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"There be dragons" this year for local school boards, chair warns trustees

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Amid rumours that the trustee-system will soon become a thing of the past, trustee Michael Bannerman, chair of the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB)'s board of trustees, warned that uncharted territory is before them.

"Mapmakers, when they created maps, they would have uncharted territory and they put all the design in the mountains and they would get out there and they usually draw a picture of a dragon and write 'There be dragons,'" Bannerman said. "... Who knows, right? Uncharted territory. And I feel like, as we go into this school year, there be dragons.

"We're heading into some uncharted territory. And it is an interesting climate to be a school board trustee."

Days after the return to school for students and teachers across the province, Minister of Education Paul Calandra teased through various media channels the end of the trustee system – spurned by recent scrutiny into spending at the Thames Valley District School Board, the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board and the Toronto District School Board.

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With their garlic clove hats on and bundles of the "Garlic Chop" on hand, Katarina Vrbaneck and mom Nancy Laslavic pose at this year's Stratford Kiwanis Garlic Festival. On Sept. 6 and 7, vendors, growers and shoppers gathered at the Stratford Rotary Complex for the annual festival, celebrating locally grown garlic. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

No homeless shelter this winter, after public urges council to do "something"

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While many delegates at the Sept. 8 Stratford city council meeting agreed that the Rotary Complex was not a good location for a shelter, nearly all of them acknowledged that something must be done.

Council and the public had a lengthy debate on the potential for a temporary homeless shelter this winter at the

complex, after Coun. Geza Wordofa put forward the motion. As he said, it was about taking responsibility.

"We are lucky to live in one of the best cities," Wordofa said. "We are so lucky ... Through (the) chair, I'll ask you (with) respect, who is taking responsibility ... for our homelessness?"

"We all are," Mayor Martin Ritsma answered. "We are, and I oppose when you say it has to be council. We have agencies in our community that serve our most mar-

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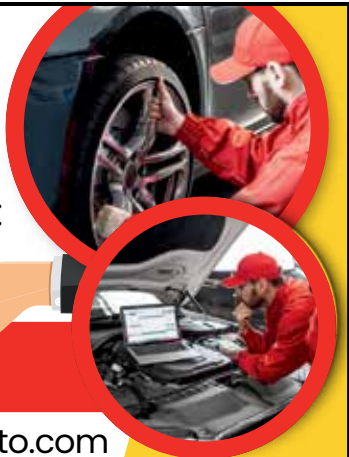
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No homeless shelter this winter, after public urges council to do “something”

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

ginalized individuals. We have a social services department ... Last winter, on a nightly basis, I would call the director and say, ‘How are we doing for housing?’ And on a nightly basis, she would say, ‘Anybody that wants to have shelter tonight can have shelter tonight.’ So when you say, who’s responsible? It frequently falls on the shoulders of our community, our social services and their amazing staff, their outreach staff, the staff that does the work during the day and during the night.

“But what we’re looking at is finding long-term solutions.”

The desire for long-term solutions was the primary reason why many councillors denied putting together an emergency shelter. Citing the ever-increasing burden municipalities face and the limited options they have to raise revenue, many said the money is better spent elsewhere, like supportive housing, housing with social supports built around it so that those needing it can be permanently housed in a space that is their own.

Ritsma shared dollar figures provided by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) for emergency overnight stays: \$32 a night in a hospital, \$14 a night in a prison, \$6 a night in a shelter and \$4 a night in supportive housing.

Coun. Mark Hunter added that it is a peculiar tight rope that municipal councils walk. The only money they can reliably generate is through property taxes.

“So every dollar we collect makes housing a little bit less affordable,” Hunter reasoned. “We walk this delicate balance of trying to get the most value for our money and to deliver a quality product for as lit-

tle as possible. That’s what we do across the board, or try to anyway. The evidence we have in front of us from experts is that shelter is not an efficient use of that money, but that putting the money into a longer-term solution is.”

“\$2.1 billion is being spent by municipalities throughout the province,” Coun. Larry McCabe added. “Homelessness is a provincial responsibility. Instead of spending \$618 million to pay up foreign brewers before the last election, the current government could have allocated some of those resources to municipalities to deal with the homelessness issue. ... It is time for the federal government and the provincial government to step up ... but to imagine that small municipalities are going to be able to compete with resources to solve this issue? I think is dishonest and will not actually get to the solution that we want.”

Coun. Lesley Biehn added that there are non-financial reasons as to why supportive housing is a better solution than a shelter. Having been to municipalities that have operated a shelter system and municipalities that have operated a supportive housing system, the latter is clearly preferable.

“When I walk out of it all, I want the taxpayer dollars – that are limited – to go toward the permanent housing that creates dignity for the human beings over there,” Biehn said. “... It’s permanent, it’s safe, it’s warm and it’s dignified.”

That isn’t to mention just how non-temporary a shelter would be. As Coun. Taylor Briscoe pointed out, “there’s no such thing as a temporary shelter.” In Canada, housing is a human right and once a shelter is put in place, legally it cannot be removed unless there is adequate support. It would be permanent, a reality that has been seen in other municipalities.

The dream of a winter shelter was seconded for discussion by Briscoe; however, the motion was defeated with only Wordofa supporting it.

Despite the sentiments of council, many members of the public in the gallery

point blank asked for a shelter and were disappointed with council’s decision. While nearly all had acknowledged that the Rotary Complex was not suitable – being on the edge of town, having a lack of showers, far from social supports, and needing extra security for the users of the complex to name a few – residents expressed that anything was better than nothing.

“The provincial and federal governments are not coming to save us,” Davis said. “... We are failing. What we are doing is not working, and we need to increase capacity quickly as an emergency measure ... The argument we have a plan to make, a plan to build something that will have 10 to 20 per cent affordable with shovels in the ground in two years, built in six years, is no longer an acceptable answer. We need a solution.”

Citing a 2018 article published by CTV News Kitchener, Davis pointed out the strong similarity between then and now when it came to the rhetoric of why a shelter is not a solution.

“We are no longer in the position to not have a shelter,” Davis stressed.

“The message I am receiving from the audience is that council does not want to have a shelter,” Mike Sullivan said. “That having a shelter is not the preferred solution. The preferred solution is this piecemeal approach and maybe collaboration with the church, and maybe we’ll make sure people aren’t unhoused in the coldest days, but we don’t want to have a shelter here in Stratford. It seems to be the message. And I think given that seven years ago, you had that same discussion, and nothing happened, and it’s just gotten worse. There isn’t more supportive housing. I think you got to bite the bullet and we need a shelter here in Stratford.”

Later in the evening, Kim McElroy, the director of social services, responded to Sullivan’s claim that the city is piecemealing its approach to the homeless.

“We’re talking about human dignity,” McElroy said. “We have to look at every individual and what their wants and their needs are. ... Here’s the reality, we have to ask these individuals, ‘What type of housing do you want?’ And why are there people on the street right now? Because some people do not want to be in emergency accommodations. There’s many

people that don’t find human dignity in shelters. So it’s about long-term solutions, and it’s supportive housing.”

While a shelter was ultimately not pursued, the possibility of overnight warming centres was discussed at length. On behalf of the Stratford Council of Churches, Trevor Biehn, Bruno Hacquebard and Suzi Higgins shared that work has begun amongst their membership to operate warming centres at the behest of the mayor.

Working in tandem with other organizations, Not One More Night, as the project is being called, means to “explore where the gaps and the unmet needs may still exist,” with the mission to make sure that no individual in Stratford is without a safe, warm place to sleep during winter nights.

Work started in 2024, when the idea was first presented, and continued well into 2025 as the council of churches investigated what needed to be in place for the centres to be operational.

The council’s congregations will be presented with the proposal to formally ratify the plan on Sept. 17. Afterwards, after a motion by Coun. Bonnie Henderson and Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach, the project organizers will meet with the anti-homeless taskforce that is operated by the city’s social services department.

Mid-way through the debate, Wordofa called the housing crisis and the amount of people in the streets a “disaster.”

“Very shameful for our community, very shameful for our city staff. We’re doing (a) good job, but we don’t want somebody dying.”

Coun. Brad Beatty seemingly took offence to his comment. Later in the meeting he reminded council and the public that “words matter.”

“Words matter and tonight I’m a little pissed off,” Beatty said. “I’ve heard people say shameful. I’ve heard people say embarrassed. I’ve heard so many things that are downtrodding (sic) our community and our staff ... This is a respectful workplace, and we started tonight with that respectful workplace policy, and I believe that we’ve gone a little bit too far here today.”

Wordofa promptly apologized to Beatty, expressing his appreciation for staff and their work.

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Editorial

Winner and waster, forever



CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Editor

It isn't often that I can apply my degree in English literature to what I do in my career. Funny enough, even in a city like Stratford, having a working knowledge of the collected works of William Shakespeare isn't helpful when reporting on local news. Go figure.

That being said, there are occasions when I look back on what I read (or didn't read) during my studies and feel grateful that I had the opportunities I did. Each

year, around this time, is one such recurring instance.

Every year when I cover the lengthy and arduous city budget deliberations I invariably am reminded of "Winner and Waster."

"Winner and Waster" is a 14th century poem written in Middle English, that in between language connecting the German-like Old English and our modern language today. In the poem, two figures conveniently named Winner and Waster entreat King Edward III to give judgement on their positions. Winner represents financial conservatism, arguing that it is irresponsible to spend money so wantonly, while Waster represents financial liberalism, arguing that it is their fiduciary and moral responsibility to spend money on the members of society today.

Each gives surprisingly relatable arguments in the short poem, especially given that it was published over 700 years ago in a completely different political

system. Whether it's Waster telling Winner, "Let the people and poor have part of your silver;/ For if you went far and wide, and watched what goes on,/ You would weep for pity at the number of poor," or Winner replying with, "You destroy all my goods with your strife and violence,/ With feasting and wassailing on winter nights,/ With extravagant spending and arrogant pride./ There is no source of wealth flowing through your hands/ That is not given and granted before you have got it," it almost sounds like Question Period at Parliament Hill.

