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(PHOTO COURTESY OF FERGUS WHALERS)

Members of the Tavistock Braves and Fergus Whalers shake hands after the Whalers clinched the PJHL title with a home-ice, 4-3 overtime victory Sunday night.

Braves PJHL season comes to an end with loss to Whalers

Team's GM expects a solid roster for next season

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

For the first time in franchise history, the Tavistock Braves advanced to the Provincial Junior Hockey League (PJHL) championship series but came out on the losing side.

The Braves lost 4-3 in overtime on Mother's Day as the Fergus Whalers took the series in five games to earn their first-ever Schmaltz Cup title.

Tavistock led 2-1 early in the second period thanks to goals by captain Marc Dionne and Stratford's Nolan Miller.

Fergus found the back of the net twice before the second period was over to take a 3-2 lead going into the third. Yann Raskin scored the only goal of the final frame at the 3:44 mark to force overtime, but Ryan Forwell found the back of the

Continued on page 22

Next regional chair will be appointed by the province

Salonen said choosing the right person is critical

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

If Karen Redman planned to seek re-election as chair for the Region of Waterloo, she no longer has the opportunity to do so.

Redman, serving her second term as the region's top elected official, said she is proud to have been elected twice as regional chair.

"That public trust continues to guide my leadership. Waterloo Region has experienced significant growth and change in recent years, and my focus has always been on providing steady, collaborative leadership that delivers real results for residents."


Redman said during the last few months of her tenure, her priorities are stability, continuity and ensuring the important work underway at the region continues without disruption.

"I remain focused on serving Waterloo Region in whatever capacity best supports our community as next steps are determined."

She added throughout her time as chair, she believed deeply in the role of local government because of the real and lasting impact it has on people's daily lives.

"Alongside council and our dedicated staff, I helped guide the region through an unprecedented pandemic, kept essential services

Continued on page 3




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Wilmot council backs \$52K in community grants for local groups

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Everything from food security and counselling services to arts programming, minor sports and community events could receive township funding in 2026 after Wilmot councillors endorsed this year's community grants allocations at the May 4 committee-of-the-whole meeting.

The committee comprising all members of council approved staff recommendations allocating \$52,000 in grants to local organizations and community groups through the township's annual community grants program, leaving \$3,000 unallocated for potential council-directed adjustments. Final approval will come at a future council meeting.

"I noted that it was \$52,000 that had been allocated," Mayor Natasha Salonen said. "So, am I correct in assuming that we've budgeted for another \$3,000 that could be used, should council choose, for a few other programs?"

"That's correct," Wilmot community services director Chris Catania responded. "... We received 27 applications totalling

almost \$140,000, so very difficult to look at how we would spread (the allotted funding) based on our evaluation. There are a couple of groups here that, based on policy and eligibility, might not have received it, however, that \$3,000 – like we did last year in 2025 – is there at council's choosing to (allocate), maybe at a future date or even tonight, or later on this month at council to decide on whether you feel it's necessary there should be a top-up.

"We wanted to be able to provide some flexibility for council to make sure the community was well represented."

The largest recommended grant was \$10,000 for the Wilmot Wellesley Resource Centre, which requested \$15,000 to support food, clothing, homelessness-prevention and mental-health services for vulnerable residents. While the recommendation marked a decrease from the \$15,000 the organization received in both 2024 and 2025, it still represented the single-largest allocation in this year's program.

The Interfaith Counselling Centre was recommended to receive \$6,000 to help subsidize counselling services for Wilmot residents unable to afford care, down from

the \$8,000 requested and the \$6,700 received in 2025.

Several community organizations and festivals were also recommended for notable grants, including \$4,000 for Love Your Neighbour Communities to support events like Porch Music in the Burg and a proposed social-service fair, \$4,000 for Community Care Concepts and \$4,000 for the Mannheim Optimist Club toward the purchase of a commercial barbecue and event tent.

Meanwhile, some applicants were recommended to receive significantly less than requested, or no funding at all.

The Baden Community Association, for example, requested \$10,000 for community programming and events, but staff recommended \$3,000. The Waterloo Region Community Garden Network requested \$6,000 and was recommended for \$500, while the Dundee Artisan Festival requested \$2,500 and was recommended for \$1,000.

Other groups, including the New Hamburg Firebirds, Grand River Friendship Society's capital request, the Wilmot Softball Association and the New

Hamburg Hockey Association, were not recommended for funding through this year's program.

With the remaining \$3,000 in the budget, Coun. Lillianne Dunstall moved to direct an additional \$700 from that funding to the Wilmot Girls Hockey Association, which had initially been recommended to receive \$880 toward coach-development programming despite requesting \$2,500.

"This is (for a coaches-development training) that is a requirement from Hockey Canada and the Ontario Women's Hockey Association," Dunstall said. "It is always so important for us to make sure that our girls are brought up in a situation where they feel confident, and a lot of times, that has to do with sports. Having the right coaches makes a big difference, so I would ask that we take it back to the \$1,500."

Dunstall said the additional funding would bring the organization's grant amount in line with last year's allocation and help support the training of qualified coaches for girls' hockey in the community. The committee supported Dunstall's amendment unanimously.



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Province ends Redman's re-election path

Continued from page 1

running and laid the groundwork for longterm recovery and growth. Together, we advanced transformative, regionbuilding priorities in transit, housing and infrastructure while working to ensure growth was matched with environmental responsibility, community wellbeing and quality of life."

Redman said she hopes her time as chair would be remembered as one where the region met significant challenges with stability, collaboration and confidence, and emerged stronger, more resilient and well-positioned for the future.

"There is important work ahead, including addressing infrastructure and water-capacity needs and continuing to support housing and economic growth. Council and staff are actively focused on those priorities," she added.

"I look forward to continuing to work constructively with the province and our municipal partners to deliver the services residents rely on and to keep building a resilient, inclusive and prosperous Waterloo Region."

The Gazette asked Redman if she planned to run for council in another capacity, but she did not provide an answer.

The Ontario government, through the recently passed Better Regional Governance Act, has given the minister of municipal affairs and housing the authority to appoint regional chairs in several regions, including Waterloo, Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Peel and York, as well as the warden of Simcoe County. Appointed chairs would receive "strong chair" powers, similar to the strong mayor model, allowing them to direct staff, veto certain bylaws and propose budgets to streamline decision-making and advance provincial priorities such as housing and infrastructure.

"The province's decision to appoint the Waterloo regional chair comes in the context of a broader conversation about regional governance across Ontario," said Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen. "It is understandable that residents will have

strong views about how regional leadership is selected because regional government makes decisions that directly affect people's daily lives."

Salonen explained the appointment process will be critical and must result in someone who understands the unique needs of this region, including the distinct realities of the cities, townships and rural communities.

"Local voices cannot be weakened through this process. Residents will continue to be represented at the regional table through their locally elected mayors and regional councillors, ensuring community voices remain central to the decision-making process."

She added her focus, should she be re-elected as Wilmot mayor, is on ensuring this change supports stronger cooperation between the region and the province on shared issues that matter most to residents.

"In Waterloo Region, solving challenges related to infrastructure, financial sustainability, affordable housing, growth and water capacity will require a strong and productive relationship with the province. The responsibilities placed on local municipalities and regions continue to grow. I hope the change leads to stronger provincial support through sustainable funding and collaborative decision-making."

The Gazette also reached out to Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Mike Harris for his thoughts on the situation. He provided a statement saying the proposed Better Regional Governance Act will support better alignment between regional decision-making and shared provincial-regional priorities, expedite building housing and infrastructure, and lowering costs for municipal taxpayers.

"These changes will help advance housing and economic development, preparing the province as a whole for growth. Chairs will be appointed following the conclusion of the current council term, after the municipal election concludes," he said.

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Incumbent mayor seeking re-election in East Zorra-Tavistock

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

"I am seeking re-election for mayor of East Zorra-Tavistock (Ezt), as council has much work to do over the next four years and I would like to lead them in that work."

Those were the words of current Ezt Mayor Phil Schaefer, who will pursue a second term. To date, no one else has put their name forward to challenge him.

"Also, there is no shortage of work to be done by Oxford County council, and I want to continue to work on behalf of the township's residents."

During the current terms of council, staff and members of council moved into a new municipal office at 89 Loveys St. in Hickson and held a grand-opening celebration. Schaefer said the 13,000-square-foot headquarters was completed without any debt financing, and its new technology allows meetings to be livestreamed and recorded. Schaefer said it was one of several accomplishments under his watch.

"Over the past four years, council initiated and approved a first-ever Municipal Alcohol Plan, which governs the use of alcohol on municipal property. The township's secondary plan process for Tavistock and Innerkip commenced just before the start of this term and should reach its conclusion later this year. This important exercise will determine what

land will be set aside for development, and what that development will actually look like," he said.

Schaefer was given strong mayor powers by the province in 2025 and said he developed a thoughtful and responsible process to deal with them. He also pointed to other gains made by the township during his first term.

"We started utilizing a five-year capital budget process last year, and we purchased property in Hickson for use as a salt and sand shed location, which will also be the home of a new Hickson fire-hall. Significant renovations were completed at the Innerkip Community Centre during this term, and a new splash pad was opened in Queen's Park in Tavistock."

He added Ezt continues to be a responsible user of tax dollars across the township.

"The township has had a surplus each year, totalling over \$1.1 million for this period. This is due to the excellent work of our staff, who not only know how to plan well, but can also execute just as well. In an environment where the federal and provincial governments are posting deficits, a government posting surpluses is a very good news story."

