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New cold frame will extend growing season at urban farm

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Margaret Smart, executive director of the Local Community Food Centre, welcomed attendees and thanked sponsors at a recent “table-to-farm” event on Sept. 22.

The event included a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new cold frame installation at the Local Community Food Centre’s Oak Street Farm, located behind the Dufferin Lions Arena.

The project was made possible through funding from the Medavie Foundation and community support. The cold frame will extend the farm’s growing season, promoting local food sovereignty and community engagement.

“All of this is only made possible by the support of our community – by businesses that support us, by individuals that support us, and by the people who partner with our urban farmers and our volunteers,” Smart said. “This is truly a reflection of incredible levels of support from our community. We’re so thankful for that, and it’s incredible to see people come together in this way.”

The event began at the Local Community Food Centre, where dinner was served. Fresh buns were provided by Cobb’s Bakery, devilled eggs by the Egg

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Melissa, Millie, Holly and Beau speed through the corner of the Orient Express ride at this year’s Stratford Fall Fair on Sept. 20. To see more photos from the fair, see page 2.

(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

United for Good: United Way Perth-Huron announces \$2.5M campaign goal

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

It was with great excitement that the team at United Way Perth-Huron announced their newest \$2.5 million campaign goal before a large crowd in Market Square. The goal of \$2,529,770 is lower than last year’s goal by \$95,000 due in part to an excess in fundraising last year.

“We are here because all of us want to unite for good,

we want to stand behind this community and we want to stand behind people in this community that maybe need a little help. We will stand together recognizing the challenge that people face, and recognizing at any moment a challenge may come our way and so as a community we need to unite for good,” began Ryan Erb.

He also recognized the local urgency in concern for the homeless and unhoused. There has been a great deal of

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Stratford Fall Fair



Like the hundreds of other patrons that visited the Stratford Fall Fair between Sept. 18-21, Gus and Allan got a pretty good view as they waved from up high on the swing ride.



Sheila Fuentes Garcia, Claudia Davo Diaz and Daniella Dominique Pendosa launch down the big slide.



The Ferris wheel turns and the pendulum ride swings up. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)
Although the fair wrapped up last Sunday and left town, it'll be back next September.

New cold frame will extend growing season at urban farm

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Farmers of Ontario and burgers were served. The City of Stratford provided bus transportation to transport guests from the Local to the farm for the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Lucas Tingle, garden educator at the Local, spoke about the significance of the initiative.

"The farm is geared toward teaching people about regenerative agriculture, about organic agriculture and about local agriculture," he said. "It's nice to know we have options that are accessible, reasonably priced and grown locally."

Tingle explained that a cold frame is a structure that protects plants from cold, wind and rain, allowing farmers to start planting earlier in the spring and continue later into the fall. It captures solar energy during the day and radiates heat at night, keeping plants warmer than the outside temperature.

"We're going to be able to pull crops out of these spaces through February and March and start things up nice and early in the season, like tomatoes," he said. "A cold frame uses the power of solar energy – not solar panels, but literally just the sun being captured inside of this space to

keep everything warm."

Extending the growing season can help reduce reliance on international agricultural systems, keep costs down and improve access to healthy food, Tingle added.

"What we're trying to do here at Oak Street Farm is create more sovereignty around food in Canada," he said. "That means extending our growing seasons so we can produce food outside our traditional seasons. We're modelling sustainable agriculture. At Oak Street, we're organic, we're regenerative and we're local."

He said the farm aims not only to provide healthy food options but also to teach others how sustainable practices can be applied in other regions.

"That's what the urban farming program is all about," Tingle said. "It's putting people back in touch with the food system – to understand where food comes from, what healthy food looks like and tastes like, and how it's done."

Smart and Tingle encouraged community members to stop by Oak Street Farm, take a walk and, if interested, join the Urban Farmers group on Tuesday evenings to learn more about regenerative farming.



Members of the Urban Farmers group and volunteers gather in front of the new cold frame at Oak Street Farm during the ribbon-cutting event on Sept. 22.



Lucas Tingle, garden educator at the Local Community Food Centre, cuts the ribbon for the new cold frame at Oak Street Farm with his daughter April and executive director Margaret Smart on Sept. 22. (JULIE DOCKER JOHNSON PHOTOS)

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Editorial

On behalf of the team, thank you for everything



CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Editor

Last Monday, the team here learned that the Stratford Times won a Canadian Community Newsmedia Award for general excellence from News Media Canada (NMC), along with a podium finish for best editorial page and best front-page photo. To put very simply, we are all thrilled here at the Times for this recognition. It means the world to us that we have been given the spotlight by NMC and have been fortunate enough to garner your attention week to week.

The editions we put forward for the general excellence category were our Nov. 15 issue and our May 17 issue, which covered across those two editions Remembrance Day, the inaugural Stratford TEDx presentation, civil unrest at city hall, a plethora of high school sports outings and an assortment of new businesses opening up shop, to name only a few of the stories included in



their pages. In my opinion, they are very good editions that reflect exactly the kind of stories we strive to tell each week. But the really wonderful thing about it, is that both those editions are not dissimilar to each edition we send to press. The same care, earnestness and hard work is replicated

each Friday, thanks to the dedica-

tion of our team.

So in that vein, there are a few notable people who this achievement rests upon: my predecessor and our regional editor Galen Simmons, our graphic designer Sarah Cairns, our publisher Stewart Grant and our contributors those editions, Emma Brommer, Lisa Chester, Gord Conroy and Paul Wilker, Al Dickie, Sydney Goodwin, Mark Hertzberger, Alex Hunt, Hannah Kavanaugh, Paul Knowles, VJ Knutson,

Anna Kowalchuk, Wendy Lamond, Stuart Lender, CJ Nyssen, Julia Paul, Irene Roth, Rebecca Schreiber, Spencer Seymour, Emily Stewart, Gary West and Bruce Whitaker.

As someone with a few different newsrooms under my belt at this point, I can tell you first-hand just how astonishing an outfit like ours is. There are many community-focused papers across Canada doing what we do, but there aren't many with the same dynamism, connection and breadth as we have. Flipping through our pages week to week you will see an assortment of bylines and contributors, even as other more established and far bigger outlets across the nation shrink their newsrooms and overburden their journalists. I am biased, I admit, but there is something special about this paper – which of course means that there is something special about this community.

In the judge's verdict, they said that our paper "does all the usual things you'd expect from a local newspaper – covering a broad range of news and feature stories – it excels at involving the community in co-creating the paper."

"The publication's guiding principles, displayed prominently on its op-ed page, declares that 'A Newspaper should be a community effort (contribute to your local paper!)' In that respect, the Times' success is demonstrated by the reams of feature stories written by local contributors and pages of high school track meet photos submitted by the students'

coach and others. The collaborative approach is sure to build readers' trust in these Times. This newspaper is a platform not only for informing residents but, at its core, a vehicle for building community."

While our team of correspondents, columnists and contributors need their due recognition for creating that community-building vehicle, so do the people that support their work. As a free community newspaper, our only source of revenue is from the businesses and proprietors that keep our light on and our operations growing. From the whole editorial team here, thank you to our advertisers for your continued patronage.

If you would like to be part of our mission here at the Times and support our award-winning journalism, if you have a story to share, whether in your own words or through one of our fantastic correspondents, let us know at stratfordtimes@gmail.com – or let me know what you think at connor@granthaven.com.



To read our award-winning Nov. 15 edition of the Times, scan the code.

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STRATFORDTIMES

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1. Everyone has a story
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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

United for Good: United Way Perth-Huron announces \$2.5M campaign goal for this year

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

conversation of late, and he wanted everyone to understand that there is a lot of people here who do care.

"I'm so thankful that community members have been standing up and speaking boldly and sharing their passion around the issue of ending homelessness in this community," said Erb. "Together we can move forward to help solve it."

Organizations like the United Way, the Council of Churches and the City of Stratford, among others, are gathering to discuss next steps, continuing to take recommendations that have already been made and hopefully making them a reality thanks in part to the extra push that has been experienced in the community.

"I want everyone to know that there is good work happening and I'm sure there will be further information in the near future," said Erb. He later said that there should be initiatives in the upcoming year that will be of special interest.

The national organization of United Way is the largest funder of social services next to the government and without their work, people would fall through the cracks. Housing has been work that is high priority, and in that spirit, there were stained glass houses donated for sale by the congregation of Avondale United Church. The church members created these in support of United Housing and were selling them for \$30 each.

The campaign co-chairs for the second year in a row are Kristin Sainsbury and John Wolfe. "Last year alone, over 25,000 local individuals benefitted from programs and services made possible through the support of the United



United for Good: The 2026/26 campaign kick off for United Way Perth-Huron revealed a goal of \$2,529,770.

(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Way," said Sainsbury. "These aren't numbers, they represent stories of transformation and renewed hope made in the lives of vulnerable people in our communities."

Through employee donations, corporate cam-

paigns, community donations and volunteerism, services like the Connection Centre can be supported by the United Way. For more information visit perthhuron.unitedway.ca.

Sept. 22 Stratford city council briefs: Public meeting on subdivision draws criticism for sprawl, perceived lack of parkland

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A new subdivision is being eyed at 750 McCarthy Road West, a currently vacant agricultural parcel just down the road from the Rotary Complex.

The developer is aiming to create 60 lots for single family homes, a single lot for multiple residential dwelling units and a lot for a stormwater management pond.

Although no parkland was being suggested for the development, the applicant has donated funds which have gone to the new "Countryside Park" being proposed to be built right next to the Rotary Complex.

Jane Marie Mitchell was the lone member of the public to speak at the meeting, expressing concern for a host of issues such as affordability, accessibility, traffic and environmental impacts – in addition to the lack of local parkland and urban



A new subdivision is being considered for the lands at 750 McCarthy Road West, just down the street from the Stratford Rotary Complex.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

sprawl into agricultural land.

"There are other areas (for) infill that could be used before you go into agricultural land," Mitchell said. "Think of the

generations to come ... I wanted to address the park situation as well. What you seem to be talking about is the big, what I would call city par ... but I

think the Stratford Official Plan says it wants to be creating new residential neighborhoods that encourage community interaction, reduce auto independence and maintain essential neighborhood qualities. So in my mind, you need to have those small parks for the people in the area to get to know each other. The big parks, like Upper Queens, that to me is a city park."

No decision on the zone change was made at the meeting, nor did councillors give their opinions on the matter. A decision on the change will come before council at a future meeting.

Stopping restrictions coming for Avon Street during school drop-off times

Without discussion, council unanimously passed a motion to add stopping restrictions on Avon Street, from Huntingdon Avenue to Avondale Avenue, Monday to Friday from 8:30-

9:30 a.m. and 3-4 p.m. on the north side.

According to the staff report, residents have raised concerns regarding parking during school pick-up and drop-off times for Avon Public Elementary School. The stretch of street is 8.5 metres wide, and residents have noted issues when school buses, winter maintenance equipment or emergency vehicles were unable to pass during peak times.

McCabe hits the breaks on 40 km/h limit in neighbourhoods

Council will soon be having a debate on speed limits in residential areas. Coun. Larry McCabe gave his notice of intent to put forward the motion to squash a 40 kilometre an hour limit in neighbourhoods, a motion that originally passed in 2021 but has yet to be implemented.

McCabe's new motion will be brought forward at the regular council meeting on Oct. 14.

Treat yourself at the Stratford Butter Tart and Dessert Festival

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Get ready for the sweetest festival filled with lots of treats, baked goods and Halloween fun.

The Stratford Butter Tart and Dessert Festival will be held on Oct. 26 at the Rotary Complex from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The festival will feature a variety of activities such as live music, selfie stations, a balloon artist, and of course, lots of butter tarts and baked goods from vendors across Ontario, including some from Stratford.

“Come on out to the sweetest day of the year,” said organizer Jackie Murdock to the Times. “Bring your friends, family or fly solo. It will be a great, fun day out.”