But the kicker, in my opinion, is that "Winner and Waster" survives in only one damaged manuscript, which is cut off right before the king gives his endorsement. We don't know what the poet intended with this work or who was right and who was wrong. Thus, Winner and Waster are doomed to forever debate an answerless question, repeat-

ing the same arguments age after age.

And so are we, it seems.

Since "Winner and Waster" was published whole countries, political systems, and ways of thinking about our world and our governance have sprung up and gone by the wayside – yet we still debate year after year whether it is moral to spend money or save money as a society. It's more complicated than that, of course, but each year I feel like it becomes that simple. Last Monday was just one such example.

City council just had a lengthy debate on a potential shelter at the Stratford Rotary Complex. A core part of that debate was money. Frankly, the city just doesn't have enough. And if it can scrounge some money together, should it spend those funds on a band-aid solution to a problem that needs a mountain of money and time and care to solve? Council evidently didn't think so. Only one out of the 11 members

of council was in favour of it.

The world is more complicated than a 500-line poem would have us believe, true, and in next year's budget (as in all budgets) there will be line items where money is saved and where money is spent – regardless if there is a shelter included or not – but I am always in awe of the fact that each year the municipality, the province, the feds, all come to the table spending *so much money*, and yet never enough money at the same time. It seems that we are Winner and Waster both, with all the problems associated but none of the benefits.

If only we had a few more lines from that poem, so we could hear the king solve everyone's problems and we can all get back to liking each other again as a country – or better yet that the manuscript survived in its entirety.

Oh? You want to hear my opinion, my solution to the problem? Well, I think

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

As someone who spent her entire working life in community newspapers, I was so pleased to see the Stratford Times while in Stratford on Friday.

Most of my career was with an independent paper, The

Alliston Herald, which was sold to Metroland in 1996.

As I am sure you know, many newspapers, including The Herald are gone, dead - not Monty Python dead - really dead.

I enjoyed reading the Times and wish you every success.

Catherine Haller
Simcoe County

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Balance between residents and tourists front and centre during debate on Albert Street inn

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Is Stratford for visitors or for residents? Can it be for both?

While not expressly discussed at the Stratford city council meeting on Sept. 8, those questions were perhaps at the heart of the debate on an inn designation for 220 Albert St.

The Albert Street triplex is owned by Sally Headley, who runs several “mid- to long-term” short-term accommodation units on Ontario Street, which 220 Albert St. backs onto. She wanted to zone the property as mixed-use to allow the property to be properly licenced with the city as an inn.

As Headley’s agent, Richard Kelly-Ruetz of GSP Group Inc., had explained, her business Sally’s Place offers a niche service in the city, offering short-term accommodations that focus on long-term stays, such as tourists making a longer stay, workers for local factories that need more than just a hotel room or residents that are doing extensive renovations in their homes, to name a few examples. Due to the city’s licencing bylaws, she would not be able to run her business as intended since she is an American citizen

and must live in the United States for periods of time (short-term accommodators must live at the unit they rent out).

At a public meeting for the site on June 23, many neighbours expressed concern about what the designation would mean for their street. They had issues with the “precedent setting” decision, the “commercial traffic” that will threaten the neighbourhood, the potential for a through-driveway to be constructed that connects Albert Street and Ontario Street and property decisions the owner has already made, like the removal of a mature tree and the dividing fence between the three properties.

Sue Satchell, an employee of Sally’s Place, spoke at the most recent meeting to assuage some of those concerns.

“We have respectfully considered the concerns of the surrounding neighbours and city staff and want to address these issues and bring forth solutions for your consideration,” Satchell said. “We want to work with the city and neighbours, not against you.”

Satchell said that no loud parties or disturbances have been at Headley’s properties, many travellers would be walking throughout the city (meaning that traffic may be less busy from tourists) and that



The triplex at 220 Albert St. was denied a zone change that would allow the building to be licenced as a three-unit inn.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Headley would install a coded gate for the through-driveway connecting Albert Street and Ontario Street, to name a few points.

Despite Headley and Satchell’s plans, many councillors could not get over losing three rental units in favour of short-term accommodations.

“This is the only part that I’m really opposed to, is the fact of taking a three (unit) apartment building and wanting to make it short-term,” Coun. Bonnie Henderson said. “... To lose three more apartments, I just can’t get my head around that. I have no other problem with all the other stuff.”

Coun. Jo Dee Burbach pointed out that the property would not need a zone change to operate two of the three units as those “mid- to long-term” stays, so long as they were 28 days or longer. The third unit, if she is residing there as she is now, could be used as a short-term rental, even if she was living there for a limited period.

“I feel like this zoning change is unnecessary for most of the use that’s intended by Sally,” Burbach said. “My concern – I have two concerns. One is that this property isn’t always going to belong to Sally, so somebody could come in and (host) short-term rentals all year round, and then we could have completely different guests ... Who knows? Nobody can guarantee the type of guest that’s going to rent these short-term rentals. The other issue that I

have is that this does set a precedent for other residential areas. Then other people will be asking, ‘Why can’t I have my three-unit or four-unit property turned into short-term rentals?’ And that’s exactly what we’re trying to prevent.”

Coun. Larry McCabe saw things differently, however. While apartment units and housing in general is greatly needed in the city, the tourism economy is hugely important to Stratford’s prosperity and it cannot be neglected. The units Headley would provide with 220 Albert St. would benefit the city’s housing stock, by his reckoning.

“It’s the unnecessary complexity that we’ve built into our bylaws here and our zoning that makes no sense for a community that needs way more flexibility in its solutions,” McCabe said.

Following the staff recommendation, council voted to deny the zone change. McCabe and Coun. Brad Beatty were the only ones in favour of granting the change. As Beatty said, reiterating a point made earlier by Coun. Taylor Briscoe, neither side of the argument is wrong or right.

“We’re splitting hairs here,” Beatty said. “... We are blessed that we have this challenge, that we have such a great economic development team ... that we have a tourism (industry) that needs these spaces. But we also have residents that need housing.”

This year “there be dragons,” trustee warns school board

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

In a statement posted to his Facebook page on Sept. 5, Calandra said that he has been clear: “The current school board governance structure is based on an outdated system that needs to be modernized. Our focus is to provide students with better outcomes and certainty, and we are looking to finalize governance changes as soon as possible.”

At the AMDSB board of trustees meeting on Sept. 9, much of the conversation surrounded the fate of the trustee system, with many around the conference table wondering where that left them. Trustee Robert Hunking wanted to have a meeting before the next one scheduled on Oct. 28 so that trustees could discuss the matter at length.

“It’s a provincial thing,” trustee Sheila Armstrong-Marshall replied. “I don’t understand what our role is to get involved with that ... Our hands are tied.”

“I think the danger of a meeting like that is we’re crossing over from our role which is public interest and discussing our personal interests,” trustee Jospeh Cohen agreed.

Vice chair Patricia Smith argued that it was in the public interest.

“Having spoken to a number of par-

ents who are very upset about it – and to the point where they’re considering writing letters and protesting it, because they want their voices to be heard and that is one way trustees work is to ensure that the public’s voices are heard,” Smith said. “So if the trustees are not here, that is a loss. And so if the people who were supposed to represent the parents are expressing that concern, to me, that automatically becomes a trustee interest.”

Ultimately, the board passed a motion to allow the chair, vice-chair and director of education Graham Shantz to schedule a special meeting should the need arise. Until then, Bannerman urged the trustees to focus on their responsibilities.

“We are in our boat,” Bannerman said. “We can’t control the wind but we can adjust our sails. ... My challenge to us this year as trustees would be that we would focus on things we have control over. Let’s be great trustees, let’s remind our communities, the schools that we work with, that we represent, why trustees are important, why we are essential, why we do play an important role ... I think its going to be an interesting year.”

“You think it’ll be a year? Three months,” joked Cohen.

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Tributes pour in for world-renowned Stratford resident Graham Greene

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stratford residents will have noticed the Canadian Flag at city hall flying half-mast this past week. As Mayor Martin Ritsma explained at the city council meeting on Sept. 8, it was in honour of resident Graham Greene.

"Before we hear the land acknowledgement," Ritsma said. "I want to take a moment and share the passing of Graham Greene, a resident of Stratford and a globally renowned actor ... We're proud to hang the flag at half-mast in memory of Graham."

Greene was a legendary actor. Born at Six Nations Reserve, he was Oneida, the son of John and Lillian Greene, and grew up in southwestern Ontario. In recent years he was a Stratford resident, where he died on Sept. 1 at the age of 73.

Most notably, Greene was nominated for an Academy Award in 1991 for his role of Kicking Bird in *Dances with Wolves*. His film credits include *Thunderheart*, *Maverick* and *The Green Mile*. He also appeared in a number of television series, including *Lonesome Dove*, *Murder She Wrote*, *Northern Exposure*, *The Red Green Show*, *Being Erica*, *Defiance*, *Longmire*, *Riverdale*, *American Gods*, *Goliath*, *Reservation Dogs* and *The Last of Us*.

Graham was a member of the Order of Canada and had numerous lifetime achievement awards under his belt.

Since the announcement of his passing, tributes from across the world have flooded social media recognizing his generational talent.

Kevin Costner, who starred opposite Greene in *Dances with Wolves*, said on



The late Graham Greene as Shylock in the Stratford Festival's 2007 production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Since the announcement of Greene's passing earlier this month, tributes have been pouring in for the legendary actor. (RICHARD BAIN PHOTO)

Instagram that a few things came to mind when remembering his co-star.

"I think of how willing he was to learn the Lakota language," Costner said. "I think of my joy when I heard that his work on the film was recognized with an Academy Awards nomination ... He was a master at work and a wonderful human being."

On actor Ethan Hawke's Facebook page,

he said that he had the pleasure of working with Greene earlier this year in the upcoming FX series *The Lowdown*, in which Greene will appear posthumously in when the series begins airing on Sept. 23.

