

STRATFORD TIMES

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Stratford Festival opens May 25

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Antoni Cimolino and Geraint Wyn Davies are set to helm this year's Stratford Festival production of *The Tempest*, continuing a decade-long trend of the two collaborating as director and leading man, respectively. Ahead of the comedy's opening on May 25 – and the official kick off to the 2026 season – Cimolino and Wyn Davis sat down with the *Times* for a conversation on this year's production, and on their many storied collaborations throughout the years. The following Q-and-A has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Can you tell me about the first time you two encountered each other?

G: "Well, Antoni and myself, we met as actors in a production of *Henry V* ... in 1989. Antoni was playing the Dauphin and I was playing Henry V, and it was a fantastic production, but a little bit challenged, let's say, on the journey, but we all came out of it pretty swimmingly. That's how we first knew each other, as players."

A: "The dauphin's the prince of France, Ger's the king who eventually fights and wins and gains a big portion of France, and he was pretty much a prince all the way through. It was a pleasure to work with him, and while the process was challenged for a number of reasons, Ger made it all fantastic. He was a pretty great leader, a leader in every way, and ultimately the production, we are very, very proud of it. It was beautiful."

G: "It's interesting, you can have the best time, and sometimes the shows don't live up to the joy that you've had, and others supersede anything you could possibly imagine, having struggled all the way through, and you go, 'Wow, this is extraordinary.' So, we were fortunate to be part of something like that early on in our journey

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Anne Hathaway Public School student council members cut the ribbon on Thursday, May 14, officially unveiling the new Buddy Bench on the school playground.

Anne Hathaway Parent Council unveils Buddy Bench

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Anne Hathaway Public School Parent Council is excited to share its new Buddy Bench initiative in support of student well-being, mental health, friendship and belonging.

Parent council and student council members held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 14 to officially unveil the bench to students and the public.

"We started this initiative because mental health is so

extremely important, and by starting early and getting the children involved by helping each other, as well as self-advocating and growing that empathy piece, is so huge," said Jamie Wagler, chair of the Anne Hathaway Public School Council.

The Buddy Bench is located in the playground area and is meant to be a space where students of any grade can sit when they are feeling down. Once another student notices, they can help make that person feel less lonely by joining them on the bench to talk.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3

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A conversation with Cimolino, Wyn Davies as they take on *The Tempest*

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

in Stratford. So, of course, we took different routes. Antoni decided to run the entire world ..."

A: "We've had the pleasure of occasionally working with each other from time to time, but Ger's done so much work on film and television and directed film, so his time took him away from the festival for a number of years. I'm so glad that in the last decade or so we've been reunited."

Did you know at that point that this is a person I should collaborate with more?

G: "At the time I just enjoyed Antoni's company, but I did. I literally left after that particular season to go over to England for a couple of years ... Then when I came back, we did a very interesting thing here on the 50th anniversary of the festival when Richard (Monette) was running it ... We had three of us meant to play Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*. There was Colm Feore, myself and Richard Monette, and we were going to share that throughout the season for different chunks of time, because of scheduling and things like that, and so when I came back, Antoni was in a completely different situation than when we'd left, both of us being actors, so it was really interesting then to have that relationship, because ... when you first meet someone that's kind of who you are to each other, and yes, of course things change, but I always remembered us as two guys who were acting."

A: "I first saw Ger's work at the Shaw Festival, and he was a young actor, and he was charming and he would throw himself on the ground a lot. So it was fun to work with him a few years later, and then to watch the career change and evolved, but there was always a respect and affection for the experiences that we had on that *Henry V*. When he eventually got back to the festival, and different projects – you were also involved, Ger, in the Chris Plummer (*King Lear*) that we did at the Lincoln Center in New York, so and then it was years later, a few years later, that we started to work together, and –

G: "And then it became unstoppable!"

That unstoppable collaboration, what spurred that?

A: "What Geraint can do on stage, very few people can. He is, at this time in his



(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

Geraint Wyn Davies as Prospero in this year's Stratford Festival production of *The Tempest*, speaks to Allison Lynch as Spirit and Marissa Orjalo as Ariel.

life, in his craft, a singular thing. There's very few actors in the world who are able to do some of the work that he does, and the range is enormous. His ability to bring Shakespeare to life is really so beautiful to experience, and so the festival has benefited from somebody who's really at the height of their game."

G: "We've had a lot of integrity, but along with that, we've had a ton of joy. We laugh a lot in our collectives, not just Antoni and myself, but our casts, our ensembles are extraordinary. They've been a lot of fun, and I think that keeps you wanting to go back to the trough and go, 'Hmm, that was a joy.' I think the integrity and joy part of a collaboration cannot be beat."

Antoni, you've mentioned that being a director, you're a starting impulse that invites everyone to contribute. Ger, can you think of an instance where you've seen that?

G: "Both of us wanted Prospero to be a man who was looking for humanity, and not as – and I'm not talking about anybody specifically, but it has historically been a part for an actor to end their career or to go and out and do a great grandstanding performance, which is great, but I had no interest in that, and I don't think Antoni did either. And so we started with a place where the person was a real human being, and that's fabulous, because then you don't have to come out and have both arms in the air the entire time with one leg up. You can actually just be a person, you can take a little time, you can come from personal experience rather than something that happened 1600-and-something years ago."

A: "I wanted a darker vision of the play than I'd done last time, but at the same time, as Ger said, we also

that?

A: "For me, in choosing this play, there is something about living through an experience, and then perhaps leaving it, and I think that was there for Shakespeare as he wrote it. But what it has turned into over time can be an actor's swan song, and we wanted to find out what the experience was really like for Shakespeare, for Prospero, in going through this, and what we came at was not so much a kind of sentimental 'here are my greatest hits and I'm going' – is an exploration of how hard it is to achieve some good things in life, to get beyond the anger, the bitterness, to make sure that you're doing right by your family, by your daughter, by the people around you, and you find a way through, and that's not easy, that comes at a cost, which I think is a more interesting story about what Shakespeare was going through. ... So we were trying to find a solution to this, where the play was, what the play is about, in a more human way."

G: "A phrase that came to me was, 'It's the cost of letting go.' And so that's interesting when I think about you, Antoni, in your final season in this iteration with the festival ... What have you had to do in your life, or Prospero in his, or anybody for that matter? And then you have to leave, you have to let go. You have to let go of your daughter, you have to let go of your sense of betrayal, you have to let go of everything, and indeed, you have to somewhat let go of your relevance. All these things are in this character, and the cost of that. To answer your question, I'd say I'm not Antoni, but I'd say of course there are echoes and parallels and stuff for anybody who's coming to an end of something, but I think certainly not coming to the end of a career, it's just an end of a chapter."

The Tempest opens May 25, when the Stratford Festival officially opens with its red carpet at the Festival Theatre.

For more information, visit <https://tlnyurl.com/2pynanfp>.



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

Director Antoni Cimolino addresses the company of actors and creatives during an introductory meeting.

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Anne Hathaway PS Parent Council unveils Buddy Bench to support student well-being

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

"It's already working," said Wagler. "We've seen that at pick up now twice, that a child sitting on the bench and someone had gone over and asked if they want to play."

Funding for the bench was donated by Mark's Stratford, which says it was a small way to give back to a school in the community.

"This is such a simple idea, and it really is about getting kids to advocate for themselves at an early age and for other kids to have the opportunity to be empathetic," said Barb Collins, owner of Mark's Stratford.

"We've been in business for 36 years, and my son and his sister both went to Anne Hathaway, and now my grandkids go here. We've always been involved in different things in the community. We get so much from this community. So this is

just a tiny little give back. These kids are so great. It was an easy yes."

The bench gives students a safe, visible place to sit if they need a friend, feel lonely or want someone to talk or play with.

"We have just noticed that a lot of things children are going through are because of conflict with peers and bullying, and it doesn't end when they leave school; they go home to technology where they're still communicating," said Wagler. "We wanted to give them a spot where they don't need to feel alone. Somewhere they can go and know someone is watching out for them and taking a step towards empathy."

The student council, made up of Grade 6 students, has been helping teach classes about the bench's purpose and how to respond when someone is sitting on it. Staff have also been informed on how to support the initiative.

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Perth County Youth Action Committee brings impaired driving awareness event to SDSS

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

For the first time this year, the Perth County Youth Action Committee held an event at Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) to educate students about the risks of impaired and risky driving.

The Perth County Youth Action Committee is made up of 15 high school students representing each of the five high schools across Perth County.

The committee's goal is to raise awareness among youth about social and legal issues in the community and to help create initiatives aimed at improving community safety and well-being on issues affecting young people.

"I think it's incredible to have students want to improve the safety of our roadways and of our community in general," said Const. Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer with Stratford Police Service. "It's important for students to recognize that this is something that impacts everybody."

This year, the committee chose to focus on increasing awareness about impaired driving among youth. Thanks to a grant from Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving (OSAID), the group was able to host events at both SDSS and Listowel District Secondary School (LDSS).

"We're very fortunate that our school board allows us and invites us into the schools," said Const. Marg Geurts of the Perth County OPP. "This way, we can interact with students one-on-one, and get to know them a little bit more, and vice



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)
Members of the Perth County Youth Action Committee and local police officers gathered at Stratford District Secondary School on May 14 for an impaired-driving awareness event. Pictured are Const. Darren Fischer, Ashley Davies, Urvi Sharma and Const. Marg Geurts.

versa; they can see that we're also human beings too.

"We go to crashes and see how they affect entire communities, so if we can educate youth, we can prevent something like that from happening and affecting a school and its community. That's what we're here for," said Geurts.

The SDSS event was held May 14 as part of Students Against Impaired Driving Day, an annual youth-led initiative dedicated to preventing impaired driving.

Students were invited to the gymnasium to try impaired-driving goggles while participating in games and activities. The goggles simulate the effects of alcohol or marijuana impairment.

"It's about finding someone's baseline," said Geurts. "When you are sober, can you catch a ball? However, when you put those goggles on, and then you're trying to catch a ball, it's completely different than if you have the glasses off."