The biggest issue facing the new council in East Zorra-Tavistock could be its neighbour to the south knocking on the door looking for land, something not lost on Schaefer.

"The next term of council will most likely once again have the City of Woodstock approach us regarding a boundary expansion. Budgets over the next four years will probably still be strained by high costs and the need for financial prudence. It will be imperative that reserves are funded adequately, and that we refrain, as we have, from the temptation of accessing reserves to lower tax-rate increases."

He is hoping council will be installing a new splashpad in Innerkip at some point in the next term and expects to be in the early stages of planning a new multi-use recreation facility in Tavistock.

"It can go hand in hand with new recreation opportunities for the township. We are also embarking on a facility audit, which is sort of a report card on the condition of our facilities."

The current mayor said there are several items on his wish list, including a service in great demand in Ezt.

"Some of the things I would hope to see some movement on in the next term would be things like more daycares (there is one in Innerkip moving through the approval stage). I would like to see more purpose-built rentals being constructed, including senior apartments. As well, once our secondary plan is completed and we have adequate servicing, I would like to see more commercial/industrial construction."

Schaefer added he is ready to guide the township through what is expected to be a



(EztCA PHOTO)

Current East Zorra-Tavistock Mayor Phil Schaefer has announced he will run for re-election in the Oct. 26 municipal election.

busy next four years.

"We will see the land and zoning in place for balanced growth, as well as improvements to water and wastewater infrastructure to handle that growth, along with services that a growing municipality requires for its citizens. This will all be happening during the next term of council. I would like to continue to lead this council in its journey."

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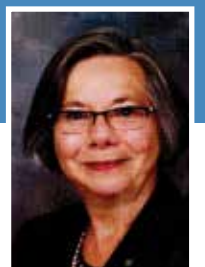
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Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides returns May 31 to support Canadians with disabilities

AMANDA NELSON

Gazette Reporter

The Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides is returning to Wilmot on May 31.

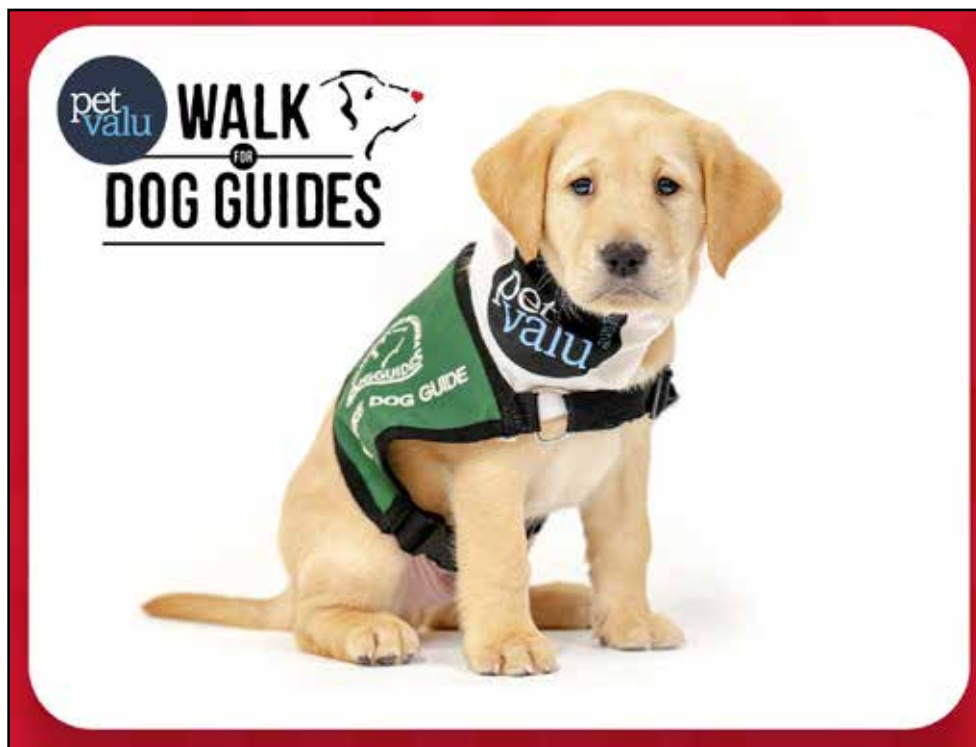
The Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides is a large, community-based fundraising walk supporting the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, which trains and provides service dogs to Canadians with disabilities at no cost. The event also helps build an inclusive, community-driven movement that supports accessibility, independence and mobility for people with disabilities.

The 2026 walk will be held May 31 at the Wilmot Recreation Complex. The goal for this year's Pet Valu Walk is to raise \$1.6 million nationally.

The event is designed to be family friendly and community focused, and everyone is welcome to attend and help raise funds. Those looking to participate can register individually, join a team or start their own team. Participants are encouraged to walk with or without a dog, making the event accessible even for those without pets.

"Our walk takes place in Schmidt Woods Trail and it's great for just about anyone," said Paul Mackie, a volunteer organizer. "Bring your dog for a nice walk; you'll be in good company."

Guide dogs are provided to Canadians at no cost thanks to donations from supporters. The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides fundraiser is happening on May 31. The walk will take place at the Wilmot Recreation Complex to raise funds for dog guides that support people with disabilities.

Guides receives no operational funding from the government, making fundraising events like this especially important.

"Pet Valu has a team, I have a team and there are others that have individual teams you can sign up with or donate to on the

website," said Mackie.

The Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides is the only school in the world to offer seven distinct Dog Guide programs. Funds raised through the walk help acquire, raise, train and match dogs with

people across Canada. Each dog costs approximately \$35,000 to raise, train and place.

"Pet Valu is our national sponsor," said Mackie. "Last year, they provided \$100,000 to the walk to provide publicity posters, website maintenance, so many different things that go a long way to help us get the word out."

Programs through Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides support people with autism, diabetes, epilepsy, mobility disabilities, vision loss and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The organization also provides facility support dogs to help children and adults experiencing traumatic situations.

"We're raising money to provide funds to the organization to trade to acquire dogs, raise the dogs and then train them to be matched with patients that have epilepsy, autism and seven different disabilities," said Mackie.

The walk has been running for 40 years and has raised more than \$23 million nationally to date.

"I would ask everyone to think about it, support it, make a donation and come on out to the walk on the 31st," said Mackie.

To register for the Pet Valu Walk for Dog Guides, visit walkfordogguides.com. For questions, email paulmackie@rogers.com.

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ANSWERS FOUND ON THE CLASSIFIED PAGE

Wellesley unveils five concepts for future of old arena and community centre lands

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Wellesley Township residents will soon have an opportunity to weigh in on five possible futures for the old Village of Wellesley arena and community centre lands as the township moves into the next phase of its long-term reimagining process.

At its May 12 meeting, Wellesley council received a presentation from GSP Group senior planner and president Steve Wever and senior urban planner Evelyn Thomas outlining five concepts for the former arena lands ranging from a simple open-event space to a large, four-storey mixed-use development with housing, commercial space and community amenities. Council then directed township staff and the consulting team to begin a public-engagement process to gather feedback on each option before a preferred concept is selected.

“There were a number of consistent themes that helped inform the concept-development process,” Wever said, referring to what the planners and township staff heard from area residents as part of the project’s first-phase public engagement process. “There was strong support for maintaining a public and community-oriented focus for the land while preserving flexibility for recreation, events and gathering spaces.

“Residents also emphasized accessibility, site functionality – maintaining adequate parking and circulation – (and) ensuring future development remains compatible with Wellesley’s low-density village character and the surrounding context.”

The concept options are the result of

a planning process that began last year after council approved a set of guiding principles informed by extensive public consultation.

Option 1A represents the lowest-intensity redevelopment scenario. Under that concept, the existing arena building would be demolished while the community hall and storage building would remain. The former arena footprint would be converted into a roughly 27,600-square-foot open-event space intended for uses like festivals, markets and seasonal programming. Existing parking and park amenities would largely remain unchanged.

Township staff noted this option would involve the lowest capital investment, though it would also generate limited revenue outside of event rentals and programming.

Option 1B builds on that idea by adding new community-oriented amenities including a 4,000-square-foot library and a 4,800-square-foot daycare while still maintaining a large outdoor-event space and retaining the community hall. Under this option, both the arena and storage building would be removed and parking would be reduced from roughly 232 spaces to about 175 spaces to accommodate the new facilities.

Option 2 would see the complete redevelopment of the site into a municipally led, civic-focused community hub. All existing structures would be demolished and replaced with a new 17,800-square-foot multi-use building housing a cultural centre, library and daycare alongside a large outdoor-event space. The concept would also realign and extend Maple Leaf Street through the site to connect with Catherine Street while incorporating traffic-calming

measures. Parking would be reduced to approximately 161 spaces.

The final two concepts introduce mixed-use developments incorporating housing and commercial space alongside community amenities.

Option 3 proposes a three-storey, 57,053-square-foot mixed-use building containing a cultural centre, library, daycare, commercial space and approximately 30 residential units. The concept would maintain many of the site’s community functions while introducing new housing opportunities and additional revenue-generating uses. Parking would be reconfigured and expanded to provide approximately 213 spaces, and access to the site would be available from Maple Leaf Street, Brown Street and Catherine Street.

Option 4 represents the highest-intensity redevelopment proposal with a four-storey, 85,265-square-foot mixed-use building containing the same community amenities as Option 3, reduced commercial space and approximately 60 residential units. Parking would increase to approximately 281 spaces through a reconfiguration and expansion of the existing parking areas.

