Bradshaw.

Jason Wonnacott created a game called Periodic Gauntlet where there are multiple runs and after each run the player receives currency that can be used to buy abilities and upgrades to take into the next run. It is based on the periodic table of elements using the properties of the element.

Amber Hillis created a text-based jousting game. "I was really struggling with the AI to get it to incorporate my different modules while still not crashing so it's kind of a little bit more bare than I would like, but you can play it," she said. With time, she will have it animated but, the project was due that night, so her work was cut out for her.

Ben Bride-McCune built a game making Churros based on a browser game a lot of

kids played.

"It's a series, Papa's, that started with Papa's Pizzeria that was drag and drop to make pizzas. There was a donut shop, ice cream sundae place and it would be basically the same formula where you prepare it, you cook it, you top it and serve it, and you just try to get the most amount of money that you can. So, we took a lot of inspiration from that because they hadn't done one with Churros," he said. His co-developer on the project is Pasha Rusin-Franke.

The class was spent testing each other's games and giving feedback to the developer to help improve. Afterward, graduating student Avery Durand was eager to demonstrate the robot she built that can crochet. The body, crochet hook and gears were 3D printed to Durand's specifications and the series of motors are powered by 27 volts.

"This is our creative engineering project and everyone in class gets to choose their

own project. We work on it all semester and it's pretty much independent and the other projects are very different. One of my classmates made a musical instrument for people with disabilities. Mine is crochet because I really like crocheting in my own time. It would be good for people with limited mobility because crochet requires a lot of different hand movements," said Durand.

Her robot runs on button presses. Each button is colour coded and labeled and each controls a different order in a different direction. Using just the buttons, someone can crochet a project, built to do one stitch consistently.

"Going into this, I didn't really know how to do any of this, so AI was a research tool for me. At first, it helped me pick motor drivers and decide on motors. Once I had all the parts it was much easier to figure it out myself and build my circuit. AI helped

CONTINUED TO PAGE 11

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Students leveraging Artificial Intelligence in class projects

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

me code. As a student we have a basic understanding of different programming concepts and how to define pins. Something AI helped me do was perfect that and code in a way that is functional.

"I think something important when working with AI is to always be questioning what it's saying because it is overconfident and it is trying to please you at all times. There were sometimes in my project where I was telling it about errors that I was having as I was building in troubleshooting and it would (say), 'Your whole circuit is broken unplug it right away!' But it was lying so you just have to keep questioning it because I hadn't done anything to make my circuit explode like it said," Durand said.

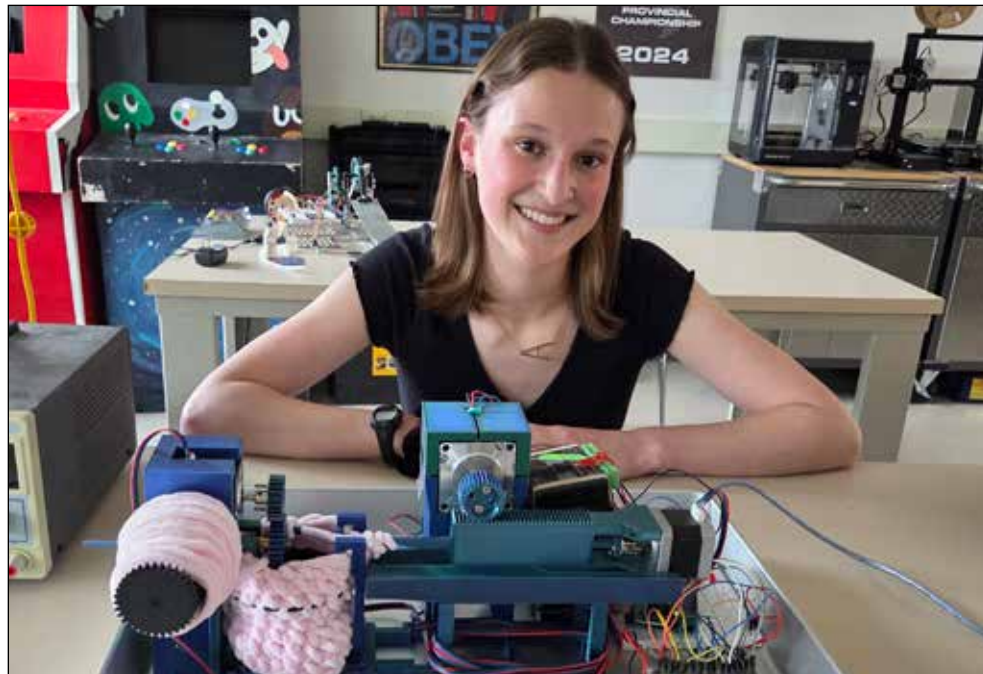
Another project she has been working on is a hand motion-controlled robot that can draw. Unfortunately, as with prototypes, it encountered network errors that were unre-

solved in just a few minutes.

It is a promising future for Durand as she prepares to head to McMaster University's engineering program in the fall. There are many of Mr. Bradshaw's students that have gone on to study engineering and often return to tell the tale of how prepared they were.

"A lot of past graduates come back and say that it really helps them with preparing for engineering and university: 'The creative engineering project that he has everybody do in Grade 12; I went to tour schools and it's almost the exact same as your final design project in first year engineering. The same criteria. You have to find a problem or someone with a disability and make something to solve that problem,'" said Bride-McCune.

Fine words indeed to the testament of the quality of education in engineering at SDSS and leveraging AI as a tool.



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Avery Durand, an SDSS Grade 12 student, poses with her robot built to crochet as part of her creative engineering project. Durand is going on to study engineering at McMaster University in the fall.



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Stratford Public Library offers full summer lineup for adults

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Stratford Public Library (SPL) will continue to offer adult programming throughout the summer. Its wide range of activities is sure to attract anyone looking to get out and socialize during the warmer months.

Back this year is the popular Happy Hour event, held from 7 to 9 p.m. on the main floor. This after-hours celebration of community, creativity and connection invites attendees to sip, mingle and soak up the atmosphere with a cash bar, literary-inspired activities and a live musical performance. In July, Happy Hour will feature Kinnaris Women's Choir and Black Swan Brewing Company.

"There's a cash bar, there's snacks, there's activities and there's, of course, a performance of some kind for each night for people to enjoy," said Melanie Kindrachuk, adult services librarian. "Then everyone is invited to hang around and talk to your fellow residents for a while in a really relaxed atmosphere."

On July 16, the library will host a Zoom event titled "The Sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald: The Ship, the Storm, and the Song." Attendees will join Steve Ackerman, emeritus professor of atmospheric and oceanic science at the University of

Wisconsin, as he walks them through the tale of the ship, the storm and the song. As this is a Zoom event, registration is required.

"Dr. Steve Ackerman was a professor of climatology, so he does talk quite a bit about the conditions that caused the super-storm that sank the Edmund Fitzgerald," said Kindrachuk. "And then he ties it to the famous song. It's really going to be a fascinating session for anyone who's interested in Great Lakes history."

SPL will host an all-ages Noon Kazoo from noon to 12:30 p.m. This joyful, multi-generational summer jam session will offer adults and children alike a way to interact together while learning new songs on the kazoo – from ABBA to Disney favourites.

"We will be having a kazoo jam, and everyone is welcome to join in," said Kindrachuk. "If you don't have one, we do have some kazoos to hand out, or you can bring your own kazoo. Every week, we'll do a different set of popular songs, and people can learn to play the kazoo and just have a really fun, joyful half-hour of playing the kazoo in a large group in our library garden."

The Summer Time Adult Reading (STAR) Challenge, for those 18 and older, will run throughout July and August. Participants can pick up a STAR reading ballot



(SARA BRADFORD PHOTO)

at the front desk for a chance to win prizes throughout the summer.

"You just stop in and pick up your reading ballots; it's like a little coffee card, and whenever you bring back a library item – it can be a library book, ebook or audiobook – you let the staff know and they stamp your card," said Kindrachuk. "Each time you fill a ballot, you receive an entry for prizes throughout the summer."

Other events that will continue are Pints and Pages, Chess Night and Writer's Club, along with other activities such as a demonstration of Taoist Tai Chi in the library garden and much more.

Kindrachuk encourages everyone to stop in and try events or programs that suit their

interests.