"It's not just for the people who are

wearing the glasses," she continued. "I find a lot of the people who are watching the activity get more out of it, because sometimes the people with the glasses on will be confident and think they did great. However, everyone else watching saw when they were trying to walk on the line; they're not walking on the line at all."

"Being under the influence doesn't just affect driving on the road; it also impacts people cooking or babysitting, or after school at a part-time job, so it's not just about driving, it's about safety in general," said Geurts.

Students from the committee ran the stations and said they learned a great deal through their involvement while helping educate their peers.

"I joined last year because I wanted to be more engaged with what's happening," said Ashley Davies, a Grade 10 student and Youth Action Committee member. "I want to be a police officer someday, so this is a great way to learn valuable lessons about the community."

Activities included Connect Four, ball toss, road-map challenges where students followed road lines while wearing the goggles, trivia and cornhole.

"I think this is a great initiative because we get to participate in school activities and actually teach and educate other students," said Urvi Sharma, a Grade 10 student and Youth Action Committee member. "With the goggles, students can learn the difference between being sober or being under the influence of alcohol, so it teaches them that difference."

Samm Simon raises more than \$33K during fundraising run for regional cancer programs

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Samm Simon is grateful for the support from a variety of people during his Epic Run fundraiser for regional cancer treatment and support programs.

Simon left Stratford on May 11 to run 251 KM to Tobermory, with his close friends accompanying him in an RV. He ran for what he said was "basically a marathon a day for seven days" and lots of family, friends, and strangers were cheering him on.

He and his team received coffee and treats on the way and school children got outside to cheer as he ran. Places let the team park the RV at no cost to them and they received permission to stay on Sacred Land once reaching the Bruce Peninsula. Campout RV also donated the RV used on the trip.

"From the bottom of my family's heart,

my wife and myself, we just really want to thank everyone," Simon said.

After his wife was diagnosed with cancer for the third time, this time terminal, Simon began fundraising via GoFundMe leading up to the run. The fundraiser has well surpassed the initial \$4,500 goal and as of May 19, more than \$33,000 has been raised. Proceeds will support Wellspring Stratford Cancer Centre, Stratford General Hospital's Emergency Room, and London Health Sciences Centre's Cancer program.

"These three organizations were all her choice because that's who she deals with and it's just blowing us away and money's still just slowly trickling in," Simon said.

Now that he's completed the run, Simon's resting up his body during recovery.

"What I went through was nothing compared to what people with cancer go through," he said.

As Simon was on his journey, Wellspring Stratford and the Stratford General

Hospital Foundation cheered him on.

"It's just fantastic when our community does such an initiative like this and for Samm to put his heart into such a fundraiser, it's been a blessing for us to help lift him up and help him with his journey," said Cheryl Hunt, executive director of the Stratford General Hospital Foundation.

A Cancer and Medical Care Clinic opened in Stratford in 2025, but many patients still travel to London for appointments and will go to Stratford General Hospital's Emergency Room in-between appointments during the difficult days.

"We will be working with Samm and looking at our emerg department and seeing how we can help a patient's journey be a little more less stressful and making sure that the staff members have the tools they need to provide care," Hunt said.

Wellspring Stratford provides an array of programs like peer support yoga, reiki, therapeutic touch, swimming at the

YMCA, arts and crafts workshops that are free for the members. The programs and support provide glimmers of joy for those battling cancer, their families, and cancer survivors.

"It's tiny little bits of joy that make their days better and they also get to meet lots of volunteers and lots of other members and they make friendships that last lifetimes," said Ange McNee, Wellspring volunteer.

McNee is also supporting Simon on his run and his wife battling cancer for the third time.

"I think anybody who takes on those challenges is just remarkable," she said.

Donations can be made online to the GoFundMe page via <https://www.gofundme.com/f/2mspu-charity-run>. More information about Simon's journey can be found online by visiting <https://sammsimon.ca>, TikTok (@sammsimon1968), Facebook (@samm.siomon) and Instagram (@samm.simon).

Father, daughter co-write fantasy epic

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

During one September evening last year, Stratford resident Iain Fletcher created a short story about a linenmaid named Lilly in a fantasy world for his nine-year-old daughter Sophie. After reciting it at bedtime, Sophie asked the dreaded question feared by many storytellers across the world.

“She just said, ‘Well, what happens next?’” Iain shared with the Times. “And I said I have no idea. So she kind of took over at that point.”

What ended up happening next quickly evolved into a 136-page children’s novel entitled *Galwyn’s Locket*, self-published by the father-daughter duo in April this year.

According to the back cover synopsis, the story follows Lilly as she has a chance encounter with the Crownwarden of Arkona and is set on a path that leads her from her home and into a realm shaped by ancient magic.

“Guided by unlikely companions, Lilley is drawn into a search for a locket that may shape her future,” the synopsis reads. “But as wonder gives way to danger, she begins to see that every thread of magic is tied to choice, and every act of courage leaves its mark.”



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Sophie and Iain Fletcher sit in their living room, holding a copy of their debut novel *Galwyn’s Locket*. Set in a fantasy world, the book is written for children aged eight to 12 and is available at Fanfare Books, Coles and Amazon.

“It’s a fantasy tale,” Iain explained. “... It’s that typical high fantasy (story) where you make your own world. So it’s not really modeled after our world, but I tried to

keep it light and keep the pace quick for kids. So, you know, I didn’t invent elvish – book two maybe.”

He also explained how the writing process worked with Sophie. As he would write the chapters, she would dictate who the characters were and what would happen next, “hashing it out” each night he came home from work. He likened her to the book’s director, guiding it as he transcribed.

“I like creating my own world,” Sophie said. “Just sometimes you map it all out, and then you need to change stuff because you can’t always just keep the same thing.”

“I just wanted to take part,” she said about the process.

The Harry Potter series was an inspiration for the work, which Iain just finished reading to Sophie recently. Additionally, Iain listed “quiet fantasy” writers like Ursula K. Le Guin, Raymond E. Feist, and Peter S. Beagle as personal inspirations, preferring personal, character-driven fantasy stories to some of the larger, more “boom-pow” fantasy staples. Born

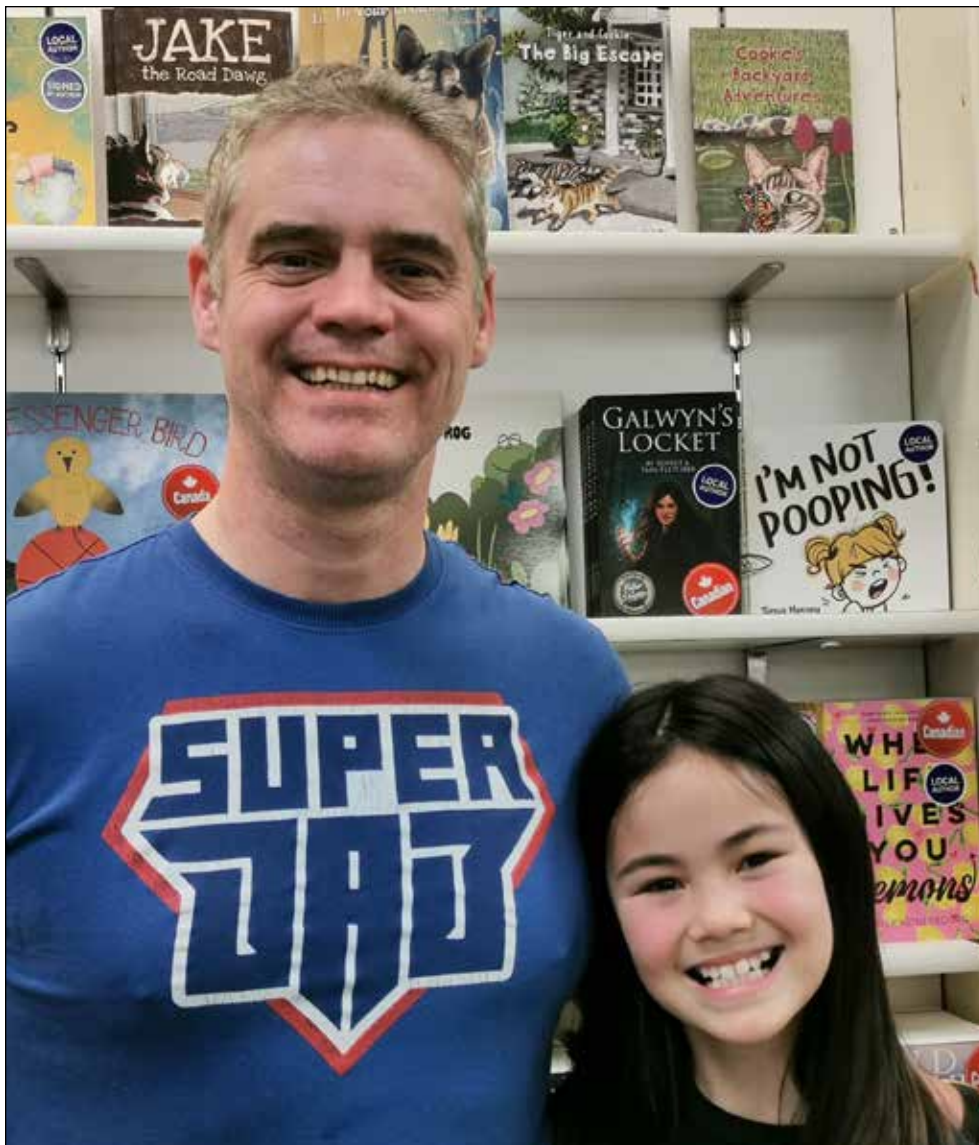


in Carmarthen, Wales, Iain also worked some Welsh folklore into the wider *Galwyn’s Locket* world.

With some good feedback from readers and Sophie’s classmates, the duo is open to a sequel – though will need some time to rest on their laurels and figure out the dreaded question: “What happens next?”

“It’s been exhausting,” Iain laughed, as Sophie began negotiating how many sequels they’ll write. “We’re exploring the possibility of writing. We had a lot of fun with the process.”