According to the report, this option offers the greatest long-term revenue potential and financial sustainability.

A comparison summary included with the report notes Options 1A and 1B would remain fully township owned and operated while Options 3 and 4 would likely require partnerships with private developers.

“As we move from a variety of options to trying to determine a preferred direction, it may borrow bits and pieces from each of these, or it may look like a short-term plan evolving to a long-term plan,” Wever said. “Certainly (you could) do

some of the things in Options 3 and 4, for example, in a longer-term context, while only doing Option 1 or 2 at the beginning.

“So, these can build on each other, recognizing Option 4 would take a lot more planning and capital and partnership and agreement and those kinds of things to come together, versus there are some quick wins – taking the arena building down, opening the site up for more open space, those kinds of things.

Public engagement on the concepts began online May 13 through the township’s Engage WR platform at www.engagewr.ca/reimagining-wellesley-arena-and-community-centre-lands.

Two public open houses are also scheduled for May 19 at the Bill Gies Recreation Centre and May 21 at the St. Clements Community Centre, both beginning at 6:30 p.m. Feedback gathered through those sessions and online will be used to refine the concepts before a preferred option is brought back to council at a later date along with recommendations on implementation and financial feasibility.

“We’re planning for the future with this,” Mayor Joe Nowak said. “... We are expanding and I think it’s important that somehow that’s reflected and we’re not just planning for today, we’re planning for the future as well. I think that’s really important.”

“I’ve been excited to see this one coming forward and I think we’re on a good path,” Coun. Derek Brick added. “... I really do hope that the public picks it up. I like the concepts in that they’re simple, they’re understandable and they’re a really good start.”



Concept 1A – open event space.



Concept 1B – open event space with addition for library and daycare.



Concept 2 – multi-use centre.

(IMAGES BY GSP GROUP)



Concept 3 – three-storey mixed use.



Concept 4 – four-storey mixed use.

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Region of Waterloo unveils new portable water unit for Mannheim Service Area

Wilmot well owners won't benefit from multi-million-dollar investment

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

The Region of Waterloo has unveiled a portable water treatment unit to increase water capacity in the Mannheim Service Area, a move officials said will allow development to continue.

Laminar Water in Cambridge has built the first 53-foot unit that will treat water flowing from the Grand River to the Mannheim water treatment plant. The technology inside the unit filters solids out of drinking water to keep it safe. It will be hooked up to the plant, so the region can treat more water while permanent upgrades are completed.

"This unit is a made-in-Waterloo Region solution that will help us get new water online sooner," said Region of Waterloo Chair Karen Redman. "It is one of the ways that council and the region responded quickly and creatively to the water capacity challenge. While this work is underway, we continue to move forward with more solutions that increase capacity, protect our communities and support growth while fast-tracking repairs and renewal projects in partnership with our municipal and provincial colleagues."

Through the first unit, up to 50 litres per second (L/s) of new water capacity could be added by the end of the year. Three more containers will be up and running by next summer, meaning the new capacity will jump to 300 L/s. The region said the move could provide up to half the new capacity needed to support forecasted growth by 2032. Upgrades to



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTOS)

Kenneth Brothers, interim commissioner of water and wastewater at the Region of Waterloo, addresses the media at a press conference on Tuesday in Cambridge. Regional Chair Karen Redman and Laminar Water CEO Fraser Kent were also on hand for the announcement.

the Mannheim water treatment plant are expected to be completed by 2031.

"A project like this would typically take more than four years to complete," said Kenneth Brothers, interim commissioner of water and wastewater for the region. "We're getting all of it done, from design and engineering to construction and operation, in 18 months or less. This mobile system allows us to add capacity much sooner than traditional infrastructure timelines."

The first unit will be delivered to the Mannheim water treatment plant next month as crews continue to prepare the site for the mobile system. This work includes installing piping and steel posts that anchor and support each 100,000-pound container.

This project is one of many solutions moving forward simultaneously to stabilize the water system in the Mannheim Service Area and support growth. What the plan doesn't do is help Wilmot Township residents with private wells who are experiencing water shortages.

"We have ongoing, comprehensive well testing in Wilmot, and we are completely sensitized to the issues there. We understand what's important in Wilmot," said Brothers. "We are looking at how we can improve the well monitoring (there),

we're keeping our eye on the ball out there in terms of the quality and the quantity of water."

Brothers added they understand the concerns of residents, particularly those with shallow wells, and said he has been meeting personally with some of those affected.

"We have some appeals from well interference. That's one of our major ongoing activities today out there. Let me tell you that the region is completely aware of the concerns in the community, and we are doing everything we can to provide the balance of water extraction and the balance of growth and sustainability throughout the community."

The next step in the region's water saga is a report coming to a June 3 council meeting, something the community is anxiously waiting for. Brothers said it amounts to an interim risk-management framework.

"We are looking at all of the inputs or additional sources of (water) supply. We are bringing back online some different wells that have been down for maintenance. It will be a comprehensive assessment to see how we can manage the water supply moving forward," said Brothers.

He added the region still doesn't have the water it needs to allow development to proceed without restrictions, but some may be allowed to move forward once the report is released.

"We are also evaluating other opportunities to bring on other sources of supply, how we can manage consumption and also how we can reduce leakage in the system with a combination of a number of factors that we need to bring to bear ... while keeping the eye on the ball of water quality, water quantity and sustainable growth," said Brothers.

The water-filtration containers are typically seen in remote communities that do not have water-filtration systems and are often deployed during emergency and natural-disaster situations



Fraser Kent, CEO of Laminar Water in Cambridge, gave the media a tour of the first of four water-treatment units, which will be installed at the Mannheim water treatment plant to boost water capacity in the region. Each unit comes with a price tag of about \$2 million.

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Oxford OPP takes part in Canada Road Safety Week

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

“Driving is a personal choice. How you drive is not.”

That is the theme for this year’s Canada Road Safety Week. Speeding, alcohol/drug impairment, driver inattention and lack of occupant restraint were linked to a significant number of last year’s 344 fatalities on OPP-patrolled roads.

“While the number of road deaths varies from year to year, these leading causes and contributing factors do not. Every year, the death toll comes down to the same threat posed by the motoring public: how drivers and passengers choose to travel on our roadways,” said an OPP news release.

Randi Crawford is the media relations constable for the Oxford detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police and said the root causes of collisions haven’t changed over the years.

“We have our top four. Drug and alcohol impairment, distracted driving, aggressive driving and driving without a seatbelt.”

She added motorists or pedestrians calling police is something police encourage

to enforce the rules of the road.

“If you suspect someone is impaired, it could be that they are even having a medical episode, so your call could not only save that person’s life but also save the lives of other people if something were to happen.”

Crawford, who writes the majority of press releases involving arrests by officers in Oxford, explained she makes a point to mention when a citizen has tipped off police.

“I try to capture that so people see those phone calls they are making on traffic complaints are making a difference.”

Ontario’s auditor general released a special report on Tuesday, which said Ontario is not effectively monitoring commercial truck-driver training and licensing regimes, leading to many unqualified drivers on the roads. Crawford said there appears to be more transport truck-related collisions in Oxford.

“I have seen an increase since I have been doing media over the last three years. I don’t know if that is because there are more vehicles on the road, which leads to more collisions in general, but I do hope

the transport companies will make sure drivers are properly trained.”

She added driver-training courses are a good idea for anyone who gets behind the wheel and asked people to reflect on their driving habits.

“We can always improve on things. Am I doing my circle check before I head out on the road? It’s also important to have your tires retorqued. Sometimes people don’t and they end up losing a tire this time of year after getting their snow tires off. Make sure you are keeping an eye on the condition of your vehicle.”

Crawford would also like to see more people utilize the cruise-control option in their vehicles to ensure they are driving at an appropriate speed.

“Make sure you are giving yourself extra time to get to where you are going. Don’t leave it until the last minute during your daily commute. You will feel more relaxed and see things coming, making it easier to react.”

In the press release, which was sent out prior to Victoria Day Weekend, one of the busiest weekends on our roads, police asked drivers to remember that every

person travelling with or near them stands to pay the price when they choose to take risks behind the wheel.

“So do their families. If you are a passenger, don’t let your family pay the price because you chose not to buckle up,” it added.

During the annual Canada Road Safety Week campaign, the OPP, alongside Canadian policing partners, will conduct robust, targeted enforcement and education to address these pervasive road behaviours and any other risks they observe drivers engaging in. As we head into the warmer months, motorists are also reminded to watch out for increased pedestrian and cyclist traffic.

The OPP remains committed to saving lives on more than 130,000 kilometres of roadway throughout the province. Drivers are reminded of their vital role in keeping roads safe and that some of the most consequential decisions of their lives are made behind the wheel.

Canada Road Safety Week is led by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and runs from May 12-18.

Marcus Ryan retiring from politics

Ryan first became Zorra mayor in 2018

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Marcus Ryan’s name will not be on the 2026 Zorra Township election ballot, as Oxford County’s warden has decided to step away from municipal politics.

“Nobody does anything forever. We all change. Politics was never a career choice for me. I backed my way into it because I wanted to keep my kids’ school (A.J. Baker in 2012) open, and one thing led to another over the years,” said Ryan. “I always wanted to just try and get stuff done, and I think I’ve got stuff done. Now, I want to do other things in life.”