As the event is just five days before

Halloween, Murdock encourages guests to dress up and go on a scavenger hunt for spiders hidden around the venue for a chance to win some treats.

Tickets for the event are \$6 each either at the door (cash only) or online. Guests can also bring a food donation for the Stratford House of Blessing for one dollar off of their admission price.

“It is super important to support your community because there are so many people struggling and in need of help these days. If you can give back to the community in any way I would encourage it,” Murdock said. “It helps people out and makes you feel good. A win-win.”

Anyone who buys tickets online via www.eventbrite.ca/e/stratford-butter-tart-dessert-fest-tickets will be entered in a draw for free butter tarts for a year.



The Sweetest day of the year is approaching soon with the Stratford Butter Tart and Dessert Festival on Oct. 26 at the Rotary Complex. (JACKIE MURDOCK PHOTO)

184th Stratford Fall Fair, part one: A success for the history books

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Directors of the Stratford and District Agricultural Society have to be given all the accolades they should, after a very successful Stratford Fall Fair wound down on Sept. 21.

From the long standing Perth-Waterloo Holstein Show, that is now inviting any and all Holstein breeders in Ontario to show their best in the Stratford Rotary Complex, to the

exceptional Agricultural Ladies division that set up a tremendous display of school fair exhibits, vegetables and flowers, along with quilts and art displays, to the task of feeding all those goers with great local food, the 184th Fall Fair was a success.

Every year there are programs that promote youth, like the ambassador competition, two days of 4-H club achievement days, that also invites hundreds of 4-H members with their dairy and beef projects into open competition.

There are also area farmers that donate animals and crops to “Farm to You,” a display set up years ago for kids and parents of all ages to learn more and be up close and personal with animals that live just

down the road in our rural communities.

There were also farmers there talking about milk, eggs, beef, pork, goats, sheep, Alpacas and many other agricultural products – the true reason why agricultural societies were set up, like in Stratford 184 years ago.

And it surely cannot be forgotten what helps to pay the bills, the attractions sprawled out on the tarmac just outside the Rotary Complex. Campbell Amusements was the provider of the rides and set up one of the best shows that fairs in the area could hope to have, for young and old.

Danny Campbell, after taking over from his late father, Don Campbell, hasn’t missed a beat in setting up and running a great midway show across four special days.

Everyone who has ever helped with a fall fair know that success and failure is often out of their hands. Each year they hope for great weather, and the weatherman delivered this time around. All four days had incredible weather and just missed an incoming storm. Heavy rain fell over Stratford within two hours of the fair’s closing.

For more on this year’s fall fair, read Part Two on page 21.



Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma hosted his annual egg drop at the Fall Fair on Sept. 21, after snagging this photo of the closing moments of the fair from 105 feet in the air. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



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City sticks with tried and true garbage bag tags after review

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After a review of the City of Stratford's waste management system, city council elected to stick with the status quo ahead of signing a seven-year contract from 2026 to 2033.

The review was prompted by the Province of Ontario's plan to shift its blue box recycling program and the conclusion of the city's current collection contract, which both come due in the new year.

Over 1,000 responses from residents responded to a survey on the plan over the course of the year. Main insights include that most respondents (63 per cent) wanted weekly garbage collection and the introduction of bins rather than bag tags, that 83 per cent of respondents participated in the green bin program and wanted it to continue, that 87 per cent of respondents used the yard waste collection service and that while the survey did not ask about recycling, many residents requested a weekly service with the introduction of bins (something out of the city's control as wheeled bins will be introduced to residents in 2026 under the new blue box program).

"It was great to see the amount of engagement we had on the survey that went out," Coun. Jo Dee Burbach said. "Over 1,000 people commented, so people are very interested in waste and what it costs us to get rid of that waste."

With the public responses in mind, city staff presented two options to council: stick with the same service or switch to an automated cart-based system.

Currently, the waste collection service is financially sustained through the sale of bag tags, which generate over \$1.2 million for the city annually. Without tags, the cost would have to be borne by property taxpayers or another user fee.

As noted in the management report, the second option was the automated system, which would have the weekly collection of green bin waste and the bi-weekly col-

lection of garbage (doubled for those in the downtown core) and the seasonal collection of leaf and yard waste. Residents would receive wheeled garbage and green carts, which would be collected by trucks with automated lift arms.

An automated system is already coming to Stratford and select areas in January. The new blue box program is a similar system.

While sticking with the tried and true would cost a little over \$8.8 million over the 2026-2033 contract term (not including the revenue accrued with the tags which would essentially cover the cost), the automated system would be over \$12.2 million without an obvious revenue source to offset the cost.

Weighing the costs, council unanimously voted in favour of sticking with the current system, awarding the seven-year, \$8.8 million contract to Canadian Waste Management Incorporated.

Moving forward, there will continue to be the weekly collection of garbage and green bin waste for most residents, with twice-per-week collection in the downtown core. Bag tags will continue to be used and may be purchased at:

- Stratford City Hall, 1 Wellington St.
- 7-Eleven, 327 Erie St.
- Blowes Stationery, 34 Wellington St.
- Canadian Tire Gas Bar, 1101 Ontario St.
- Daisy Mart, 555 Downie St.
- East End Variety, 231 Douro St.
- Esso, 501 Ontario St.
- Giant Tiger, 477 Huron St.
- Hallmark/Blowes, 1067 Ontario St. (Festival Marketplace Shopping Mall)
- Joe's Variety, 760 Ontario St.
- Mobil, 180 Erie St.
- Mornington Variety, 231 Mornington St.
- North End Pharmacy, 240 Graff Ave.
- Shell Station, 405 Huron St.
- Sobey's, 581 Huron St.
- Stratford Mini Mart / GoCo, 666 Ontario St.
- Stratford Variety, 542 Downie St.
- Video 99 and Convenience, 332 Erie St.
- Zehrs, 865 Ontario St.

Time to hit the pavement! Last Treasure Hunt Weekend of 2025 is this weekend

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Sept. 26-28 is the last Treasure Hunt Weekend of 2025, an opportunity for Stratford residents to recycle any unwanted household items by placing them at the curb, for anyone in the community to collect. This event keeps materials with some useful life out of

Stratford's landfill site.

Materials can be put out starting at 4 p.m. on the Friday, and any unclaimed items must be removed from the curb by 3 p.m. on Sunday.

The City of Stratford is reminding all residents not to leave any items you want to keep, including children's toys or bicycles, near the curb during the Treasure Hunt Weekend.

New Countryside Park planned for greenspace next to Rotary Complex

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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The City of Stratford wants to hear what you want to see in its newest park.

The proposed eight-acre Countryside Park is situated snug next to the Stratford Rotary Complex, in the greenspace between the complex and Bradshaw Drive.

No matter what, the design is set to include a variety of seating options, native plants and universal, accessible

design, but planners are engaging with the public to discern what features exactly the new park should have – be it a splashpad, an open lawn, a skate trail or anything else that the public desires.

Over the next few weeks, a series of in-person engagement events are planned after the city started at the Stratford Fall Fair this past weekend.

Additionally, residents can participate online by completing a brief survey on Engage Stratford, found at <https://tinyurl.com/y3ttrrup>.



The eight-acre Countryside Park is in the early stages of planning and the City of Stratford wants to hear what you want to see included.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



A pop-up engagement event was hosted at the Stratford Fall Fair this past weekend, where visitors were asked to list what they wanted in the new park.

(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Local family grows pumpkins and young entrepreneurs

DIANE DANEN

Times Contributor

What started as a fun family project during the COVID-19 pandemic has turned into a yearly tradition and a hands-on business for the Hart family.

Jodi and Dave Hart, along with their three children Lincoln, Leo and Camilla, began growing pumpkins five years ago as a way to teach their kids about hard work, money management and responsibility.

Since then, the young entrepreneurs have taken part in every step of the process from planting seeds in the spring to harvesting in the fall. They even save seeds from the current year's pumpkins to replant next season.

This year was more challenging than previous years. A cool spring followed by high summer temperatures and dry

weather led to a smaller harvest, down about 35 per cent from past years. Still, Jodi Hart sees it as a valuable learning opportunity.

"It's a life lesson, especially about farming," she said.

Farming is nothing new for the Hart family. Dave Hart grew up on a farm in North Easthope and has been involved in agriculture his entire life. He works in the family business doing custom work for area farmers.

The Harts grow the pumpkins in North Easthope on the family farm but sell them from their home in Stratford.

"The setup is mostly self-serve unless you catch the kids haggling with a customer in the driveway!" Jodi Hart laughed.

Through hard work and a bit of fun, the Hart family is showing that farming, even on a small scale, can teach big life lessons.



Camilla, five, Leo, nine, and Lincoln, 11, proudly show off their pumpkin harvest at 290 St. Vincent St. S in Stratford.



(JODI HART PHOTOS)

Far left: Lincoln, Leo and Camilla display the sign for their family business.

Left: Camilla, the youngest entrepreneur in the Hart family, with her favourite pumpkin.

We Were So Far Away exhibit returns Sept. 29 and 30



The Falstaff Family Centre (FCC) hosted the We Were So Far Away exhibit courtesy of the Legacy of Hope Foundation from Sept. 22 to 26, which will return on Sept. 29 and 30 for Truth and Reconciliation Day. The FCC is hosting a full day's worth of activities on Sept. 30 for the annual holiday.

(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)



Along with the We Were So Far Away exhibit, the FCC also hosted a micro exhibit on locally found Indigenous artifacts, courtesy of the Stratford Perth Museum.

Stratford nets \$3.2 million in 2026 infrastructure funding, \$350,000 less than this year's investment

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae announced the region's annual infrastructure funding on Sept. 19 for 2026, with the City of Stratford topping the list with \$3,224,624.

Provided through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF), the funds are calculated based on a formula that takes into account current infrastructure within municipalities, as well as "economic conditions," according to the province's website.

"We continue to support our small and

rural municipalities to build and maintain critical infrastructure," Rae said in an announcement. "Our rural communities are getting shovels in the ground on important infrastructure projects, and our provincial government will be there to support their future growth and prosperity."

In 2025, Stratford received nearly \$3,582,916 in OCIF funding, \$358,292 more than next year. The region as a whole is receiving less as well. In 2025, Perth-Wellington received \$14.2 million in OCIF funding, nearly a million more than next year's \$13.3 million.

Next year, Ontario will allocate \$400

million in OCIF funding to help 423 small, rural and northern communities address critical infrastructure needs such as roads, bridges, water and wastewater systems. The minimum grant amount for municipalities will increase to \$125,000 from \$100,000. Since 2018, \$2.8 billion has been allocated across Ontario through OCIF, \$102.9 million of which has come directly to municipalities in Perth-Wellington.

According to the city's asset management plan, an average capital budget of over \$30 million is needed towards the city's aging infrastructure to maintain; however, the city averages about \$18.7

million, leaving a \$11.5 million gap.

The 2026 OCIF funding allocated for the Perth-Wellington riding, as provided by the Ministry of Infrastructure, is as follows:

- Mapleton, \$ 1,180,220.
- Minto, \$ 1,360,917.
- North Perth, \$ 1,128,233.
- Perth East, \$ 373,247.
- Perth South, \$ 434,389.
- Perth County, \$ 537,802.
- St. Marys, \$ 502,284.
- Stratford, \$ 3,224,624.
- Wellington North, \$ 1,286,956.
- West Perth, \$ 1,246,949.
- Wellington County, \$ 2,115,126.



Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae during an OCIF funding announcement in 2024. This year, Stratford netted \$3.2 million in provincial funding for infrastructure –though it won't be enough to bridge the funding gap in the Festival City. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Police bust alleged furnace maintenance scam

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Stratford Police Service has arrested a 39-year-old Bolton resident in an alleged furnace maintenance scam here in the Festival City.