"I think that the library programs are a great way to get out into the community because it's very low-stakes, it's free, the library is a really relaxed location and very welcoming to anyone who wants to join in," said Kindrachuk. "We encourage people to come out, experience something new and test it out to see if you like it. We try to have a variety of options, so people who like physical activity, reading or crafts – we try to have programs for all sorts of interests, so you'll find something that will catch your fancy."

For more information and to register for upcoming programs, visit www.splibrary.ca/adultevents.

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STRATFORD NISSAN

Stratford Kiwanis honours students for service, leadership and community impact

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Kiwanis Club of Stratford hosted its annual Kiwanis Service Awards ceremony recognizing secondary school students for their service and talent in fields such as the arts, engineering and science.

The selection process is application-based, focusing on students' contributions to their community and organizations. Ten students were chosen from 25 applicants and recognized for their commitment to their communities.

Awards are given for community service, not necessarily for post-secondary education, as evidenced by the range of students pursuing diverse paths, including a fifth year of high school and a career as a dancer on a cruise ship. Students also spoke at the event, showcasing their maturity and commitment to service. The club aims to support children and youth in making their communities better.

"To say that this group of young people is impressive is an understatement," said David MacLennan, Kiwanis president-elect. "It is not surprising that they are also high achievers in their areas of interest."

Throughout the evening, students took a few minutes to speak about their accomplishments and future endeavours.

Rachel Barber was recognized for her participation in the Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts. Barber plans to pursue a teaching career after taking a fifth year of high school.

Olivia Van Bruwaene was recognized for her years of experience working with youth at Camp Bimini and for leading



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Ten secondary school students were honoured at the Kiwanis Service Awards in Stratford for their leadership, volunteer work and community contributions. From left: Avery Durand, Jack Lindsay, Rachel Barber, Casen de Graat, Julie Herman, Cindy Yuan, Olivia Van Bruwaene, Clair Tiemans, Natasha Van Stratten and Gregor Harris.

a youth program at Avondale United Church. She will attend King's University College at Western University for a degree in child and youth studies and also plans to become a teacher.

Natasha Van Stratten is heading to the University of Guelph to study neuroscience in the fall. Her experience mentoring youth, working on the school yearbook and teaching Sunday school contributed to her receiving this year's service award.

Cindy Yuan participated in the law society club and helped raise funds for Ro-

tary Hospice. Yuan has served on student council as well as the prom organizing committee in high school and will be studying engineering at Western University this fall.

Gregor Harris will also study engineering at Western University in the fall. Through his involvement in the robotics club during high school, he learned the importance of teamwork in problem-solving. He volunteers as a mentor at Stratford Intermediate School for its robotics club, which contributed to him receiving this

year's service award.

Avery Durand has volunteered as a bowl painter for the Stratford House of Blessing "Empty Bowls" fundraiser and also assists at STEM camps at the University of Waterloo. Durand has been accepted into the engineering program at McMaster University.

Julie Herman is involved in several school initiatives and recently created a mural for the school's front lobby. She has had her own exhibition at Gallery Stratford and was commissioned to design an album cover for a local band. Herman is also a member of the tech team at Avondale United Church. She will pursue a degree in philosophy of law at York University in the fall.

Clair Tiemans will attend the University of Waterloo to study biology in September. She strongly believes in helping others and hopes to enter a scientific field where she can continue to advocate for humanity.

Jack Lindsay, a Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts alumnus, is committed to supporting and mentoring others in the arts. He is beginning his career as a dancer with Carnival Cruise Lines and will embark on an 11-month contract this fall.

Casen de Graat worked at Camp Bimini as a camp counsellor, mentoring youth for several years. De Graat is interested in sports and sports injuries and will pursue a degree in kinesiology at Western University this fall.

"The goal of the award is to highlight those whose focus is on making the world a better place, one child in one community at a time," said MacLennan.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

11-year-old Ben Bell gallops at a high speed on his horse Holly to a first-place finish on Sunday at the Stratford and District Saddle Club Show.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A large part of the Ontario Pork Congress (OPC) in Stratford each year is keeping the next generation of pork farmers entertained. Keirstin Uich watches over her three children at OPC playing with toys in the corn: Ellery, Brinston and Reagan Uich. Beside them are Logan Legault, T.J. Houben and Harnot Harnest.

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The Story Behind the Poem: “Healing” by Faera Lane

MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Correspondent

Faera Lane was a true bookworm as a child and fell in love with words from a very young age. She was home schooled and her mother kept many books in the house but her first introduction to poetry was the local library, where she read works by poets like Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe. Lane says: “The way poetry utilized words with such complex economy to weave nuanced and sweeping narratives fascinated me.”

Libraries were safe and welcoming places for Lane, with access to so many stories, perspectives, and ways to understand the world. In fact, it was a library contest that inspired her to write her first poem when she was twelve years old. She says, “It just seemed like a natural extension of reading!”

Lane found the Every Voice contest to be a challenge – but a good challenge. As an introvert, it gave her a chance to “step out of (her) head a bit” and engage with the poetry community. It also resulted in her first officially published poem.

When Lane writes, she jots down ideas as they pop into her head, usually while doing household chores. Later she moves these “scraps” into a Word document and

expands on them.

“It’s an amorphous process,” Lane said. “Usually the core doesn’t change but sometimes the direction does. I have an idea to express but turns out to be something quite different. The story tells itself to me and I think: Oh, that’s what was there! I also read my poems aloud to see how they flow and where I want the emphasis of cadence and tone to land.”

Lane’s poem, “Healing,” is about surviving one step at a time: “Survival is often quiet and unglamorous. Tiny daily tasks can become mountains due to physical or mental health barriers, and there is often shame attached to being unable to do what seemingly comes so easily to others. I think we all need to give ourselves a little more grace and the permission to do one thing at a time. Even if it seems small, it is enough.”

“I inhale and forgive myself for survival.”

The Story Behind the Poem is an ongoing series by Mark Hertzberger featuring conversations with poets recognized in this year’s Every Voice Poetry Contest and published in the anthology, Roots Through Stone: Poems of Strength and Resilience. Copies of the anthology are available for purchase at Fanfare Books in Stratford.



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Healing

[hee-ling]

Phonetic (Standard)

adjective

re-learning a language our bodies forgot how to speak

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one plate
one fork
one glass

Artificial lemon scent fizzed bitter in my mouth as I
ran hot water over numb fingers
circled the sponge in lather
set my small accomplishments to dry

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cutlery
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shame

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Year after year, Stratforders near and far come out in droves to celebrate Canada Day, and this year is set to be no different.

Canada Day celebrations begin this Wednesday, July 1 at 11 a.m. in Market Square. There will be numerous community organizations there with interactive booths

and activities, along with regular performers throughout the whole five hour event (which is set to wrap at 4 p.m.

Community organizations and activities include:

- Stratford Youth Soccer – soccer zone activities and face painting
- Stratford Public Library – interactive activities
- Family Photo Booth – free photo booth strips
- Gallery Stratford – button and magnet making
- Playmakers Theatre – lantern making for the lantern

parade

- City of Stratford Lions Pool/Day Camp – free Canada Day tattoos, stickers and flags
- Stratford Lakeside Active Adults Association (SLAAA) – information
- Stratford Police Service – information
- Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron – information and supports

CONTINUED TO PAGE 18

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Celebrate Canada Day in Stratford

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

• NextStrat – youth esports gaming activities

• Upper Thames River Conservation Authority – activities

Additionally, two free public swims will take place at the Lions Pool from 2:30-4 p.m. and 7-8:30 p.m.

The annual Canada Day parade will once again be hosted by the Stratford and District Saddle Club and Bethel Pentecostal Church. This year's theme is "The Future is Bright in Red and White!"

The parade is scheduled to kick off at 6 p.m. from the corner of Lakeside Drive and Waterloo Street moving north-east from Waterloo Street to Mornington Street, heading west on McCarthy Road West and finishing at the Rotary Complex. Fifty floats are expected to participate.

Non-perishable food donations to the House of Blessing Food Bank will be ac-

cepted at the parade.

Finally, the Stratford Kinsmen Club will once again host an annual Canada Day concert and fireworks show. Evening entertainment at the Stratford Education and Recreation Centre (SERC), near Matilda Street and Oakdale Avenue, will include a concert, food vendors and fireworks show. Food vendors open at 6 p.m., live music begins at 8 p.m. and the fireworks show will begin at dusk.