Ryan said the role of mayor and warden has changed over the years and has become more intense in different ways, including spending time lobbying the provincial government.

“I was at Queen’s Park for a day last week, talking to ministers and trying to get stuff done. Now I go to the cabin, and I’m taking phone calls from people. I can’t go on a two-week vacation, so to some extent, I want to just have more personal time.”

He would like to spend more time kayaking and hiking but did hint at remaining active in politics – just on the other side of the table.

“I’ve thought a little bit about maybe offering some council training, public speaking and maybe some consulting, but we’ll see. I don’t know if people would be interested in hearing from me on that stuff

or not.”

Ryan said he feels good about a new school being built in the village of Thamesford, as well as a new policy direction that will proactively protect farmland.

“Those intensification targets that we put forward are, in my opinion, historic for Oxford, and I’m proud of that. The Maple Leaf redevelopment in Thamesford of that land is going to reap rewards for the community for generations.”

No one would deny housing and homelessness has become a paramount issue for the county. Ryan said whether residents don’t want someone living in a tent or they don’t want someone living in a tent behind their house, either way, that’s an issue.

“And I think I’m proud of the investments that council made in staffing and in policies and in dollars to make that happen. We had an announcement last week about an affordable housing project opening in Oxford. Sometimes, those things are disconnected for people, but without those difficult budgets that we passed, then we can’t have those days where we make an announcement about affordable housing.”

Ryan explained he isn’t the kind of person who lives with regrets for decisions made or not made in the past, but there is one issue that has stuck with him throughout his political career.

“It was during my first term on council that there was a proposal to move the Embro library to the rec center out of the town hall. I was brand new, and there was

a lot of public opposition to it, and I sort of went with that. In hindsight, I think it was probably not the best choice. We probably should have moved it to create a sort of community hub of all kinds of services there.”

Ryan added he hopes his replacement can move his priorities forward, though as of press time, no one has put their name forward to run for mayor of Zorra.

“I want someone to come along and do a better job than me because either way ... I am still going to be a resident of Zorra. I’m still going to be a resident of Oxford. I’m still going to use these services. My neighbours, my friends and my family are going to use these services and pay these taxes. And I really hope somebody comes along and says I found a better way than Marcus did.”

He also hopes voters are satisfied with the work he did.

“We had some challenging budgets. We had challenging times. Managing through COVID and the immense budget turmoil that came with that before and after. Then, reacting to the housing and homelessness issue, I think that we’ve been doing the right things. And I think the reality of government is sometimes you pass the policies while you’re in the chair and then the benefits of those policies come years later.”

Ryan said he’ll be very happy if some future warden gets the credit for some of the work that he did while in the chair. He also



(FILE PHOTO)

Marcus Ryan

hopes more people begin paying attention to municipal politics.

“I wish more people followed their local councils and knew what was going on. I wish more people knew what was going on with climate change. I wish more people knew what was going on with the economy, with all kinds of things. But I think having done this for sort of 12 years, and I don’t mean this in a fatalistic way, but people are engaged to the level they’re engaged with, and it’s very hard to convince them to be more engaged than that.”

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GALEN SIMMONS AT GALEN@GRANTHAVEN.COM**

The Sideyard brings coffee, treats and community together across Perth County

AMANDA NELSON

Gazette Reporter

After more than 10 years running a side-hustle baking business, Vanessa Simpson has expanded her company by launching a mobile events and workshops business built around a café-style coffee-and-treats trailer.

The Sideyard is a mobile trailer serving specialty coffee, dirty sodas, charcuterie-style boxes, artisan sandwiches and seasonal baked goods. Simpson also offers experiences and has a small mobile cart with similar items for indoor events.

“The idea had always been to open a brick-and-mortar, café-style experience selling my treats,” said Simpson. “I also really love coffee, and I love making artisanal-style sandwiches. So, I started getting my friends together and offering them different style arrangements, foods and sandwiches, just to see if I had something unique enough or if they would spend X amount of money on what I was making, and I kept getting really good feedback.”

Highlighting other local businesses and

farms across Perth County is also an important part of the business. Simpson plans to use fresh, in-season produce with strawberries and raspberries soon appearing in baked goods and menu offerings.

“Any ingredients that we use in my baked goods or my sandwiches; I try to get them all locally sourced around Perth County to try and give back to local businesses and help promote them, too. My candy, for instance, is from Corner Store Candy Co. in Stratford. So, I try to get my own brand out there, but I also really emphasize supporting local businesses too.”

Another aspect of The Sideyard is its events and workshops, where Simpson plans to host crafting sessions such as wreath-making and flower arranging.

“I love to host,” said Simpson. “I host parties, gatherings and get-togethers all the time, and I love having big, extravagant parties. So that's kind of where the events and workshop side of things come from, and having a mobile trailer, it just made sense. I have a little flower farm that I've started on my property, so I'll be able to incorporate that into what I offer.”

Right now, Simpson said the business offers a wide range of services, with plans to narrow the focus over time based on customer demand. People booking the trailer for events can choose the features they want, and Simpson will create customized packages to fit their needs.

“It's kind of like a one-trick pony offering a little bit of everything right now,” said Simpson. “Eventually, I'll try to hone in and really narrow down my packages and experiences. Right now, I just want to see what people like and what's popular. You can rent it out for showers, weddings, birthdays, graduations, just about anything.”


The Sideyard is hosting the Blooms & Brews Spring Makers Market in collaboration with Shakespeare Brewing Co. on May 23, serving favourite drinks, snacks, grazing boxes, artisan sandwiches and baked goods.

Though mobile, the trailer will also be parked outside Shakespeare Brewing Company at 2178 Perth Line 34 (Highway 7/8) in Shakespeare throughout the summer. Beginning with the first Cruise Night on the first Thursday in June, The Sideyard will operate all day. After that, the trailer will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., with extended hours during cruise nights.



One of The Sideyard's signature dirty sodas is pictured during the trailer's launch party at Shakespeare Brewing Company last weekend.

For more information about customized event packages or where to find The Sideyard this summer, visit them on Instagram at @thesideyardco or email Simpson at thesideyardco@gmail.com.



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(AMANDA NELSON PHOTOS)

Vanessa Simpson serves customers from The Sideyard trailer during the business' launch party at Shakespeare Brewing Company last weekend. The mobile café offers specialty coffee, baked goods and event packages while highlighting locally sourced products from across Perth County.

OPP investigating serious collision in Perth East

WILMOT-TAVISTOCK GAZETTE STAFF

thewtgazette@gmail.com

A motorcycle driver is in hospital with life-threatening injuries following a serious motor-vehicle collision last week at an intersection in the Township of Perth East, Perth County OPP say.

At approximately 2 p.m., Perth County OPP, along with local fire departments and the Perth County Paramedic Service, responded to a report of a collision involving an SUV and a motorcycle at the intersection of Perth Line 47 and Perth Road 107, north of Amulree, in the Township of Perth East.

The motorcyclist, 36 and from Shakespeare, suffered serious, life-threatening injuries, police said in a press release. They were treated on scene by paramedics before being transported by Ornge Air Ambulance to a regional trauma centre.

The SUV driver, 87 and from Stratford,

sustained minor injuries and was transported to a local hospital for assessment.

The intersection was closed for several hours. Members of the OPP traffic incident management and enforcement (TIME) team attended the scene to assist with the reconstruction of the collision. The roadway was safely reopened to traffic at approximately 2 a.m. May 9.

The investigation is ongoing and police are seeking the public's assistance. Anyone who may have witnessed the collision or has dashcam footage of the area at the time of the incident, or anyone with residential or commercial video surveillance that may have captured the collision, is encouraged to contact Perth County OPP at 1-888-310-1122.

To submit an anonymous tip, call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) or submit a secure web-tip at www.cstip.ca, where tipsters may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2,000.

One long load rolls through Shakespeare



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

A massive concrete I-beam used in bridge construction made its way through Shakespeare last week, creating quite a spectacle for local residents. Due to the extraordinary length of the load, the village's main intersection had to be temporarily cordoned off so the transport truck could safely complete the turn while travelling east from the Tavistock area toward Kitchener. Escort vehicles with flashing lights accompanied the slow-moving load at both the front and rear of the convoy.

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OPEN HOUSES THIS WEEKEND

SATURDAY, MAY 16 • 10:30-12:00 NOON

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and worry no more about the hydro going off, this unit offers a Generlink generator, also included for this unit is a pop up carport great for the winter months. Access to the community clubhouse with indoor pool, social events, and the trailer park amenities during the summer season. View during the open house to see if this home is just what you have been looking for.

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SATURDAY, MAY 16 • 1:00-3:00 PM

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partially finished basement with family room and 2 pc bath, some updated wiring and plumbing, new roof April 2026, updated stucco on the exterior of the home. The rear yard offers a fully fenced rear yard ideal for your children to play or your pets to run. Be sure to call to view this lovely home today it might be just what you have been looking for, immediate possession is available.

SATURDAY, MAY 16 • 1:00-3:00 PM

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AMDSB director visits local schools to highlight student nutrition programs

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Avon Maitland District School Board director of education Graham Shantz recently visited Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare and North Easthope Public School to learn more about the nutrition programs helping support students in local schools.

Shantz said he heard about the snack and lunch programs offered at both schools, including support from local egg farmers who provide hard-boiled and peeled eggs free of charge for students. During the visits, Shantz met with principals, staff and students while continuing his efforts to stay connected with schools across the district.