Galwyn’s Locket is aimed for children aged eight to 12 and is available at Fanfare Books, Coles and Amazon.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The co-authors of *Galwyn’s Locket* pose in front of their novel at the local Coles.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What corporation is Canada’s largest uranium supplier?
2. What major man-made waterway is in Egypt?
3. What are Drake’s newest albums called?
4. What does DEFCON stand for?
5. Who is Disney’s tiny fairy introduced in 1953?
6. What type of dish is a Minestrone?
7. Billiard cloth on a pool table is commonly referred to as _____?
8. What celebrity launched a perfume called glow?
9. What are you to do if you happen to catch on fire?
10. What is the most dangerous level of tornado?



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This week’s answers are found on pg. 19

Community Access Market marks 10 years of affordable food access in Stratford

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The Local Community Food Centre's Community Access Market is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, marking a decade of helping make fresh, affordable food more accessible for people in Stratford.

What started as a small setup of local produce on tables in the main dining area at the Local has now become a full market open during the week to serve anyone looking to save on groceries.

"It has sort of evolved to meet the demands of the people who already come through the doors," said Jenn Parsons, manager of food logistics. "We listen to the requests, and then it becomes a staple part of what we provide. Dairy, for instance, came about because we received a small refrigerator as a donation. So then I thought, 'Oh, we can start selling milk; people have been wanting milk.'"

From there, the market has evolved into its own unit at the Local, where a range of food, including fresh produce, dairy products, meat, pantry staples, frozen foods and, when available, culturally diverse items are available for purchase.

One popular item is the day-old bread from Downie Street Bakehouse, initially purchased and sold for \$3 a loaf. Ten years later, the owner has never increased the price for the Local, meaning the market is able to pass along high-quality bread at outstanding prices.

At its core, the market was created to fill a gap between traditional food banks and regular grocery stores, offering people a way to access healthy food at lower prices while maintaining dignity and choice.

Instead of pre-packed hampers, the Community Access Market works more like a small grocery store. People can browse shelves, pick out their own groceries and choose foods that work for their households, all at significantly lower prices than traditional retailers.

For many shoppers, the market means stretching a grocery budget a little further – and still heading home with enough fresh ingredients to make healthy meals for the week.

"We see an increased need every year,

but over the last two years especially, there has been a rise in need within the community," said Parsons. "It's really nice to see this dream come true and continue to grow.

"Seeing that it's meeting a need, and hearing people ... be astounded by, not only the price that they're being charged, but also how excited they are about the quality of items, is really nice to see."

Beyond groceries, the market also aims to be a community space for connection and friendships.

"It is a community itself, and it's really lovely when people come into the market for the first few times, they're a little unsure," said volunteer Christine Bland. "You get to know everyone and greet them by name. You learn what they normally have in their basket, and if they don't have something they usually purchase, you can remind them. It's a very personalized experience, and I think everybody needs personal interactions like that."

What makes the Community Access Market unique is that it's open to everyone. Whether someone is on a tight budget or simply looking for affordable, good-quality food, they are welcome.

Revenue generated through purchases is reinvested directly into the market, helping keep prices low, supporting programming and strengthening the Local as a whole. In turn, that support flows back into the wider community, reinforcing a model built on shared participation rather than separation.

The Local Community Food Centre is part of the national Right to Food network, which treats food security as a human right. Its work is grounded in the belief that everyone deserves access to healthy food, and that dignity, accessibility and removing barriers are central to that philosophy.

Recent data from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS), conducted by the Local's parent organization Right to Food, shows just how widespread the issue has become. The findings show that one in four people – nearly 10 million Canadians – live in households that struggle to afford food, including 2.4 million children.

As the Community Access Market marks its 10th anniversary, organizers say the focus remains on meeting growing community need while staying rooted in the same

values it started with – dignity, choice and accessibility.

With a recent grant, the market is continuing to grow and serve the community.

Everyone is encouraged to drop by during

market hours and pick up groceries at great prices while also supporting the community.

The market is open Mondays from 4-6 p.m. and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

THE LOCAL'S MARKET PRICING COMPARISON 2026

The Local VS Grocery Store

Asparagus (per lb)

\$2.85



Asparagus (per lb)

*\$4.99



Cabbage (per ea)

\$2.50



Cabbage (per ea)

*\$3.99



Green Onions (per ea)

\$1.50



Green Onions (per ea)

*\$1.64



Potatoes (per lb)

\$0.50



Potatoes (per lb)

*\$0.80



Beets (per lb)

\$1.25



Beets (per lb)

*\$3.00



Ground Beef (per lb)

\$5.99



Ground Beef (per lb)

*\$7.06



Total Cost

= \$14.59

Increase of 9%

Total Cost

= \$21.24

Increase of 22%



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Jenn Parsons and volunteer Christine Bland stand inside the Local Community Food Centre's Community Access Market, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary of providing affordable groceries to the community.

A price comparison shows that the Local Community Food Centre's Community Access Market offers staple groceries at significantly lower prices than traditional grocery stores, helping shoppers stretch their food budgets further amid rising food costs.

Helping others heal: The community impact of Lisa Stacey

JULIA PAUL

Times Contributor

Lisa Stacey has spent much of her life helping others heal.

Whether through yoga, meditation, Reiki, community work or simply the energy she brings into a room, the lifelong Stratford resident has quietly become one of the city's most recognizable sources of support, connection and joy.

Now, as Stacey celebrates her 50th birthday, the people closest to her say her impact on Stratford reaches far beyond the yoga mat.

"She makes this town better," said Joanie Chapple, owner of Formerly The Glass Shoppe and Stacey's longtime friend. "She's not a spotlight. She's a light that fills the room. She gives people the opportunity to be their best self."

Born and raised in Stratford, Stacey attended Stratford Central Secondary School before studying film and finance at the University of Waterloo. At first, she imagined a future in film, but life quickly took an unexpected turn.

While looking for work in Toronto, she was scouted for modelling, eventually working in both Toronto and London, England.

"My life kind of turned," Stacey said. "Not in the direction that I thought it was going."

Years later, after moving to the country near Brighton, Ont. with her husband, Stacey began focusing more deeply on wellness. Yoga, which she had first started practicing at 17 after a volleyball back injury, became something much larger than physical recovery.

"It was making my mindset better and feeling physically, mentally better," she said.

That path eventually led her into yoga instruction, Reiki training and work at an ayurvedic wellness retreat, where she supported people living with chronic illness, including cancer patients.

When Stacey and her family returned to Stratford in 2009, local connections led her to begin teaching yoga at WellSpring Stratford. About 15 years later, she now manages the centre while continuing to teach yoga and meditation classes both in person and online.

Through WellSpring, Stacey helps oversee a wide range of supportive programming for people affected by cancer, including yoga, meditation, Reiki, therapeutic touch, peer support groups and creative workshops.

"I think people don't really know what WellSpring is," Stacey said. "They might associate WellSpring with cancer and think of the worst, but it's actually a very positive and uplifting place."

Her work extends well beyond WellSpring. Over the years, Stacey has volunteered extensively throughout the community, teaching yoga at schools, supporting local wellness initiatives, partnering with the Local Community Food Centre and helping lead the long-running Yoga Breakfast program.

She also spent years travelling to Nunavut through a youth exchange initiative, teaching yoga and meditation to students in northern communities while helping foster connections between youth in Nunavut and Stratford.

For Mike Odbert, one of Stacey's longtime friends, her impact was life-changing.

Odbert first met Stacey in a YMCA yoga class while struggling with addiction, chronic pain and what he described as a worn-out body after years working in the steel industry.

"The pain had become greater than my pride," he said.

Over time, he credits Stacey with helping heal his "body, mind and spirit," eventually inspiring him to become a yoga instructor himself.

"She is a giving soul," Odbert said. "A good friend who changes lives for the better in many ways. Compassionate and kind."

That ability to help people reconnect with themselves is something both friends and students repeatedly describe.

Chapple said Stacey's influence comes not only from what she teaches, but from how authentically she lives.

"The older she gets, the more colourful she becomes," Chapple said. "She lightens up this beige world."

Known for her vibrant fashion, bright makeup and creative spirit, Stacey embraces individuality openly and encourages others to do the same.

"It's okay to be different," Stacey said. "Don't be so concerned with what everybody else thinks. Just be yourself."

That philosophy shapes how she approaches both well-

ness and life itself.

"A lot of people think success is money," Stacey said. "But I think success is health, family and friends."

Still, the work has not always been easy. One of the most difficult parts of supporting people through cancer journeys, she said, is forming close relationships with members and then losing some of them.

"You have to set up boundaries," Stacey said. "But when it's a human connection, sometimes you can't help having that close connection with somebody."

Even so, she continues to show up with openness and compassion – something Chapple said defines who Stacey is at her core.

"She keeps her heart open when it's really hard," Chapple said.

Outside of work, Stacey finds joy in music, fashion, nature and family life. She DJs local events, collaborates creatively with friends and recently developed a passion for birdwatching, often sitting quietly outdoors listening to birdsongs through a bird-identification app.

For Stacey, those moments of presence matter deeply.

"I think life is too short," she said. "People need to find what brings them joy."

Asked what legacy she hopes to leave behind, Stacey paused before answering simply:

"When in doubt, instead of turning your back on someone, reach your hand out to somebody."

After five decades of building community, lifting others up and helping people heal, many in Stratford would say she already has.

Hog Jog fundraiser for Emily Murphy Centre nourishing community

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Walking or running the route for this year's Hog Jog fundraiser will help the Emily Murphy Centre further expand its capacity.

The Ontario Pork Industry Council (OPIC), in partnership with the Emily Murphy Centre, will host its 19th annual Hog Jog on June 17 at the Stratford Rotary Complex. Participants can either walk or run the 3.5 KM route or run the 10 KM route, and children can do the Weaner Route. There will be a pork dinner after the race and an awards ceremony.

The 2026 Ontario Pork Congress is also happening on June 17 and 18 at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

"There's lots for the whole family to come out and do and this is a great opportunity to do something good for your body, but also do something good for the community because we are really, really, in need of the funds to get these homes installed," said Lisa Wilde, executive director of the Emily Murphy Centre.