"*Dances with Wolves*, *Thunderheart*, *Reservation Dogs*, to name a few," the post reads. "He has always possessed extraordinary grace, wisdom, wit and depth."

Working with him was shockingly fun. He improvised brilliantly and infused every moment with spontaneity and humour. I even got to break bread with him – and share some fries. I am shocked to hear of his passing. Blessed travels, friend."

Gov. Gen. Mary Simon, who presented the Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement to Greene just a few months ago, called him a legendary actor.

"He brought depth, dignity and authenticity to every character he portrayed, delivering countless unforgettable performances," Simon stated.

Some of those unforgettable performances were right here in the city he would call home. In 2007 he played Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*.

"As Shylock he brought a painful dignity and sharp intellect to the part," artistic director Antoni Cimolino recalled in a social media post. "From the moment he entered, we knew we were in the presence of a star. His Lennie was heartbreaking in his child-like innocence. We were completely won over by his simple warmth and consequently devastated as the play progressed."

"Despite his fame and many accomplishments Graham as a colleague was genuinely humble and friendly – and he loved to share a laugh with his fellow players," Cimolino stated. "He was generous in sharing his experience and knowledge of the skills of our craft with young actors. He brought with him a bigger artistic world but also a recognition that staying true to oneself is essential to a performer."

"We have lost a brilliant actor, a wonderful neighbour and a good friend."

Veteran's Dinner recognizes local veterans and highlights importance of community support

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch 8 will host its annual Veterans' Dinner on Friday, Sept. 19 at 6 p.m. at the Legion

Hall.

The dinner, held exclusively for veterans, their spouses and caregivers, is meant to recognize their service to the country.

This year's guest speaker is Perth East firefighter Jean-Guy Poirier, who lives with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Poirier founded PTSD: The Truth Behind the Smile in 2017 after PTSD forced him to step away from the Shakespeare volunteer fire department.

At the dinner, he will share his personal story and provide information on support available to veterans within the community.

Legion member Frank J. Mathieson said veterans in the community receive a personal invitation to attend.

"We want to be sure to acknowledge them with a personal invite and be sure to make everyone feel included," he said.

Mathieson added it's important to recognize local veterans throughout the year, not only on Remembrance Day or special occasions.

"There are several local veterans who

are homeless or living in poverty within our community, some who do not have family support to help with everyday tasks and others who could use a helping hand," he said. "It's essential for the community to be aware that we haven't forgotten about our veterans, and to remember to honour them every day throughout the year. What we're trying to drive across is that the veterans are there 365 days a year."

While financial support through the Poppy Fund is one way to help, Mathieson said there are many other practical options.

"You could offer to give rides to appointments. During spring, summer and fall, you could help with lawn care. In the winter, you could help with shovelling snow or even go get groceries for them. It doesn't always need to be monetary – it's just giving that helping hand to show your support."

Community members interested in learning more about how to support local veterans are encouraged to contact the Stratford Legion at stratfordlegion008@gmail.com or 519-271-4540.

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Aunt Gail's Taxi owner Gail Cossey reflects after five years in business

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

In spite of facing challenges that come with opening a new business during the COVID-19 pandemic, Aunt Gail's Taxi owner Gail Cossey was determined to let her business flourish.

Aunt Gail's Taxi opened in 2020 and is celebrating its five-year business anniversary, along with accomplishments like building a strong team of drivers.

"It's hard to believe it's been five years already. It went very quickly. It feels really good. It's very exciting," Cossey said.

Aunt Gail's Taxi is the number one rated cab company on Google and was nominated for the service award from the Stratford Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards in 2024.

It took a while for Cossey to find the right drivers for her taxi company partly because it was difficult to find people willing to work with the public during the pandemic restrictions. Also, Cossey focuses on customer service and wants to ensure that her staff are customer-oriented as well.

"I need people that like to be working with the public and that are friendly and outgoing and that can assist the clients with their walkers and groceries, that sort of thing," she said. "The first couple of years was tough trying to get the right

drivers."

During the restrictions, Cossey designed a plan which included the plastic shields between the driver and passengers to mitigate COVID spread while ensuring that health care workers could attend work. Protocol also included wiping down machines after each transaction, doors and seatbelts, sanitizing and wearing masks.

"We never had a driver that came down with COVID while we had the shields in," Cossey said.

She also got a liquor license for Aunt Gail's Taxi so the cab company could keep the company going and deliver orders from the LCBO and Beer Store to customer's porches. Aunt Gail's Taxi also delivers takeout orders, groceries, packages and flowers to customers' doorsteps.

"I really feel it was the deliveries and us having the shields that made us through our first full year," Cossey said.

Aunt Gail's Taxi ensures those unable to afford their own car can have access to transportation, that bar-goers have a safe ride home and that seniors can get around the city and maintain their independence.

"That is very rewarding about my business – is that I know we're making a difference by touching people's lives that way," she said.

To book a ride with Aunt Gail's Taxi, call 519-276-2899.

End of U.S. duty-free threshold leaves Stratford makers facing tough choices

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Stratford makers and small business owners who rely on American customers are bracing for big changes after the U.S. ended its duty-free "de minimis" exemption on Aug. 29.

For years, Canadians could ship goods worth up to US\$800 across the border without duties or taxes. That changed on Aug. 29, when nearly all parcels entering the U.S. became subject to duties, brokerage and customs paperwork – regardless of their value.

The change is expected to increase costs and delays for both sellers and buyers, and it is already prompting local entrepreneurs to rethink how they run their businesses.

Naomi Clement, a Stratford-based ceramic artist, said while shipping physical goods isn't her primary source of income, the new rules add a layer of confusion and risk.

"I had been planning a shop update this fall, but I've had to rethink it now," Clement said. "It's all super confusing and opaque, and the small administrative issues are really prohibitive for a solopreneur. It's not worth the hassle right now."

While Clement focuses mainly on on-

line classes and virtual offerings – which won't be affected – she worries about other artists and makers whose sales depend heavily on American buyers.

"About 75 per cent of my audience is in the U.S.," she said. "That's partly because the market is just so much larger than Canada's. For a lot of small businesses, this will be completely devastating."

Major platforms are also scrambling to adjust. Etsy announced it would suspend certain international postage labels to the U.S. ahead of the rule change, while Canada Post has warned of temporary flat-rate fees and possible service delays.

Many Stratford-area entrepreneurs are watching closely before making decisions. Clement said most artists she knows are temporarily pausing shipments to the U.S. until the new system is clearer.

"The last thing I want to do is charge a customer and have their order stuck in limbo because some box wasn't checked properly," she said.

For now, makers say they're hoping for more clarity from shipping carriers and trade officials. But with the holiday season approaching, Stratford's creative community is left to navigate yet another challenge in bringing local goods to international markets.



Gail Cossey, owner of Aunt Gail's Taxi, is celebrating the five-year business anniversary of her cab company, reflecting on the past few years of ensuring customer service excellence.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. Who is known as the father of ethics?
2. What tower was the first to be struck by terrorists on 9/11?
3. How many Super Bowl wins do the Buffalo Bills have?
4. Klondike Gold Rush national historical park is found in what U.S. city?
5. Mick Jagger is the lead singer of what band?
6. GO Transit was founded in what year?
7. What river did George Washington cross to attack the Hessian mercenaries?
8. Ultrasonic waves have frequencies that are above how many Hz?
9. What is the farthest planet from the sun in our solar system?
10. What red creature starred in *Sesame Street*?

This week's answers are found on pg. 23

Unearthing the untold: Museum partners with local storytellers to shine a light on Black history

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

When Garvia Bailey first got involved with the Stratford Perth Museum for an upcoming exhibit on the region's Black history, like many she wasn't fully aware of how deep its roots go. As she soon discovered, the stories of Black Stratforders throughout history are not superficial.

"Some of those stories are Stratford building stories," Bailey said. "They're Perth County building stories. It's not just we existed or there were a few Black folks that existed in Stratford, in the area – it's that there were Black folks collaborating with the people of Stratford to build Perth County up, to build what we see now as a strong civic-minded county, a strong civic-minded city."

"... My brother was a history teacher in Stratford ... I was sharing some of the stories with my brother, and he was like, 'I had no idea. It's not in our history; it's not in the books.' Unless you're looking for it, and specifically intentional about finding it or searching it out, you won't find out."

To make sure that everyone in the community can find out, without having to pour over records and dig through newspaper clippings themselves, the museum will be expanding with an "evolving Black history exhibit" this fall. To kickstart its development, the museum has partnered with mixed-media artist HAUI, behind the upcoming *Aunt Harriet* installation, and Bailey, a Stratford-native.

Bailey has joined the exhibits research committee, bringing her skills as the co-founder of the award-winning podcast and media company Media Girlfriends Inc. and over two decades at CBC and JazzFM to the project.

"I'm genuinely humbled that Garvia Bailey – someone I've followed with deep admiration for decades – approached the museum with the desire to help us uncover and share Black histories in Stratford and Perth



Garvia Bailey has joined the Stratford Perth Museum's exhibits research committee, joining others to unearth the untold stories of Stratford's Black residents throughout history. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

County," said general manager Kelly McIntosh in an announcement. "Garvia is a powerhouse of insight, talent and integrity, and we're incredibly lucky to have her join our team at this pivotal moment."

Bailey said that she will be working with the committee to uncover those Stratford building stories. While some, like the stories of Charley Lightfoot, the first Black Canadian to play professional hockey, and the Harrison family, a 19th century entrepreneurial family in the city, are more well known, there are others like Ben Sleet, an ice dealer in the mid- to late-1800s, that will be unearthed and told.

There are even stories of white

Stratforders who contributed to Black history that will be explored, such as abolitionist John Linton.

As Bailey explained, Stratford's history was not perfect, but there is a reason why people are drawn to the small city.

"It's that history that we might not know, but we can somehow feel it and sense it – that we are a welcoming, giving, building community, right? That's what my parents felt 50 years ago. Where did that come from? Where did that feeling of being able to settle here and be happy here come from? Well, it turns out that it comes from things that were happening 150 years ago."