Residents should also be aware that Stratford Transit will not be operating Canada Day and the following road closures will be in place from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.:

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STRATFORD *TIMES* SPORTS



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTOS)

The Stratford Flames U9 team left it all on the field during a tournament this past weekend. The team opened with a narrow 3-2 loss to Embro on Friday, followed by a 4-1 loss to the St. Marys Rockies on Saturday morning. The Flames bounced back later that day with a 4-3 win over Sweaburg in the quarterfinals before falling 6-5 to Innerkip in a hard-fought semifinal game on Sunday. "The girls played so hard all weekend and we said to them, it doesn't matter if they lost or won, as long as they had fun," said coach Natasha Tousignant.



18U Nationals ends losing streak in a split week

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The 18U Stratford Nationals finally ended their seven-game losing streak on June 17 in a 7-2 win on the road against the Ancaster Angels in Ancaster.

After a scoreless first inning, the Nationals pounced on the Angels, scoring five runs in the second. With two outs, Ethan Priestap scored on a double steal, putting the visitors up 1-0. After a walk to Finley Newton, Dawson Davidson drove home two runs with a double, allowing Logan MacMillan and James Robinson to score and give the Nationals a 3-0 lead. Alex Everett's two-run RBI single put the Nationals up 5-0 before the end of their half of the inning.

Ancaster scored with a run in the fifth, but Cooper Yantzi's groundout in the sixth allowed Robinson to advance from third, increasing the Nationals' lead to 6-1. Davidson then scored on MacMillan's hit by pitch with the bases loaded, making it 7-1 for Stratford. The Angels scored a run in the seventh, but Robinson and Stratford's defence held the lead, securing a 7-2 vic-

tory.

Everett pitched over four innings, striking out six while giving up one run on three walks and three hits in 108 pitches. He also led the Nationals with two RBIs and was tied for the team lead with two hits. Robinson finished the game with six strikeouts, four walks and one hit allowed, along with one run given up.

On June 19, the Nationals played against Guelph Royals Team 1 at Stratford National Stadium. They regained balance in the fourth inning thanks to Ethan Priestap's RBI single, which brought Yantzi home with two outs, and an error by Guelph's defence, enabling MacMillan to score from second base.

Guelph scored four runs in the fifth inning to establish a commanding lead, adding two more insurance runs in the sixth and eighth innings to secure a 10-2 victory over Stratford.

Stratford's Reed Bowles pitched five innings, allowing three earned runs on four hits and two walks, while striking out six.

On June 27, Stratford is set to play a doubleheader at National Stadium, facing the Hamilton Cardinals in both games.

U15 Strikers Girls rumble past Rockwood FC

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On June 22, the Stratford U15 Strikers hosted Rockwood FC at Cowan Field in Festival Hydro Park.

Elena Hogger and team captain Peyton Ward led Stratford with a total of five goals in a 7-0 victory over the visitors. The other goals were scored by Peyton Van Straaten and Madison Brisbois. Goalkeeper Grace Elliott achieved her third shutout of the

season.

With the result, the Strikers improved their record to 5-0 and took first place in the Southwest District Soccer League U15 Girls Division by better goal differential over Waterloo United, who have the identical win-draw-loss record.

The Strikers are set to face Waterloo United in a showdown for first place in the division on June 29 at Cowan Field in Festival Hydro Park. The game will kick off at 7 p.m.

U16 Strikers Girls continue winning ways

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U16 Strikers remain unbeaten in the 2026 SWDSL campaign after a 4-0 win over FEDS United on June 16 at Victoria Park in Fergus.

Arabelle Garland scored a brace for the Strikers, while Myra Wood and Niamh

Appel also found the net. Goalkeeper Victoria Brander recorded her fifth shutout of the season and the team improved to a 3-2-0 record, tallying eight of 15 possible points to start the season.

Next up for the Strikers is rescheduling the June 11 game against Oriental SC to June 25 at SERC Field in Stratford (after press time).

U16 Strikers Boys make a road sweep

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U16 Strikers secured two victories this week: one against Puslinch Predators in Southwest District Soccer League action, and another against Oriental SC in the first round of the Nothers Youth Cup.

On June 16, Stratford defeated Puslinch 4-0, with Lucas De Witt and Logan Wilson each scoring, the latter earning a hat

trick. This win brought their record to 2-1-3, placing them seventh in the league with seven points, nine points behind division leaders Waterloo United as of press time.

On June 19, at Campo Do Oriental in Cambridge, the Strikers beat Oriental SC 2-1, with goals from Wilson and Max Weber. They will face Owen Sound United in the Cup semifinals on July 24.

Their next regular-season match is against RED Academy on June 30 at Vancea Financial Field, Festival Hydro Park.

15U Nationals pounded Simcoe in ICBA action

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

After winning against the Clinton Mustangs in exhibition play, the Stratford 15U Nationals continued their winning streak by beating the Simcoe Giants 22-8 on June 16 at Simcoe.

In the first inning, Cole Morris scored for the Nationals with a two-run RBI triple. Dexter Powell's RBI single extended the lead to 3-0 as they headed into the second. Reid Musselman added an RBI single, making it 4-0 through two innings. The Nationals then dominated with five runs in the third, taking a 9-0 lead before Simcoe responded with four runs off starter Jackson Goebel, cutting the Stratford deficit to 9-4 going into the fourth.

Morris increased the Nationals' lead to 10-4 with a bases-loaded walk by Quintin Parr. In the fourth inning, Simcoe answered with two runs, narrowing the gap to six. Goebel's double drove in Will Mo-

lenhuis, boosting the Nationals' advantage to 11-6, followed by Morris's RBI groundout that made it 12-6 for Stratford before the bottom of the fifth. Simcoe scored two more runs, reducing the Stratford lead to 12-8 after five innings.

After both teams remained scoreless in the sixth, the Nationals launched an offensive rally, scoring ten consecutive runs in the seventh. They then withstood a late rally by their opponents in the bottom of the inning to secure the victory.

Morris, Powell and Landon McCann delivered a strong performance in Stratford's middle batting order, contributing eight RBIs, seven hits and eight runs.

Stratford increased their record to 6-4 and now holds fifth place in the Intercounty Baseball Association 15U T1 Division as of press time.

Next for the Nationals is a doubleheader with the Simcoe Giants at Stratford National Stadium on June 28.

U18 Strikers advance in Nothers Cup, hosts Blue Mountains United

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U18 Strikers Boys move forward in the Nothers Cup after a 4-3 victory over Kitchener TFC on June 19 at RBJ Schlegel Park in Kitchener.

Caden Ollson scored twice to lead the Strikers, with Nicholas Brintell and Piers Murray also finding the net for the visitors.

As a result of this win, Stratford will compete against Rockwood FC in the

semifinals on July 10 at Marden Park in Guelph.

On June 22, the Strikers hosted Blue Mountains United at Cowan Field in Festival Hydro Park.

Brintell scored the lone goal for the Strikers in the 1-1 draw with Blue Mountains United. Stratford improves to 4-1-1 in the season, with 13 points in fourth position in the Southwest District Soccer League U18 Division. Stratford's next match is against Oriental SC at the Campo Do Oriental in Cambridge on June 29.

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Creators of the Classic City: Rex Bartlett

PAUL WILKER

Times Contributor

At one time, Stratford had a place in the early days of the thriving automobile manufacturing business. Reginald Cleveland (Rex) Bartlett, an imaginative Stratford engineer, successfully designed, built and marketed several of his inventions. One of those was, for a time, a revolutionary automobile, a car with air suspension and four-wheel brakes.

Most cars had two-wheel brakes only, and they were mechanical; there was no power assist. The pressure applied in braking depended on the pressure a driver could apply to the brake pedal. If a driver was going a little too fast and had to make a panicked stop for some reason, it could be interesting.

Bartlett's car was tested in public in 1913 in front of the Royal Alexandria Theatre in Toronto. The four-wheel brake system worked so well that when the car was brought to an abrupt stop in front of the theatre, 26 other cars behind it that were part of "the parade," ran into each other. American car manufacturers, concerned about competition from the Bartlett car, are said to have offered Rex a million dollars for his invention, but he turned them



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The 1915 Bartlett Model A-2 Roadster, retailed at \$665. It is not known if any Bartlett cars still exist today.

down.