On Sept. 18, local police received a report of a suspicious male who had impersonated a Bick Heating & Cooling employee to enter a residence. Police say the man had contacted the residents of the home the previous night by phone and arranged a maintenance visit for their furnace. He arrived and was permitted into the residence under the pretense that he worked for Bick Heating & Cooling. The homeowner's daughter contacted Bick Heating & Cooling after becoming aware that the male was in her

parents' home, when it was confirmed that he was not an employee and was requested to leave immediately.

The subject of this matter is described as a black male, with short black hair and a black beard. At the time of this incident, he was wearing a dark blue shirt and blue jeans. He arrived at the home in a rented, grey Nissan Sentra, licence plate CZE163.

The subject was arrested at Stratford Police Headquarters after being contacted by police and was charged criminally with Unlawfully in a Dwelling. He was released on an undertaking with a court date of Oct. 27.

Police are asking for anyone who has had any similar incidents to contact Const. Tom Lecomte at tlecomte@stratfordpolice.com.

Police still investigating downtown stabbing

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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The Stratford Police Service is looking for suspects in a late-night stabbing downtown last week.

On Sept. 13, shortly after 2:30 a.m., police responded to a stabbing that occurred in the picnic area on Ontario Street at the end of Downie Street. The victim reportedly suffered a large laceration to the back and had been sprayed by an un-

known substance in the face. They were transported to Stratford General Hospital and was released from medical care later that day.

As of press time, there are no suspects. Anyone who was in the area between 2 a.m. and 2:45 a.m. is being asked to contact police if anything suspicious was observed. Businesses and residents in the area are also asked to review any video surveillance and contact police if anything of interest is observed.



Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the capital of China?
2. Which TV show follows the lives of the Bluth family?
3. What device uses sunlight to tell time?
4. What kind of food is an olive?
5. What is the outer layer of a tooth called?
6. What is Beyoncé's last name?
7. Where does "the Muffin Man" live, according to the nursery rhyme?
8. When the stock market is performing well, it's called a ____ market?
9. Charlie Kirk was assassinated in what state?
10. Who does Meghan Markle play in "Suits?"

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

Stratford Parkinson's fundraiser nearing \$80,000 goal

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

As September nears its end, the fundraiser for people living with Parkinson's and their families is almost at its goal.

The annual Stratford and Area Walk for Parkinson's, organized by the Parkinson's Society Southwestern Ontario, took place on Sept. 6 and 7 with a goal of \$80,000. Still raising funds, the pool is at 77 per cent filled, at \$61,788 as of press time.

There are two Shakespeare families who have been doing their part for years in supporting the walking fundraiser, the Schafers and the Harrisons.

This year, "Team Kathy Schafer" and

"Team Ron Harrison" were walking after obtaining thousands of dollars again from relatives, friends and neighbours, who feel for the many across the province that need all the help available from the Parkinson's Society Southwestern Ontario.

Parkinson's is a complex neurodegenerative disease which manifests in different ways. It can induce tremors or rigidity, as well as cognitive impairment, to name just a few symptoms – though everyone's Parkinson's journey is different.

More than 110,000 people in Canada are living with the disease.

With walks like the one in Stratford every year, families raise money to help their loved ones and strangers across the nation, as well as raise money to one day find a cure.

For more information on the walk, and to donate, visit https://www.walkforpd.ca/site/TR?fr_id=1565&pg=entry.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Right: Amanda Harrison, Ron Harrison, Rod Harrison and Britt Harrison at this year's Stratford walk. The Harrison family walk every year for Parkinson's.



Above: Kathy and Bill Schafer have been walking with family and friends in Stratford's Parkinson's Walk for more years than they can remember, collecting dollars as they go to find a cure or at least some relief for those diagnosed with the disease.



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Nature London donation supports conservation of rare turtles across southwestern Ontario

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) has received a \$20,000 donation from Nature London to help launch a turtles at risk education program and expand a tallgrass prairie restoration project. The funding will be distributed over four years.

For more than 30 years, the UTRCA has worked to bring local turtle populations back from the brink of extinction through the Southern Ontario At-Risk Reptiles (SOARR) program.

"This educational program is a collaboration between our education department and the SOARR team," said Karlee Flear, UTRCA community education co-ordinator. "The aim is to create programming to showcase what they've been able to achieve, the work that they're doing and the research that they've done, and be able to show that to the community."

Flear said growing demands in Ontario's agriculture sector continue to threaten wetlands and turtle habitats, making conservation efforts more urgent.

"Southwestern Ontario has tremendous pressures in terms of land use," she said. "We're seeing incredible development in agricultural land use and all those things impact turtle habitat, biodiversity and water quality, all of which impact turtles' health and their ability to survive."

Agricultural expansion often leads to fertilizer and pesticide runoff that degrades water quality, creating low-oxygen conditions harmful to turtles. It can also cause habitat fragmentation and increase turtle mortality on roads. Altered water flows and reduced groundwater recharge further compromise the suitability of wetlands for turtle species across the region.

The SOARR program creates and protects habitat, conducts long-term research and incubates turtle eggs found across the watershed. Hatchlings are released back into the wild.

"They have been working really diligent-



Cott Gillingwater, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) species at risk biologist/herpetologist, with two softshell turtles.



Spiny softshell turtles hatching from their eggs.

ly to create and protect turtle habitat," said Flear. "They've done some really long-term research on the turtle populations in our watershed, as well as collect and incubate eggs, and then release them back to the wild. Their collective efforts over the past 30 years have made great strides in our at-risk turtle population, specifically the spiny softshell turtle."

The donation from Nature London will allow SOARR to work more closely with the UTRCA's community education team to share their knowledge with watershed residents.

"What Nature London funding is doing is allowing us to get out into the community to educate students about these turtle populations, as well as educate individuals on how they can help protect and serve the turtle species in our watershed," Flear said.

Learning opportunities will include turtle lab tours, interactive activities at community events and school programs highlighting the six turtle species found in southwestern Ontario.

"The spiny softshell turtle is a unique turtle found in southwestern Ontario," Flear said. "It's not found anywhere else in Canada. A lot of effort has been made on that particular species. However, work is being done to protect all of the native turtles we have in our watershed."

Flear expressed gratitude for the partnership.

"I wanted to say a special thank you to Nature London. It's difficult for us to expand our programming, to do these projects without them. So their funding is much appreciated, and we really value them as a partner in our community."

Nature London, a volunteer-driven charitable organization founded in 1864, works to protect, educate and encourage enjoyment of the natural environment.

"Nature London is proud to support these initiatives in support of our mission to preserve and enjoy nature," said Don Taves, president of Nature London.

More information about protecting turtles in the region is available at thamesriver.on.ca.

Perth County Sustainability Hub awards Violet Davenport for her comic about helping the Earth

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A comic about helping the Earth became an award-winning piece of art for a young student in Stratford, thanks to the Perth County Sustainability Hub.

The Perth County Sustainability Hub awarded Violet Davenport, a 10-year-old Stratford Middle Years School student, for her cartoon about helping the Earth. The organization awards \$100

each year to a youth for their art piece supporting local sustainability efforts.

"It has a good structure; you follow it all the way. ...It has one central figure in each and pictorially, it tells a story as well that you can follow a lot from ... if you didn't read the words," said Sharon Collingwood, co-founder of the Perth County Sustainability Hub.

In a statement sent to the Times, Davenport said that she enjoys creating comics and cares for the environment.

She's pleased that the Perth County Sustainability Hub liked her comic and hopes it inspires others to take care of the Earth.

"I feel proud to be recognized for my work," she said.

Collingwood said that opportunities like the contest for youth encourages younger generations to teach all generations, whether it's older folks or fellow youth, to live a more sustainable lifestyle.

"People of Violet's age will take Violet's advice more than they'll take mine. They'll listen to what other people their own age have to say," she said.

In 2024, the Perth County Sustainability Hub awarded Chef Jude for his photography showcasing community gardens.

To view Davenport's comic online, visit <https://perthcountysustainability.ca/pesh-contest-2025>.

Local man bikes across Canada to raise funds and bring awareness to Crohn's disease

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Peter Meszaros thought to take an extended summer vacation now that he had graduated from university and wanted to make an impact with his time off before continuing his life journey. He decided to bike across the country, from Vancouver, B.C., to St. John's, N. L., something that he had always wanted to do. He was inspired to raise funds by his family and chose a cause close to home, Crohn's disease.

"Around September, when my family was visiting me in New Brunswick, I was telling my parents about (the trip), and my mom came up with the idea to tie in fundraising with it. It was right around the time that my brother Will was diagnosed with Crohn's disease and I figured that would be a great cause to fundraise along the way," explained Meszaros. "In addition to Will, I have friends in school who suffer from Crohn's. Even when I was on the road, my (maternal) grandfather was hospitalized and diagnosed with Crohn's."

On May 5, Meszaros set out on his bike from Vancouver, B.C., for 10,505 kilometres reaching St. John's, or more specifically, Cape Spear, the easternmost point in Canada where when standing there, Ireland is closer than Toronto. The journey took 118 days which comprised 95 days of biking and rest days along the way. He gave himself a nice break in New Brunswick to visit with his girlfriend. He arrived at Cape Spear on Aug. 31.

Support throughout the trip came in the form of kindness from strangers, who provided snacks along the way, a place to stay, kind words or contributions to the cause.

"It was incredible how friendly random people along the way were. I received help in all sorts of forms. Once in Ontario an older fellow took me fishing and taught me how to fillet a fish and taught me how to cook the fillets, so I had a big fish dinner. A lot of people provided snacks and drinks along the way, which was very, very, nice and of course friendly words and people saying they would support the cause. Strangers were very kind," shared Meszaros.

His strategy was not to set a mileage goal each day, because of variables such as weather and the terrain. He instead tried to bike between five and eight hours a day; the shortest day was two hours when his father, Joseph, had joined the ride and around the Georgian Bay area they had a really big day, so they took it easier the day



Stratford local Peter Meszaros (LISA CHESTER PHOTO) **cycled across Canada this summer to raise funds for Crohn's Disease research.**

following to pace themselves.

"I was really, really, impressed. Dad bought a gravel bike last October or so, because I kind of encouraged him to do so, so when he heard I was doing this he wanted in. I planned four days that we rode together, from Tobermory to Blue Mountain and honestly, I was so impressed with how much grit and tenacity he has. There were sections on our big day where I think, Lion's Head to Owen Sound, which was around 111 kilometres, there were really rough moments where we were pushing our bikes along the Bruce Trail and wading through water up to our knees on really inundated parts of an ATV trail. But he took it like a champ and pushed through it all and did it all with a smile on his face. I was really impressed.

"If I had been alone I would have been cursing the trail," he confessed.

He tried to avoid the Trans Canada Highway as much as possible, although highway biking is faster, it just doesn't have the same hidden gems found when veering off the most beaten path. The biking route Meszaros followed is the Great Northern Bike Packing Route

(GNBR) which travels from the Pacific Coast of Canada to the Atlantic Coast. The GNBR is one of the longest and most adventurous contiguous bikepacking routes.

"It's very much a dirt trail focus that takes you off the beaten path and into the more remote areas where you can practice your self reliance skills, see some more beautiful sights and truly be alone in nature," said Meszaros.

The most challenging part of the journey was bad weather and steep climbs. There were about five days in B.C. that rained non-stop and really wore down his spirit.

"It was so hard to stay motivated and wake up in the morning and want to get out there. Everything is soaking wet and you know you aren't going to have the opportunity to dry off, but you just have to push through it. That was really, really, hard especially since I was still inexperienced riding in bad weather and it was the middle of May and it was cold and I couldn't feel my fingers and toes," said Meszaros.

The kindness of people along the way was surprising and took him aback. People were curious about where he was going and were kind, making him love Canada even more.

"There aren't many other places in the world where you can do something like that and feel so safe, and feel so accepted," said Meszaros.

And now that he is home, the lesson learned from such an undertaking is to be adaptable. No matter how much or how many times he tried to plan, something would come up to cause a change.