The first story on display in the



HAUI, a mixed-media artist, unveils *Aunt Harriet*, a film about "one of the most picturesque characters Guelph has ever known," in October. The film and accompanying exhibit will kickstart the Stratford Perth Museum's new and evolving Black history exhibits. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

exhibit is *Aunt Harriet*, a film directed and devised by HAUI and starring ahdri zhina mandiola as Aunt Harriet Millar, an interesting character in southwestern Ontario's history. In a 1932 article published in the Toronto Star for her death, Millar was described as "one of the most picturesque characters Guelph has ever known." At the time of her death, she was believed to be well over 100 years old, but she had lost her memory and family, meaning that fact is questionable and many other details of her life are simply unknowable. However, through HAUI's research and "interpretive exploration," and by using spoken word and surrealism to evoke memory loss, who she was and how "picturesque" she was will be front and centre in the film, which officially launches at the museum this fall.

"I'm very excited for October," HAUI said. "It's going to be great. And my involvement be-

yond? That's just a conversation with both Garvia and Kelly and Megan.... It's amazing that one can spearhead one of the projects and then take a step back as the other steps in. And I'm excited about that, that sort of malleable quality of what we're trying to build."

The launch event for *Aunt Harriet* will take place Oct. 11 at 2 p.m. at the museum. It will feature a panel conversation with HAUI, Bailey, Michelle Robbins, curator of Buxton National Historic Site and Museum, historian Jade Ferguson and mandiola.

More details about *Aunt Harriet* and the evolving Black History exhibit will be announced in the coming months.



For more on *Aunt Harriet*, scan the code and scroll to page 23 to read our story in the March 21 edition of the Times.

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Justin's Corn Stand wraps up another season, raises \$1,351 for Operation Smile

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Justin's Corn Stand on Vivian Line in Stratford has become a summer staple for families looking for fresh, local produce, especially sweet corn and peaches.

This year, the roadside stand wrapped up another successful season after raising \$1,351 for Operation Smile Canada. The funds came from corn sales on the final weekend, a tradition owner Justin Malott has continued since 2020.

"I donate all the corn proceeds on the final weekend of the season," Malott said. "Since 2020, I've raised more than \$15,000 in total for Operation Smile."

Operation Smile is a non-profit organization that provides cleft lip and palate surgeries in countries where access to safe surgery is limited.

"As a kid, I grew up watching Operation Smile television shows and I was really impacted by that," Malott said. "I remember thinking if that happened to me, how hard it would be to go through. That's one of the reasons I started donating."

The local teen has balanced running his

stand with adventure across the world. This year, he hiked 3,000 kilometres through New Zealand on the Te Araroa Trail. Next year, he plans to take another year off before starting university, with goals of biking across Europe and cycling through Ontario this fall.

"One of the things I definitely bring back to my life here is being active every day and being outside every day," he said. "Being in New Zealand and outdoors every day really improved my mindset and how I think about things."

Malott sources his corn from Wayne Herlick, a Tavistock-area farmer who has been supplying non-GMO, pesticide-free corn to Justin's Corn Stand for more than six years – since Malott was 10 years old.

"I just want to give a big thanks to everyone who supported the stand this year and especially those who stopped by on the Operation Smile weekend," Malott said. "I couldn't have raised that money without your support."

Next up for the Malott family is their annual Skeletons of Vivian Line display, which also raises money for Operation Smile.



Justin Malott stands in front of his corn stand on Vivian Line in Stratford after raising \$1,351 for Operation Smile Canada during the final weekend of his summer season. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A sit-down with the mayor on homelessness in Stratford – Part 1

LEE GRIFFI

Times Reporter

A recent video posted to social media by former CJCS radio personality and part-time cab driver, Rob Wreford, brought renewed attention to the issue of homelessness in the city. The Times reached out to Mayor Martin Ritsma for a conversation about the current state of homelessness and what the future could hold.

In part one, we talk about today's struggles and solutions.

Ritsma said the problem in Stratford doesn't compare to that of cities such as Woodstock, but he added even one person living on the street is too many. He explained the city oversees the issue for area municipalities.

"We do have a homelessness strategy and it operates under social services. Beyond that, it functions under our shared services between St. Marys and Perth County. We manage it in the city and across the county, and we work together to utilize those dollars as best as possible."

The city receives just over \$3 million to support the issue, which is surprisingly more than Oxford County gets to deal with a much larger problem there. Ritsma said those dollars go towards several supports for those in need.

"Whether it's outreach, supportive housing or overnight accommodations. We invest that money wisely and I can say that last winter was a tough one. It reminded me of when I was in high school in the 70s with snowfall and cold weather."

The mayor said he would phone Kim McElroy, the City of Stratford's director of social services, for an update from the street, and it was always positive.

"Her response was, without a doubt, was everyone who wants to be housed is housed. That would be a nightly routine. It's a big job and a difficult job, but the passion here in our community, and beyond, is huge. It's not seen as a burden. It's seen as a service."

Ritsma said no one is trying to move the homeless out of the city in cabs to make the problem go away. The goal is to find housing, wherever that may be.

"At times, we are going to do our best to connect family to family or friend to friend."

Ritsma said homelessness, along with the problems of mental health and drug addiction, are top of mind for the residents he hears from.

"That, and childcare. We get our regular calls and concerns about roads and infrastructure, but the human side of it remains number one, which it should be. We can do a great job on the physical stuff, but it's the social infrastructure people are most passionate about and connected to."

The Stratford Connection Centre provides essential supports for individuals experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health challenges or precarious housing. Operated through a partnership between the Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth, Choices for Change, the United Way Perth-Huron, the city and other community organizations, the centre serves as a vital hub for care and connection. Ritsma, who served as the United Way's fundraising chair when the centre was established, has expressed his hope to see the facility expanded to offer overnight support for those in need.

"It's a trust piece and some people do not trust the idea of being housed, they just don't. We have to provide opportunities where if the trust isn't there, then let's get to a location where they are already familiar. Let's get to a location where they have some sense of comfort and trust and build on that."

He added in the long-term, homelessness isn't resolved in a shelter.

"It might be a band-aid, but we need to build long-term housing."

Part two of this story will be available in next week's edition of the Times, when we discuss the future of homelessness in the area.

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Cozyn's Fall Fest kicks off Sept. 13 to bring community together

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

As the leaves turn, Stratford's own Cozyn's Garden Gallery is turning up the fun. The business is debuting its Fall Fest on Sept. 13 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., where families can enjoy live music, fall-themed workshops, food, drinks and more – all while celebrating the community that has supported Cozyn's for 44 years.

"The community has supported (us) for the past 44 years. Cozyn's has always been involved in the community," Shay Mitchell, marketing and social media coordinator at Cozyn's Garden Gallery, said.

"We like to have these events to show our gratitude to the community, and this event is free admission. It's very family-friendly; it's a festival where there's something for everybody that they will enjoy. I hope our attendees feel appreciated."

Mitchell said that the gallery hosts many events throughout the year for the community, but this will be their first-ever Fall Fest. The celebration will feature live music running all day, plenty of food and drinks and activities spread across the property. Guests can also enjoy Girl Guide cookie sales, face painting and a variety of workshops. Money that's raised



Workshops and community education play a vital role in Cozyn's Garden Gallery's ongoing support to the locals. On Sept. 13, it hosts its first Fall Fest.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

will be given back to support the community.

Each spring, Cozyn's Garden Gallery hosts a two-night fashion show that draws community support and raises funds for the Rotary Hospice Stratford and Perth.

There will also be an upcoming Fall Fashion Show taking place in the green houses on Oct. 1 and Oct. 2, with proceeds donated to the hospice as well.

"Coming in the winter we do a VIP night to show our most loyal custom-

ers our appreciated and we also have a Christmas open house for the community as well," said Mitchell. "Since we're a garden centre, a lot of people think we're closed but we're open and hosting events all year round."

"This year there have been a lot of new ideas swirling around especially for Christmas, we have many ideas which we will announce in the coming months."

Mitchell said that she's looking forward to meeting all the new community members that will be participating at the Fall Fest tomorrow. She adds that staff will put on a wonderful show and notes that their ambition and teamwork is carried to the gallery's year-round events.

"I think Cozyn's just grows and gets deeper and deeper in the community. Everyone working here is very friendly and hardworking. We have to thank the staff. They are very ambitious, and everyone is willing to grow and work hard," said Mitchell. "Listening to the community is how you grow and move forward as a business, we have feedback forms, and we are very attentive and every time we work our hardest to make that a reality. We have evolved a lot through the feedback over the years. I think that's why this business has been so long lasting."



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From stress to serenity, Black Creek Flower Farm creates a space to breathe

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Black Creek Flower Farm's new Sunset Flower Picks are giving people a chance to slow down, relax among the blooms, and leave with more than just a bouquet but memories.

The Sunset Wednesday Pick at Stratford's Black Creek Flower Farm gives visitors an opportunity to come to the fields from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., and with a \$20 price tag they can pick a bouquet of flowers alongside playing lawn games and socializing. Visitors are also free to bring their own picnic set up if they wish.

"We get a lot of couples that come for date night, or families and groups of girls coming out together to enjoy a relaxing evening," said Laura Barker, owner of Black Creek Flower Farm.

"It's a nice mid-week break and at the end people can go home with a beautiful bouquet of flowers. We have cornhole and ring toss games. There's something for everybody."

Black Creek Flower Farm is a family-run business now in its third generation with Barker taking over ownership. The farm has offered "u-pick flowers" for about five years, and this year introduced the Sunset Flower Pick. Each



Laura Barker is the proud owner of Black Creek Flower Farms and is excited to show the community what's to come in the fall.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

season, the farm continues to add new events and expand its offerings.

Barker said that the farm has received requests from the community to add floral painting workshops in the future. Additionally, the Fall Harvest Festival is set to return in the coming weeks for its third year. The event will feature a sun-

flower trail for visitors to walk through and pumpkins and seasonal decorations geared toward families. The festival also includes face painting, with all proceeds donated to the local food bank.