Instead, he opened the Canadian Bartlett Automobile Co. Ltd. in Toronto. In its first two years, the company built 100 vehicles. With need to increase his output, in 1916

Bartlett bought a partially finished furniture factory at 212 Norfolk St. in Stratford.

In 1916, 200 more cars were built in the Stratford plant. As well, the output included a few Bartlett trucks, which were built

on the automobile chassis. But it all came to an abrupt end in 1917. The world was at war, and many of the U.S. manufacturers that Bartlett relied upon for machined parts for his cars, had all their civilian contracts cancelled by the U.S. government so they could manufacture war materials.

Bartlett was forced to declare bankruptcy and close down his operations. In total, 600 Bartlett cars were produced. It is not known if any Bartlett cars still exist. As recently as the 1980s, a 1917 Bartlett was in the collection of Gordon E. Smith in Ottawa.

Bartlett's son, Edward Morley, operated a riding school and stables in the former car plant on 212 Norfolk Street, and in the 1980s he ran the Bartlett Restaurant in the same building. Today it is the home of Rover's Ranch Dog Daycare and Boarding facility.

This article is taken from Creators of the Classic City: www.streetsofstratford.ca.

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

PIF reports 23 proposals to reimagine Avon River

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

What could Stratford's Avon River become in the years ahead? That question is already generating a remarkable range of answers, according to a media release from the Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF).

Since launching in April, Flowing Futures: Avon River Design Challenge has received 23 statements of interest from artists, designers, environmental thinkers, storytellers and community members – with more proposals expected in the coming weeks, including a new student submission stream involving Stratford's elementary, intermediate and high schools.

The submissions so far reveal an ambitious and imaginative range of ideas: floating wildflower islands and gathering

spaces, ecological restoration concepts, public art installations, nature-inspired play spaces for young children, winter activation projects, accessible river pathways and promenades, guided nature and history walks, storytelling initiatives and climate resilience strategies.

Among some of the most compelling proposals are an audio documentary exploring time as a river, built through conversations with Stratford's oldest residents – including people in their 90s and over 100 – gathering memory, reflection and lived experience as part of the city's evolving story.

Other developing projects include a documentary on the history of Stratford's river system and the completed Avon River Way Framework, an innovative capstone project created by graduating University of Waterloo urban design students.

"The breadth and originality of the ideas we're seeing is extraordinary," said Mark Rosenfeld, founding director of PIF. "What's emerging is exactly what we hoped for – a civic conversation about the Avon River that is imaginative, practical, artistic and deeply rooted in community."

For those who missed Flowing Futures initial call for statements of interest, this initiative continues to welcome project submissions in virtually any form – including public art, ecological design, digital media, performance, storytelling, installations, sound works and interdisciplinary collaborations – with all finalized submissions due no later than Aug. 28.

To support participants, MTE Consultants will be offering a Flowing Futures River Clinic in August, along with a series of mentorship sessions to help strengthen proposals with environmen-

tal, watershed, habitat and implementation expertise.

"This is where creativity meets possibility," said Rosenfeld. "The River Clinic gives participants a chance to test and deepen their ideas with real technical insight."

Selected works will be featured in a city-wide public exhibition from Oct. 1-17, with installations and displays at Copperlight (Knox Church), Our Stör(y) and along the Avon River pathway, culminating in a public awards celebration on Oct. 17.

Flowing Futures is presented in partnership with: PIF, BMI Group, MTE Consultants, the Stratford Public Library, Our Stör(y), Pathways to Poetry Festival and the Boathouse Stratford.

The project is supported in part by the Stratford Destination Development Fund.

Downtown Stratford Sidewalk Sale returns July 11

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) is excited to announce the return of the annual Downtown Stratford Sidewalk Sale on Saturday, July 11 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The popular summer event will bring the downtown core to life with sidewalk shopping, special promotions, prize giveaways, children's activities and community fundraising – creating a full day of fun for residents and visitors alike.

Shoppers are encouraged to explore the

downtown and take part in the "Passport to Savings" promotion. Passports can be picked up at Destination Stratford, the BIA Tent at Memorial Gardens and at 20 participating businesses. Customers who receive three stamps from participating businesses can submit their completed passport by 5 p.m. for a chance to win \$100 in Downtown Dollars. Visitors will also have the opportunity to enter a draw for a pair of Stratford Festival tickets by bringing receipts totaling \$100 or more (before tax) from downtown purchases to the BIA Tent at Memorial Gardens before 5 p.m.

Additional activities throughout the day will include a Downtown Dollars guessing game contest, free popcorn, free temporary tattoos and the always-popular kids fishing pond at Memorial Gardens, where every child wins a prize.

Community spirit will also be front and centre during the event with Jake's Lemonade Stand operating from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. in support of Juvenile Arthritis research, education and support through the Cassie + Friends Society.

"The Sidewalk Sale has become one of our favourite summer traditions downtown," said Jamie Pritchard, general

manager of the BIA. "It is a wonderful opportunity to support local businesses, enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of the downtown, and bring the community together for a fun-filled day. There truly is something for everyone."

Residents and visitors are encouraged to spend the day shopping, dining and exploring all that Downtown Stratford has to offer. For more information, visit Downtown Stratford BIA or follow downtown social media channels for updates and participating business information.

Here For Now Theatre review: *I Am An Island* contrasts community and individual, avoidance and alarmism

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

We are all on an island and it is sinking. Is there a life to live somewhere else or do we just live life to the fullest in the time we have left here? Is there an in-between?

Those were the thoughts with which I was left after watching playwright Julia Lederer and director Allison Plamondon's production of *I Am An Island*, which ran at Here For Now Theatre earlier this season.

The play is a thinly veiled (or maybe not at all) parable for the modern environmental crisis, balancing two types of responses to the existential threat we're facing as a species – environmental alarmism with lost-cause avoidance.

In the story, the characters are part of a small community on what was once a picturesque tropical island. The islanders have known for generations that their island was sinking; every resident was taught a song in preschool underscoring that very warning. Yet the residents continued living their happy lives, adorning their island community with handmade trinkets and decorations made from native plants, seashells and other materials for the countless holidays they celebrate throughout the year.

The play's protagonist, May (Siobhan O'Malley), sees the impending danger and urges her sister, Sandra (Kelly Van der



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

From left: Kelly Van der Burg as Sandra, Siobhan O'Malley as May and Nick Dolan as Ben in Here For Now Theatre's 2026 world-premiere of *I Am An Island*.

Burg), and her fiancé, Ben (Nick Dolan), and the rest of her community to begin evacuating to another island somewhere else in the world – a wider world reported to be far less idyllic and far more polluted than island life. But the islanders refuse. They have always called the island home, and they have no plans to change that any time soon, despite the continuously and

rapidly disappearing shoreline.

Encouraged by an unexpected and pregnant island tourist, April (Brianna Rodrigues), and haunted by the ghost of her grandmother (Barbara Gordon) – who, herself, may have died trying to warn her community about the impending doom before she mysteriously vanished into the ocean – May stages a kind of protest by standing in a hole and gradually sinking with the rest of the island. Meanwhile, Sandra, Ben and the other islanders adapt to their new, more aquatic surroundings,

all the while becoming increasingly annoyed with May's singlemindedness.

By the end of the play, the message is clear. While spreading awareness of the environmental threats we face is crucial, environmental alarmism may only serve to push those who refuse to see the truth further from it. On the other hand, a life without community and a sense of belonging and culture may not be one worth saving.

Beyond the considerable acting talents of each of this production's five cast members – the emotional depth and increasing division in the relationship between sisters Sandra and May, and the humorous levity with somewhat foreboding undertones offered by the grandmother and April – what really struck me about this production was the production design.

The use of projection and soundscape combined with a relatively simple set – a handcrafted backdrop made to look like waterfalls, a rising "hole" in the middle of the stage meant to depict May's sinking with the island and numerous island props like aquatic plants, flowers, buckets and fish – fully transported me to this rapidly sinking fictional island while carrying that underlying feeling unease as happiness gradually turns to dread and ultimately acceptance.

As a world premiere, I believe this play carries an important message for humanity and I look forward to seeing it produced by other theatre companies for larger audiences.



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(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Lincoln Bentley shows Poet Bellmore how to draw with chalk at this year's Stratford Live Music and Food Festival. Last Friday and Saturday, bands and vendors took over Veterans Drive.