"Schools across the Avon Maitland District School Board area offer a variety of nutrition programs depending on the needs of their community," said Shantz. "Some of these programs are funded through community partners like Egg Farmers of Ontario, who contribute to Student Nutrition Ontario in order to provide protein-rich snacks to students across Perth and Huron counties and beyond."

According to Shantz, Egg Farmers of Ontario contributed more than \$350,000 to student nutrition initiatives in 2026. He said nutrition programs play an important



From left are Avon Maitland District School Board director of education Graham Shantz, acting principal Sarah Gerber, snack-program coordinator and educational assistant Leana Diehl, and secretary Leanne Gabel at Sprucedale Public School.

role in helping students succeed both academically and socially.

"These programs help ensure students are engaged in learning, experience a sense of belonging at school and develop healthy eating habits," Shantz said.

He added the success of the programs depends heavily on volunteers, staff support and community partnerships.

"When students are well nourished, their focus increases and their learning improves," he said. "We are grateful to those

who make these programs run as smoothly as they do."

Shantz also thanked area farmers and community organizations for their ongoing support of nutrition initiatives throughout the Avon Maitland District School Board area.

Raised on his family farm near Punky-Doodles Corners in Perth County, Shantz attended Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare before later graduating from Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary

School near Baden.

He went on to earn a bachelor of education degree from Western University in London and later completed a doctorate of education degree through the University of Southern Queensland in Australia.

Before becoming director of education for the Avon Maitland District School Board in 2025, Shantz spent many years working with the Waterloo Region District School Board as superintendent of education.

SPRING ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

FORMER WELLESLEY ARENA LANDS

Concept options for the future of the arena lands have been developed and the Township is seeking public input on these ideas. Read more about the Arena Lands Project and give your feedback online by scanning the QR code, or visiting:

<https://www.engagewr.ca/reimagining-wellesley-arena-and-community-centre-lands>



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OPEN HOUSES:

May 19, 2026 | 6:30-8:30pm

Bill Gies Recreation Centre - 1401 Queens Bush Rd., Wellesley, ON

May 21, 2026 | 6:30-8:30pm

St. Clements Community Centre - 1 Green St. Clements, ON

OFFICIAL PLAN

The Township of Wellesley is creating a new Official Plan - a roadmap that will guide growth and development to the year 2051. The Draft Official Plan is ready for review! To review, scan the QR code or visit:

<https://www.engagewr.ca/official-plan>



JOIN US TO GIVE FEEDBACK:

Statutory Public Open House - May 27, 2026 | 6:30-8:30pm

Crosshill Mennonite Church - 2537 Hutchison Road, Crosshill, ON

Statutory Public Meeting - June 18, 2026 | 5:45pm

Council Chambers - 4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill, ON



From left are North Easthope Public School principal Charles Longston, local egg farmer Gary West and Avon Maitland District School Board director of education Graham Shantz during a recent visit to the school.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

WODSS student art showcased at Castle Kilbride juried exhibition

Collaboration between the museum and local high school highlights young artistic talent in Wilmot

AMANDA NELSON

Gazette Reporter

Students from Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School (WODSS) are being recognized for their creativity and artistic talent through an exhibition now on display at Castle Kilbride.

The exhibition, "Artistic Expressions of WODSS: A Juried Art Show," officially opened April 30 and features artwork created by students in grades nine through 12 over the course of the school year. An opening reception held Saturday, May 2, welcomed students, family members, faculty and members of the public to view the collection for the first time. During the event, awards were presented by Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen, WODSS art teachers and museum staff.

"This is our second year in hosting this art show," said Taylor Hynes, museum assistant at Castle Kilbride. "It was a combined effort. We'd reached out to them last year to see if this was something of interest for them as a way to highlight and showcase the students' art."

The exhibit includes a wide range of artistic styles and mediums, including traditional fine art, graphic design and photography.

"We focus on art from grades nine to grade 12 and all different art and art realms – for instance, this year we even had the graphic design course as a part," said Hynes. "Last year, we had photography program students who did a variety of projects. So, we have had a good selection of different art styles."

Hynes said the partnership between the museum and the school is part of a broader effort to increase youth and community involvement at the historic site.

"It's a newer collaboration," said Hynes. "We really wanted to get back into doing more community involvement. We have other art collaborations, like the Central Ontario Art Association and Ontario Art Association, and we do a lot of shows, but we wanted to see more of our community involvement, especially the youth."

Hynes said exhibiting student work in a professional gallery setting gives young artists an opportunity to feel recognized and encouraged in their creative pursuits.

"I think it's quite special for the students to know that their pieces are being shown in the same gallery spaces that we have professional artists getting to show their pieces in as well," said Hynes. "I think it's really special for them to be highlighted in this way alongside professional artists."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Artwork created by students from Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School is currently on display at Castle Kilbride as part of the Artistic Expressions of WODSS juried exhibition running until May 24.

The exhibit has already received positive feedback from museum visitors, according to Hynes.

"We've actually had a lot of great feedback from people who are visiting the museum," said Hynes. "They're blown away that this is high-school grade art."

"I actually had a comment from one of our visitors last week, who had asked me if this was a specific art school – like, was it focused solely on art," Hynes added. "I said no, this is the local high school, and it's just crazy to see how much talent is in one particular school."

The exhibit runs until May 24 in the Belvedere Gallery and Wilmot administration complex at Castle Kilbride. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.



Grace Jull poses with her first-place senior division award-winning piece, *Fishy Fishy*, during the opening reception for the Artistic Expressions of WODSS juried art show at Castle Kilbride Saturday.

SEND US YOUR STORY IDEAS AND YOUR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO GALEN SIMMONS AT GALEN@GRANTHAVEN.COM

Perth County to submit concerns over province's Bill 98 planning changes

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth County council has endorsed planning staff's comments on the province's latest round of proposed planning and development legislation, raising concerns about the impact Bill 98 could have on local decision-making, rural planning and municipal flexibility.

At its May 7 meeting, county director of planning Andrea Hächler presented a report outlining staff comments on Bill 98, the Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act, before the May 14 provincial comment deadline.

"With the bill came out 21 related Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) postings that municipalities have been invited to comment on," Hächler said. "The bill proposed nine pieces of legislation be changed, including the Planning Act, the Development Charges Act, Building Code Act and Municipal Act.

"... You'll note I only commented on seven of the nine (legislation) changes because I felt those impact Perth County the most. ... This was released on March 30 and we were given to April 29 to comment. Luckily, that deadline was extended to May 14, so I was able to get a report to council and we'll have time to get comments into the ERO posting."

Bill 98 is the 19th piece of provincial legislation related to land-use planning and development in the past eight years. The bill received second reading April 14.

The proposed changes include standardizing municipal official plans, reforming site-plan control, establishing a minimum residential lot size in fully serviced settlement areas, prohibiting some mandatory enhanced development standards at the lot level, streamlining complete-application requirements and updating parkland dedication rules.

While county staff say they support efforts to make planning processes more

efficient and user-friendly, Hächler raised concerns that some of the proposed changes would reduce municipal discretion and limit Perth County's ability to respond to its specific rural, agricultural and settlement-area contexts.

One of the major proposed changes would allow the province to prescribe a standard structure, table of contents, list of schedules and land-use designations for all municipal official plans. The county's official plan would need to comply with those requirements by Jan. 1, 2029.

"Just simply standardizing official plans doesn't give us the ability to address area-specific contexts," Hächler said. "Perth County in particular has prime agricultural lands, you have smaller, rural settlement areas and we definitely don't have an official plan that would look like a City of Toronto official plan or a Region of Muskoka official plan."

Staff cautioned that while consistency may help in some cases, a one-size-fits-all approach could limit the county's ability to reflect local landscapes, resources and land-use patterns. Staff also warned standardized designations could result in more official plan amendments to address site-specific circumstances.

"So, we're asking the province to allow us to build in site-specific contexts and not to standardize official plans to that extent," Hächler said.

The county also raised significant concerns with the province's proposed site-plan-control changes. Bill 98 proposes removing site-plan control as a land-use planning tool and replacing it with a more standardized process focused on public health and safety. The legislation would also limit the number of circulations, create different review streams depending on project complexity and introduce a site-plan review panel or arbitration process for applications exceeding statutory timelines.

County staff are not supportive of removing site-plan control, noting it remains an

important tool for addressing matters such as access, grading, drainage, stormwater management, building location, parking, garbage storage and snow storage.

"The stormwater and the grading and stuff like that; is there another way we can ensure those are being done without site-plan control?" Coun. Hugh McDermid asked during the council discussion.

"There is a bare minimum that your building officials can ask for through the building permit that would likely speak to grading and drainage. However, in terms of any sort of compatibility issues (with neighbouring properties), we wouldn't be able to address those any longer," Hächler responded, noting the locations of things like garbage dumpsters and snow-storage areas, as well as the types of outdoor lighting within a proposed development would not be subject to change regardless of their impact on neighbours.

Staff also argue the province could reduce the number of application circulations by restoring municipal authority to require pre-consultation before an application is submitted. While many applicants already take part in pre-consultation voluntarily, staff say applications submitted without that early discussion can take longer to review.

Another proposed change would give the minister authority to set a minimum residential lot size in fully serviced settlement areas. The proposed minimum would be 175 square metres, roughly equivalent to a lot nine metres wide and 19 metres deep.

While county planning staff say they generally support smaller residential lot sizes and have been exploring reductions through local zoning bylaw reviews, the report raises concerns that the proposed minimum may be too small in some situations. Staff identified potential impacts related to stormwater management, reduced permeable area, parking, driveway spacing and sightlines, particularly for corner lots.