"My word of the year is joy. It's great spreading joy to people; it's such an important thing in this day and age. Mental

health is such a huge thing and there's been so many studies on flowers and being amongst them can be so good mentally for you," said Barker. "People are so tied to electronics, and a lot of jobs are based inside of a building. People aren't outside as much, and life is so demanding with jobs taking so much from us."

"It's rewarding for me to see how happy people get. I had a workshop, and a lady was crying because she thought the flowers were so beautiful. I think she mentally slowed down when she came out and the flowers might remind people of a family member and someone who's special to them."

Throughout the summer, the farm offers workshops designed with children in mind, including themed events such as a princess tea party and a teddy bear picnic. The farm also hosts private events, giving families and groups a chance to create their own memorable experiences.

"I have been the owner for five years. I'm sticking to the roots of what foundation that the business was built on," said Barker. "We are very family oriented, but my family is still very much involved with the operations. We have been shifting to more events and workshops and slowing down the wholesale end of things, it's much more rewarding interacting with people."

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Warriors feeling optimistic for season ahead; Leadership group named as preseason ends

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Optimism is in the air for the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors as the regular season draws closer to reality.

The Warriors continued their preparations for the season at the Allman Arena, and a buzz is in the air as the team looks to win its first Sutherland Cup since the 2003-2004 season.

On Sept. 4, the Warriors named Haden Frayne the 44th captain in franchise history. Jonas Schmidt, Quinn Kipfer, Rhyse Brown, and Joe Curtin were named alternate captains and will rotate the duties during the season.

Frayne is grateful for the opportunity to be the captain of his hometown team.

"Yeah, it's obviously really special. I am not taking for granted the amount of responsibility that I've been given here. These coaches, they're great here," Frayne said.

"They treat us all very well. This organization, it's pristine. They treat everyone here with the respect that (they deserve), and they expect you to give it back to them. I'm just being a hometown kid. It's very special, growing up here, watching the games, and now I'm here as a 20-year-old captain. It's pretty cool. It's very cool."

Second-year player Kipfer says he is honoured to be part of the leadership group and embraces the role with the veteran core.

"Obviously, we have a great group of leaders here, and it's great to be recognized as such a young leader on this team," Kipfer said.

"You know, we got a good core of older guys, so to be a part of that group is really exciting, and I'm proud to be a part of it."

The veteran Brown feels proud to be among the leaders of the team and knows what the goal is the team is looking to achieve this season.

"It means a lot. It feels really good to get recognized by my teammates and my peers," Brown said.

"Doesn't change anything, as far as it goes for a team ... We're all in this together, and we're gonna keep building forwards towards, obviously, the end of the year, hoping for a championship."

Schmidt says expectations for himself and the team are very high.

"All my expectations for this year is a really, really good run as a team, kind of trying to go into it with few expectations," Schmidt said.

"I feel like that's when I put on the most – most like myself, most free – but I think we got a really good group and we're going to be prepared for a long run this season."

Connor Davis, acquired by the Warriors from the Chatham Maroons in the offseason, believes the team's strong potential in the season ahead.

"I think it's high expectations. I mean, we've always been pretty competitive in the past, and I don't think there's any difference coming into this," Davis said.

"We definitely expect to come in and make a statement, especially early, and then down the stretch continue to build towards playoffs and hopefully go for it all at the end. So definitely high expectations, for sure, for us."

Frayne likes the growth of the team so far, but is aware of what to expect in the level of competition in the Western Conference.

"We have a great group of guys. We bonded well, really quick here. Practices are fast. They're high pace. And for the start of the season, we like what we see here," Frayne said.

"We gotta really keep pushing. It's a tough division; it'll be a 50-game grind to try and battle for a spot for playoffs, and then we go from there."

Kipfer knows the organization's standards, and he says it must meet them if the team wants to reach the top.

"Obviously, very high expectations. You know, the management staff here has high expectations and that carries right through the players here," Kipfer said.

"So, we had a good season last year, and I want to do better than that, so kind of just build on that and keep going well."

On Sept. 6, the Warriors ended their preseason schedule against the St. Andrew's

Saints in the Eli Pelfreyman Tournament finals rematch at the Allman Arena.

The Saints grabbed a 2-0 lead in the opening twenty minutes and controlled most of the period and outshot the Warriors 13-5. Jack McGurn scored his third goal of the preseason to put the Warriors on the board at the 2:40 mark before St. Andrew's restored their two-goal lead over a minute later.

The power-play goal by Kipfer pulled Stratford to within one midway through the middle frame, but the Saints responded with a goal with 4:37 left in the period before Drew Hodge scored with under four minutes remaining in the period.

But the Saints held on and prevailed with the 4-3 win. Gage Hurst made 19 saves on 23 shots in the loss for the Warriors.

Brown likes the team's overall performance in the preseason and wants to provide positivity to the team through the challenging season ahead.

"I think that our expectations are obviously very positive going into this year," Brown said.

"I think we had a very strong preseason, so moving into the season, I think we should try to continue that on and keep it going through the whole entire year – there's going to be ups and downs – and just stay positive and keep rolling and hopefully moving towards that championship."

Stratford will kick off their 2025-2026 campaign on the road against the London Nationals at the Western Fair Complex in London on Sept. 17. The Warriors will then host the Waterloo Siskins for their home opener at the Allman Arena on the following night, Sept. 19.



Stratford hosts OHL exhibition game at Allman for the first time in a decade

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On Sept. 12, after press time, the city of Stratford will be hosting an Ontario Hockey League (OHL) exhibition game between the Erie Otters and Flint Firebirds at the William Allman Memorial Arena. This game is the first time the Festival City has hosted an exhibition game since Sept. 13, 2014, when Connor McDavid and the Erie Otters faced the London Knights.

Mark Nelson, in addition to his duties

as goaltending coach and assistant general manager of the Stratford Warriors, is the director of player evaluation for the Erie Otters. Nelson also scouts the U16 Alliance program for the OHL club while keeping tabs on future league draft picks in various age categories.

Nelson says the importance of having an exhibition game is to generate money for the city – and for the team.

"It's pretty important," Nelson said. "Fundraising for our team, it's getting tougher and tougher."

Nelson added that the Otters' braintrust appreciated how the Allman Arena can host games with solid attendance and the opportunity for many of the young players to play at the historic barn for the first time.

"For one, it means that they have to have trust in your organization. We're going to try to put on a good show. And I think one of the things, other than me being involved with Erie, is our GM saw (the) arena," Nelson said.

"He saw in the past how many people

we put in there in playoff games – and the fact that the arena's 100 years old that ... I think that all helped, and I think a lot of it's just to let some of these kids that are playing that have probably never saw an arena like ours before."

Local hockey fans will see a couple of familiar faces expected to appear in Friday night's game. According to Nelson, the Otters will have former Huron-Perth Lakers U16 captain Jake Murray and former Warriors netminder Chase Furlong on the roster, and both are likely to play.

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Local café welcomes Robin Magder for special September show

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Music lovers will have a reason to gather at the Livery Yard, as the popular coffee shop welcomes Robin Magder for an intimate acoustic concert, part of its ongoing effort to support local arts and culture.

Robin Magder, who also goes by the name of Rocket, is a Hamilton based singer/songwriter and will play at the Livery Yard at noon on Sept. 20, free of charge.

"I'm pretty stoked to have Robin in the shop for her acoustic set. She's been doing music for a long time and fronts a rock/country group called Rocket and the Renegades out of Hamilton," said Liesa Hartman, general manager of the Livery Yard. "Her son and his family live in Stratford so it's great that she's able to play and have them here to support her as well."

Hartman said the idea for hosting concerts at the café was inspired during the COVID-19 lockdown. As a lifelong music lover, Hartman wanted to use her position to bring some life and colour back to the community. The first performance featured fiddler Dan Stacey playing on the sidewalk outside the café, followed by local musicians Martin Defreese and Joseph VanRooyen, and from there it continued to evolve.

"We are a small coffee shop, but we're

licensed and we offer performers a little bit of money, a place to put their guitar case for tips and unlimited shots of espresso from the bar," said Hartman. "A lot of times I have musicians use it as an opportunity to bring awareness to a local charity and use it as a fundraiser for the Avondale Food Shelf."

"It's stressful planning an event, but it always comes together in the end. It's like magic, and somehow, I always convince myself I should do it again," said Hartman. "I love music. I love theatre, art, books, poetry, and there's so much of it here in Stratford."

Hartman said the response from the community has been positive. The Livery Yard had recently hosted an event organized by Rina Barone of Stratford Arts and Lectures, featuring journalist and author Bonnie Reichert, who shared stories from her memoir.

Hartman added that Santa Claus has confirmed he will return to the Livery Yard on Dec. 6 for the annual Coffee with Santa event. Hartman says that the café will continue to host a variety of events within the coming months, including one featuring a book launch for Kerry Ramsay in November. More details are available at freshideacollective.com.

"We have this wonderful, rich, vibrant community around us," said Hartman. "I hope that people can continue to find ways to support the arts in whatever way they're able to."



Silas Sobeck, barista at the Livery Yard, and Haze Kelly, assistant manager, welcomes the community with open arms to try a taste of their brew when Robin Magder brings her acoustic set to the coffee shop on Sept. 20. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation opens fall application for community grants

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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The Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation (SPCCF) is open for applications for its community grants program. Registered charities and other qualified donors serving Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County are invited to apply by Sept. 25 at 4 p.m. to the stream.

"Local charities are delivering essential services that address needs throughout our region," said Heidi Culliton, executive director of SPCCF. "These grants reflect both the generosity of our donors and their commitment to supporting priorities close to home."

Over \$200,000 in funding is available through funds held at SPCCF, a philan-

thropic matchmaker connecting resources with local community projects and initiatives to enhance quality of life and belonging. These funds have a wide range of interests from seniors to children and youth, health and wellness, education, the environment, the arts and sports and recreation. Each fund is unique, but every fund has been established to flow resources to vital community projects and local initiatives that strive to enhance the quality of life in the region.