"Any time I tried to plan ahead, it seemed something always went wrong ... I kept planning to a minimum. I had my route planned out, but I would really only try to plan camping spots just a night or two in advance."

The GoFundMe fundraising for Crohn's disease opened by Meszaros had an initial goal of \$10,000 but has raised in excess of \$24,000.

"That blew me away. My original goal was \$10,000 and I didn't know if that was a realistic goal or not, but it was really a community effort. So many friends and family members chipped in, Stratford businesses as well, so it felt like a really local effort with strangers along the way contributing, too," he said.

Anyone wishing to contribute to this worthy cause can visit the GoFundMe page <https://www.gofundme.com/f/biking-across-canada-to-raise-money-for-crohns-research>.

Local humane society's Pet Pantry faces critical shortage

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Picking up an extra bag of pet food during your next grocery run could support animals and their families in need during a critical time for the regional humane society.

The Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo and Stratford Perth announced on social media that the organization's animal food bank, the Pet Pantry, is facing a critical shortage.

"Over the summer, we've had a pretty steep increase in families that are accessing the Pet Pantry," said Stacy Murphy, outreach coordinator.

The Pet Pantry usually serves around 250 families each month between the two centres. It helped more than 600 families over the course of two months, and is in critical need of pet food of any brand, wet and dry, and pet supplies.

"There is a great need out there in our community," Murphy said.

The Pet Pantry program is entirely run on donations, either by pet food suppliers or residents.

Murphy acknowledged that many people are facing difficult financial times and tend to prioritize their pets' needs over their own. For example, if someone is in a situation where they have to choose between making sure they're fed or their dog is fed and know they cannot do both, they will make sure their dog is fed even if it means going hungry themselves. By ensuring that pet parents in need have access to the Pet Pantry as needed at no cost to them, they will be able to ensure everyone is taken care of.

"It's just a really great way to support the community, not only the animals that live in the community, but the people who love them," she said.

Ever since posting on social media on

Sept. 16, donations have been pouring into both centres and the local humane society is always looking for more.

"Any little bit counts, even if it's just an extra bag or two, we'll find a good home

for it," Murphy said.

To learn more about the Pet Pantry program online, visit <https://kwsphumane.ca/pet-pantry-program>.



Local food centre offers budgeting workshop to help residents save amid rising costs

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

After positive feedback from the first "Honest Budget" session, the Local Community Food Centre is hosting another workshop to help residents better understand and manage their finances.

The Honest Budget workshop returns Sept. 29 at the Local Community Food Centre on 612 Erie St. The event is free for all attendees and will run for an hour starting at 3:30 p.m. followed by dinner at 4 p.m.

"This is meant to be in a non-judgmental way while we assess what we spend our money on," said Jen Vredeveld, financial literacy and tax clinic coordinator at the Local. "Let's be real, I don't care where your income comes from, I just want to help people budget."

"I want to help people see where the money is going, where they work hard for that paycheck that they receive. I want this program to teach something that attendees may have not learned before and to feel more confident in making decisions with their money."

Vredeveld said that people often slip into a restrictive mindset, cutting out all spending to save. She hopes the workshop



Jen Vredeveld, financial literacy and tax clinic coordinator at the Local Community Food Centre, is hosting the Honest Budget workshop on Sept. 29. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

will show participants how to strike a balance between setting money aside and still enjoying life, while exploring ways to feel financially secure and reach their goals.

"I want to give people a sense of reliability, there was a time when I was only making \$500 a month and rent was \$500," said Vredeveld. "I know what you have to do to

get your rent paid and I haven't forgotten that. It's really important to remember that people are not choosing to live in poverty and have no money."

Vredeveld said many systemic programs end up supporting poverty rather than solving it. She hopes the workshop will help shift the conversation toward long-term solutions, adding the Local is an ideal place to host it.

"Last time we did this in July we had 10 people; I want to do this event on a quarterly basis. People are requesting help," Vredeveld. "If people don't know where to start, we take a deep dive on what people are spending, how much they're making and what's getting them jammed up from a financial standpoint."

"Once people see what's going on, something clicks. They become honest about it and then reflect on what they should be spending on. It's to give people more decision-making confidence."

Vredeveld said the program has launched a new service to help residents file back taxes from 2017 to the present, something not currently offered in town. While tax clinics in the community typically only go back two years, this service will run year-round to help people catch up outside of tax season. All services are free.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Stratford Warriors start the season with three individual milestone moments

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors only secured one out of the possible four points in their opening week of the 2025-2026 GOJHL season, but three players provided their first career goals in the process.

Stratford began their 2025-2026 campaign at the Western Fair Sports Complex in London as they played the Nationals on Sept. 17.

It was a tough game for the Warriors, as they couldn't overcome an early deficit and an undisciplined second period, resulting in a 4-1 loss.

London opened the scoring midway through the first period and added two more goals via power play in the second period to give the Nationals a 3-0 lead.

Stratford finally responded late in the middle frame when Jonas Schmidt notched his first goal of the season on the man-advantage, giving the Warriors some momentum going into the third.

But despite the Warriors putting 41 shots on goal, they were unable to climb back from the early deficit.

After the game, Stratford head coach Dave Williams said the team had a challenging game both physically and mentally, but assured them they can play better.

"At the end of the first, even though we outshot them, I think their quality of scoring opportunities far exceeded ours," Williams said.

"I just thought we were very sloppy in general. So hopefully that's just the first game, we're still a little rusty. I know we can be a much better team and play much better than we did tonight."

Connor Davis made 27 saves between the pipes for the Warriors and was instrumental in keeping the Warriors in contention against an opponent who had played two games into the season.

Davis believes the team can make the necessary adjustments to be on the right path.

"It's just trusting the process. I mean, we're pretty early in the season here. It's our first game," Davis said.

"They got two games under their belt already ... I think as we move along here, we're starting to tighten things up."

Williams praised the netminder for his performance, in particular in the first period when the game could've been ended much earlier.

"I mean, that's kind of part of it, is the shot total, but I think we still gave up way too many grade-a scoring opportunities to them," Williams said.

"We probably could have come out of that first down three or four. I thought Connor played incredibly well in the first and kept that game close for us."

Lucas Minard recorded his first point in the GOJHL on the assist from Schmidt's goal. Minard says he is proud of being part of the historic franchise.

"So coming here like a week ago, the boys have been great. Staff, whole city, town, (they've) been amazing, just the legacy of the organization," Minard said.

"It's an honour to put the jersey on every day and go to work for the team."

Warriors fans packed the Allman Are-

na on Sept. 19 to witness their team battle back from a 3-1 deficit in the third period, but lost heartbreakingly to the Waterloo Siskins 4-3 in overtime.

Waterloo grabbed a 2-0 lead in the second period, but Schmidt scored his second goal of the season to cut the deficit to 2-1. The Siskins responded with a short-handed goal a few minutes later to go up 3-1 heading into the third period.

Stratford rallied midway through the third period by first career GOJHL goals from second-year Dominic Marshall and rookie Max Wildfong to force overtime, but the visitors escaped with the extra point in overtime.

Despite the loss, Williams liked that the team bounced back in the third period to pick up their first point of the season and commended the performance of the line of Marshall, Owen Galbraith and Brady Murphy.

"I didn't think we played real bad in the first two periods. I just thought we were a little slow to get the net front and some of the inside ice that we need to get to score goals," Williams said.

"You know, it kind of changed a few lines up in the third ... And I thought the line of Colin (Slattery), (Owen) Galbraith, Dom Marshall and Brady Murphy were excellent the whole night, and it was great

to see those guys get rewarded with a goal."

Marshall described the play that led to his first-ever GOJHL goal and sparked the comeback effort.

"I saw the little battle on a wall there on the left side, and I kind of floated out behind the play and went to the net with my stick and popped out, plotted it in," Marshall said.

Wildfong, who also scored his first career GOJHL goal that tied the game, felt the warm atmosphere from the team since day one.

"Oh yeah, it's pretty good. It's my first year and I'm the youngest on the team, so the boys have been really welcoming," Wildfong said. "(We) started off the season pretty, pretty slow, but it's been fun. I think we're gonna pick it up here."

It was a shaky start to the season for Davis, as he allowed three goals on seven shots through two periods. However, the veteran netminder had a strong bounce back by stopping all eight Waterloo shots in the third period.

Williams defended his decision to keep Davis in the third period and overtime, and used this as a learning opportunity for the team.

"Well, I think the game was still within reach, or still two goals down there," Williams said.

"So again, it's early in the season and sometimes you got to go through a little adversity at different times, and sometimes it happens at different points this season, and maybe we're hitting a little bit of adversity early on here with the first two games. So let me say I thought the way the guys battled back was definitely moving."

The Warriors travel to Sarnia for a game against the Legionnaires on Sept. 25 and then return home to play the Komoka Kings on Sept. 26.







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Walking soccer tournament kicks off in Stratford to promote fitness with seniors, youth

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

No running, no contact, no problem. Stratford's walking soccer tournament is showing how the game can level the playing field for players of all ages, from youth to those in their 80s.

Stratford hosted a free, family-friendly walking soccer event on Sept. 20 at Festival Hydro Park. Peter Mitchell, tournament organizer, said that the no-contact sport offers health benefits for older adults, including improved mobility, reduced stress and lower risks of cardiovascular disease, while fostering social connections.

"I've played soccer my whole life. I've coached, I've refereed. Walking soccer is easy to pick up and we have seen improvement from everybody in our play of the sport. ... It's very rewarding and it keeps your fit," said Mitchell. "We play for an hour and it does not sound very long but it very much is. We are going as fast as we can. It's very different from regular soccer. We are walking three times the normal speed."

Mitchell, who has been hosting pick-up walking soccer matches for the last four years, says that Saturday's tournament was an event that was meant to spread awareness of the sport. The game

is mostly aimed for seniors but welcomes youth as well.

"We want to showcase what this activity actually is. When you play walking soccer something interesting happens for me," said Mitchell. "My heartbeat gets up 20 beats more than regular soccer throughout the whole hour and our other teammates have said the same thing."

"Intensive walking is fantastic on the body as opposed to running. You have to be very careful when you first come out, if you have not played for a while you have to take it easy at first."

Mitchell stated that people are unaware of the sport but as soon as they find out what it is, there is a drawn interest. He adds that the sport is suitable for all ages. Mitchell says that there are players in their 70s and 80s that are playing it.

Saturday's first tournament featured a demonstration from a kinesiologist on how to do proper warm-ups as well as relaxing methods for post games.

"For this event we are getting close to the international side of pitches at Cowan Turf. We play indoors and have been doing it for four years," said Mitchell. "This is a special event for awareness, it's very promotional, we were able to procure a grant from the Ontario government to promote physical activity for seniors."



Peter Mitchell, pictured here at Festival Hydro Park, organized Stratford's first walking soccer tournament on Sept. 20.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Stratford's Andrew C. Brown nominated for ACO award

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Stratford resident Andrew C. Brown has been nominated for this year's Public Education and Engagement Award distributed by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO), an award that recognizes events, exhibitions, programs, news media, digital platforms and other projects undertaken by an individual, a group or a non-profit organization that has helped to advance public understanding, engagement with and enjoyment of Ontario's built and cultural heritage.

As noted by the ACO, Brown has had a major impact on the documentation of historic structures and people of Stratford and area. Since he started volunteering to make documentaries in 2019 with the Stratford and District Historical Society (SDHS), Brown has developed ten short documentaries available through its YouTube channel, including The Railway Stations of Stratford, Ontario; Saving City Hall; Constructing Confederation Falls; Avon Crest; and Innovation at the Beacon Herald. There are five in production as of May 2025.