Bill 98 also proposes changes to the way municipalities can require studies and materials as part of a complete planning application. The province is considering a standardized list of core and contingent studies, as well as expanded electronic submission requirements.

County staff caution that a province-wide online submission model could create barriers in rural areas where internet service may be limited or unreliable. The report also notes the needs of the traditional Anabaptist community, where modern technology is not used, should be considered.

Staff also raised concerns about proposed changes to Minister's Zoning Orders that would remove the legislative requirement for the minister to provide public notice on amendments or revocations. County staff recommend public consultation and consent from the host municipality before changes are made to existing MZOs.

On parkland dedication, the proposed changes would require municipalities to accept a broader range of lands, including some encumbered lands and privately owned public spaces, toward parkland requirements. Staff warn this could lead to smaller, disconnected or less useful parcels that do not align with municipal parks and trails plans.

In its report, county staff acknowledge the province's goal of supporting more residential development but note planning applications in Perth County generally meet legislative timelines and there are already a significant number of approved residential units in serviced settlement areas.

Council directed planning staff to submit the county's comments to the province and forward the report to the county's lower-tier municipalities for information.

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Perth County survey shows strong business confidence, growth across sectors

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Businesses across Perth County are continuing to show confidence in the local economy, with many planning for change or growth in the coming years, according to the county's latest business retention and expansion (BR+E) survey.

County economic development and tourism staff shared the survey results with council at its May 7 meeting as part of a broader update on economic activity and tourism across the region.

"This time, our BR+E was focused on being a concise, business-level, intelligence-gathering exercise as opposed to a community-level temperature check," said county economic development officer Justin Dias. "So, that survey has been completed and those results help to inform our staff's response and deliver resources to those businesses requesting additional funding, joining our programs, or other resources related to their survey responses."

The 2026 BR+E survey collected 142 responses from businesses across Perth County, representing a range of sectors including retail, agriculture, arts and recreation, manufacturing and construction. Responses were spread across all four lower-tier municipalities, with the largest share coming from North Perth, followed by Perth East, West Perth and Perth South.

One of the most notable findings from the survey is 66 per cent of respondents indicated they are planning some form of change within the next two years, whether that be expansion, relocation, downsizing or selling their business.

At the same time, businesses identified a range of supports they would like to see from the county, with grant and loan programs topping the list. Other commonly requested supports included marketing assistance, social media and digital marketing training, artificial intelligence tools, succession-planning resources and workforce-related supports.

Workforce challenges remain a key concern for many businesses. More than 40 per cent of respondents reported difficulties recruiting or retaining employees, with common issues including a lack of qualified applicants, competition for labour and a limited pool of candidates.

"Of the 142 business responses, 68 per cent chose to remain anonymous, and that's understandable," Perth County Warden Dean Trentowsky said during the council discussion. "But 42 per cent of the respondents reported experiencing workforce, recruitment or retention challenges. ... I guess my concern is ... how do we help them if they remain anonymous, but they indicate they're in trouble and need help? ... It's kind of like a 911 call comes in and they say, 'I need police, fire

and ambulance,' and then they hang up the phone and we don't know where to go.

"We have the ability to offer some assistance, but how do we make that connection ... and try to offer some assistance?"

Speaking to Trentowsky's concern, Dias said the county can address the issues raised around workforce, recruitment and retention challenges through a general approach. One piece of that puzzle, Dias explained, is letting businesses across the county know about the relaunch of Ontario Job Grant, the redesigned Canada-Ontario Job Grant program that provides up to \$10,000 in funding to help employers train their employees and update their skills so they can adapt to a changing economy.

"This is a program designed to help employers access the specific training they need to help their employees upskill or get the skills they need to be retained or once they're recruited," Dias said. "That's something we shared yesterday on our socials; we're going to push that out to ensure as many businesses as possible can take advantage of it."

Coun. Rhonda Ehogoetz also noted that Perth County council and its member, lower-tier councils can continue pushing for new housing and higher densities in their communities to support employers as they bring new workers into the county.

Despite those challenges and broader economic pressures such as inflation and

uncertainty, roughly two-thirds of respondents still rated Perth County as a good or excellent place to do business.

In addition to survey results, staff also provided council with a snapshot of where business expansion is occurring across the county using building permit data.

In the agricultural sector, nearly \$97 million in construction activity was recorded in 2025, including new builds, renovations and additions. West Perth accounted for the largest share of that activity, followed by Perth East, with North Perth and Perth South each making up smaller but still significant portions.

Commercial and industrial construction activity also remained strong, totalling more than \$53 million across the county in 2025. In contrast to agricultural development, Perth South led the way in commercial and industrial investment, followed by Perth East and North Perth, with West Perth accounting for a smaller share.

Staff noted the inclusion of building-permit data provides a more complete picture of business expansion across Perth County, capturing activity that may not be reflected through formal funding applications or direct economic-development support.

The county plans to continue tracking this data on a quarterly basis moving forward to better understand growth trends and support ongoing business-development efforts.

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Tavistock Optimist Club gearing up for busy summer during 50th anniversary year

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

After 50 years, membership in the Tavistock Optimist Club continues to grow.

The club, which was chartered on April 15, 1976, was one of the largest Optimist clubs in Ontario at the time with 81 members – a provincial record that still stands today.

The club's inaugural president, Bruce Swartzentruber, said membership has now grown to 92 members.

Three charter members – Bruce Swartzentruber, his brother, Brian Swartzentruber, and Eugene “Beany” Bender – sat down Tuesday to reflect on the club's history and growth over the past five decades.

Other charter members who remain involved with club activities include Lyle Bender, Steve Bender, Steve Yantzi, Ken “Took” Zehr and Brian Wilhelm.

During the club's first year, Steve Bender served as secretary-treasurer while Paul Steinman was first vice president.

The club was originally chartered and sponsored by the Optimist Club of Shakespeare under the leadership of Gill McNeil and with support from members of that club.

The group's first dinner meetings were held at the Tavistock Legion and its charter night celebration took place in Stratford on July 17, 1976, with many local members attending.

With its longtime motto, “Friend of Youth,” the club has remained heavily involved in promoting youth activities throughout the community.

The charter members recalled one of the club's earliest and most ambitious fundraising projects – raising money to purchase the club's 11-acre property on the west side of Tavistock.

To finance the purchase, members built a new house in Tavistock and sold 2,400 raffle tickets at \$100 each. The fundraiser launched July 29, 1976, and by Dec. 5 of that year, every ticket had been sold.

The project generated a profit of \$115,000, allowing the club to purchase the property from Canada Food Distributors and establish what has since become a busy community park.

Today, the club is once again in fundraising mode with a \$200,000 campaign to help pay for a new pavilion addition and recently installed ball-diamond lights completed by D&D Electric of Tavistock.

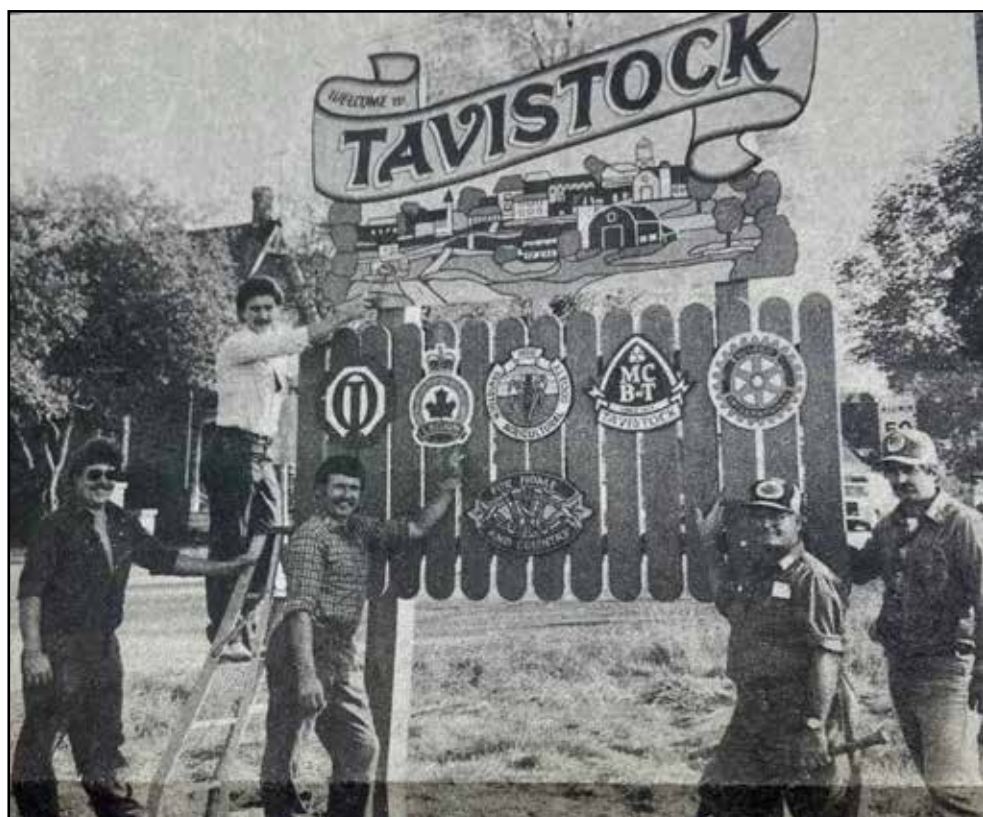
The charter members said the club has already raised 75 per cent of its fundraising goal and thanked community members for their continued support.