STRATFORD TIMES

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Stratford Festival review: Colourful sets and ornate costumes offer the perfect backdrop for comedy in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Besides the return of *Something Rotten!*, which everyone knew was once again going to be a smash hit, director Krista Jackson's production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* might be the funniest show at the Stratford Festival this season.

Without much knowledge of Wilde's work, I went into opening night at the Avon Theatre with the feeling I was in for another story about a bunch of rich people behaving badly in Victorian England, with at least one character named Ernest. While I wasn't entirely wrong, what I hadn't counted on was Wilde's signature comedy and the ability of this cast and crew to make the absolute most of the humour in this play.

From the time I walked into the theatre and saw the beautifully designed set – the interior of a Victorian sitting room painted bright pink with all sorts of oddities hanging on the walls including a human skull, a cat skeleton, an accordion and a French horn among other items – I quickly realized I was in for a much more amusing show than I'd first thought.

The costume designs, too, are something to marvel at. Between the summer suits and smoking jackets worn by Algernon Moncrieff (Carter Gulseth) and John "Jack" Worthing (Joe Perry) and the beautifully ornate dresses and gowns – each



(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

Marissa Orjalo as Cecily Cardew, Carter Gulseth as Algernon Moncrieff, Joe Perry as John Worthing and Allison Lynch as Gwendolen Fairfax, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Stratford Festival 2026.

a different bright and audacious colour, and accented with sparkling jewels I can only describe as Victorian bling – worn by Lady Bracknell (Fiona Reid), Gwendolen Fairfax (Allison Lynch) and Cecily Cardew (Marissa Orjalo), the whole production felt like it was somehow both of its time and absurdist, lending itself as perfect context for Wilde's comedy.

And that comedy is non-stop in this production. There is very little dialogue in the play that isn't punctuated with a joke, or at very least, a wry jab between

Algernon and John. Even between the scenes, as characters like Algernon's butler, Lane (Sean Arbuckle), John's butler, Merriman (Liam Tobin), and his gardener, Moulton (Landon Nesbitt), are moving one set aside to reveal another, equally ornate and beautiful set, there are brief moments of humour and physical comedy to keep the audience laughing.

The delivery of this comedy comes at a quick pace – not so quick that the audience can't keep up but delivered at such a speed that allows one to truly appreciate

the playwright's genius and comedic wit.

Each of the actors onstage show their impeccable comedic timing, and every punchline hit its mark. While I enjoyed every performance in this production, Reid's portrayal of the sharp-tongued and ever-observant Lady Bracknell as she quizzes both John and Cecily on their upbringing and social status to protect the reputations of her family members was a particular comedic high point for me.

I also enjoyed the budding friendship between Lynch as Gwendolen and Orjalo as Cecily, a bond that only becomes stronger after they realized they had both been lied to by the Ernest who proposed to them. Both actors did a remarkably funny job speaking and moving in unison, and making John and Algernon explain themselves before ultimately, and rather easily, forgiving their deceptions.

I should also mention the choreographic and comedic genius involved in the fight over muffins between Gulseth as Algernon and Perry as John. Using that scene as hilarious cover for a quick set change is brilliant.

If, like me, you haven't yet been introduced to the work of Oscar Wilde, I believe this season's production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a good place to start.

The Importance of Being Earnest runs at the Avon Theatre until Oct. 23.

Market Update: Finally finding its footing

MAKLANE DEWEVER

Home & Company Real Estate

After a cold winter, literally and figuratively, the Stratford real estate market is finding its footing.

Home sales were up 23 per cent this spring, the busiest in four years. Between March and May, 135 homes sold, up from 110 over the same months last year, and more than \$85 million in homes changed hands, about 20 per cent more than a year ago.

Prices have softened modestly. The median sold price this spring was about \$583,000, down roughly three per cent from \$605,000 a year ago. Real price momentum came this spring, with median prices bottoming out at \$528,000 in January. From there, the median climbed steadily from \$579,000 in March to \$600,000 in May and reached \$617,000 in June.

The winter was cold for the real estate market. In January, the median price had fallen to \$529,000, and homes were taking nearly 90 days to sell, the low point of a winter freeze that was the slowest stretch since 2023. By spring, both price and pace had turned.

Buyers have more choice than at any point in over a decade. More than 160 homes were for sale this spring on average, at any giv-

en time, climbing to 172 by June, the most in years and up from about 123 a year ago. During the boom years, 2016-2022, the average was closer to 56. This spring's buyers absorbed enough of that inventory to lift prices from their winter lull, but many homes remain unsold.

This degree of choice has handed buyers leverage. Homes selling over asking were half as common as last spring. Sellers received 97.4 per cent of their asking price this May, down from 98.6 per cent a year earlier, though by June they were again getting close to 99 per cent as the market firmed. More than a quarter of homes needed a price reduction before selling, with cuts averaging about five per cent. Another sign of the times: 62 listings were cancelled this spring, a figure somewhat skewed by re-listings at new prices, compared with 28 last spring and a mere handful per season during the boom years, when homes sold themselves.

The result is a market operating at two speeds. Well-priced homes are selling quickly, with the median sale taking 27 days in May, while others sit on the market much longer. That can be frustrating for sellers, especially those who watched neighbours sell in a weekend a few years ago. But part of the longer timeline is a healthier process: offers conditional on home inspections and

financing are standard again after years of buyers waiving everything to compete, and sometimes encountering surprises after closing, these conditional periods add days to a sale while giving buyers protection they hadn't had in years.

As stated in an earlier Market Update, this adjustment is, in part, the market pulling prices back toward what Stratford paycheques can actually carry.

Zooming out, Stratford homes have repriced from the 2022 peak, when the median topped \$777,000. Today's prices sit roughly 22 per cent below that, essentially a return to 2021 values. And while today's selling times feel sluggish against the 2016 to 2022 bull run, in the 2000s, 50 to 80 days was normal.

Whether the spring bump holds is not cut and dried. Local unemployment is the lowest in the province, but the larger picture is murky: trade tensions with the United States weigh on Ontario's economy, and overseas conflict has pushed up oil prices and, with them, fixed mortgage rates. However, this is showing signs of calming. The Bank of Canada held its key rate at 2.25 per cent for a fifth straight meeting on June 10, and Governor of the Bank of Canada Tiff Macklem says the next move could be a hike or a cut. The Canadian Real Estate Association forecasts

essentially zero price growth in Ontario this year; TD forecasts a four per cent decline.

That Stratford buyers and sellers kept trucking through it all suggests durable local demand. The wildcard is rates: if they ease in the second half, this spring suggests buyers are ready.

Sellers: Demand is real. Price to today's market, not to COVID peaks, and make sure your house presents as its best self.

Buyers: Real selection for the first time in a decade, fewer bidding wars, conditions back on the table and prices that have already steadied. Waiting for a crash means waiting for something the data doesn't quite show.

Move-up buyers: The gap between what you sell for and what you buy for hasn't been this favourable in years. If you bought in 2021 to 2023, though, equity recovery may take several years.

To sum up: a quarter more sales than last spring, half as many bidding wars, prices steadying month by month, and the most inventory in years.

Maklane deWever is a realtor with Home & Company Real Estate Corp., Brokerage, in Stratford. Market data from the MLS® System (OnePoint Association of REALTORS) and CREA; analysis by the author. You can email him at makdeweever@homeandcompany.ca or call or text 519-301-2214.

Editorial

The greatest thing my daughter built was her group of friends



AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

At 3 p.m. on Tuesday, June 16, I picked up my daughter, Hailey, on her last official day of high school ever. She still had three exams to complete, but that was her last day of attending class. Although this milestone was always going to come, it really hit me when I saw her marching through the parking lot for the last time.

Hailey excels at everything she does, and that extends to her marks in school. She's always been a high achiever and great at school. I was never a parent who had to worry about her failing out, and sometimes I even had to remind her that marks aren't everything and that she shouldn't be so hard on herself. But here she is – an adult I raised – off to Queen's for biology, something she's wanted to do since she was little.

One thing Hailey also excelled in was being social. That was never me. I was quiet and awkward, and it took me a long time to understand the meaning of friendships. But fortunately, I found my way there – and now I think I do it pretty well. Ironically, I think it's because of my daughter.