The longest, Under This Roof, was di-

rected and edited by Brown, with the production assistance of Nancy Musselman of the SDHS. In the one-hour documentary, local artisans and well-known authors Gerard Brender à Brandis and his sister Marianne Brandis speak about the artist, the archivist and the last of the frame cottages. When Gerard moved into the house, one of the last old frame houses in Stratford, it marked the coming together of an artist practicing the traditional arts and crafts of wood engraving and bookmaking with a historic dwelling built in 1866 and thoroughly restored in the 1980s with an eye to authenticity. The house was Gerard's home and his workspace. The former dining room became his studio, and the former parlour served as a gallery for displaying his work. The house was designated in 1985 as the McDonald-Creasy House, and until 2019 the studio was open to the public five days a week from May to October.

Brown faces the Maidstone Bicentennial Museum in Emeryville and the Amherstburg Freedom Museum in the category. A jury of heritage professionals will review the nominees to decide the winner.

The award ceremony will most likely be in October of this year in Toronto.



COMING EVENTS

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| September 10 | Ladies' Auxiliary Cold Plate Luncheon, \$16 per plate.
Call Mary Helen 273-1389 for reservations |
| September 14 | Chicken Parmesan Dinner \$25 per plate, caesar salad, garlic rolls, harvest pie |
| September 25 | Burger and Fry Night, pick-up 5:00-5:30, dine-in 5:45, 2/\$25 or \$13 each |
| October 4 | Bus Trip to the Toronto Argonauts vs Hamilton Tiger Cats, BMO Field.
Tickets are \$95 per person.
Call Dean Listman 519-273-4463 to book your seat by August 26. |
| October 17 | Euchre Night, register in advance, team of two players, \$20 per team |
| October 23 | Burger and Fry Night, pick-up 5:00-5:30, dine-in 5:45, 2/\$25 or \$13 each |

**Tuesday Morning Buddy Check, 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. OPEN to all Veterans
Widows and First Responders**
Friday Afternoon Weekly Social 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Saturday Afternoon Meat Draw doors open at 2:00 p.m., meat draw starts at 4:00 p.m.

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Stratford's Ballinran Entertainment to produce documentary on Paul Shaffer

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A Stratford production company is playing a big role in bringing the story of Paul Shaffer, the legendary bandleader for David Letterman, to screens big and small around the globe.

Stratford's Ballinran Entertainment, in partnership with Grace Street Media and White Pine Pictures, announced its next big film, *Say Hello to Our Good Friend Paul Shaffer*, after signing a deal with Shaffer at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) earlier this month.

"We've made a practice over the last 30 years as a company of doing a lot of stories about well-known Canadians who have achieved something of international success, whether it's William Shatner or Alex Trebek or others," said Ballinran executive producer Craig Thompson. "We've recently been approved by the CRTC to launch a new channel called Stageview and we're looking for high-profile projects. Because of our track record, we're able to reach out to well-known people like Paul Shaffer, and there's a real interest right now in biopics or documentaries about people who have made a difference in society."

"... What we're seeing now is a lot of high-profile Hollywood producers and directors getting behind stories because there's a real interest in nostalgia and untold stories. Paul's is really unique because he's always been a sidekick – the guy who makes everyone look better – and nobody really knows his story, yet he's been so influential not only in late-night television but in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and



Stratford's Ballinran Entertainment has partnered with White Pine Pictures and Grace Street Media to produce a new documentary on Paul Shaffer, *Say Hello to Our Good Friend Paul Shaffer*. (BALLINRAN ENTERTAINMENT PHOTO)

in helping musicians find their audience by bringing them onto the Late Show with David Letterman because he was the musical director. So, he booked the bands, he organized the bands, he rehearsed them, giving people a chance to shine in the national spotlight. He's very humble about it ... but he really has an amazing story."

The film will chronicle Shaffer's rise from Thunder Bay, Ont., to the world stage; his start in Godspell, his years with the original Saturday Night Live Band, three decades as David Letterman's bandleader and comic foil, and collaborations with icons including James Brown, Are-

tha Franklin, Sly Stone and Ray Charles.

While the film will be told through the lens of Shaffer's life and rise to fame, Thompson said Shaffer will also serve as a guide through the eras of pop music, from the '60s to modern day – a concept that, along with the notion of working with an all-Canadian production team, helped convince Shaffer to do this film.

"It's not a documentary about Paul's life, but Paul is a guide through musical history," Thompson said. "He's going to talk about his life and his journey, but it's going to be at the intersection of different eras of pop music ... and looking at how

music influences society and vice versa because we all think of eras in terms of songs. When you hear a song, it takes you back – 'Oh, I remember hearing that in 1974 or '88 or whatever. So, he's looking at music as a bond that unites us all. In this era of divisiveness, there's a couple things that unite us – one is sports and the other is music."

"I've been the luckiest guy in showbiz," Shaffer said in a press release. "I've had a front-row seat to music history. This film isn't just about me. It's about the soundtrack of our lives and how music connects, inspires and remembers us."

The deal signed between Shaffer and the three production companies also included a signatory from one of Hollywood's biggest talent agencies, United Talent Agency (UTA). Before production can begin, UTA will package the film and pitch it to all the major streaming platforms to find a home for the project once it's done.

This film also marks the first big, marquee project produced out of Stratford's new Stageview Studios – the first in a series of soon-to-be-announced films for the studio that will not only bolster the local film and television industry, creating local jobs, but also boost Stratford's reputation as a Canadian hub for content production.

"Although it's a documentary that will involve a lot of travelling, a lot of the post-production and creative work will be happening in Stratford," Thompson said. "It's the kind of thing we're trying to do to put Stratford on the film-and-television-production map. ... Because we have our own channel now, we can commission content and get stuff off the ground."

Here For Now Theatre's first winter season filled with stories of hope

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

After successful summer seasons year after year showcasing independent new and undiscovered plays, Here For Now Theatre will have its first winter season.

Here for Now's winter season will feature three productions from Nov. 5 to Dec. 24 at the Rose McQueen stage on 24 Andrew St. All of the plays' themes centre on hope.

Pandora, a solo play written and performed by Stratford Festival favourite Jessica B. Hill, will run from Nov. 5 to 16, with opening night on Nov. 7. The play is developed from the 2021 Here for Now Theatre's reading series Searching for Catharsis that was shown at the Bruce Hotel.

"It's a really and fun gratifying experience

to see a show that was seated and developed at Here For Now and has gone off to have this beautiful big life and is now coming back as a fully fledged production," said Fiona Mongillo, artistic director of Here For Now Theatre.

The world premiere of Amy Rutherford's *Reproduktion*, running from Nov. 19 to 30 (opening Nov. 21), explores a woman attending an alternative fertility treatment clinic in Sweden. Mongillo, who will be starring in the show, said the production will appeal to the millennials of Stratford and surrounding areas.

"I think it's for people who are living in the area – Kitchener, Waterloo, Hamilton, Guelph, who are more our age who are kind of interested in theatre and want to feel like it's relevant to our lives," she said.

Ruby and The Reindeer by Mark

Crawford, another world premiere, will close off the winter season from Dec. 10 to 24, opening on Dec. 12. The play, which takes place in 1989 on a Perth County dairy farm, was a request from Mongillo. She told Crawford to create a Christmas play that wasn't a fluff piece but still had the Christmas magic to entertain audiences of all ages.

"He did it, which is the hardest ask, like that's an impossible ask and he wrote the most beautiful Christmas show that we're calling an instant Christmas classic because it's just a perfect Christmas play," Mongillo said.

Each of the productions has a connection to Stratford and area.

"That was really intentional on my part because it's that idea of regenerative tourism, like tourism that takes place in your area and the idea of making sure

we're doing productions that are for the community at large," Mongillo said.

Due to the success of previous Here For Now Theatre seasons, including the past summer season selling at near-full capacity, Mongillo was concerned that the reception wouldn't be the same for the winter season. However, about 30 per cent of the total tickets for the winter productions are sold already.

"We're still far out from the season, so I anticipate the entire thing will sell out which is great and really exciting," she said.

Here For Now Theatre's winter season was created with the support of Destination Stratford. Tickets are \$32.50 each can either be purchased through the box office by calling 519-272-4368 or online by visiting www.herefornowtheatre.com.

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Second music and art event to be held at St. James Anglican Church Oct. 18

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

After a successful first kick at the can, organizers are bringing back Music and Art at St. James for second time on Oct. 18, an event that will feature the work of more than 30 local and regional artists, as well as performances by local musicians.

The first Music and Art at St. James event was held at St. James Anglican Church in Stratford back in March, raising \$1,900 for the ongoing rehabilitation of the church's belltower. After finding success with that event, organizers Karin Mussen and Lois Justrabo decided to bring it back in the fall with more space for exhibiting artists.

"On March 1 of this year, I just wanted to float a trial balloon to see if this sort of event could even happen," Mussen said. "I really just opened it up to people who were connected with St. James and we just did it in the upper hall. There were a couple people who were from outside of the St. James community, but they couldn't come at the last moment for various reasons. ... It was more an in-house thing and it went so well, I was just flabbergasted.

"... We made over \$1,900, which was flabbergasting. Part of it was having the jazz combo from Stratford District Secondary School. They were amazing, so people came in ... and, of course, they donated very kindly."



Local artists sell their wares to shoppers at the St. James Music and Art Sale March 1 in support of the St. James belltower restoration project. (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

While weather was a factor for the first event – blowing and drifting snow made it more difficult to travel to Stratford from further afield – the event's success gave organizers the encouragement to begin planning a similar event, only larger.

This time around, the event will span both the lower and upper hall at St. James, offering space for as many as 32 local and regional artists to display and sell their work – double the number of

artists who participated in the last event. While there is no vendor fee, the artists are being asked to donate a minimum of 20 per cent of their sales back to St. James in support of the ongoing belltower rehabilitation.

While Mussen says there will be art on display across many disciplines and for sale at different price points for every budget – from student art to local photography and everything in between – one of

the event's highlights will be the inclusion of local artist Leslie Watts' painting, "No Exit," in the event's silent auction.

"The big surprise is Leslie Watts," Mussen said. "Her painting has been valued at \$2,000. ... She has artwork for sale at Village Studios in Stratford, so she's a very well-known Stratford artist who has completely donated this piece."

On the music side of things, those who come out for the art will have the opportunity to listen to several live performances, including one by longtime St. James bell chimer Peter Ryde, who will perform a mini concert before the event begins at 10 a.m. From 11-11:30 a.m., St. James organist and choir director Ian Sadler will present several choral contemporary songs with the church choir, and from 2:30-3:30 p.m., student musicians from Stratford District Secondary School will perform under the direction of Kelsey Regier.

"It is really, really incredible the response to this event," Mussen said. "I'm hoping I'll get another person or two on board to help with organizing the next one."

For more information on Music and Art at St. James, which runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Oct. 18, contact Mussen at kejmsstudios@gmail.com or 519-272-0629, or contact the St. James office at 519-271-3572 or office@stjamesstratford.ca. Freewill donations will be accepted at the door.

Two sold out screenings of *Meet the Barbarians* at city hall charmed the audience

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The 2024 Julie Delpy film *Meet the Barbarians* premiered last year at TIFF and was generously sponsored at the Stratford Film Festival (SFF) by Kathy Vassilakos and Dan Mathieson, CICS and Today FM, Destination Stratford and an anonymous donor. The sponsorship was in recognition of the similarities to this community that ten years ago embarked on its own mission to sponsor refugees.

The film centres on a small town intending to welcome a Ukrainian family to sponsor but instead are faced with Syrian refugees. The satirical comedy explores serious themes with a blend of humour that had the audience laughing.

"It was my favourite film last year at TIFF and I knew immediately that I wanted to program it for Stratford. One of the reasons that I thought it would be a good fit here is that this community set out to welcome five families through Stratford Welcomes Refugees and made that a community effort," explained Megan Smith-Harris, executive director of SFF.