Proceeds from the Hog Jog fundraiser will support the

Emily Murphy Centre's capital campaign. The centre is expanding capacity by adding five tiny homes to its backyard.

"Those homes have been gifted to us, but we do need to raise the money to put the infrastructure in, so things like plumbing, electricity and security and all of those things that come along with a new installation of any building," Wilde said.

The Emily Murphy Centre has always had a waitlist, ever since its inception 37 years ago.

"For many women who have experienced violence with or without children, they choose the Emily Murphy Centre to try to re-establish themselves violence free in the community so that waitlist is a constant," Wilde said.

The organization expanded its shelter space two years ago, and the waitlist continues to grow.

"We have a beautiful big backyard that's a great space and why not utilize it for the women that need it the most?" said Wilde.

To learn more about the Hog Jog and to register online, visit <https://raceroster.com/events/2026/114848/hog-jog-2026>.




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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

18U Nationals start three-in-three

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford 18U Nationals started their first multi-day regular season games with a matchup against the Kitchener Diemert Panthers on May 18 at the warm Stratford National Stadium.

The Panthers opened the scoring with

two runs at the top of the first inning, but the Nationals responded with a run of their own at the bottom half on an RBI single from Ethan Priestap, driving home James Robinson, who avoided disaster by dodging the Kitchener infield on the rundown from third base.

After starter Cooper Yantzi and the defence retired the Panthers in order

at the top of the second inning, the Nationals took the lead with an RBI from Daniel Hovius and a run by Tucker Otto on a wild pitch.

Kitchener extended their lead in the following inning, taking a one-run advantage into the bottom of the fourth. A near costly baserunning error then loaded the bases for the Nationals. Hov-

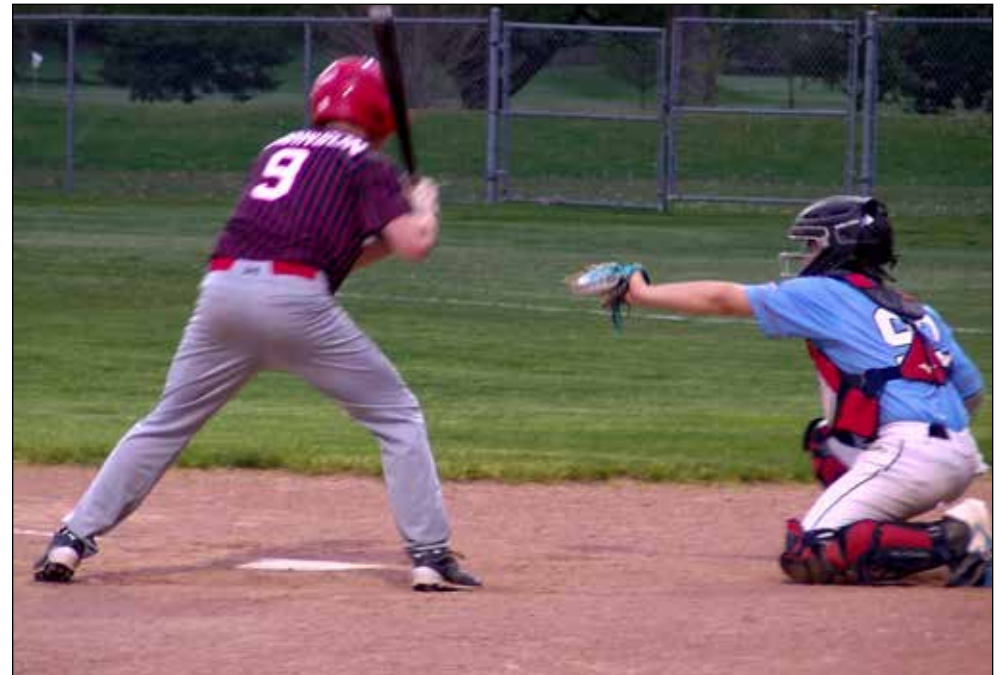
ius' second RBI of the game with an outfield sacrifice fly scored Nolan Miller, tying the game.

Moments later, rain flooded the field, leading to the game being called off with two outs in the bottom of the fourth inning. As of press time, the rescheduling of the game has not been announced.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Pitcher Cooper Yantzi throws his pitch in the first inning against the Kitchener Diemert Panthers at Stratford National Stadium on May 18.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

James Robinson holds up his bat in the batter's box against the Kitchener Diemert Panthers at Stratford National Stadium on May 18.

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(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

The rain-soaked diamond at Stratford National Stadium minutes after the Nationals-Panthers game was called off during the fourth inning on May 18.

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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15U Nationals gets clawed, but leaps past Waterloo

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford 15U Nationals experienced mixed results against the two Waterloo Tigers teams. They lost 8-2 at home on May 14 but bounced back with a 12-2 victory on the road during Victoria Day.

On May 14, the Nationals played against the Waterloo Tigers Team 1 at the chilly Stratford National Stadium. In the first inning, the Tigers took a 1-0 lead after a double with one out. Stratford had a chance to equalize in the bottom of the inning with the bases loaded and one out, but they couldn't capitalize, as a strikeout and a pop fly ended their rally.

Waterloo scored two more runs in the next inning against starting pitcher Jake Price, increasing their lead to 3-0 after two innings. The Tigers added an additional run in the third inning off reliever Reid Musselman. The Nationals finally scored in the bottom of that inning when

Cole Morris drove in Will Molenhuis with an RBI single. Later in the same inning, Stratford had the bases loaded with two outs and attempted to score more but was unable to do so.

The visitors continued to pour on the runs in the late innings, putting the game out of reach and winning 8-2. Quintin Parr added an RBI in the bottom of the sixth for the Nationals' second run.

After the game, Nationals coach Rick Boon praised Waterloo's timely pitching, noting that their inability to score runs was the deciding factor.

"I thought the Waterloo pitching was strong. All three pitchers for them threw well; they kept the ball around the zone. It's a cold night. We didn't hit the ball as well. We had chances. We left at least eight runners on. We had bases loaded twice," Boon said.

"I said to the guys in there, 'We have to make sure we hit back-to-back. We have to put hits back-to-back to make that work.'

Didn't happen tonight, so we'll have to bounce back and play the other water routine on Monday."

On Victoria Day, the Nationals travelled on the road for the first time this season as they faced the Waterloo Tigers Team Two at Lexington Park in Waterloo. Boon says the focus of the game is to improve offensive execution and generate more scoring chances.

"It's stringing two and three hits together, making sure that we kind of push the line along, so we get a base hit, or we get a walk, somebody else is going to push him along to the next base, and then we get a fastball and another base hit, so we got to keep making sure that we put two and three hits together," Boon said.

On May 18, the Nationals rebounded from their loss with a 12-2 win over the Waterloo Tigers Team Two at Lexington Park.

This was the Nationals' last regular-season game before the Cardinal Classic in

St. Thomas from May 22 to 24. Stratford will be placed in Group A with Clarington, Newmarket and Quinte. Stratford's expectations, according to Boon, are to be competitive in the season-opening tournament.

"I think we just want to be competitive. We want to be competitive in every inning. I don't like having innings just kind of go by, and we just run through the score. We're going to be playing some really good ball clubs, and we're not always going to win every game, but I want to be competitive in every single game," Boon said.

The Nationals start their round-robin on May 22 with a match against the Clarington Orioles. On the last day, May 23, Stratford will compete against the Newmarket Hawks in the morning at 8 a.m., followed by a game against the Quinte Royals in the early afternoon at 2:45 p.m. All three games will be held at Emslie Field.

The semifinals and the championship are scheduled for May 24, also at Emslie Field.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford pitcher Quintin Parr prepares to throw the pitch against the Waterloo Tigers at Stratford National Stadium on May 14.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford infielder Jackson Goebel awaits a pitch in the bottom of the fifth against the Waterloo Tigers at Stratford National Stadium on May 14.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford pitcher Quintin Parr prepares for his next pitch against the Waterloo Tigers at Stratford National Stadium on May 14.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford first baseman James Antonio holds on after recording the final out of the fourth inning against the Waterloo Tigers at Stratford National Stadium on May 14.

Vivienne Abbey and Alexandra Krohn discuss sharing the role of the Changeling Child in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Two dancers from Stratford Dance Co. have been cast as the Changeling Child in this year's Stratford Festival production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. This is not an understudy casting. Vivienne Abbey and Alexandra Krohn are taking turns portraying this central character of the play and are having a magical time of it.

This is the debut role for both, but they come from artistic stock. Abbey's father is the director and festival staple Graham Abbey and Krohn's parents are actors, and her father Aaron Krohn is cast in the production as Flute. As a shared role for the character, they each have their own identity; Vivienne is known as Rose Petal and Alexandra is known as Daisy.

"I think it's nice that we get to share it. The director made it more interesting for us because the Changeling Child is sometimes not in the scene or doesn't have any lines, but he made it so that we have two lines and we're actually in a lot of scenes. We're basically always with the fairies when they come on, except when the couples are there," said Alexandra.

Performing Shakespeare is perhaps a lofty pursuit, daunting even, for any ac-

tor, but these two have acquired a great understanding of the story and the central conflict between the fairies caused by the mortal child, with one faction wanting to protect them and the other wanting nothing but mischief.

With only two lines throughout the entire play, Vivienne and Alexandra rely on their dance skills to express their storytelling and emotions.

"We're a playful personality, a child that doesn't want to grow up and just wants to have fun and isn't thinking about all this conflict even though we are aware. We're just laughing and having fun," said Vivienne.

"There's one scene where the Changeling Child has snuck away and they see Puck and then they have a whole little game together. Our lines are talking to Puck who we think is just a friend," added Alexandra. "You have to use your face to keep it interesting."

Preparing to go on stage involves a little bit of exercise of hand flapping, leg shaking and counting down which, when demonstrated, makes them giggle. Essentially, they do what they can to relax and get ready to enjoy the performance. They even have a special handshake. While only one will be on stage for a performance,

the other will still come and be present for support as true teammates.