Hailey attended St. Joe's on St. Vincent Street, and that's where she met Lyla. When she started a new school in Grade 4, Hailey's dad and I were a bit worried about how she would fit in. She was by no means a girly girl – at the time, she was obsessed with Star Wars. Her backpack was Star Wars, her room décor was Star Wars, her shoes, pyjamas and even her T-shirts were all Star Wars.

Growing up, we never pushed Hailey in one direction or another. She was a funky, outgoing kid who would latch onto a specific interest for months at a time, and we just let her do her thing. At one point, it was Harry Potter; another time, Marvel – especially Spider-Man – and then Star Wars. She even had a classic literature phase, during which she would dress as Phileas Fogg, a character from the book *Around the World in 80 Days*, complete with a pocket watch and top hat. You could quiz her on any movie, book or fact, and she would answer without hesitation.

So when Hailey got to Grade 4 and became best friends with Lyla, we were... a little stunned, to be honest.

Lyla wore pink from head to toe; her backpack had hearts on it; she was never seen without a pink hair scrunchie around her high ponytail; and she was very much into make-up. Her nails were always done, and her birthday party that October was spa-themed. I remember thinking, maybe Stratford isn't for Hailey. But when she got invited to that party, she was ecstatic – though one thing had to happen first. I needed to call Lyla's mom, Natasha, to make sure Hailey didn't have to participate in anything spa-related, because there was no way she was wearing pink nail polish – nor any nail polish, for that matter. Natasha laughed and agreed not to force her into hair, makeup or nails, and Hailey went off to her new best friend's party.

The following weekend, Hailey had a Star Wars-themed birthday party, and Lyla showed up with a new lightsaber and a Star Wars blanket that Hailey still has today. This was the beginning of it all.

That friendship – with the two of them now 17 years old, with both of them basically living in matching Lululemon and Aritzia clothing, and Hailey finally doing her nails for special occasions – was the beginning of one of the most beautiful friendships I've ever witnessed.

Once Hailey got to high school and started playing sports, her social circle grew even more, eventually including kids from all over Stratford, St. Marys and Mitchell. At St. Mike's, she met Anne, Liv, Evie, Emmy, Brynn, Izzy and Tessa. Through baseball and volleyball, she met Lucy, Marin and Julia, and through friends, she met Leah, Jessie and others from SDSS.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

She surrounded herself with strong, amazing girls who helped shape her life and become who she is today.

One thing I always taught my girls was that you never let someone be a bad influence on you – but you also never turn down a friendship if you could be a good influence on someone else. There were definitely a few friends in there I've laughed about looking back, but somehow, they all shaped her just as much as she may have shaped them.

I told her almost daily how lucky she was to have found her friends – it was one in a million. Rarely was there a fight or disagreement, and every weekend she had something to do with someone. I sometimes worried that her social life would come between her and her grades, but walking out of school last week – already accepted into her dream program at her dream school and still surrounded by those same friendships – I just felt this overwhelming sense that maybe friendships are truly more important than grades.

Hailey's friendships taught me

that choosing your people wisely is one of the biggest strengths there is. She has people she can lean on and trust. She has lifelong friends she'll come back to again and again. She has people she can look up to, and people who look up to her. It's incredible what strong friendships do in a life – and Hailey and her group are the perfect example.

As she moves on to university, I'm not even nervous. I know they'll stay friends. I know life will pull them in different directions – different cities, different countries, different careers, maybe even different lives for a while – but that doesn't change what they've built.

Because if there's one thing this group has shown me, it's this: the most important things in life aren't just the goals you achieve – it's the people you walk through life with. And Hailey chose her people very, very well.

Congrats to all the grads at St. Mikes and SDSS.

With love,
Hailey's mom

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Publisher

Stewart Grant • stew@granthaven.com

Editor

Connor Luczka • connor@granthaven.com

Times Reporter

Amanda Nelson • amandajanewriter@gmail.com

Graphic Design / Sales Inquiries

Sarah Cairns • stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Business Development

Heather Dunbar • heather@granthaven.com

Billing Administrator

Cindy Boakes • boakescindy1576@gmail.com

Contributors

Galen Simmons, Spencer Seymour, Julia Schneider,
Gary West, Paul Knowles, Emily Stewart, Lisa Chester,
Fred Gonder, Sheila Clarke, Irene Roth, Lee Griffi,
Stuart Lender, Sydney Goodwin, Patrick D. Burk

36 Water St. St. Marys, ON, PO Box 2310 N4X 1A2
stratfordtimes@gmail.com | 519.655.2341 | granthaven.com



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Opinions

As I See It From America: Your world would be so much better



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

Whenever I start to write my article, I look at information that I have received, news that I have read and comments that have been made about my previous writings. I so enjoy writing for the Stratford Times. It is a way for me to show my appreciation for all that is positive in your community as well as comment on many of the things that I see today in our world. I just reviewed an article about homelessness in Stratford and feel saddened that this is especially concerning today, no matter where you live, due to the abundance of riches that seem to be part of our society. As one aspect

grows wealthier, the other side of the societal coin seems to be becoming more apparent.

I remember, once as a young man, my parents were notified of a homeless family, due to lack of work and an injury, in our small community. I was astounded that most of the community members were more concerned about how this looked in their village as opposed to the family that desperately needed some help. I recall how a few investigated the “why” this was happening to a family in small town western New York. Certainly, one had to be lazy or not willing to work. That at least was the prevailing opinion. When someone did check on the facts, it was soon discovered that the father was injured, had worked as a day labourer building barns and such, and could not currently work. He wanted to, but it was advised that he not do lifting, climbing ladders etc. Further investigation led to the finding that he fell on the job, injured his head and shoulder and was told to not come back until he could do what he had been doing without further complications. When one lived as a day

laborer in those days, it meant a significant loss.

This family had three children, ages seven to 15, lived in a small weekly rent apartment and were contributors to community, school and church. With dad not making money, confusion on filing for disability or unemployment and health concerns, two weeks of not bringing home a paycheque put them out on the street, looking for a place to live. I was very relieved when the family received assistance, not from the religious facilities or social services but from the children at the school. It seemed that the very young had taken it upon themselves to collect donations and the high school students – who were the peers of one of the homeless family members – were able to raise enough to stabilize the family for three months, until dad could get back to work. With only small industry in this rural town, it was heartening to find a local printing company was willing to give the dad a “real” job that paid on a weekly basis. Little did we know that one of those homeless children would grow up to be an attorney specializing

in low-income issues. He is a powerhouse in the field.

I read today that the Stratford area has over 150 people in this same or similar situation. Today we also see people with mental health issues as well as social and economic issues struggling to get by on a day-to-day basis. I also read that housing is such a big issue and that rental rates are considered very high. It is also reported that many are seniors. I applaud that you have a 24/7 overnight warming centre and that there is a strong group advocating for care. Providing care and immediate assistance is so very important. I also am very much aware that there is a tremendous amount of “Not in My Backyard” syndrome going on as well. I can see both sides of the fence and since I am no expert, certainly would not even begin to tell your city how to handle this issue. The homeless and underhoused problem has been going on for decades all over the world. Some of the wealthiest countries have the worst homeless rates. My community is one that prefers to ignore, not solve, and yet continues to complain

about this topic on a regular basis. As a former school official, it always was such a sad situation when you heard the number of homeless students and families that were part of your school and how they managed to live.

So, my beautiful Stratford, I understand both sides. Who wants someone sleeping on a bench outside your amazing business that you have invested in so much? Who wants someone begging for money on your street corner and who really wants to visit an area of the city or one of your beautiful parks where there are tents and temporary shelters being erected? Those things are fair to say but I guess I am only saying this: please remember that service and understanding to the least of us is perhaps our highest calling. Stratford, you have a heart. Please help. Just remember to be kind, concerned and aware of all the aspects of this issue as you address the solution. Your world will be so much better with kindness.

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

AI, data centres and us: the cost of what we get ‘for free’

LOREENA MCKENNITT

Guest Columnist

In the 2025 documentary *I Live 400 Yards from Mark Zuckerberg’s Massive Data Centre*, by the Emmy-winning investigative newsroom *More Perfect Union*, the opening sequence reveals the collapse of an American household’s water supply before pulling back to expose META’s two-million-square-foot AI data centre in Mansfield, Ga.

The documentary exposes a shocking array of personal and environmental consequences as a result of the centre’s infrastructure. Sitting on what was once forested land, it consumes massive amounts of water and energy and exudes lighting that illuminates the night sky for miles around. It’s the kind of mammoth infrastructure that may soon be coming to a community near us – down the road in Hamilton, or in Olds, Alta. We best be prepared.