The townsfolk are forced to look in-



The Q-and-A panel following the screening of the film *Meet the Barbarians*. From left to right, Kathy Vassilakos, Felicity Sutcliffe, Saja Alta'eh and Megan Smith-Harris. This well-received comedy had the audience in laughter despite the seriousness of sponsorship. (LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

ward as they face their own prejudices once confronted with Syrian refugees among them. Dissent descends upon them thanks to the local plumber who was perfectly cast with his underly-

ing seething whenever the Syrians are around.

This is a story of resilience and perseverance, by both the refugee family and the townsfolk who must learn to over-

come their fears and prejudices so that overtime, they can learn to live together and thrive.

The theme of resilience was further explored after the screening with a Q-and-A featuring a panel of Kathy Vassilakos, Felicity Sutcliffe, Saja Alta'eh and moderated by Smith-Harris. To begin the discussion, Alta'eh shared her story about what her life in Syria was like and what happened to her family and how they have persevered.

Back home, her life was simple; her grandparents were farmers with crops and animals. Her parents were farmers too, but on a much smaller scale with only one animal. The day surrounded school in the morning, studying in the afternoon and then playing with her cousins.

"The year before we left Syria, something unusual happened. It snowed. Heavy snow that reached our knees. For me it felt like a sign, almost as if our destiny was pointing us toward Canada. Then the conflict began, gunshots echoed all around us. My mom, siblings and I would flee to safer cities, then return until the time I started Grade 3 where we left and never went back," shared Alta'eh.

They stayed with her grandparents

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Sock It To Me! puppet pop-up by SpringWorks will be at the Grand Trunk site

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

SpringWorks, in association with Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF), will feature a new fall pop-up play-time for families and friends Oct. 4 and 5 at the historic Grand Trunk site, where it will transform into a pocket park. If you missed World in a Weekend last summer, this is your chance to get in on the wildly popular free sock puppet making workshops.

This new collaboration between SpringWorks and Provocation Ideas Festival is sponsored by the City of Stratford and is meant to be a conduit in which ideas and possibilities begin to percolate.

“I think the general idea is to get people curious, interested, excited, positive with possibilities of what that area of the city could evolve into. It’s in public lands, public properties, like parks and market squares, where people can come together in community, in a welcoming place,” said Eileen Smith,



Stroll along Downie Street to the pocket park to create sock puppets at this free pop-in event presented by SpringWorks.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

executive director of SpringWorks.

The pop-up, Sock It To Me! will be located at the pocket park that is located between the YMCA and the bus depot across from Bradshaw Lofts on Downie Street. Additionally, there will be ten tents on site

for Trophy X Dream Weavers, as presented by PIF.

Making sock puppets is one of the most popular workshops during World in a Weekend, where attendees can create a puppet using a sock provided or bring their own socks

that seem to be calling out for creative imaginations. There will be all sorts of fabrics and decorative art supplies on hand to turn each sock into an animated creature.

“We will have our little puppet theatre there so that your children

can tell stories with their sock puppets and or other creature puppets. We’ll have our play puppets there. Just go for a fall walk and hang out with us for a while and help the dreaming of what that place can turn into. It isn’t that far from downtown. Functionally, it is downtown,” said Smith.

Creativity, imagination and play leading to ideas of what the potential could be for the Grand Trunk site is the motivation of the day. There will be chalk for artwork on the tarmac or hopscotch for all ages to play, hula-hoops and table games.

“The beginning is people understanding how close in the heart of the city this place is. It is only two blocks away from Market Square. October is still nice enough for Al Fresco dining too,” she concluded.

Sock It To Me! is to be held Oct. 4 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Oct. 5 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, or to donate to Springworks, visit its website at springworksfestival.ca.

For more than 160 years, Indigenous children were forced into Indian Residential Schools.

September 30 is National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, a day to learn about the 150,000 childhoods lost to Canada's Indian Residential School system.

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Second City alumni premiering *Frankenstein's Daughter* in Stratford this October

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The world premiere of *Frankenstein's Daughter* will be a Second City reunion here in Stratford this October.

The comedy play will be staged by Process Theatre in Here For Now Theatre's black box space on St. Andrew Street and was written by Deb Lacusta and Dan Castellanetta, a husband-and-wife writing duo and alumni from The Second City in Chicago. Readers may also recognize Castellanetta as the iconic voice of Homer Simpson.

The play is directed by Michael J. Gellman, a Second City mainstage director and the former artistic director for the Canadian stage in Toronto, as well as one half of Process Theatre, a Stratford-based ensemble that embraces improvisation to assist in developing new plays.

Deborah Smith, the other half of Process Theatre and Gellman's wife, explained that they all go way back.

"They were his students in his class and have been friends of his for over 40 years, maybe 30, 40 years, so they're good friends of ours," Smith said. "Michael's directed everybody. He directed (Stephen) Colbert and (Steve) Carell and John Candy and Gilda Radner. He's 73 now, so I guess you would call him semi-retired, because he refuses to retire."

Smith explained that she and Gellman hosted the Scripted Toronto festival at Theatre Passe Muraille before the COVID-19 pandemic, where they got about 50 writers together to read new works and see what they were excited about. Lacusta and Castellanetta came up from Los Angeles and read *Frankenstein's Daughter*. As Smith said, they "loved it, loved it, loved it."

"It's just hilarious. It's so funny. It's like *The Odd Couple* but on steroids. It's two



Alastair Forbes, Jim Annan and Clare Blackwood at a 2019 reading of *Frankenstein's Daughter* at Scripted Toronto. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

totally different people in a cabin in the woods battling it out, basically having different opinions, different views ... And it's just the lines. The writing is brilliant, and of course it's brilliant. These are the writers from *The Simpsons*, right? So, funny, funny, funny. Every line is rich and they're jewels. And of course, because my husband was directing in Second City for so many years and these guys are comedy specialists, you need to run this like a well-run pianoforte, you know? So the timing is brilliant and

fast and quick. When it's all together, you get something which is incredibly talented and gifted and well-run. It's got to be seen."

Post pandemic, Smith said that it felt like the stars were aligning for this production. Here For Now Theatre opened their space up for rent, they had a stellar work like *Frankenstein's Daughter* prepared for the Halloween season and Lacusta and Castellanetta were ready to come to Stratford for the first time.

"It's serendipity," Smith said.

Frankenstein's Daughter runs on the weekends from Oct. 16-26. It stars Jim Annan and Alastair Forbes, two Second City alumni themselves, and fans of Mary Shelley's works should be warned that despite its name, neither Dr. Frankenstein nor his creature make a prolonged appearance in the production. It contains mature content and is not recommended for audiences under 14 years of age.

Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased at <https://processtheatre.com/store>.

Two sold out screenings of *Meet the Barbarians* at city hall charmed the audience

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while her father worked in Lebanon. Bullets would fly overhead and her mother was nearly hit. Then, a plane dropped a bomb.

"My uncle shouted, 'Get down!' My heart dropped. My throat went completely dry from fear and I could feel every beat pounding in my chest. The explosion shook the ground beneath us. For a moment it felt like the world had stopped," said Alta'eh.

That fear stayed with them for months as they continued to run, until her parents decided they would flee to Lebanon. After three years, they were invited to move to Stratford. They didn't know where it was or what life would be like. Classmates in Lebanon would tell stories

of kids being taken from their families and try to scare her. But deep down they knew that this was the safest and best option.

"Stratford turned out to be smaller and quieter than we expected, but comforting and could be our second home. From the very beginning there was a group of people that stood by our side, 'SALT.' They respected our culture, celebrated with us and even shared our food," she said.

The group helped support them with everything from school to banking to getting a driver's licence, appointments at hospitals and even helped bring her uncle and family here as well.

"Starting over is not just reaching safety, it's about leaving everything behind. Your home, your school, your friends,

the life you once lived. You carry only memories, while everything familiar is gone. Rebuilding takes time and patience and support of those around you. In Stratford everyone has been so kind, even the smallest gesture like walking down the street and someone smiles at you," said Alta'eh.

Kathy Vassilakos reflected on the beginnings of the Stratford Welcomes Refugees campaign and how quickly the city came together to brainstorm and fundraise. Vassilakos was also a member of council and part of the team along with Sutcliffe who was instrumental in the many thousands of dollars raised needed to sponsor a family. In an interview with the Times, she looked back on those days.

"It's kind of interesting to be reflecting back a decade later, on what we did and what we accomplished. In the end, there were seven families sponsored. The original plan was to fundraise and sponsor five, but we did enough and raised enough for seven," said Vassilakos. This represents about 30 souls. "There's lots to be proud of in this community. It was quite incredible. Within weeks we raised the money required to do the sponsorship."

The greatest sign of success for Stratford Welcomes Refugees is families like Alta'eh's and most of the others sponsored have stayed in Stratford and continue to lead their lives in safety and thrive.

184th Stratford Fall Fair, part two: Fair opens with large crowds and big plates all around

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The 184th annual Stratford Fall Fair kicked off on Sept. 18 with an assortment of events. Front and centre was the crowning of Mitchell's Paige Wilhelm as the 2025-2026 ambassador.

A large crowd had gathered in the Stratford Rotary Complex's community hall, watching as three young women competed for the honour. Along with Wilhelm, Chloe Bell from North Easthope and Maddie Higgins from Shakespeare were also in

the running.

Wilhelm was sponsored by the Co-Operators, Bell by Famme and Company and Higgins by the Shakespeare Opti-Mrs. Club.

Judges Cathy McCaan, Brittany Van Straaten and Katelyn Sykes interviewed the competitors as to why they wanted to be crowned ambassador. Later in the evening at the opening ceremonies, each gave their prepared speeches and an impromptu speech on topics suggested by the ambassador committee.

Although Wilhelm was named ambassa-

dor, the judges took longer than normal to decide because all three were exceptional – any one of the three could have easily been named the winner.

That evening, the Stratford and District Agricultural Society brought fun and excitement to the complex with its fundraising pie auction, which annually nets over \$2,000 for the society.

With the audience young and old helping with the auction, and Brodhagen's David Jacob as auctioneer, Kathryn Ritsma paid the top price for an apple pie freshly baked from locally sourced apples.

She said she is "always happy to support the local agricultural society, since they work so hard every year to bring agriculture to Stratford and the Perth County area."

While not in attendance, Perth-Wellington MP John Nater had said in absentia, on a note read by Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma (Kathryn's groom), that if the pie he baked didn't top the sale, he would be glad to take a pie in the face from any member of the ag society's board of directors.

He has been M.I.A ever since.



Chloe Bell, Paige Wilhelm and Maddie Higgins vied to be this year's Stratford Fall Fair Ambassador. Although it was Wilhelm that took the top spot, the judges noted that any of the three could have won, the competition was so tough.



Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma poses with past ag society president Murray Schlotzhauer, Clare Schlotzhauer and Bob Schlotzhauer at the fall fair's opening night. Bob was hoping for a bite, once his brother was finished eating his piece. (GARY WEST PHOTOS)



Every year, the Stratford Fall Fair holds a mini prince and princess competition – and this year there were more entries than ever. In the end, Logan Linder, nine, and Adelynn McDermid-Blakely, eight, were crowned this year's winners.



A Yundt Brothers Construction dump truck was one of the many exhibits at this year's fair, a truck that was involved in the construction of Highway 19 from Stratford to Milverton. Owner Lincoln Mueller poses with Candice Yundt and Wayne Verellen next to the historic truck.

Opinions

As I See It From America: Share and share alike



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

I have always been impressed with the kindness of the people in Stratford and all that is available for us to take part in while in your city. From your wonderful bookstores to the incredible mall, I have always been very pleased with customer service as well as the real drive to make sure that people are treated kindly and with care. There seems to be a great number of people who go out of their way to make sure that you feel welcome. At home in western New York, that is not always the case. I don't take customer service or care for granted. I make sure that those that include this as part of their service are tipped, recognized and thanked, however there are some places of necessity that do not make this a priority. In Stratford that is never the case.