The cast have been very welcoming to the young performers and have made the experience one to remember with great opportunity to learn.

"It's fun getting to know people so I'm friends with everyone. It's nice because I find they are all really great actors and it's nice to be in a room with talented people. I always learned something from them," Alexandra said.

"It's very cool to see professional actors that have been with the company ever since they were our age to see them perform. It's just so interesting to watch, to look at their facial expressions and how they do that, and knowing that we might be able to do that someday," added Vivienne.

Even though the performers come to the table experienced in dance, there was a lot of new choreography and techniques to learn. Curtain call will see the Changeling Child perform a tap dance for the audience.

They both agree on which scene is their favourite. Not surprisingly, it is the firefly scene with Puck where they really get to play around with movement and personality.

"We're with a very experienced actor (Mike Nadajewski) and it's so funny, and just makes it so much more enjoyable," Vivienne said.

"I also really like it because it's fun to be with him as a really good actor. We play around and have fun. It's not improvised, it has choreography but it's not like the choreography couldn't change a tiny bit each time," added Alexandra.

They also agree that this experience has reinforced their love and ambition for dance and acting. When giving advice to another prospective performer, it would be to just have fun.

"Just have the most fun you can have because these times don't last forever and you can learn from experienced actors, and if you watch and listen, it's really magical. If anyone wanted to try this, I think it's an amazing idea and an amazing thing to do in your life. It's life changing, it's beautiful," concluded Vivienne.

"And if you're ever nervous, remember that you're not going to mess up, you know what you're doing and just have fun on stage. There's so many people around you who know exactly what they're doing and have been there for so long. It's really just magical," Alexandra said.



(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

Alexandra Krohn as Daisy the Changeling Child in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.



(ANN BAGLEY PHOTO)

Vivienne Abbey as Rose Petal the Changeling Child, with Mike Nadajewski as Puck, Sara Tophan as Titania, Andre Sills as Oberon and Derek Kwan as Limestone.

Ripy & Vine the result of an evolution of vision

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

With an eclectic mix of gourmet products, wines for sale and a seasonal cocktail menu, the vision for Ripy & Vine has been an evolution from concept to opening day with a smattering of self-discovery along the way.

Owners Shane Kirkland and husband Matt Vaile have built a place where customers can browse through the carefully curated collection of beautifully branded gourmet offerings while sipping a glass of wine or a cocktail with friends. Residents may recognize Kirkland as the sought-out mixologist of Stratford, having worked at Elizabeth. and the Relic Lobby Bar.

“Matt and I have been talking about opening a general store for a while now, but the space never came up. Then this space became available and we thought it’s about time we do something for us,” explained Kirkland.

With space secured they gave themselves 30 days to manifest their vision into reality. The name is a nod to Kirkland’s grandmother whose maiden name is Ripy. Her grandfather was a bourbon distiller named TB Ripy and his son was also a bourbon distiller, both in Lawrenceburg, Ky. During prohibition, they sold their distilleries to two brothers who turned it into Wild Turkey bourbon.

“It was a quick journey. We decided on Oct. 20 last year to open a space, we got the keys on Nov. 1 and with the help of Grace (Fullerton) and Matt’s father and our friends Ashley and Andrew, we were able to get the store open in just over 30 days. It was a lot, but it was good; it was fun. We learned a lot about ourselves, and we learned a lot about our relationship as well which was good, and we grew,” said Kirkland. “Matt has a great eye for design, most of what is here is from his eye.”

Having to pivot from a general store was a challenge of their original vision discovered in the middle of a wine tasting when they heard the news that they received their liquor licence. Upon hearing of this success, the wine rep informed them that they wouldn’t be able to buy direct from him after all, they would have to buy direct from the LCBO. With that news, they changed their licence from general store to cocktail bar so that they could continue to have access.

“I’m happy that we opened the bar and I’m happy that we’ve had people around us, supporting us,” said Kirkland.

The Ripy & Vine experience is about great wine, great cocktails, great snacks but without any sense of pretention. They want wine to be

approachable for everyone, to come in and feel welcome and that the business is theirs to enjoy as well as if it were their own home.

The food items and other general sundries are curated by Vaile with an outstanding eye for detail, such as the ceramic olive oil bottle that can be reused. Most of the wine is curated by Kirkland.

“Matt and I both love old world wines, so French, Italian, Austria, Germany, that sort of thing. So we selected most of the wine to be old world with some VQA, so Ontario wines sprinkled in a bit, but the majority is old world. We try to stick with as natural as we can, understanding that some people are not fans of natural wine, so we will have a couple of what I’ll say are non-natural wines,” said Kirkland.

With natural wines, each bottle, each vintage, is going to be a little bit different dependent on the soil or the weather. Wines are not supplemented with yeast, sugars or acids to balance the wines. Natural wines use the natural sugars and yeast in the fruit. These are typically wines that are not found in the LCBO.

Signature items Kirkland is particularly proud of naturally comes from the cocktail menu. The Old Ripy is an homage to his mother’s family bourbon and Hyde Park is a tribute to Vaile’s mother who grew up in Hyde Park in London, Ont. His grandmother had an apple tree in her backyard and Vaile would always eat apples as a kid, so he wanted an apple dirty martini.

The Ripy & Vine monthly wine club features two different groupings. “There is the classic and adventurous with four bottles a month of each group. The classic is going to be grapes you would know from regions you would know; so Pinot Noir from Burgandy or Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire Valley. The adventure is going to be grapes you may not be familiar with or wine making



(LILA LAVEREAU PHOTO)

Matt Vaile and Shane Kirkland have opened Ripy & Vine, a realization of an evolving vision. techniques you may not be familiar with; a little more off the beaten path,” shared Kirkland.

Wine club members receive a free bottle tote bag with their first order to carry bottles home each month as well as perks just for them. Looking ahead, the future for Ripy & Vine looks promising having made it

through the winter and now with an additional 10-person patio, seating capacity is doubled for the season. There are new cocktail menus every eight weeks to keep things fresh and an upcoming happy hour Tuesday through Thursday.

Ripy & Vine is located at 148 St Patrick St and is open Tuesday through Saturday.

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Stratford-produced *Farm to Fork* returns for third season spotlighting Waterloo Region agriculture

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A Stratford production company is once again shining a spotlight on the people behind Waterloo Region's agricultural industry with the third season of *Farm to Fork*.

Produced by Stratford-based Ballinran Entertainment and directed by co-producer Julian Wierzbicki, the television series follows Bruce Hotel chef Nick Benninger as he visits farms and agricultural businesses throughout Waterloo Region, exploring not only where food comes from, but the people and stories behind it. Executive producer Craig Thompson said the show's success comes from its focus on the human side of farming at a time when more Canadians are thinking carefully about food, its origins and the people producing it.

"Very few people tell the story from the farmer's perspective," Thompson said. "It gives the viewer a better understanding of some of the pressures and emotions that go into creating food for our tables. It really is a glimpse into the lives of the people who are behind the food on our grocery-store shelves, on our kitchen tables and in our restaurants."

Thompson said the Waterloo Region area is uniquely suited for a show like *Farm to Fork* because of its strong agricultural roots and growing agri-tourism industry.

"We're in the breadbasket of Ontario," Thompson said. "Many of the people we profile have these farmgate operations



(BALLINRAN ENTERTAINMENT PHOTO)
Farm to Fork host and chef Nick Benninger cooks up a meal with fresh, organic vegetables grown onsite at Pfenning's Organic Farms near Baden during shooting of the Rogers TV show's third season.

where the public can come in and see the farm or buy some of the products. ... Farmers are very entrepreneurial and they have that idea to spread their products more than just in supermarkets, but directly to restaurants and at the farmgate."

"The show is literally rooted in some of the best soil in the world, nurtured and managed by dedicated artisans who, with pride, skill and experience, bring their incredible food to their neighbours in our community," added Wierzbicki in a press

release issued by Ballinran. "The show starts with the region's great soil and ends with the incredible people who, with time, effort and pride, provide their neighbours with some of the best produce found anywhere."

Season three features several Waterloo Region agricultural operations including Eby Manor Farms, organic vegetable producer Pfenning's Organic Farm near Baden and the Perth Farmhouse, a winery and agri-tourism destination in Perth East

near both Wellesley and Wilmot townships.

Thompson said the show has also highlighted a shift within the agricultural industry as younger generations of farmers bring new ideas and business models to family operations.

"The younger generation is not just tilling the soil and cutting the hay," Thompson said. "They are injecting an entrepreneurial spirit into farming and agriculture, and we're seeing that all over the place."

Hosted by Benninger, who Thompson described as a natural storyteller and interviewer, the show aims to connect viewers more closely with local food producers and the passion that drives them.

"These are people who genuinely care about what they do," Thompson said. "There's a lot of sacrifice that goes into being a farmer, so you have to love what you do. We hope that love and passion comes across in each episode."

The series is supported by Explore Waterloo Region, which has partnered with the production for all three seasons as part of its efforts to promote local food and agricultural tourism.

"*Farm to Fork* beautifully captures the passion, innovation and authenticity of Waterloo Region's agricultural community," Explore Waterloo Region CEO Minto Schneider said in a press release. "It's a powerful way to connect residents and visitors alike with the people and places behind our local food story."

The new season of *Farm to Fork* is now airing on Rogers TV and is also available online.

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STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

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

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

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

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SPRING TEA & BAKE SALE

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Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

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FOOD TRUCKS

May 25, 2026 from 4:30-7:30

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

El Milagro, Wild Boar, Fo Cheezy, Beavertails
Donations to Grace United Church

HOLY TRINITY VARIETY SALE

St. James Anglican Church, 41 Mornington St, Stratford

First Choice Night

Thursday May 28th, 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Super Sale

Friday May 29th 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Toonie a Tote Hour

Friday May 29th 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Drop Off Items Accepted

May 12-13-14

May 19-20-21

9:00 am - 12:00 noon

If you can help - call Karen: 273-5398

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 1; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Ish n Chips, SWAT, Siggis, Pablos Street of India

Donations to Tavistock Health Clinic

YARD SALE

Saturday, June 6

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Dishes, books, jewelry, games, toys, knick-knacks, silverware, craft supplies, lamps, materials, china, decorations, small furniture, vintage and collectibles table, electrical appliances, plants and garden décor items

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 8; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Los Rolling Tacos, Born2Eat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to Camp Bimini

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June 9th to June 13; 7:30 p.m.