Earlier this year, SPCCF disbursed \$142,000 in directed grants and scholarships through designated and scholarship funds established by generous donors.

For full program details and eligibility guidelines please visit www.spccf.ca/community-grants.




Stratford Branch 008

All veterans and First Responders are welcome at the branch Tuesday mornings 10:30 to noon for a social visit at the Buddy Check Coffee.

The Branch Chaplain can provide Mental and Moral support.

Notice of itinerary visit of Mrs. Rebecca Hyndman, Provincial Service Officer will visit Branch 8, Stratford on Thurs. Oct. 9th, 2025; 1 p.m. to assist veterans and their widows.

Please contact Branch 8 - 519-271-4540
email: StratfordLegion008@gmail.com
or the Branch Service Officer Steve Zurbrigg - 519-305-1125
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Beloved Avondale Variety Show returns with more variety than ever

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

One of Avondale United Church's beloved events will return for its fifth edition this October, and the community is eager to watch a variety of talent perform.

The Avondale Variety Show returns on Oct. 25. The show will feature a variety of music, dance and aerial acts such as Smokey Peats, Cirquesmith Silks, Karen Brown and Dan Van Winden, Trio Con Brio, Terri Sparling and Sam Wyatt, Roulston Trio, Kinnaris, Infinity Dance and hometown harpist Alexa Yeo. All proceeds from the performance showcase will support the church's ministries.

Radio host and local celebrity Jamie Cottle will be the emcee of the event.

"There really is something for families and something for everyone," Sparling, chair of the music planning team and performer, said.

As there are a variety of acts, both part of Avondale's congregation and outside of the church, there will be multiple stages at the event.

"We'll be going from a small set onto the larger stage and then another one, so the movement of things will be quick, and everyone's been given a shorter amount of time," Sparling said.

Aleah Graff, community engagement coordinator for Avondale, said the variety show's programming featuring dance and aerials in addition to music, that will also invite more community members to attend.

"It expands not only the audience, but the type of people we should expect to be in the audience," she said. "One that jumps out to me is Infinity Dance. I could see a lot of parents and grandparents, as well as just supporters of the dancers, wanting to be interested."

Graff also manages the social media for Avondale and noticed that as soon as the date for the variety show was announced, people were already declaring their attendance and calling the church.

"This was even before we had a sufficient amount of tickets printed. I think that speaks volumes not only to this event, but also to the music series planning team. Great group of people and great connections that everybody brings," she said.

Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$25 at the door, and \$5 for youth 16-years-old and under. Doors open at 6:15 p.m. Tickets can be purchased either in-person at the church's box office, by calling 519-271-7946, sending an e-transfer to avondaleuc@wightman.ca or online via <https://ticketscene.ca/events/55248/>.



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Region's unemployment rate increases to 4.9%

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

In August, the unemployment rate for the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula economic region increased by 0.8 percentage points to 4.9 per cent, according to the Four County Labour Market Planning Board's monthly update.

"Our rate is in line with both seasonal norms and the provincial trends this month", said Dana Soucie, executive director for the board, in the update. "The numbers show positive signs that our region is weathering the economic changes at this time and we will follow the sectors that show concerns as we move forward."

The region sits at the second lowest unemployment rate in the province, behind northwest Ontario. Meanwhile, the provincial unemployment rate increased by 0.3 percentage points this month to 8.3 per cent, both unadjusted for seasonality.

In August, the region's overall population aged 15 or older increased by 300 whereas the labour force size dropped by 1,300 people, resulting in the number of people not in the labour force in the region to increase by 1,600. This dragged the region's participation rate down by 0.5 percentage points to 58.2 per cent. The region experienced a decrease of 2,600 people in overall employment. It saw an approximately 200 full-time employment gains whereas about 2,800 losses in part-time employ-

ment were recorded.

The goods-producing sector saw an increase in overall employment numbers in August (over 2,500 jobs, a 3.8 per cent increase), with the biggest gain in construction (over 4,600 jobs, a 27.2 per cent increase), followed by manufacturing (over 800 jobs, a 3.1 per cent increase). On the other hand, Utilities experienced an employment decrease in three consecutive months (over 2,500 jobs lost, a 17.1 per cent decrease).

Overall employment in the services-producing sector saw a decrease of 5.2 per cent (about 5,100 people) in August. With an 1,800 drop in employment, finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing experienced the biggest percentage loss this month (a 23.1 per cent decrease), followed by educational services (about 1,100 jobs, an 18 per cent decrease) and public administration (about 900 jobs, a 16.4 per cent decrease). Wholesale and retail trade also experienced a 12.3 per cent employment losses (2,700 people).

On the other hand, business, building and other support services experienced the biggest percentage growth in employment in August (over 500 jobs gained, an 18.5 per cent increase), followed by information, culture and recreation (over 600 jobs gained, a 12.5 per cent increase) and other services except public administration (over 900 jobs gained, a 12.5 per cent increase). Professional, scientific and technical services (over 300 jobs gained, a 2.3

per cent increase) also saw employment gains.

Employment remained unchanged in the health-care and social assistance sector.

STRATFORD TIMES

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Stratford singer-songwriter Nora Joy finding success with latest single, “Shine”

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Though she’s still in high school, Stratford’s Nora Stephens – known musically as Nora Joy – is finding some early success as the singer-songwriter continues to release singles and perform live across Stratford and the surrounding area.

At just 15, Stephens has already released three singles – “Starlight,” “I Like You” and, just earlier this month, “Shine.” She began writing music at the age of 11, combining her authentic perspective of the world and people around her with catchy melodies that bring listeners back to their own teenage years.

“My whole life, I’ve kind of grown up with music,” said Stephens, who has family ties to St. Marys on her dad’s side. “My parents are both very musical, so from a young age I was kind of just introduced to it. And then around 2018, we met some very musical friends, so during COVID ... we would sit around in the backyard and just play music. That’s how I got into writing songs because I love to write a song and then every week, we would come and share songs in a circle.

“It was cool to be around such a supportive group. They’re my parents’ friends, so they’re like professional musicians and they would offer critiques, but in such a thoughtful way. It was a really cool environment to first start sharing my music.”

Taking inspiration from life, love and her friends, Stephens’ music has been



Fifteen-year-old Nora Stephens, known musically as Nora Joy, is experiencing success as a singer-songwriter after releasing three singles with a full debut album to come. (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

making an impact with one of her earliest songs, “Tell Me Why,” featured in the anti-bullying campaign at her middle years school in 2021.

Stephens was selected as an Ontario Youth Discoveries Competition winner in 2024 and was awarded the opportunity to perform at the Owen Sound Summerfolk Festival. Her solo-acoustic performance was noted in the press as one of the key highlights of the festival.

She was also personally invited by Canadian songwriter Ron Sexsmith, also a

resident of Stratford, to perform and share the stage with him at his celebrated and sold-out Sexsmith At Sixty concert in August 2024. Shortly thereafter, she travelled to the prestigious Eastcote Studios in London, UK, to sing backing vocals on Sexsmith’s 2025 album, *Hangover Terrace*.

“When I first started writing, I loved to write about people in my life because I felt like it was a really easy connection to make when I was younger because I just knew everyone in my life so well; it was

just easy to kind of incorporate into my songs,” Stephens said. “But as I’ve grown up, I like to write about changes in my life – going into high school was a really big thing ... to kind of put it into perspective. It kind of helps me (process what I’m going through), and then I hope it can help other people who are going through the same things.”

Stephens’ latest single, “Shine,” which she released on Aug. 5, is about chasing her dreams and not giving up, a sentiment that has served her well as she continues to expand her musical offerings, which will include a debut album at some point in the future.

Stephens has also been performing live at venues across Stratford including at the Starlight, the Livery Yard, the Bunker Performance Lounge and Café and even at this weekend’s Rotary Dragon Boat Festival on Sept. 13.

“I was playing with Ron Sexsmith last summer, so I sang one of his songs at his Sexsmith At Sixty show and a guy was there that saw me perform and offered to have me sing at the Dragon Boat Festival,” Stephens said. “So, I sang there last year and I’m doing the same thing this year. It’s pretty cool. I just play in the beer tent. It’s super chill but there are so many people, which is nice because it introduces me to other audiences.”

To listen to all three of Stephens’ singles and to stay up to date on everything she is doing, visit www.norajoymusic.com.

Bring Your Own Vinyl event finds new home at the Bunker

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Attention vinyl enthusiasts, Bring Your Own Vinyl night has returned to town in a new home at the Bunker Performance Lounge and Café on the third Thursday of every month. The return of the event also marks a new partnership between the Bunker and the annual Stratford Winter

Film Festival (SWFF), which is the host.

The trio of SWFF founders, Craig Sangster, Leslie Marsh and Bruce MacInnis, thought the end of those intimate vinyl nights that were held at Revival House was a loss to the community, so that when the opportunity to partner with the Bunker came up, they jumped at it.

“There was a void, so when John Crawford (co-owner of the Bunker) approached

me about doing a vinyl night, and knowing Craig’s and Leslie’s affinity for audio, I thought why not make it a SWFF event,” explained MacInnis.

The atmosphere at the Bunker is perfect for the event with the intimacy of one’s own living room but with a connection between people that are also audiophiles.

“The Bunker is a smaller space with a layout where everyone is there and it’s easy to slide a chair over and have cross-conversations, so I think it really lends itself to a shared listening experience,” said MacInnis.

“It’s an acoustically treated room, so it sounds good,” added Sangster.

Every night is a different night, unique and dynamic. The music played will depend upon who comes and with what vinyl they bring. Song selections come with memories and stories to tell. The evening is a very casual one led by MacInnis with support from Sangster and Marsh. A turntable is present so all aficionados need bring is a record or simply come to join in and choose an album from the selection of records made available courtesy of SWFF.

“People show up with 45s, singles from the ‘50s or before, as well as stuff into the

current millennia. It’s a mixed bag of who shows up and what their tastes are, or why they think what they brought is unique or noteworthy. You never know what will happen,” said MacInnis.