As part of its 50th anniversary celebrations, the club is inviting the public to an open-air anniversary celebration June 6 from 7-11 p.m. at the Optimist Park ball diamond featuring the popular band, Highway 21.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Three original charter members of the Tavistock Optimist Club gathered Tuesday to reflect on the club's 50-year history. Pictured, from left, are Eugene “Beany” Bender, Bruce Swartzentruber – the club's first president – and Brian Swartzentruber.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Members of the Tavistock Optimist Club erected signs at the main entrances to Tavistock on Oct. 17, 1984. Pictured, from left, are president Brian Swartzentruber, “Butch” Mogk, Bruce Swartzentruber, past president Willis Swartzentruber and Terry Currah.



Tavistock Optimist president Ken Meadows, left, and the club's parkland committee chairman Earl Ramseyer at the new ball park's food booth and washroom facilities. Photos by Nancy Hotson

Optimists create 11-acre facility
New ball park in Tavistock

lights focused.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Tavistock Optimist Club members Ken Meadows, left, and Earl Ramseyer were instrumental in bringing a second ballpark to the club's 11-acre property. Ramseyer served as parkland committee chairman in 1988, and both men helped plan the ballpark's food booth and washroom facilities.

Braemar Women's Institute members experience a school day in 1910

LAURA GREEN

Submitted to the Gazette

It was a fun experience to be a student in 1910 at the Brocksden Country School Museum, the oldest one-room schoolhouse in Perth County. It was known as SS#1 North Easthope and was built in 1853. It was closed in 1967 like most rural, one-room or two schoolhouses across Ontario.

The school museum offers a school day program which allows children to experience a typical day in 1910. We encourage participants to dress in period clothing and bring a pail lunch to add to the experience.

Our branch experienced a short version of the day which include the 1910 school-teacher, Ms. Smith (teachers were not married). We had to stand up straight to answer a question and address the teacher before answering the question. "Ms. Smith, the answer is Wednesday." It was a learning experience to write on wooden slates with a slate pencil and answer the mental arithmetic questions without a calculator.

Writing with your left hand was forbidden. Ms. Smith demonstrated the punishment for this activity when caught, which was holding a small log out from the side of your body (T-formation) for a certain length of time. She also discussed other forms of punishments used depending on the crime. She does have a strap in her teacher's drawer.



(LAURA GREEN PHOTO)

Ms. (Kim) Smith had attentive students from the Braemar Women's Institute who visited her class at the Brocksden Country School Museum on Wednesday, May 6. Pictured, starting with the front seat, is Norna Howe, Anya Donaldson, Bernice Marsland and Linda Howe. Anya Donaldson and Linda Hammond (not in the photo) attended city schools so were sad that they didn't experience schooling in the country after hearing the presentation and members' personal tales.

Back to 2026, teacher and hostess Kim Smith gave the history of the school which included building upgrades like electricity, a basement that had many purposes and indoor plumbing. One of our members started her teaching career in a one-room school and the visit brought back memories.

Talking about memories, most of our members experienced attending a

one-room or two-room rural school and shared a memory for Roll Call.

We didn't bring lunch in a pail, but enjoyed a cup of herbal tea in a China teacup and homemade cookies.

The school museum committee hosts special events during the year, and you can find information on them on their Facebook page or webpage. They will be open on Saturdays starting June 27 until

the end of August for tourists.

To book a class or group for an authentic 1910 school day, contact Jessie Campbell at brockdenschool@gmail.com or 519-271-2619. The Brocksden Country School Museum is located at 2719 Perth Line 37.

Unfortunately, because the building was built in 1853, it does not have ramps or elevators and is therefore considered "not accessible."

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STRATFORD NISSAN



New Hamburg resident wins Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades 50/50 draw

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

There is always at least one smiling face following the monthly 50/50 draw hosted by the Wilmot Heritage Antique Fire Brigades.

New Hamburg resident Gary McNeil was the latest winner after being notified by brigades president Peter Gingerich that he had won \$462.50 in the organization's April draw.

McNeil, who has long supported local community organizations, said winning the draw was never his motivation for purchasing a ticket, but he was happy to support a worthwhile cause while also taking home the prize.

The Wilmot Heritage Antique Fire Brigades and Museum, established in 1995, continues to preserve and celebrate the area's fire-fighting history through its museum and community events.

The Wilmot Fire Museum, located at 10 Bell Dr. in Baden, welcomes visitors and community groups throughout the year. The museum is open Wednesday evenings beginning at 6:30 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon during July and August. Visits can also be arranged by appointment.

For more information, contact the museum at 519-572-2811 or by email at wilmotfiremuseum@gmail.com.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Wilmot Heritage Antique Fire Brigades president Peter Gingerich congratulates New Hamburg resident Gary McNeil after he won \$462.50 in the brigade's monthly 50/50 draw. McNeil says he always makes sure to purchase a ticket in support of the local organization.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



School bus drivers play important role in students' daily lives

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

It is often easy to take for granted the people and services that help keep communities running smoothly each day.

Among them are school bus drivers, who take on the responsibility of safely transporting dozens of students to and from school every day in all kinds of weather.

At North Easthope Public School, west of the hamlet of Amulree, four local school bus drivers recently spoke about the rewards and challenges that come with the job. The drivers said one of the best parts of the work is building relationships with students and their families over the years.

"All of us love picking up the students

and getting to know them and their families on a first-name basis," the drivers said.

While transporting 30-40 students at a time can occasionally present challenges, the drivers emphasized the importance of making sure every child arrives at school and returns home safely each day.

Mark Mayer, who has been driving a school bus for the past 12 years while also living and farming nearby, said he genuinely enjoys starting his mornings on the bus route.

"When weekends come along, I really miss the kids," Mayer said.

He added he is now beginning to transport the next generation of students, including children of former riders he once

drove to school years ago.

Parents of students who ride the buses also praised the drivers for their dedication and care.

Several parents said they feel fortunate to have such considerate and dependable drivers transporting their children each day.

Though school-bus driving is often considered part-time work, the drivers

acknowledged the hours and responsibilities make it a unique commitment. Despite the challenges and responsibilities involved, they said the work remains rewarding because of the connections they build with students and families.

The drivers also noted the job requires patience, focus and a commitment to safety every morning and afternoon throughout the school year.



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

School buses depart North Easthope Public School after dropping students off for another day of classes. School bus drivers continue to play an important role in the daily lives of students and families.



North Easthope Public School principal Charles Longston stands with school bus drivers, from left, Kim Miller, Jeff Daigneault, Nick Rees-Evans and Mark Mayer. Rees-Evans is also the author of the book, *Forefathers*.

Community campaign delivers major boost to Perth County food banks

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The Stratford House of Blessing food bank recently received thousands of dollars in cash, cheques and cereal donations through a community campaign organized by two local couples determined to help fight food insecurity across Perth County.

Bruce and Margaret Whitmore of Stratford, along with Richard and Jean Smelski of Shakespeare, initially believed a simple cereal drive could make a difference.

The group first hoped to collect about 250 boxes of cereal by asking friends and neighbours to donate one or two boxes each. However, after learning more about the growing need at local food banks, they quickly realized much more support was needed.

The couples said reading about food insecurity in Perth County prompted them to investigate further.

Bruce and Margaret Whitmore visited several organizations, including St. Joseph's Society of Saint Vincent de Paul food kitchen and Stratford House of Blessing, to better understand the challenges families are facing.

They also contacted all 13 food banks across Perth County to gather information on the number of households being served each month. What they discovered



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Pictured with hundreds of boxes of donated cereal at Stratford House of Blessing are campaign organizers Richard and Jean Smelski, Bruce and Margaret Whitmore, Lori Stewart of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and Eva Hayes, executive director of House of Blessing. The donations will help support food banks across Perth County.

surprised them.

According to the organizers, 1,805 households accessed food banks across Perth County each month, with some families relying on cereal as a supper meal by the end of the month. Food-bank usage is

also expected to increase by another 20 per cent this year.

Realizing their original goal would barely make a dent in the need, the Whitmores and Smelskis expanded their fundraising efforts and turned to the agricultural community for support.

They reached out to seed companies, farm organizations, elevators, agri-businesses, grocery stores and local farmers, many of whom responded generously.

Bruce Whitmore said the campaign gained momentum quickly.

The first business they approached agreed to donate 100 boxes of cereal. A second business matched the donation, while a third contributed \$1,000 toward cereal purchases.

"At that point, we knew it was doable," Bruce Whitmore said.

The campaign eventually raised more than \$18,300, with additional donations still expected to arrive from several organizations and corporate head offices.

To date, the organizers have already delivered 151 boxes of cereal to House of Blessing, with nearly 150 more boxes still to come.

All cereal and financial donations will be distributed among Perth County's 13 food banks based on the number of clients each organization serves.

While the four organizers describe the campaign as a "one-shot deal," they say they are deeply grateful to the many individuals, businesses and organizations that stepped forward to help.

"Hungry families will be eating because of those who were so generous in their giving," they said.

Decoration Day service returns to Riverside Cemetery June 7

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The New Hamburg Legion and the Township of Wilmot are inviting the wider community to Riverside Cemetery next month for the third annual Decoration Day service since it was brought back as an annual tradition in 2024.

The service will begin at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 7, with the Legion Colour Party marching in to open the ceremony. This year's service will again include music from the New Hamburg Concert Band and Sir Adam Beck Public School band, as well as participation from local dignitaries.