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St. Marys Gospel Hall, 632 Jones Street East, St. Marys

Speaker: Scott MacLeod

These meetings are hosted by Christians gathered in His Name at St. Marys Gospel Hall.

For more information email fullerglenj@gmail.com or mobile: 519 703 9453

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 15; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Wild Boar, El Milagro, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 22; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Born2Eat, El Milagro, Ish n Chips

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

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

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Pablas Street of India, Swat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

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

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Siggis, Los Rolling Tacos, Berlin 95

Donations to Camp Bimini

FOOD TRUCKS

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

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

SWAT, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

PLANT SALE

Saturday, May 23; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Siloam United Church, 1240 Fanshawe Park Rd. E.

The London Orchid Society will be holding an Orchid Plant Sale. Admission \$5.00. Contact Daryl 519-666-2927 or www.londonorchidsociety.com.

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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11:00 a.m. - Fellowship and
Coffee Hour

We are a Welcoming Community

Editorial

Our second year of home upgrades are underway



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As I sit here typing out this editorial at the last minute before the paper goes to press – as I always seem to do – everything around me is a little chaotic.

We have contractors ripping out our upstairs bathroom so it can be cleaned of black mold – a lovely little surprise the previous homeowners neglected to inform us of – before it can be expanded and reconstructed into more of an ensuite bathroom.

In addition to redoing the bathroom, the same contractors will be redoing our flooring and sub-flooring upstairs. There are parts of the subflooring that have clearly rotted over the years and need to be shored up, ideally before I stick my foot through the floor in the middle of night.

The contractors will also be working to remove several support pillars upstairs that were

installed, again by the previous owners, to support the roof long after they decided to turn two bedrooms into one without replacing the load-bearing wall with any other kind of support.

Again, that was something we didn't find out about until months after we purchased the home. An inspector told us at the time of the sale that the support posts would be fine for the short term, but it would be something we would need to deal with sooner than later.

At the same time as all of that, we are having our backyard redone. We're looking at establishing a firepit and seating area, a shallow deck and outdoor dining

space, and bother perimeter gardens and a keyhole garden for vegetables.

There are other stages to the plan – maybe a hot tub down the road – but this is the first phase, and we do have a bit of a quick deadline for this work. The plan is to have it done by the last weekend in June so we can host our wedding shower in the backyard. Luckily, the contractors we found are confident they can get it done before then.

Fingers crossed!

Finally – and potentially the most exciting part of all of this – we're getting central air conditioning installed today! Yes, we waited until it was unbearably

hot and we had lost access to our shower before booking an install, but luckily, we were able to get someone here right away thanks to a family connection – and we got a pretty good deal on it, to boot.

For us, especially when it comes to renovations, change seems to happen all at once. Though that does come with its fair share of chaos, it is chaos for the better and sooner than later we will be able to sit back and enjoy the fruit of our short-term inconveniences.

Oh yeah. I almost forgot. We're also planning a wedding for Sept. 5. I guess we'll just keep this chaos going for a little longer, then.

CORRECTION: In the article "The art of tumbleweeding," published on page eight of the May 8 edition of the Stratford Times, the author incorrectly stated Monica Viani designed and built the bonnets for *The Handmaid's Tale*, when she prototyped and led the build for the bonnets designed by Ane Crabtree in season one of the TV show. The Times regrets any confusion this error caused.

Quote of the Week

"It's a crazy feeling, a lot of emotion. It was a war all series long and for it to end up being Game 7 in overtime. Sometimes it just takes one shot and coming across the line; I just thought there was a shot opportunity. Great to see it find the back of the net, and there's no better feeling than celebrating with your teammates after a win like that."

- Montreal Canadiens Alex Newhook after scoring the OT goal in Game 7 that will take the Habs to the Eastern Conference Finals.

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STRATFORDTIMES

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6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Opinions

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL: SURFACE-SURFING



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

In a great many scenarios in life, with all the world being a stage and all the people merely players, it's the stuff underneath that usually matters the most. I look for that. Not just the actor – but the person stepping off the stage. It's a practice that brings understanding. For much of the more meaningful elements in a lifetime, the stuff underneath is the stuff that moves us. The rest is smoke and mirrors, politeness and presentation. Brilliant fun and entertaining – absolutely – but often the cover of a book, not the content. What's within is what elevates or disappoints. What is learned and what is shared.

When the content is focused

on, the world opens, becomes fresh – and persons, places and things become sprouts of wonder, even if they ultimately end in disappointment. We become child-like, and we feel what we were meant to feel: wonder. Regarding ourselves – it's a lack of content that often makes us ghosts to ourselves, makes us search for happiness through the things we buy, makes us love through appearances and feel self-worth through titles and prestige and money. We are meant to be malleable, to keep growing, to change inside. That is a sign of our resilience.

There is a lot written about happiness and by now we have all heard the adage that money can't buy it. No matter how wealthy the wealthy become, any "happiness" purchased is not inherently tied to life satisfaction, unless one can lift and look underneath the thick carpet of things that exist within us and outside of us – for the substance. And often that substance is delicately tied to us, in subtle illuminations in the natural world, through nature's example, life and death, and through our human interactions. In that way, we can sense what is necessary for us to sustain ourselves in

meaningful interaction. Focusing only on the surface of things can make one's work mundane, one's partner shallow, one's home a prison and one's living akin to dying.

I believe the greatest danger for human beings is illustrated in this quote:

"The perfect dictatorship would have the appearance of democracy, but would basically be a prison without walls, in which the prisoners would not even dream of escaping. It would essentially be a system of slavery, where, through consumption and entertainment, the slaves would love their servitude." In other words, subsisting on the surface of things and never delving deeper into the self. Of course, along with that, comes a serious lack of empathy.

Let us go deeper, where wonder resides every now and again: when looking – trying to see, when doing – trying to create, when speaking – trying to open, when listening, trying to learn. To not always surface-surf, formulating opinions or beliefs through a misguidance we all, at times, welcome in at the door of our own quick and shallow perceptions and judgements.

To be clear – where is all the

interpretation and meaning to be found? Why, within ourselves of course. After we have all been hurt or blamed or blessed – at whatever age awareness of ourselves begins to happen – we can begin to find it, feel it, interpret it and change it, that elusive meaning of ourselves. But always in the context of those around us. How do we live with others? More importantly, how do we live with ourselves. The work is ours, and it keeps shifting as we slide into different situations, altering to fit our points of reference. And without going beyond the surfaces outside of us, into the depths within, we cannot see the whole human. We cannot re-discover ourselves as we grow.

Within a perfect circle, we are born pure and impressionable. As children, we grow, see and learn, but are still too young to fend for ourselves. Here then is the place where the luck of the draw exists – the parents, the country, the race, the money, the beliefs... all taught us through the limited world of youth, other people, and our environment. And when, finally, we have a hand in molding ourselves from the tools we've been given, we struggle into a shape. And for some of us, once we have that

shape, we place our clay-like selves into a kiln for firing to create the firm foundation. We say to ourselves and others, I know who I am – this fear, this anger, this circumstance, this job, this privilege, this habit, this sacrifice, this strength, this weakness, this love, in this place. This is me. This is mine. This is my lot in life.

But we are not these things. We are not destined to come to an endgame and fix ourselves in place. These things are merely signposts on the road to our own discoveries. At each one, we are meant to stop and ask the only question that carries any immediate consequence: What do I truly, in the deepest places of my soul, know about myself now?

Within that question are our answers and our wisdom. And we should not look away from any truth revealed there. For that is what allows us to continue the search, stronger, newly born – so that we may find more of ourselves, and in so doing – know what our contributions are.

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.

Why slowing down makes life richer



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

In today's world, speed is often treated like a measure of success. We move quickly from one appointment to another, answer messages immediately, multitask through meals and fill our calendars to overflowing. Productivity has become a badge of honour, and slowing down can sometimes feel almost uncomfortable.

Yet many people are beginning to question whether faster always means better.

There is a growing realization that constantly rushing through life may actually cause us to miss much of what makes life meaningful. Slowing down is not

about laziness or a lack of ambition. Rather, it is about becoming more present, more intentional, and more aware of the life unfolding around us. In many ways, slowing down can make life far richer.

When we are always hurrying, we tend to operate on autopilot. We move from task to task without fully experiencing the moment we are in. Meals are eaten while checking phones. Conversations are interrupted by notifications. Walks become another thing to complete instead of something to enjoy. Life becomes efficient, but not necessarily fulfilling.

Slowing down changes this.

It allows us to pay attention again. We begin to notice details that rushed living often hides from us: the sound of birds in the early morning, the comfort of sunlight coming through a kitchen window, the warmth of a genuine conversation or the quiet satisfaction of finishing a task without feeling frantic.

These moments may appear small, but together they create a deeper sense of connection to our lives.

Slowing down also improves the quality of our relationships. When people feel hurried, they often listen less carefully and respond more impatiently. But when we take time to truly be present with others, relationships deepen. A conversation becomes more meaningful when we are not mentally rushing toward the next thing on our schedule.

Children, older adults, and even pets often remind us of this slower rhythm. They are not always focused on efficiency. They pause, observe, linger and fully experience ordinary moments. Adults frequently lose this ability because modern culture rewards speed and constant achievement. Yet some of the richest experiences in life cannot be rushed.

Friendship cannot be rushed. Healing cannot be rushed. Creativity cannot be rushed. Joy itself often appears quietly, in moments when we finally stop long enough to notice it.

There is also a strong connection between slowing down and mental well-being. Chronic stress and overstimulation have become increasingly common.

Many people feel emotionally exhausted before the day has even ended. Constant busyness keeps the nervous system in a near-permanent state of alertness.