Their citizens, like the rest of us, are

rushing to comprehend the whole AI ecosystem while being asked to get on with our “AI literacy program,” albeit reluctantly. And one of the most consequential pieces of that program are these very centres.

So, what is it that data centres actually do? Well, according to Google’s AI “Data centers are centralized facilities that house thousands of servers, networking hardware and storage systems. They are the physical backbone of the internet and modern IT, used to securely store, process and deliver the digital data behind our daily apps, websites and cloud services.”

But there are different kinds and different scales of data centres, many of which have been around our cities for years. They’ve been quietly acquiring our information that we’ve knowingly and unknowingly, voluntarily and involuntarily, offered to all manner of institutions and organizations. From banks and government offices to social media companies

and more, everything about us has been digitized.

What makes AI data centres so different and consequential is their size. A hyperscale data centre, we are told, would cover a significant part of Manhattan and consume twice the energy the City of Ottawa uses. In some cases, the centres are being proposed for what is currently rare fertile farmland.

AI companies are ramping up their marketing to convince us we’ll all be better off with AI. They’re aggressively competing to have us adopt their particular version while rushing to establish the necessary data centres ahead of any regulation that informed citizens might demand. Some cities are thinking ahead and banning them outright. Others are calling for a moratorium.

According to a Feb. 2026 report by the World Resources Institute, “Across the country, a surge of new data centres is reshaping local energy grids, water systems and land use. This rapid expansion is of-

ten happening with limited public information about the long-term impacts – or benefits – new data centres could bring.”

If Canada already has five hyperscale data centres and 96 more are in development, then citizens across this country will need to respond with a sense of urgency.

For those here in Stratford with fresh memories of the two years of secrecy during which time our municipal and provincial governments attempted to implement a float-glass factory on fertile farmland just outside the city limits, we best not take anything for granted.

This is a subject for those who are concerned with farmland, the environment, water and energy consumption, air quality and natural resources. Our democracy demands we have a say.

Whether or not a hyperscale data centre comes to our neighbourhood, we all need to understand the price we pay for the internet and AI. No matter what they tell you, it certainly isn’t free.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US

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Opinions

WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH THE PESTS



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

It was the year 2000. I drove into a foul-smelling fog. Someone had just finished blanketing Stratford with pesticide. I was honestly aghast at the level of chemical injected into the air that everyone in the city was breathing, not to mention the birds, the important insects and all animals, wild or domestic. It was a wake-up call.

Stacey asked me at a CFUW meeting if I wanted to work on a resolution on the cosmetic use of pesticides (for pretty gardens). There were three of us, Stacey, Norma and I. That question began a two-year deep dive into the nature of pesticides and the industry. As a science grad and a researcher, I was handed a huge stack of documents that absolutely proved that pesticides were dangerous. I meticulously began

to verify each document.

It was a magical time, including disappearing documents, contradiction, sheer fabrication, skulduggery and ultimate resolution. I concluded that we were at a point in time where the industry realized that the anti-pesticide organic backlash was growing and moved to stop it in its tracks. Every blessed one of the stack of documents had either become “inaccessible” or had been disproven – even one linking canine cancers with dogs running on freshly sprayed lawns.

In the course of the next two years, I interviewed farmers who told me they had been assured pesticides were safe enough to drink, I met secretly with a university researcher who didn’t want to be seen being interviewed and I followed the rats – the rats that were being used for pesticide research. Rats are often used for toxic research because their systems are capable of continuing to function with high levels of toxins.

The final conclusion was two-fold: firstly, pesticides were poisons designed to kill. Their toxicity was developed during the two world wars. Following the wars the industry immediately altered its markets to agriculture and to the creation of picture perfect lawns and gardens. Secondly, it was impossible to test

them on humans. There was no experimental protocol to allow administering a toxic substance to a human subject to see what happened. We did however see the effect on nature. Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring was a beacon for the removal of DDT, which was wreaking havoc in nature.

The evidence suggested a precautionary approach. That argument won the day, as cosmetic use of pesticides was deemed not valuable enough to warrant spraying of pesticides in communities. Cosmetic spraying was banned in Ontario in 2009. CFUW contributed to the research and met with government committees. However, a few snuck through – most noticeably glyphosate. There is now a large amount of anecdotal evidence to suggest that it contributes to Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. It’s still on shelves and being used widely – except on organic farms.

Neonicotinoids (neonics) are another continuing issue. The EU has banned them due to the damage they do to insects needed for food for birds and for pollination (especially bees), and to birds themselves when they consume neonicotinoid coated seeds. Canada thus far has opted for modification of concentration and use. Neonics continue to affect biodiversity through pollinator decline, aquatic ecosystems

and bird populations.

There is one other point that may bear mention. The main ingredients of most pesticides derive from fossil fuels – those same industries who lobby aggressively for continued fossil fuel production, plastic and pesticides. For an issue that is deeply connected to biodiversity (including humans) and health, it would seem that science should be our guide.

On June 18, the federal government passed Bill C-30, which enables cabinet ministers (politicians, not scientists) to set aside prohibitions relating to pesticide use. The rationale being offered is economic gain in agriculture and food security. The Canadian non-profit organization Ecojustice has an excellent summary, which can be read at <https://tinyurl.com/2jch9tbx>.

Agriculture is clearly important to us. There are many approaches, including industrial, organic and regenerative. Regardless of what hat you wear, we have learned Earth does not operate in silos. The Algonquin tribes have a word for it: “Ankosé,” everything is connected. As we learned with DDT, you can’t apply a deadly toxin to one part of the biosphere without it passing into the entire system. We are all dependent on the web of life that we are part of: the in-

sects, the birds, the mammals, the plants, the air, the water – that connection is vital to our lives as well.

Many, many years of research have gone into what chemicals are safe to release into our systems and our environment. It is critical that science and health continue to be the key gatekeepers in permitted use of pesticides – not cabinet ministers. Every environmental and health voice has aligned against this bill, with good reason. Contact your MP and the prime minister to repeal section eight of part three of Bill C-30. Profit is not a fair trade for health and our environment.

UPDATES:

Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of June 22, 2026: 431 ppm. Global warming dries out timber and increases the incidence of “dry lightning.” The rate of warming is accelerating.

Note: The UN report, Counting What Counts, does not call for removal of GDP. It calls for other measures of well-being to be used in combination with GDP. If money is your god, we are all in trouble.

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

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Sobey's

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron
Circle K - Huron
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Stratford Hospital
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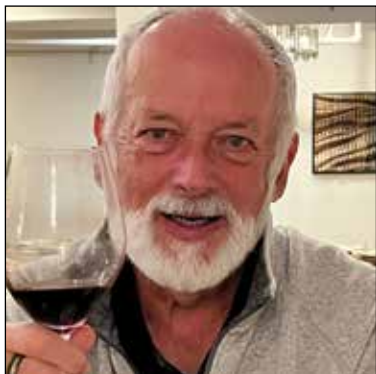
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: The plusses of a small-ship ocean cruise



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

I will admit we approached the trip with a bit of trepidation. We were invited to sail on the “Viking Sea,” one of Viking’s fleet of 15 ocean ships.

The trepidation had nothing to do with Viking, per se. We have done several river cruises with Viking and have nothing but the highest praise for those experiences. But river-cruise ships host fewer than 190 guests, while the newer, ocean-going ships carry just over 900 passengers.

So, was this significant increase in travellers going have a negative impact on our experience?

What we found was the experience is quite different, but honestly, no less enjoyable. I had a lengthy conversation with the Viking Sea’s Hotel general manager, Bogdan Stefanescu. He knew that my previous Viking trips had all been on European river cruises, so he was curious; did I prefer river cruises or this Mediterranean ocean cruise?

My answer was, “Yes.”

I know that many of my readers will have experienced river cruising, on Viking or one of the other highly reputed river-cruise companies. But most may not have tried the ocean-going option – it’s rela-



The Viking Sea, one of Viking’s fleet of 15 ocean-going ships.

tively new. So, here’s my take.

There are advantages to both options. River cruises usually find you moored right next to the town or city you are visiting, and you can easily walk into the town. On both river and ocean cruises, Viking offers an included excursion every day, as well as options for upgraded excursions. My feeling was we spent more time on coaches simply getting to the excursion destination on the ocean cruise. But the tours are almost always excellent.