My family has a lot of experience in Stratford, as we have

talked about in previous columns. From the Wild Hog to Fanfare Books, Bentleys and Features and even to my quite successful trips to the dollar store, I have met and interacted with a great number of people. During my last excursion I had a wonderful discussion with a young lady in MacLeods Scottish Shop as she helped me look up something that I, because of my addled 68-year-old brain, seemed to not recall with confidence. The information that I required was exactly as I thought, but I was uncertain. Once again, I found out that the Scottish part of my family is from the MacDonald clan. A wonderful young lady made that possible.

There are some things that I have questions about in Stratford and I would really relish the answers. I was very pleased to see the mural over the former Ellam's Restaurant on Ontario Street as well as the store that was removed next to the Record Shop. What is going to happen to these spaces? I also noticed that my favourite Scoopers was actually missing, building and all, and the former Festival Square seems to need a little extra help and attention. I used to love going there to all the small shops and I remember once there used to be an amazing restaurant on the third floor. Considering that

you must wait in line sometimes to get into Features, I wonder, would a restaurant do well up there again? I also have questions about the real estate and rental market. How are those areas doing in my favourite city? What is the best way to see about rentals? Just my thoughts and questions.

I sit down here and watch the devastation in our news where people and neighbours are pulled apart by division and hateful rhetoric. This morning, I was treated to our national leader telling a crowd of people that he "hated his adversaries and political opponents." He actually used the word and called them "weak and evil." It is no wonder that the impact of this type of speech provides the backdrop for nationwide tragedies. I do wonder what it would be like if everyone just took a deep breath and decided to be kind, and essentially accommodating. What if kindness was addressed rather than difference? What if our national leaders stepped up and did an about face and addressed all with a caring nature?

I am in such a deep funk about this at times that I find myself not relating to or even not watching what is happening to our country. I won't include it in conversations, and I avoid people who might even want to talk about it. I was invited to a political rally.

Didn't go. I was asked to make a statement in an interview. I refused. I was asked to sign up for a campaign. Didn't do it. What hurts the most is that there are people that I know and love that truly support this tyrannical government. It really does allow you to question your thoughts and allegiances to some family and friends. Sometimes it totally stops you from interacting with certain people. That seems to be the easy way out. That is the road that I have taken.

I have praised other democratic governments for having seamless, although sometimes muddled changes in leadership. Many times, these have led to some major deviations in the way the new government and its leaders look at the world, and their vision of how they thought it should be. I cannot recall, however, the exhausting and horrific rhetoric that is being spouted in our country by this new class of politicians. It is no wonder that my country is being compared to the hateful pre-fascist regime in Europe during the 1930s. These comparisons are being made by reputable think-tanks and educational conferences on government. It is just so sad. How did we allow this to happen? What do we do now?

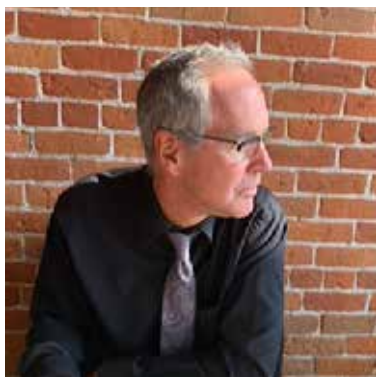
I bring all of this up because of what I have found in Stratford. I have found kind and caring

people. An acceptance and an acknowledgment of what it is like to be in a functioning society that ensures that difference is not a reason to hate or deride. I see a vast number of people from many different backgrounds living together and supporting one another regardless of nationality or ethnic group. I am certain that this is the way that it is all over most of Canada, but in Stratford it is special because your community also welcomes a wide range of people from all over America and the world to your community and mixes them in with your residents, business owners and culture through your amazing theatre.

I will be visiting once again in November, and I will be bringing my wife and a few friends with me to enjoy the experience. As I approach your fair city there will be a calming signal of normalcy settling into my brain. This time, as with all times, I will feel the welcome and the openness as we get closer. The sharing of the Stratford experience is now one of my most favorite things to do, and I do it a lot. With your wonderful welcomes, your kindness to all and your amazing culture, I think Americans could learn a lot from Stratford. I think I will keep sharing.

Please let me know how you feel at burk.patrick1956@gmail.com

THIS IS HOW IT GOES



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

I wake up. I'm alive. I don't take that for granted because in the blink of an eye, I remember – I might not be... alive that is, but for the grace of the gift I've been given. I'm acutely aware of that. I lie there for a moment. I'm grateful. The day begins.

On the way to work I go the long way, through the park, past the Festival Theatre grounds,

past the theatre where I've seen fully lived lives played out on the stage: tragic, jealous, ridiculous, sublime – into the trees, a deep verdant green in the summer months, a crisp white lace of wind-carved branches in winter. And everything I see in-between the time I leave to the time I arrive, is as involuntary and unbidden as the remaining seasons of springtime blossoms and autumn decline. And when I unlock the door of the funeral home and set my purpose and plans upon my desk – behind the labour, at any time – there is always a part of me that waits for the "call."

This is my work. It doesn't recognize time. I live inside it, because I am the one at the end of what is sometimes a long rite of passage for someone I don't know, where a new beginning blossoms for someone I may come to know – just a little. Or perhaps it is a beginning for

both. The one dead and the one living.

We sit at a table in their home, in their living room, outside on a deck or in the comfortable chairs of the funeral home... and we talk, trying to set things gently on the road to healing. Sometimes we laugh and sometimes we cry. And sometimes, I get the real gift of who that person we're talking about truly was, and still is, for the one sitting across from me. I feel such gratitude for that. I feel such privilege. I feel connected. And at some point, always, behind our conversation, I feel that out-of-body sensation that someone, one day, will be talking about me like this.

There are some, however, who are not ready for conversation. All they want is to have things taken care of. That's fair. For those who do, I know their healing will begin in the quiet moments alone, where silence

smothers words, when they are visited through a memory that they cannot and perhaps should not, escape. Blessings that show up in bits of sound and smell and any little thing that resonates. Regardless – I do what it is that I do, that many don't care to know about, but that some see the need for knowing.

And I think, when I die, what then? Who will speak of me? Who will laugh and who will cry? And then begins the inevitable thought: I hope I go before my daughter, before my partner. But I know all bets are off. That uncertainty positions me in the heart of living. That uncertainty grounds me in love, makes me so present. Grateful. And then... gift of gifts... in those rare moments, I'm not fearful any longer of the way life wants to manifest, what it wants to reveal – because all I want at those times is that very gratefulness, where death

walks with me as friend. The one who comes calling. The one who will open a door that I hope to be ready to walk through. And if that door is opened for me at a time unsuspecting – to hopefully know that I have loved greatly. And that is all that is needed.

And so, at the end of each day I lock up the funeral home, I move through the park, I'm charged or tired, I eat and talk with the ones I love and then rest again in the arms of that uncertainty of which I'm so familiar – that perhaps tomorrow, I will either open my eyes to the light of another day or open out the soul into another world.

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL.

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

Opinions

All you never knew about grass

JULIA SCHNEIDER

Times Columnist

Think grass (the stuff you walk on even though the signs tell you not to).

If you are like me, you were brought up to look at grass as something that was living (unlike astroturf), which meant you had to cut it. Cutting the lawn was a kind of civic responsibility, like taking out the garbage, shoveling the sidewalk or even using a Kleenex when you sneezed, something you did.

Though I sometimes revert to looking at grass that way, my learning curve took a dramatic upward turn at Garden Stratford's Sept. 8 meeting, where I heard ecologist Shawn Booth give his presentation on native grasses and sedges. This revealed that native grasses are much more than a lawn, and infinitely preferable. They are fundamental to the birds, the bees and the butterflies, and can be as beautiful as flowers.

They are "protein bars for birds" helping to provide some of the 300-500 caterpillars chickadees need every day to raise their

brood. They are also "natural bird feeders" during the winter months, as long as you don't cut them down in the fall. They are often overlooked, but provide colour, texture, movement and importantly food, as well as holding the soil together.

Booth, who is the co-author of *The Gardener's Guide to Native Plants*, continued to fill still common information gaps regarding his topic. How many people know that there are cool season grasses, that grow in the spring and fall, and also warm season grasses, that flourish in the summer? There are many types of both that you can choose from, according to what you need them for, and to do, and where.

When it comes to grasses here are a few he mentioned:

- Big bluestem is adaptable, drought tolerant and sun-loving, with a height of four to seven feet. This grass feeds 24 species!
- Sweetgrass: this Indigenous favorite (See Braiding Sweetgrass) is slow-growing, has a lovely scent and beautiful, wispy flower heads.
- Canada rye is a grass that will grow to five feet in sun or partial shade. It is

fast-growing and will cover the ground quickly. It self-seeds and "birds go crazy for them!"

- Little bluestem is a warm season, drought resistant grass which starts out blue then becomes golden in the fall. It has a showy and upright form, requires little maintenance and feeds songbirds.

- Indian grass is another warm season grass. It is tall, elegant and upright and produces red seedheads in the fall. Its foliage persists through the winter months.

These are just a few of the grasses; there are many more.

So, what is the difference between grasses and sedges? Sedges are grasses with edges!

As with grasses, there are many different varieties. Here are a few:

- Ebony sedge is a cool season sedge. It grows a foot high in sun or partial shade and adds brightness to shady spots.
- Mace sedge is another cool season sedge. It has a clumping habit with spiky seedheads that feed birds and skipper butterflies.
- Palm sedge has a refined look, grows

up to three feet high, and "plays well with other plants."

- Oak sedge likes shade, dry to average soil and can handle moderate foot traffic.

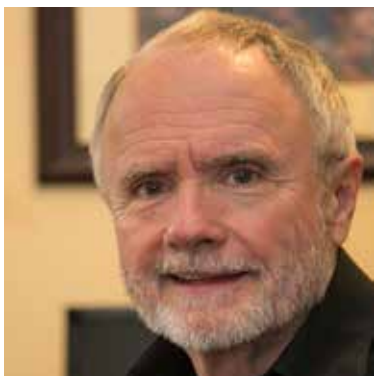
- Side oats gram (or sedge) needs full sun and well-draining soil. It is a hardy, drought tolerant plant that is excellent for erosion control and meadow landscapes. It provides food for birds and is a host for skipper butterflies.

Booth concluded his talk by reminding his audience that grasses and sedges are "far more than just green background," and invaluable to the environment. The website he works with, inourgarden@gmail.com, features over a hundred varieties – at least one for every location and need.

And so, go forth, plant your native grasses/sedges of choice and remember: you don't need to – indeed, shouldn't – cut them!

The next Garden Stratford presentation, *The World of Culinary Mushrooms*, will take place at the Army Navy and Air Force Veterans building at 151 Lorne Ave. E, on Oct. 6 at 7 p.m.

Musings: The Birth of Helena



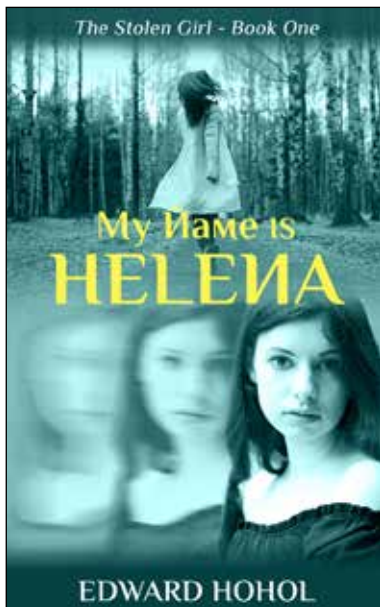
MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Columnist

You might think that Stratford author Ed Hohol, a second generation Ukrainian-Canadian, would have little interest in reading or, for that matter, writing a book. "I was rarely read to as a child," he says, "My father was way too busy and my mother wasn't comfortable enough with English to read books aloud."