Slowing down helps interrupt this cycle.

Taking a walk without checking a phone, spending time in nature, reading quietly, gardening, journaling or simply sitting in silence for a few minutes can calm the mind and restore emotional balance. These simple practices create space for reflection and clarity. We begin to hear our own thoughts again instead of constantly reacting to external demands.

Interestingly, slowing down does not necessarily mean accomplishing less. In fact, people often make better decisions and feel more satisfied when they approach life with greater intention rather than constant urgency. When we stop trying to do everything at once, we often discover what truly matters.

Nature offers one of the best lessons about slowing down. Trees do not rush their growth. Seasons unfold gradually. Gar-

dens bloom according to their own rhythms. Much of the natural world operates with patience, yet it remains remarkably productive and beautiful.

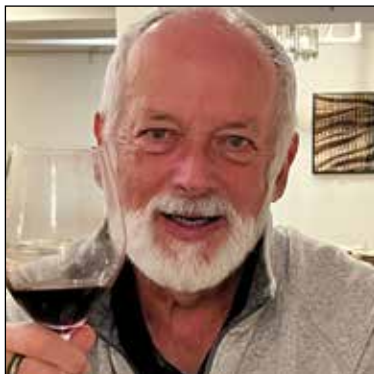
Human beings are not machines, even though modern life sometimes expects us to function like them. We need rest, reflection, and moments of stillness. Without these, life can begin to feel mechanical and emotionally thin.

Slowing down also encourages gratitude. When we pause long enough to truly experience life, ordinary things regain their beauty. A shared meal, a handwritten note, laughter with a friend or a peaceful evening walk can suddenly feel deeply nourishing.

Perhaps the richest parts of life are not found in rushing toward the next milestone, but in learning how to fully inhabit the present moment.

In a culture that constantly urges us to move faster, choosing to slow down may be one of the healthiest and most meaningful decisions we can make. It allows us not only to live longer days, but fuller ones.

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: It's not only about the onions



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

You could easily get the impression that, in Tropea, it's all about the onions. Well, that's not the whole story, but the onions do play a big role in this lovely Italian seaside town.

We were in the southern tip of Italy – Calabria – on a Senior Discovery Tours visit. It was a great trip – so good, that we have arranged to repeat the tour next year with a group of friends! So obviously, there were more attractions than just onions.

However, the Tropea onions are actually world-famous among foodies. We first learned about them in the Calabria episode of Stanley Tucci's television series about food in Italy. He visits Tropea, which is on the western, Terranean Sea coast of Calabria (his ancestral home), and among other taste delights, he eats a sweet, red, Tropea onion like an apple, and claims to enjoy it.

If that makes Tropea sound like a slightly quirky destination, so be it, but I would not have missed it for the world.

Let's leave the onion fields for a moment, and take in some other, also-quirky features of the town – the cathedral, for example.

I know; I can hear some of you jaded travellers moaning, "Not another



Tropea stores often have displays of miniature characters enacting historic crafts.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

cathedral!" And we all know the sentiment.

But the Cathedral of Saint Mary of Romania has at least one feature that, I will admit, I have never encountered elsewhere. Mounted inside the main doors, one on each side, are unexploded World War II bombs. The fact that they landed near the cathedral but did no damage is credited as a miracle to the Madonna, and celebrated by the prominent presence of these devices (now disarmed, thank goodness) inside the cathedral.

The cathedral is genuinely ancient; it was built in 1160 and is dedicated to the Virgin of Romania, patron saint of Tropea. The church design shows Arab and Byzantine influence, and pride of place behind the altar is given to a 13th-century Byzantine icon of the Virgin of Romania. Not only is the Madonna credited with the miracle of the un-

exploded bombs, she also is deemed responsible for saving Tropea from earthquakes, plagues and other natural disasters.

The shops of Tropea have an ambience all their own. Several feature very large displays of miniature figures and buildings showing life from ancient times and illustrating crafts that have been lost to history. These displays fill the entire wall space in some shops, and there is no charge to see them – though donation boxes may be in evidence.

Almost every store has a display, for sale this time, of bug-eyed, large-nosed ceramic faces guaranteed to ward off the evil eye. I don't know if they work; I do know they are guaranteed to make you smile. They're hilarious.

The town itself has its own unique beauty – narrow alleyways hung with flower baskets, ancient arch-

ways and doors, shops with their displays spilling out onto the street. In one such store, the shopkeeper spoke not a word of English – and I have no Italian past "vino" – but he still managed to sell me a jar of bruschetta spread, and another of a "mousse" made from – you guessed it – Tropea onions.

Better yet, as an inveterate collector of wildly coloured and patterned socks, I was thrilled to find a reddish-purple pair illustrated with, yep, onions. I wear them with pride.

Tropea is right on the sea, and the town offers some spectacular views of the Mediterranean (The Terranean Sea is just one section of that larger ocean). The view includes the sight of the active volcanic island, Stromboli, which rises as a nearly perfect triangle out of the sea.

Our day trip included an additional stop at Pizzo, another seaside

town half an hour north of Tropea. There, while there is a castle with an intriguing history and more beautiful views, the highlights were two culinary experiences.

First, we went to a pizzeria for a plethora of genuine Calabrian pizza. The servers just kept bringing pizzas to the table, one kind after another – a delicious, simple Margherita pizza, then ham and mushroom followed by a veggie version with zucchini, eggplant and more. But the two signature choices were an 'nduja pizza ('nduja is a spicy, spreadable pork and chili pepper sausage unique to Calabria) and a tuna and Tropea onion pizza.

They were amazing. We were stuffed to the gills. And then they took us for tartuffo – two kinds of gelato moulded around a chocolate centre covered with cocoa and nuts. It turns out we weren't all that full after all.

Tropea and Pizzo, like Calabria in general, is a very unspoiled part of Italy. Local customs, legends and culinary traditions have survived here, largely intact.

But these are seafront communities with lovely beaches, and our guide admitted that "in summer, Tropea is very, very crowded." But in the shoulder seasons – the long spring and fall of southern Italy – the tourists are largely absent, but the wonderful features remain and are readily available to delight visitors like us.

And as I mentioned, we are going back.

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.



Unexploded bombs hang near a statue of the Madonna in the Tropea Cathedral, making a miracle of deliverance from harm.



The 13th-century icon of the Virgin of Romania hangs over the altar.



Caricatures that ward off the evil eye – or at least make you smile.

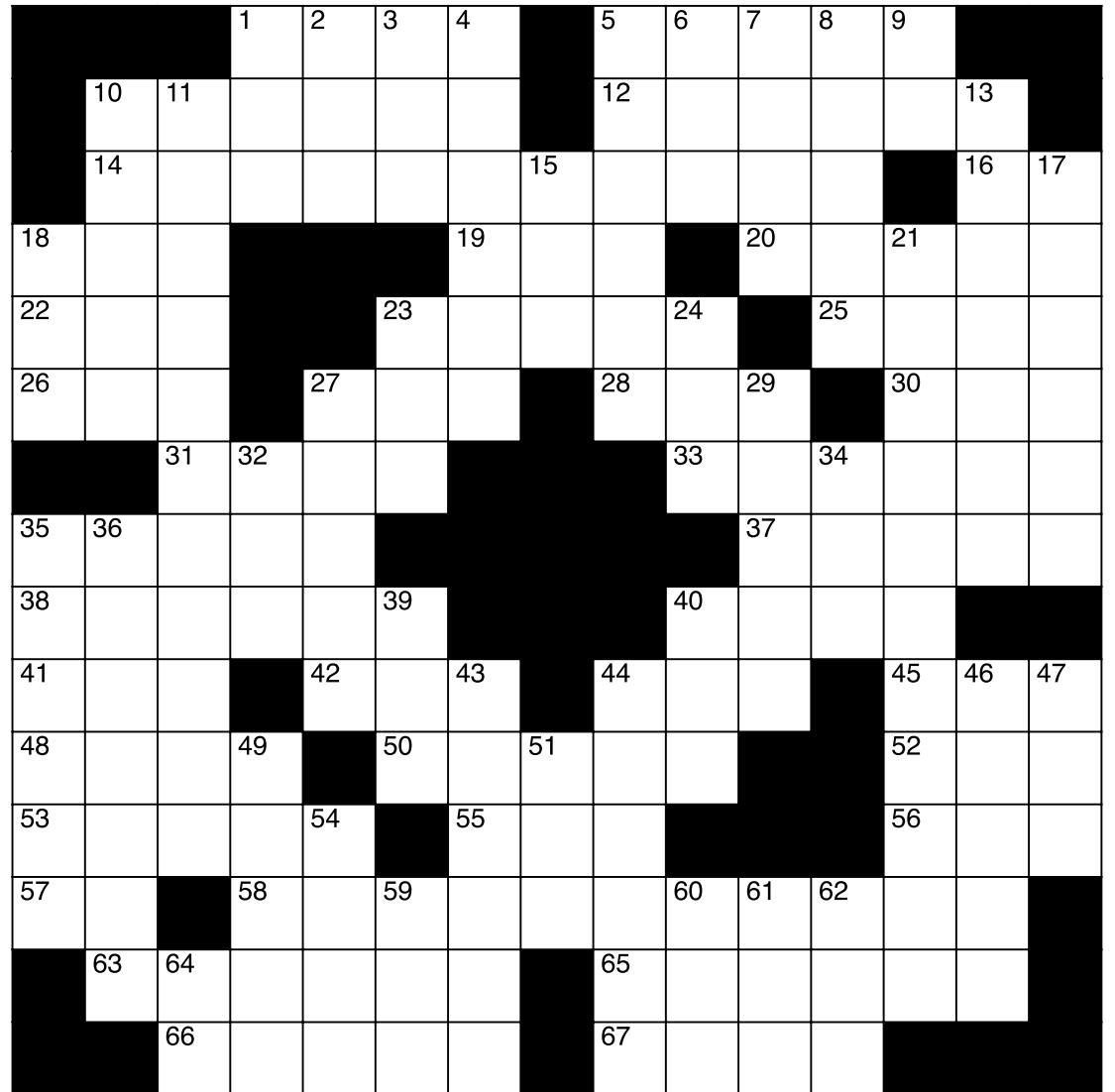
Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