Songs are introduced explaining why they chose it, or simply that they wanted to listen to it in that environment. “We stay away from formality, this is not about standing on ceremony in any way, we don’t want to put people on the spot. We want people to have a comfortable experience wherever the SWFF brand is,” reinforced MacInnis.

“Bruce runs the table and someone can bring in a song or record and folks can say a few words like, ‘This was my first dance at high school,’ or not say anything at all, or pass a little note to Bruce about it. I guess in a way we cater to introverts and extroverts alike,” said Sangster.

This is a pay-what-you-can event where the recommendation is \$5 at the door. The evening runs from 7-9 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month. Funds raised help fund SWFF for the anticipated third year in 2026 which is currently in development. The Bunker is located at 104 Wellington St., Stratford.

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Perth County Federation of Agriculture brings rural and urban residents together

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

For the first time, the Perth County Federation of Agriculture (PCFA) hosted an evening designed to bring farmers and urban residents together for meaningful conversation about food production and availability.

The event, called Across the Table, invited Stratford residents to meet the farmers who grow their food in the surrounding townships of Perth County. Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma, who also farms just outside the city, co-organized the evening with PCFA directors and members.

The gathering, held in Ritsma's barn, drew more than 130 people who shared a meal of pork, chicken, homegrown potatoes and other locally sourced dishes. The Ellice Optimist Club and Perth County Pork Producers prepared and served the food.

Half of those in attendance were urban consumers while the other half were farmers representing commodities such as dairy, beef, poultry, eggs, grains and vegetables. Together, they discussed how food is produced, the challenges farmers face and the importance of agriculture as a major driver of Perth County's economy.



Above: Stratford recording artist Janna Leduc and her band provided live entertainment for the evening. Leduc also spends time recording and performing in Nashville. (GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Right: Farmers and Stratford residents sat down together to share perspectives on food production during the PCFA's Across the Table event.



Pictured from left are Sara Wood, Perth County director and vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture; Derek Vande Walle, president of the Perth County Federation of Agriculture; and Perth-Wellington MP John Nater. All took part in one-on-one discussions during Across the Table. Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae also attended but is not pictured.



Humane society launches monthly giving program to provide steady support for animals in need

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo & Stratford Perth (HSKWSP) has launched the Give Back Pack, a new monthly giving program that offers animal lovers a meaningful way to provide medical care, food, shelter and love to homeless and vulnerable pets.

This unique program allows individuals

to choose the area of care that matters most to them. Whether someone's heart lies with cats, dogs, small animals or pets who rely on the Pet Pantry to stay with the families who love them, members can direct their generosity to whichever is most dear to them.

Monthly giving means animals benefit from consistent, reliable support all year long. This steady support ensures that medical care is never delayed, training and

enrichment is always available and families facing hardship can continue caring for their beloved pets. Members will also receive special stories and behind-the-scenes updates, giving them a closer connection to the impact of their generous donation.

There are three levels donors can choose from: \$45/month for cat or dog sponsor, \$25/month for small animal sponsor, and \$20/month for Pet Pantry sponsorship.

"By joining the Give Back Pack, you're

becoming part of a community dedicated to helping a variety of animals get care and second chances," said Kathryn Ladano, senior development officer at the humane society. "Every dollar you give goes directly to what you care most about."

To learn more or to become a Give Back Pack member today, visit kwsphumane.ca, or contact Kathryn Ladano at Kathryn.Ladano@kwsphumane.ca or 519-745-5615, ext. 279.

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Read for your life

JULIA SCHNEIDER

Times Columnist

How long had they been there, waiting for me to notice them? I have no idea. A day? A year? A few weeks ago, however, I finally did, and an even more pressing question came to mind: by what coincidence or cosmic plan had the two happened to come to rest, one on the top of the other, on my upstairs staircase?

The book below was *Read For Your Life*. This one was no mystery; it was written by Joseph Gold, an English literature professor at the University of Waterloo when I was there in the '70s. He was a strong advocate of bibliotherapy, the therapeutic aspects of reading, something in which I also believe.

Above it lay *The Paris Library*. I couldn't remember where I got it, whether for free at a little library or on sale at a bookstore or

thrift shop; by what serendipity had it come to rest there, inviting me to read it? It was a chance acquisition, for sure, spurred by a curiosity to learn more about what it was about, which was now made even stronger by virtue of a placement which seemed to command "Read this one now."

And so I did.

The Paris Library turned out to be the story of Odile, a French girl and an avid reader who managed to get her dream job at the American Library in Paris just as the Nazis were taking over the city in the Second World War. This library is, in fact, both a setting and a sort of symbolic character in the novel; Odile's life revolves around it for the first part of the novel. The book's author, Janet Skeslien Charles, worked there herself, and was able to research the role the library, which opened in 1920, played during

the Nazi occupation. As a result, the story, which involves romance, mystery and suspense, is historically accurate, and the more gripping for it.

Why did Odile feel she had to leave the library to which she was so devoted? How did she betray its aims of openness, fairness and access to all? Read the book to find out. There you will discover the complex circumstances that led her to escape Paris and live in far-distant Froid, Montana, and what she would find there.

Sentimental? It didn't seem so in the reading. There is no sugar-coating of events. What the book does, successfully, is to show how, at the very worst of times, a library gave hope, companionship, and a sense the human community to Paris residents, soldiers on the front (it delivered books to them) and, indeed, everyone who came to

use it. The library is an ideal that brings out the best in everyone involved with it.

In 2025 we are also living in difficult time, made so by forces beyond our control: wars, environmental crises and other problems that seem inescapable and often insurmountable. What can we turn to for hope? Where can we go to get some respite and renewed sense of hope and perspective in such a politically and environmentally fraught climate?

When I read the book, I thought of the library in Stratford (and St. Marys and, indeed, everywhere readers live) and realized it is now, just as the American Library was in the 1940s, there for the people it serves. It is open to all, provides a cool place to go in dangerously hot weather (and a warm place in cold); it has a world of reference and entertainment materials available,

to be asked for or discovered; it provides programs to children and their parents, teens and their peers, and adults in groups or solo. Moreover, it does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex or sexual preference, ableism or race, but respects all its users (even if they espouse unpopular creeds, as long as they are civil) because that is what public libraries do.

Like the American Library in Paris, the staff are always polite, friendly and helpful, from the lower level to the top, and people actually seem to enjoy working there, just as they did at the Paris library in the book.

At a time when things are tough, think of the library, support it, and go to it. Your life could depend on it!

The Paris Library is available in both book and audiobook form at the Stratford Public Library.

Musings: The next island



MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Columnist

Roy Lewis was performing in *The Winter's Tale* with Groundling Theatre, Graham Abbey's company at the Coalmine Theatre, a storefront theatre that barely held 40 people. He says, "There was a scene where a statue steps down from a dais onto the tiny main stage. I was so close to the audience that I could see the tears spilling from one man's eyes." When I ask if he felt uncomfortable performing so close to the audience, Roy emphatically says no: "There were no nerves. It was a wonderful experience. The audience was breathing with us."

As a child, Roy was always encouraged to be involved in the arts: "England was very arts-friendly," he says, "I was taken to art galleries and pantomimes. I was in all the school plays. My first acting gig involved dual roles as both Fa-

ther Christmas and one of the Three Wise Men in my school's Christmas pageant. I remember my Auntie Dolly waving to me as I came onstage!"

Roy became involved in acting and writing almost from the very start. When he was 13 he watched a television production of *Doctor Faustus*, starring Richard Burton. To his delight, he found he could understand the Elizabethan dialogue perfectly: "This was because my family was Seventh Day Adventist and the King James Bible was the language of the time. It wasn't a stretch for me to decipher the dialogue. Other kids my age could make neither head nor tail of it. I was intrigued by the exchange between Faustus and Mephistopheles. My pursuit of the theatre came out of those times."

When this happened, Roy had recently immigrated from Birmingham, England where his mother had trained as a midwife. "She was highly artistic," says Roy, "writing poetry, drawing sketches and singing in the church choir." Roy's grandfather on his mother's side was a well-known builder in Mandeville, Jamaica. Blue House, the name of the home he built for his family of eight still stands. "My family, particularly my mother, was always making something, creating something, always aspiring and on the



move," said Rory.

"I spent much time, probably too much time, in school studying painting and drawing, art history and, of course, theatre," says Roy. He soon realized that acting was his passion. Out of that came his writing: "Words are the paint palette for actors and stories are the heart of poetry. I realized that, in each sonnet, Shakespeare was trying to convey a story in fourteen lines."

Roy's first significant break into theatre came in Thunder Bay where he met Brian Richmond, the artistic director for Magnus Theatre. "I did five plays for Brian there and it happened that John Neville, the future artistic director for the Stratford Festival saw me perform in *The Tempest*. Eventual-

ly he invited me to audition for Stratford. After that, I worked with Christopher Newton at the Shaw Festival.

Roy's career has been eclectic. From a recurring role in the TV series *Beyond Black Beauty*, touring with Sir David Suchet in *The Last Confession*, to portraying doctors, lawyers, policemen, jilted lovers, wise grandfathers and, more recently, guest starring as a businessman slated for murder on *Hudson and Rex*. Roy likens acting to a long swim, not across the pool but across the channel: "You can't know why you haven't been chosen for a particular role, but you have faith that it's not because you don't do good work. You may float for a while but you keep swimming because you know there's another island along the way. Otherwise you sink."

He laughs about a recent science fiction movie in which he was told he would be playing a scientist gone mad. "I pictured being in a disheveled state, hiding under a table. Instead, I wound up literally naked, spraying gasoline all over my laboratory and setting myself on fire! How's that for movie magic?"

This summer, Roy combined his acting and writing talents in the reading series at Here for Now Theatre with his play *The House of Monte Cristo*. Earlier this year he narrated his poetic play *The Life and Troubled*

Times of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor with the London Symphonia Orchestra in London, Ont. You may also find him at one of the many poetry events in Stratford, honing his skills as a poet and actor.