The ocean ship is of a size that means it must dock in larger ports, and the view from your balcony is likely to be industrial docks or container yards.

River cruises are very personal. You’re up close and interacting with your destinations with your fellow passengers and with the Viking staff.

When it comes to the staff, that doesn’t change on the ocean ship.

Incredibly, within a day of being on board, several staff members were able to call us by name when we encountered them. And the proportion of staff to passengers is amazing – the Viking Sea had 464 crew members serving 907 passengers, according to Stefanescu. His title, “hotel general manager,” may be slightly confusing, but he is actually responsible for everything except actually running the ship (that’s done by the captain), which means more than 400 of the staff members are in the hotel general manager’s reporting chain.

When we first saw the ship, our initial reaction was, “That’s a big boat!” And yes, it is a lot larger than the longships on the river. But Stefanescu told me that if the Viking Sea and its sister ships were part of another cruise line, they would be designed to hold a lot more passengers. Viking deliberately designed the craft with an enormous amount

of common space – the ship never felt crowded and there was plenty of space for quiet relaxation. Stefanescu told me, “The ship always feels comfortable.” I agreed.

The river cruise ships have one main lounge/bar where you will often find a pianist or other solo performer.

In contrast, on the Viking Sea, from late afternoon on, there were many wonderful options. One day, we enjoyed five different musical acts: a folk guitarist/singer entertaining al fresco diners on the rear deck; a string duet in the soaring atrium; a classical pianist; a brilliant ABBA tribute quartet plus band in the spacious Star Theatre; and the Viking Band, a six-person, kick-ass combo in the pub called Torshavn.

Dining options were similarly varied and always excellent. There were two “reservation only” restaurants – one an Italian eatery, the other a “Chef’s Table,” as well as

a brilliant buffet restaurant, a more formal restaurant and some casual eating spots. And almost every day brought special options in the buffet – a mussel and lobster night, a paella night, a pasta night and so on.

Stefanescu knows his ship like the back of his hand. He’s been part of Viking’s ocean-going program from the beginning.

“I was part of the launch of the first ever ocean ship, the Viking Star, in 2015,” he said.

In total, he’s spent 30 years at sea. He adds that he has been on the Viking Sea for the past 10 years. “She’s amazing,” is his perhaps biased assessment. Amazing, yes, but he won’t use the word “luxury” – although I might argue that would be justified. “The word is ‘comfort,’” he explained. “We never use the word ‘luxury.’”

And that comfort is built into the design of the ship, the attention paid to every detail and the unique elements like the thermal. But what stands out most is the astonishingly good service.

Not only do the 464 crew members consistently go out of their way for the good of their guests; they also consistently collaborate and support each other. No mean feat, considering the crew during our cruise came from 47 different countries.

Stefanescu noted that Viking does not make political statements or take political stands, but he did agree that such international cooperation may offer some reasons for hope in a fractured world.

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.



Pasta night in the World Café.



Beverage manager Vladan Krstic doing what he does best!



Folk guitarist Chanel performing for al fresco diners.

Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Nocturnal S. American rodent
- 5. Requesting
- 11. Give temporarily
- 12. Excitedness
- 16. Armed Forces branch
- 17. Actor Harris
- 18. Middle Eastern capital
- 19. Air hostesses
- 24. Partner to “Pa”
- 25. Percussion instrument
- 26. Popular computers
- 27. Reduce light
- 28. Asian mountain range
- 29. Every one of two or more
- 30. Absence of difficulty
- 31. A public announcement of a proposed marriage
- 33. Whittles
- 34. Impact
- 38. Serviceman
- 39. A French river
- 40. Prehistoric people
- 43. Messenger ribonucleic acid
- 44. ___ Clapton, musician
- 45. Ancient Greek sophist
- 49. Largest English dictionary (abbr.)
- 50. Singer Hansard
- 51. A way to disentangle
- 53. Atomic #93
- 54. Manifesting approval
- 56. Indigo bush
- 58. Former AL MVP Vaughn
- 59. Off-Broadway theater award
- 60. Fencers
- 63. Small Eurasian deer (pl.)
- 64. Relating to passerine birds
- 65. Arrange systematically

- 3. Photographer’s tool
- 4. Blues Traveler hit “But ___”
- 5. Grew older
- 6. Not the leader
- 7. ___ Lang (country singer)
- 8. A driver’s license is one
- 9. Nests of pheasants
- 10. Wildebeests
- 13. Equal to one quintillion bytes
- 14. Japanese three-stringed lute
- 15. Type of cat
- 20. It cools your home
- 21. The ancient Egyptian sun god
- 22. Pouches
- 23. German trigraph
- 27. Form of Persian
- 29. Measurement unit
- 30. Body part
- 31. Bridge building degree
- 32. Indicates position
- 33. Political action committee
- 34. Snack food
- 35. Front part of a quadruped
- 36. Locate
- 37. Pitching statistic
- 38. ___, myself and I
- 40. City in Utah
- 41. They play in the trenches
- 42. “Can’t Touch This” rapper ___ Hammer
- 44. Type of tree
- 45. Performers
- 46. Slang for mistake
- 47. More open
- 48. Most slick
- 50. Needles
- 51. University of Dayton
- 52. Atomic #11
- 54. Large fish of the mackerel family
- 55. Not any
- 57. ___ and behold
- 61. Popular sports highlight show (abbr.)
- 62. “The Great Lakes State”

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CLUES DOWN

- 1. Colorless fluid
- 2. Of a main artery

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Pet of the week



MABLE

Meet Mable, the prettiest 5-year-old calico mix you'll ever see! Her favourite hobbies include snuggling up in cubbies, climbing her cat tree, or sitting in a window to watch all the wildlife.

Mable may be shy, but she has a secret: there are actually a few tricks to help her become more brave! She does best with calm, quiet introductions at first. She'll also summon up the courage to say hello to anyone who brings wet food, treats, or a recording of a cat purring.

She loves to explore at night and her playful side is just starting to shine. If your family is looking for a sweet kitty who just needs some time and space to open up, Mable may be a perfect fit. Learn more about Mable at kwsphumane.ca!



Sudoku

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

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

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

Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

FOOD TRUCKS

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

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Pablas Street of India, Swat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

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

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Siggi's, Los Rolling Tacos, Berlin 95

Donations to Camp Bimini

FOOD TRUCKS

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

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

SWAT, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

GARAGE SALE

Multiple household items

Saturday, June 27; 8 a.m. - 3p.m.

231 Whitelock St, Stratford

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

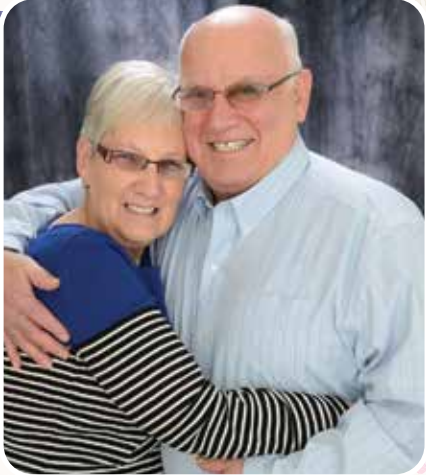
- The Community Calendar is for non-profit organizations to promote their free admission events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as a phone number, email address or website.
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more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

CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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Fair value offered for your vinyl records, cassette tapes & hifi components. Please contact **Sound Fixation, 519-801-5421, 4 George St. W, Stratford.**

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JUNK REMOVAL

JUNK REMOVAL – Garbage, Basements, Yards, Dump Runs. Call Mike 519-276-7766

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A	R	M	Y		E	D			D	U	B	A
S	T	E	W	A	R	D	E	S	S	E	S	M
M	A	R	A	C	A		M	A	C	S	D	I
A	L	A	Y		E	A	C	H	E	A	S	E
				B	A	N	N	S		P	A	R
A	F	F	E	C	T				M	A	R	I
L	O	I	R	E		O	L	M	E	C		
M	R	N	A		E	R	I	C		A	B	A
O	E	D		G	L	E	N		U	N	C	O
N	P		G	O	M	M	E	N	D	A	T	O
D	A	L	E	A		M	O			O	B	I
S	W	O	R	D	S	M	E	N		R	O	E
				O	S	C	I	N	E		S	O

SUDOKU

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

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