1. Streetcar
5. Take ___ of it!
10. SW Asia peninsula
12. Beating wings to escape from a perch
14. One who revitalizes
16. Indicates position
18. Dishonorable man
19. Singer King Cole
20. Short-tailed marten
22. One point east (clockwise) of due north
23. The god of the underworld in ancient mythology
25. Dirt
26. Superconducting super collider
27. Not good
28. A way to sink
30. Unwell
31. Follow orders
33. Deep ravine
35. Perfumery practice
37. Indian film director Sultan
38. Member of U.S. Navy
40. Wing-like
41. Very fast airplane
42. Slang for cigarette
44. Most cars still need it
45. Political war chest
48. Cools down
50. Diminish toward one end
52. Indigenous person of Thailand
53. Combined
55. Container
56. Expression of satisfaction
57. Thou
58. Return a favor
63. Go over once more
65. Removed
66. "Silence of the ___"
67. Comedian Rogen

CLUES DOWN

1. Children's game
2. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
3. Own (Scottish)
4. Female follower of Bacchus
5. Subsides
6. Protects from weather
7. Spanish municipality
8. Supermarket chain
9. Domain name
10. Semitic peoples
11. Designs anew
13. City associated with Jesus
15. Cool!
17. Bank employee
18. Central nervous system
21. Standardized piece of text
23. A type of fever
24. Baglike structure in a plant or animal
27. Threaten persistently
29. Aspirations
32. Baby's eating accessory
34. Actress Thurman
35. Turn into bone
36. One who saves you
39. Consume
40. Swiss river
43. A part of a river where the current is very fast
44. Categories
46. Expressed amazement
47. It's important in respiration (abbr.)
49. Greek war dance
51. Bland, semi-liquid food
54. Regard in a specified way
59. Taxi
60. Naturally occurring solid material
61. Feline
62. Post-burning residue
64. Elevated railroad



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Pet of the week



DAWN

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Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

CLASSIFIEDS

OBITUARY



**ROBERT "BOB" WALTER HAROLD NEWLAND
CELEBRATION OF LIFE
STRATFORD COUNTRY CLUB
Sunday, May 24, 2026 at 2 pm.**

As Dave Carter's 'When I Go' played in the background, Bob Newland died peacefully at Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth on December 28th in the presence of his daughter, Evelyn; his son, Graham; their mother and Bob's friend of 57 years, Crys; and his faithful English Cocker Spaniel, Lilith (Lily).

Born in Leamington, Ontario, Bob was the eldest child in a close-knit family. He was a patient and fun big brother, always ready to play any game for hours and, in later years, occasionally even win a round of euchre. As a teenager, he worked as a Point Pelee lifeguard and at the family business, where he learned from his father the skills required to run a successful retail store. Customers became friends and staff became family at Newland's Flowers. Bob's mother, a teacher and talented cook, fostered his love of reading and fine food. Developing a keen interest in drama, he acted in highschool plays and in the Leamington Playhouse, the local community theatre group. School trips to Stratford ignited a love of Shakespeare, and he first discovered Fanfare Books before a student performance in 1968.

Upon graduating with an Honours B.A. in English Literature from Trent University in 1976, Bob began a bookselling career which took him from Peterborough to Toronto, to Ottawa, and eventually to London, Ontario, where he managed the flagship independent bookstore, Roberts Holmes, for almost a decade. While there, he hosted signings by many literary luminaries including Timothy Findley, Alice Munro, Pierre Berton, and John Irving. His love of books became a passion, not just for their contents but for the physical objects themselves. An avid collector of antiquarian books, especially books about books, he explored numerous book fairs and bookstores, savouring the quest for that one special treasure. Yearly trips to Boston and New York offered the chance to expand his collection and experience beautiful historical libraries, with a Broadway play or two as a bonus. In 2018, his trip to the Welsh town of Hay-on-Wye, famous for its many bookshops, was a dream come true.

In November of 1989, Bob purchased Fanfare Books. Over the course of close to 36 years, he built the bookstore into a mecca for bibliophiles from all over the continent. Specializing in theatre books and Canadian fiction, but stocked with a carefully curated selection of titles from all genres, the store has survived and thrived through a time when many bricks-and-mortar independents have sadly closed their doors. The torch was passed to a capable new owner in June of 2025, but Bob's influence will live on within the exposed brick walls and creaky wood floors of his so-called "third child" for years to come.

A private, unassuming man at heart, Bob was content to simply read on his porch, a cup of coffee or glass of Innis & Gunn at hand, while Lily patrolled for squirrels in the yard. Always a doting father, he relished time with his kids, whether debating the merits of a new movie, discussing philosophy, or despairing the state of modern politics. He set out to raise two independent thinkers and he succeeded, believing Evelyn and Graham to be his greatest legacy.

Bob is the beloved brother of Jamie (Jo-Anne) and Claire (Greg), and a dear uncle to Jeff, Sheilagh, Liam, KJ (Jayce) and Tess. His uncle, cousins, colleagues, and friends are also saddened by his passing. He was predeceased by his father, Don; his mother, Jean; and his first wife, Barb Sandrin.

In accordance with his wishes, Bob's body has been donated to the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

To honour Bob's memory, please consider a donation to Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth (www.rotaryhospice.ca) or the Canadian Cancer Society (www.cancer.ca), either directly or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services (www.jarfh.com) 519-271-5062.

And remember to read -- to a child, to an elder, to yourself. As Anne Tyler has said, "For one who reads, there is no limit to the number of lives that may be lived."



ATJE TUYTEN

Atje Tuyten (Zwep), born January 27, 1949, transitioned out of this life surrounded with the love of her family on Sunday March 29, 2026 in Orillia, ON after her courageous battle with Lewy Body Dementia. Through her journey of 77 years, she gifted this world and those that knew and loved her, with her kindness, love, humour and exceptional patience and understanding.

Atje is so deeply missed by her loving husband Charlie (Hendrik) Tuyten and children, Nicole Atje Tuyten (son-in-law Don Sangster) and Leah Annette Black (Tuyten) (son-in-law Darryll Black) and her four grandchildren, Ryley and Ronin Black and Kaia and Noah Sangster, who will forever be the lights of her life. There was nothing that brought Atje greater joy than being there for her grandkids. Whatever they were into, she was there for it, whether it was getting down on the floor to play mini sticks, or lending her hair to a creative hairstyle. Her unconditional love for her grandkids will always be remembered by a presence and tenderness that can never be matched.

Atje was born in Elburg, Holland and came to Canada with her late parents, Jacob and Aafke Zwep, when she was only one year old. The eldest of five beloved siblings, Harry Zwep, Annette Lewington (Zwep) (brother-in-law Ernie Lewington), George Zwep (sister-in-law, Jane Zwep) and Jerry Zwep (sister-in-law, Sandra Hunt), she spent much of her childhood becoming the strong and resilient person she was, growing up on the family farm near Brussels, ON. A joyful, caring, adventurous soul, Atje set out to carve her own path in Stratford, ON where she met her husband of 54 years, Charlie, and many adored friends. She later moved to the Orillia area to support and be close to the families of her two daughters, as well as spend more time with her deeply cherished grandkids.

Atje was driven by her great love and care for family. She generously devoted so much of her time and energy to supporting her daughters. A sports enthusiast herself, she chauffeured them to countless sporting events and was a passionate cheerleader on the side lines. She taught us that family is everything - family reunions at the farm were a priority, no matter the weather. Atje always created time and space to celebrate with family, lend a hand and was always a safe shoulder to cry on.

Outside of her family life, Atje thrived in various roles, working primarily in accounting and administration for reputable local Stratford businesses which she was proud to be a part of. She was a well-respected, hard-working, trusted colleague and friend to so many over the years. Kind and compassionate, and friendly to all, Atje was always a welcoming neighbour and an amazing friend. She valued her trusted close circle of special friends with whom she loved spending time making wonderful life-long memories. No matter what was on her plate, she made time to connect with others, truly listen, and share a cup of cheer.

Atje filled our homes with song - her joy-filled smile while playing her favourites on her record player, and eventually her new 5-disc CD changer, snapping along to her favourite tunes and gracing us with her enthusiastic singing - thank you for filling our lives with your beautiful music.

A beautiful Dutch, farm girl, Atje shared her love for nature and the outdoors with many friends and family. Boundless gardens created with her own two hands brought nature to every new family home. Camping trips to her cherished provincial parks and weekends at Rustic Acres as well as kayak adventures exploring her bucket list of waterways were some of Atje's favourite times enjoying the beauty of the outdoors.

Atje is profoundly loved and missed by all her special friends and dear family. Free from the confines of the human body, Atje's soothing soul will live on through the adventures we shared with her, the beauty we see in the resiliency of nature and the uplifting songs we remember her singing. Rest peacefully, go, stand up, stretch and smile; climb in your kayak and feel the warmth of sun on your face, dip your paddle in the warm clear water and be free.

We encourage you to honour Atje's legacy of love and caring for others and the world around us by being patient with others, pushing the boundaries of life and slowing down to stop and smell the tulips. Her daughters would love to keep her memory alive through your sharing of the stories and adventures you've had with their dear mother - special memories of Atje are encouraged and warmly welcomed in her memory book - link: Untold Stories & Memories of Atje Tuyten.

A visitation to honour Atje will be held in Stratford, ON, on the morning of Saturday May 30th, at W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street Stratford ON. The family is warmly welcoming visitors at 10:00 am followed by a celebration of life service for all at 11:15 am. Everyone is welcome afterwards to gather at Brch & Wyn in Stratford from 2:00-5:00 to share stories and memories of Atje with family and friends. A private family burial in Brussels, ON will take place at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, Atje's spirit of caring can be beautifully recognized by memorial contributions in her name to the Alzheimer's Society through W.G. Young Funeral Home www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com or by planting a tree or some tulips in her honour.



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