In closing the interview Roy quotes from an article by Norman Mailer which explores what art is. Mailer says that the artist is called upon to do something that the rest of the world is not willing to do. It is like swimming out to the centre of a lake then diving to the bottom, finding something in the sand, then bringing it back up to the surface and talking about it. "The rest of the world is not interested in doing that. Artists are chosen to do that. Shamans, oracles, painters, sculptors and writers are chosen to do that."

A long swim, with many deep dives along the way, takes perseverance and an unshakable faith. Roy Lewis has both. Watch for him on the horizon.

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.

Opinions

THE HOLY TRILOGY: HOPE / LOVE / PEACE



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

Hope, as the first word – some of us silently hold onto it, often unaware that we do, and so very hopeful, making it the only word, making it sometimes too late to do anything. As we hope for, as we wish for, so we are often not working for. We remain in wishful thinking. We cannot work for peace with anger in the heart. We cannot work for dialogue if we are shouting at the other. We cannot work for change if it is only we who are right – and we can't see the wound if we don't allow

ourselves to feel where we are broken. But yes... we can hope.

Here is an example of hope in its rightful place, as the first word in the trilogy, where the other words of love and peace justifiably follow:

On Oct. 2, 2006, a man by the name of Charles Roberts took hostages at West Nickel Mines School, an Amish one-room schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. He shot 10 girls, ages six to 13 (five of whom died) and then shot himself. The response from the shocked Amish community after the tragedy settled itself into their rational minds, was one of grieving and then forgiveness. This is what they did amid their sorrow and trauma: They visited and comforted Mr. Roberts' widow and his parents and offered their forgiveness for his heinous crime. They set up a charitable fund for the family as Mrs. Roberts had three children of her own to support now, without a husband. They attended his funeral, and they invited his widow to the funerals of their children.

After the funerals of all involved took place, Mrs. Roberts wrote an open letter to the community through the newspaper: "Your concern for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately needed at a time of great sorrow, regret and shame. There are no words to describe what you have done. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you." Recognizing the commonality of hurt, joy, or any emotion within another – that's hope. Acting on that common awareness is love and opening to forgiveness provides peace.

An ancient Jewish teacher, Rabbi Hillel, once said: "What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man." The Buddha taught: "Consider others as yourself." Confucius expressed: "What one does not wish for oneself, one ought not do to others." And, of course, Jesus: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Despite where

these sayings originated, they are good and true, and shunning the source of any truth of the common human heart is folly.

And we can try this. It's an active thing to do. It's the right thing to do. It works. It makes one feel good, and it makes the other feel good. It sets the world in a righter direction. And eventually, one chooses to live one's life in the order of the trilogy. Hope, love, peace. And the most important of these, as it is said – is love. Love is a verb, an action, an expression of something that is felt (hope) that leads to a desired outcome (peace). That kind of path is the ultimate expression of the divine within us because it is only through that realization that we experience the universal – the transcendent principle, the guiding rule, the directing ethic – something reliable and transferable to all situations.

I think there's something divine about us which we have overlooked or perhaps is lost amongst the foibles and activities of the day. The "energy" or "spir-

it" or "soul" within that is in a constant state of flow, needs to be observed within ourselves more often and acted upon through outward demonstrative efforts, and not merely hoped for as some random philosophical state.

It is a human being's crowning achievement, to see a lack of love and to fill the empty space with it. It is that and only that which leads to the completion of the trilogy, provides peace, and makes real an otherwise empty phrase: "On earth as it is in heaven." The trap for many is that any of this has something to do with one specific religion – or religion at all for that matter. It doesn't. Of course, it can. But it really has to do with understanding what every human being wants from a life.

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.

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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

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday (2-4pm) and 4th Tuesday (7-9pm) September to May

Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street, Woodstock Ontario N4S 1C7

If you have never belonged to a stamp club, now's the time. Meet new friends, grow your knowledge and collection. Contact: Don Eaton dhfe@silomail.com
Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

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Free Open House and Ceilidh (Dance)

Monday, Sept. 15 from 7:30-9:00 p.m.

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

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

BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Thursday Sept. 25 and 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.

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday, Oct. 6; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "Under Our Feet, the World of Culinary Mushrooms", Andrew Mavor, Chef/ High School Teacher/ Food Nerd

Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

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Friday Oct. 17 and Friday Nov. 21.

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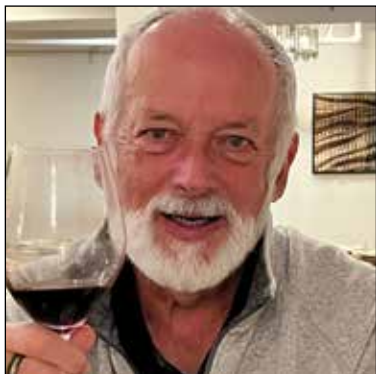
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Getting behind the scenes with the Blue Jays



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

Once upon a time, long ago and sometimes far away, I was given a dream assignment: write a book about players on the Toronto Blue Jays. It was published right at the start of regular season, 1986, and it featured chapters about Jesse Barfield, Lloyd Moseby, Tony Fernandez, Willie Upshaw, Mark Eichhorn and Kelly Gruber, among others.

I was sent to Dunedin for a week in spring training where I got to know all these terrific athletes and, frankly, terrific people. Then back to Toronto for the weeks prior to season opening.

The book, *Home Run: The Personal Profiles of Champion Athletes*, went into two printings. The foreword to the book was contributed by Gary Carter. Like I said, a dream job.

And why, other than sentimental nostalgia, did I bring this up today? That's because of a tour we did a couple of weeks ago – a tour of the new parts of the renovated Rogers Centre, home of today's Blue Jays.

See, when I was hanging out



The wall of baseball cards in the Heinz 328 Club.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

with the Blue Jays, their home was Exhibition Stadium; open to the elements, terrible seating and occasional pre-game snow-removal challenges.

Not so, today. Rogers Centre (which those of us of a certain age will always call "Skydome") is a state-of-the-art sports stadium. We joined a pre-game tour of the place and by and large, it was a pretty interesting experience. Tours are run all season long, several times a day. It's not wildly expensive – the classic tour costs \$40 for adults, \$30 for seniors, \$25 for kids, though you can also spring for a pre-game tour at twice that price, which is longer and includes batting practice, or an "ultimate pre-game tour" with a price tag well into three figures. We were hosted by Destination Toronto on the pre-game tour.

As Blue Jays fans know, Rogers Centre has just undergone some

major renovations. A venue that once was home to other sports apart from baseball, it is now a dedicated space for baseball and concerts only. So, the designers were able to change the configurations of the ballpark and make – so they claim, I think accurately – all of the seats more suited to watching a ball game.

Now, to tell you the truth, I am of two minds about the pre-game tour. There's a lot of good stuff for sure. We got to see, up close, the Jays' World Series Championship trophies. In the same room are housed the Gold Glove trophies of Vladimir Guerrero Jr., José Berriós, Vernon Wells, Devon White, Tony Fernandez and Jesse Barfield.

That's the good news. The bad news for the average fan is that these key bits of memorabilia are kept in the Rogers Banner Club, accessible only to folks who have

TD Premium Access or to people like us on a tour.

And that pattern was repeated throughout the tour. We saw the much-touted new wall of Blue Jay baseball cards, but it's in the Heinz 328 Club named for the foul pole on the first base side of the park; it's located 328 feet from home plate, and the base of the pole is right in the wall of the club. The 328 Club is also an exclusive venue open only to members who have paid extra for the privilege.

The tour takes visitors to a few other similar locations, including a very high-end corporate box. You get to see a lot of photos of famous players and plenty of memorabilia, but at the same time, the tour gets to feel a little like a sales job: "You, too, could enjoy these amenities at a price."

For us, the highlight of the tour was to be on the field, carefully

corralled behind a rope, to watch Blue Jays batting practice. And while we were there, the batters up were Vlady, Bo Bichette, George Springer and Daulton Varsho. For true Jays fans, that experience was probably worth the price of admission.

We also had tickets to the game – good seats, but not in a special section. We discovered that once in the stadium for a pre-game tour (for which you also must have game tickets), you can't leave between the tour and the game. But again, some good news – it was Loonie Dog night, so dining out wasn't wildly expensive. And the Jays won a tightly contested and exciting game.

So, bottom line; is the tour worth the money? For die-hard Jays fans, I would say yes. The chance to get behind the scenes and see trophies, photos and other memorabilia (including a bat used by José Bautista in the famous bat-flipping game) is somewhere near priceless to the dedicated lover of all things Jays.

And I must confess, I did get a bit nostalgic for those days when I could actually sit in the Exhibition Park Jays' dugout before a game and wander on the field with Tony, Lloyd and Jesse. But for a guy now long disconnected from the team, the tour and the game were highly enjoyable experiences in their own right.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past-president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



Gold Gloves won by Blue Jays: from top, left to right, Vladimir Guerrero Jr., José Berriós, Devon White, Vernon Wells, Tony Fernandez and Jesse Barfield.



One of the two World Series trophies won by the Jays.



Memorabilia from José Bautista and Edwin Encarnación.

Riddles

- Why did the leaf go to school in the fall?
To turn over a new leaf.
- What's a snowman's favorite breakfast?
Frosted Flakes.
- Why do flowers always drive so fast in spring?
Because they put the petal to the metal.
- What did the ocean say to summer?
Nothing, it just waved.
- Why was the broom late for fall cleanup?
It swept in.
- What do you call a snowman with a six-pack?
An abdominal snowman.
- Why are spring jokes so great?
Because they always grow on you.
- What did one autumn leaf say to the other?
"I'm falling for you."
- Why don't winter athletes ever get hot?
Because they have lots of fans.
- What's summer's favorite math problem?
Tan-gents.
- Why was the calendar so popular?
Because it had a lot of dates all year round.
- How do trees get on the internet in fall?
They just log in.

Sudoku

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	7		1			9		
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7	4			2				
5								

Solutions on page 23

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