His father, however, had a bookcase full of novels and reference books in a corner of the living room which Ed gravitated toward: "The books themselves were what first fascinated me, holding them, looking at the dust jackets and flipping through the pages. They were full of tantalizing promise."

While growing up in his small



hometown of Barrhead, Alta., Ed haunted the local library and the magazine and paperback rack of the pharmacy. He was interested in everything; the genre didn't matter. It was the idea of all the stories they contained that fascinated him.

By the age of nine, Ed was writing his own stories. At the age of 12, he wrote two self-bound mystery novels. A fellow student acted as an "agent" of sorts, and distributed them to other students to read.

Throughout his life Ed has devoured a wide variety of lit-

erature, from Dostoevsky, Dickens, Austen and Shelley to Doris Lessing, John LeCarre and Margaret Atwood. But it was investigative journalist Victor Malarek's hair-raising book about the global sex trade, *The Natashas*, that inspired him to write his first novel.

This summer, after seven years of early morning rising, writing and rewriting (which is "99 per cent of the process!"), Ed published his first novel, a page-turner entitled: *My Name is Helena: Book One of The Stolen Girl*, the harrowing tale of a fifteen year old Ukrainian girl who is torn away from her family and sold to sex traffickers.

The lead character, Helena, as well as her family and her life in Ukraine, came to Ed fully formed out of his research. "Her name was born with her," says Ed. "She was just there, saying, 'Write about me.'"

His fiction is based on an all-too-real modern global tragedy, which Ed researched via published first-hand accounts and books (*The Whistleblower* by Kathryn Bolkovac, *The Johns* by Victor Malarek), documentaries, movies and internet research. "My ethnicity is very important to me," he says, "The new wave of global trafficking

investigated by Malarek involved east European girls and women, and I responded strongly to that as a Ukrainian."

The prevalence of sex trafficking is difficult to determine but, by some estimates, 4.8 million people are victims at any given time, with the average age of entry into this slavery placed at thirteen years of age. According to a United Nations report, only one out of 10 victims are rescued. No data is available for how many manage to escape.

At times brutally vivid in its descriptions, the novel follows Helena from a loving, peaceful home life to a hellish, transient existence under the harsh control of international sex traffickers.

Some people have questioned the unflinching depiction of violence in the novel. To this Ed replies, "You can't tell a story about sex trafficking honestly, with integrity, if you soft-pedal the violence. That would be a betrayal of Helena and every other girl who has been victimized. I'd be just another person keeping it in the shadows, perpetuating a state of willful ignorance. Not one detail in the book is gratuitous."

When you read this novel, you will come to know Helena and feel for her as though she exists

and, in a sense, she does – in the form of her real-life counterparts. Ed's writing is always mindful of her humanity and her reality as a person. She is never objectified. In spite of being trafficked, she is never actually owned by any of her oppressors.

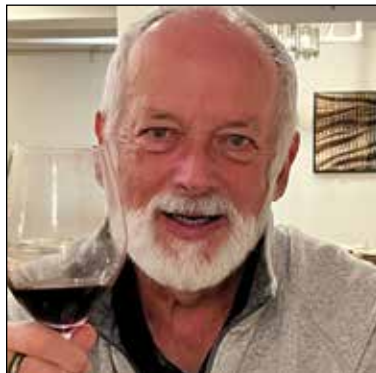
Ed hopes the story, and the characters in it, will completely engage the reader's imagination, emotions and intellect: "The payoff would be that the story stays with them and makes them think about what happened, and is still happening, to these girls."

My Name is Helena: Book One of The Stolen Girl, by Edward Hohol, is available now through Amazon.ca in paperback and Kindle formats. Book two, *Helena in the Wasteland*, is slated for release this fall. A year from now, watch for *Helena, Long Journey Home*.

Mark Hertzberger is a former social services supervisor, human resources manager, conflict mediator, and literacy practitioner. He has since freed his mind and now writes poetry and occasional opinionated columns. Mark has lived in Perth County for 27 years, the last 12 of which have been in Stratford where he resides with his wife, novelist Yvonne Hertzberger.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT GRANTHAVEN.COM

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: History, hurting and healing



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

As soon as I was born, I was taken from my birth mother and put into foster care. Three months after I was born, I was taken to the home of Rose and Ralph Knowles, who adopted me.

And right now, I can hear you ask, "What the heck does this have to do with travel?"

My answer: I have always known those facts about my life – although only in the past few years have I discovered the identity of my birth mother and met seven siblings I never knew about. But knowing that I had been given up for adoption has always been part of my life, and has shaped who I am.

"But," you say, "remember the travel part?"

Yes. One of the most impactful destinations I have ever visited is the National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada, in Portage la Prairie, Man. This is not a destination that entertains; it's one that informs, educates, enlightens and changes you from the inside out.

I have often heard people wonder why Indigenous people seem so focused on residential schools. It is not rare to hear the phrase, "That was in the past. Can we just move on?"

And that's where my birth story



The sculpture "Healing Shoes" by Genevieve Lavasseur features ceramic shoes made from mud from four residential school sites in Manitoba.

There are 152 shoes – one for every year from the signing of the first treaty to the year the artist created the work, intended "to honour lives lost and lived" at the institutions.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

connects, for me, at least, because those circumstances have been a real, living part of me all my life and my story of loss is pretty insignificant compared to the tragedies that residential schools brought upon thousands of Indigenous Canadians.

And their story is not ancient history. Touring the Residential School Museum, we were reminded the last residential school closed only 29 years ago! Most of you reading this were adults while the government of Canada and a number of churches were still operating institutions that were founded, according to the deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, "to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada." Residential schools were intended as a means to steal the identity of all Indigenous Canadians to "assimilate" each and every one, in the words of Prime Minister Sir John A. McDonald.

Compare those stated intentions

with the mission statement of today's Residential School Museum: "A place where people can learn, share, heal and move forward." The museum and its staff are committed to that process.

Our guide was Farah Houle. She led us through small rooms in the museum – which was once the Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School founded in 1916 and in operation until 1988. Each room contains exhibits that reveal the unfolding history – often synonymous with "unfolding tragedy" – of the people of the First Nations.

I learned that from the 1800s until 1951, residents on reserves were required to have an official government permit simply to leave the reserve. I learned that the massacre of buffalo was not just a ridiculous blood sport, but an organized effort to cause the extinction of native people.

I saw pictures of kids being trans-

ported in cattle trucks from their homes to residential schools. Houle described the rounding up of native kids as "pick and go."

One display case held three straps of different weights, all used to administer punishment by school officials. The least heavy was for children eight years and younger. The many reasons for such punishment included speaking their native language or talking to a sibling. In fact, our guide said, "If you spoke your language, you got a pin through your tongue."

"They were taught not to love each other," Houle said, which laid the foundation for very troubled lives.

A very telling display is found in the dining room exhibit, where the table for priests and nuns was laden with fish, meat, fruit and vegetables, while the children got oatmeal and, added Houle, "They had to eat it even if there were bugs in it."

Perhaps the most shocking exhibit

is a simple, empty baby's crib. Houle explained this exhibit is in memory of babies born to young girls in the school, babies fathered by priests and teachers, babies who were then murdered to hide the evidence and whose bodies were incinerated.

What is truly amazing about the museum is, in spite of the horrors on display, there is an overriding invitation to find hope. But first, we need to learn, then to heal, only then to move forward. The exhibits include artworks that capture both suffering and joy.

We thought the best example of the need to know the past to move to a positive present was our guide herself.

"I was raised by a residential school survivor and I wondered why he didn't say, 'I love you,' " she said. "Now, I know why."

"People need to know what happened. I'm going to continue to tell the story of those who never made it home alive."

And while Houle said that part of the story is "how religion was forced on the children," she also shared that she continues to be a practicing Christian – to me, an incredible, living example of forgiveness and faith.

Clearly, the Residential School Museum is not a destination you will visit if you're looking for entertainment, but this is a place that will change your life more than a thousand visits to Canada's Wonderland. And, as a guy who has discovered how one's personal, childhood history impacts the rest of your life, I could not recommend it more highly.

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.



Farah Houle, our guide at the National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada.



The empty baby crib is in memory of all the babies born – and disposed of – in Canadian residential schools.



The museum was once the Portage La Prairie Indian Residential School, now designated as a place of healing.

Riddles

Why did the pumpkin go to the fair?
Because it wanted to be a little gourd-geous!

What do you call a cow at the fall fair?
A moo-sician at the barn dance.

Why did the scarecrow win a prize at the fair?
Because he was outstanding in his field.

What's a pie's favorite ride at the fall fair?
The Whip-cream!

Why did the corn stalks bring tickets to the fair?
Because they wanted to see the maize-ing attractions.

What do you call a sheep at the fair's talent show?
A baa-ritone singer.

Why was the Ferris wheel so good at telling stories?
Because it always went full circle.

What's a chicken's favorite game at the fair?
Egg toss!

Why did the apple pie sit out the rides?
It didn't want to crumble.

What's the most popular music at the fall fair?
Hip-hop...scotch.

Sudoku

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Solutions on page 27

Pet of the week



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Bourbon is a big-hearted, large-breed dog who has been waiting over 180 days for his forever home. This outdoorsy adventurer loves long walks, tracking, and scent games! Bourbon is best suited for an active family who can keep up with his energy and provide plenty of enrichment. Though he's enthusiastic and sometimes talkative, he also enjoys winding down for couch time. With his big personality, love for adventure, and loyal nature, Bourbon could be the perfect trail companion and cuddle buddy in one. Adopt Bourbon today at kwsphumane.ca!



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

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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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

ROAST BEEF DINNER

Orange Lodge Harmony
Tuesday September 30th
3178 Perth Line 26, Perth East
\$30 roast beef dinner 5-7 p.m.
Call for tickets 519-274-0216

TROPHY X DREAM WEAVERS: STORYTELLING THAT TRANSFORMS US

Saturday, October 4; 3:00 - 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 5; 1- 2:30 p.m.
290 Downie St, Stratford Grand Trunk site — green space across from the bus station
Step into a circle of light and story. Trophy X Dream Weavers transforms Stratford's historic Grand Trunk site into a glowing village of ten intimate tents, each one home to a powerful tale of transformation, hope, and the dreams that shape who we are. This is a free, all-ages event.
Email: contact@provocation.ca
Website: www.provocation.ca/2025-events--stratford

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday, Oct. 6; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.
Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford
Featured Presentation: "Secrets of Successful Garden Design", Elizabeth Spedaliere, Owner of Blue Beech Design and Tri-County Master Gardener
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, October 7, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.
93 Morgan St., Stratford
Speaker – Lisa Harper from the United Way.
211 and how it assists us day-to-day
Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome.
519-273-4327

PROBUS CLUB OF STRATFORD WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

October 8, 2025 at 10:00 to noon
The Army, Navy, Air Force facility
151 Lorne Ave. E in Stratford
Hear guest speakers, explore new interests, take tours
Fun and Fellowship in Retirement

BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Thursday Oct. 23
Legion 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford
Bring your friends out for a fun and tasty evening, supporting your local legion. No tickets needed, just show up! The cost is \$13 each or 2 for \$25. Take-out is available if preordered from Dave Hartney at 519-703-6544.

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY CIRCUIT BOOK FAIR

Saturday, Oct. 25; 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.
Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street, Woodstock Ontario N4S 1C7
Free Admission & Parking
Stop in and buy some stamps and meet fellow stamp collectors. About 8 participating stamp clubs.
Contact: Don Eaton dhfe@silomail.com
Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRE

Friday Oct. 17 and Friday Nov. 21.
Legion 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford
Doors open at 6 pm, play starts at 6:30 pm. Register your team of 2 people for \$20. Prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place.
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1	6	9	8	7	3	2	5	4
9	3	6	1	5	7	4	2	8
8	4	1	2	6	9	3	7	5
2	5	7	4	3	8	1	9	6
6	7	2	9	4	1	5	8	3
3	1	5	7	8	6	9	4	2
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