While the event includes a focus on honouring local veterans, organizers say Decoration Day is also meant to recognize all family members, friends, neighbours and community members laid to rest at Riverside Cemetery.

"We're really trying to promote it to the community," said Decoration Day committee member Gail McMullen. "Not just veterans; the community."

Before the ceremony, members of the 822 Tutor Squadron Air Cadets will help place small Canadian flags at the graves of veterans buried at Riverside. Families are also encouraged to visit and decorate the graves of their loved ones.

Legion past president Ross Eichler said the service is not intended to replace or take away from Remembrance Day, but to provide another opportunity for people to gather, reflect and reconnect with local history.

"We will be honouring the veterans as well because the Legion is doing what we



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

New Hamburg Legion past president Bob Berg, Decoration Day committee member Gail McMullen and past president Ross Eichler stand among the graves at Riverside Cemetery, where the third annual Decoration Day service will take place on June 7 beginning at 2 p.m.

do," Eichler said. "But the main emphasis is the entire cemetery, the people that are buried there."

Legion past president Bob Berg said Decoration Day is also about preserving

the stories of local families whose names are part of the community's history.

"Everybody used to know everybody in a small town like this. They don't anymore," Berg said. "It's falling through the cracks. If we can keep those stories alive and in mind to people ... we should do something about it."

Organizers have placed a greater emphasis on promotion this year in hopes of encouraging more residents to attend, including families connected to the Legion's

veterans-banner program.

Those attending are encouraged to bring a lawn chair. Parking will be available across the street from Riverside Cemetery in the ODG and Arcadian Projects parking lots.

Details:
Location: Riverside Cemetery, New Hamburg
Date: Sunday, June 7
Time: 2 p.m.

IN MEMORIAM

Jason Fewkes



Remembering a very special son who chose to leave us on May 05, 2025. I continually think about the days and our conversations just before, and I believed things were okay. Yet in the end something happened on that weekend that took you to a place you could not recover from. I cannot imagine or fathom the thoughts you must have been wrestling with and to think what was positive in your life was not enough to change your decision. I will never know the suffering that was going on in your mind. Some might say choosing to leave could be a sign of weakness, but I believe it was an indication of your trying to be strong for too long and that what you were carrying inside became too much to bear. I know the question of why you felt you needed to leave cannot be answered and I simply need to accept the reality of that day.

In your 45 years you filled many roles. You were a son, brother, grandson, nephew, uncle, cousin, friend, husband and father. Your life was filled with highs and lows, and after hitting rock bottom it was your determination and resilience that served you well as you rebuilt your life and gave back to so many others along the way. I was always so proud of you and what you had been able to accomplish.

You could make others feel better with just a hug or a few kind encouraging words. You had determination and when you set your mind to do something, there was no stopping you. Hard work never scared you. You faced challenges with courage and always found a way to persevere. It was your kindness, generosity and willingness to help when it was needed that made you the special person you were to so many others. You lived in the moment and knew you could accomplish whatever you set your mind to. You never gave up on your dreams and trusted the future would always work out.

Today I still experience periods of pain, anger, numbness and denial. What helps me to make it through is finding comfort to know you touched so many lives in so many different ways, that I will continue to carry a piece of you in my heart and that your impact will live on through others and in the stories and memories we share. I miss you more than words can express, and the memories of our times together, the lessons you taught me and the love we shared will stay with me forever.

It is said as parents we give life to our children, but I can honestly say it was you who gave me life. I know you are now in God's everlasting care, are now at peace and reunited with your sister Jen and other family members. Thank you for the love you brought into our lives. Thank you for being my son.

With enduring love, Your Dad

QUIZ TIME

BY JAKE GRANT

1. An educated guess made at the start of an experiment is called what?
2. What does VHS stand for?
3. Which celebrity has fulfilled the most Make-A-Wish requests?
4. The Dead Sea is located between which two countries?
5. An orca can also be called a what?
6. What archeologist discovered King Tut's tomb?
7. How many time zones are there in Canada?
8. What year did Leonardo DiCaprio finally win his first Oscar?
9. Before Tokyo became the capital city of Japan, where was the capital located?
10. How many syllables are in the word Mississippi?

Answers found on the classified page

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 WILMOT-TAVISTOCK-GAZETTE**

The Old Gazettes

By Sydney Grant

Slowly but surely, I'm reading through the past pages of the Tavistock Gazette (est. 1895). Within this weekly column I'd like to share with you some of my findings.

May 6 - 13, 2021, Edition (5 years ago)

The B-W Feed and Seed mill in New Hamburg was sold this week to a local group of people under the company name, Just Homes. They plan to turn the heritage mill into faith-based, mixed, affordable housing and a community meeting place. "I picture the area as an inviting place for the entire community, maybe a marketplace, or a place to hang out," said Just Homes representative Jeff Van Gyssel. "We are planning a community study to get everyone involved to see what the need is.

The Teskey family created a Wilmot Township-themed digital scavenger hunt at the beginning of the pandemic, and now, almost a year later, the scavenger hunt is still seeing traction – including a mention by Google. "We've been overwhelmed by the support from the community," said Matt Teskey. Teskey, who is a program manager for Google's Firebase, created the scavenger hunt along with his wife and two children using Google Forms after being inspired by a digital Harry Potter escape room.

May 11 - 18, 2011, Edition (15 years ago)

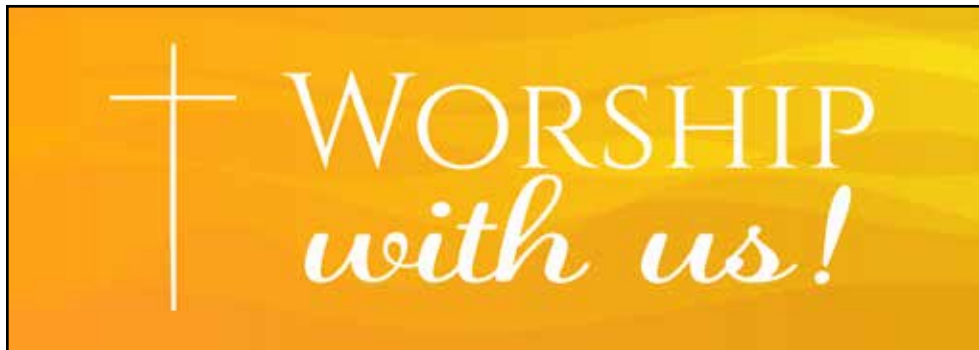
Christy Harris of Tavistock has received the monetary award for social justice from Stratford Area World Aid (SAWA). The award was presented to her at the end of the group's regular meeting on Monday, May 2, 2011. Harris was nominated for the award by her teacher, Ms. Christine Ritsma of the North-western Secondary School in Stratford. Taught by Ms. Ritsma for many years, Harris is the first person to come to mind when Ms. Ritsma was asked for a candidate for the award. "Christy ignites ideas," she said. "She doesn't just identify ways to help, but makes it happen. She is socially aware."

What do hot chili and hot music have in common? An afternoon of fundraising for two young students planning a mission trip to Ecuador in the summer of 2012. Alex Urlando and Alys Mak-Pilsworth and their families hosted an afternoon of music, dancing, raffles and baking to raise funds for their mission trip through the Free the Children program. The 17-day project will help build a school in the country's Chimborazo province. There, high in the Indigenous mountain communities, local people face extreme poverty, lack of education and health care, as well as a constant struggle to farm on the rough, rocky terrain. By providing Ecuador's native communities with alternative forms of income, these forgotten people are finding hope for a better future.

May 8 - 15, 1996, Edition (30 years ago)

It's not difficult to get a smile from Brad Stere these days. The 30-year-old Tavistock resident just underwent a kidney transplant courtesy of his mother, Betty, and both are doing fine. After three and a half hours of surgery on Wednesday, April 24, at University Hospital in London, the pair went through a rough few hours of recovery before realizing the success of the operation. Betty returned home on the following Monday, and Brad was released on Tuesday, April 30. Brad said he knew it was a success when he had to stop by the side of the road on the way home from the hospital. He said he hadn't gone in six months, and that's no exaggeration.

Hickson Central School students, through the generosity and assistance of Oxford Mutual Insurance Company, planted a red maple on the school grounds last week and each took home a Colorado Blue Spruce seedling. "Trees for a Greener Future" is the program successfully completed by the insurance company over the past four years at seven rural Oxford schools. Company personnel volunteer their time to educate students on the importance of trees and their value in the ecosystem.



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Pastor Jim Brown

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To have your place of worship listing included here, please contact thewtgazette@gmail.com

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette **SPORTS**

Historic season ends in overtime for Tavistock Braves

Continued from page 1

net from the slot at nine minutes in to give the Whalers their first-ever Schmaltz Cup.

The Braves dropped Game 4 in Fergus on Friday by a score of 6-5 despite holding a 5-3 lead until the 15-minute mark of the second period when the Whalers cut the lead to one and then scored the only two goals of the third. Yann Raskin scored twice for Tavistock with singles from Keegan Metcalf, Miller and Jacob Reid-Brant.

The Whalers jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period of Game 3 last Wednesday before Ryan McKellar put the Braves on the board 42 seconds into the second frame. Fergus restored its three-goal lead, but Metcalf, Evan Palubeski and Jack Hodge scored to tie the game at four by the 1:33 mark of the third. Two of the three Whalers' goals came with the man advantage.

Joey Martin, who had a monster game with three goals and a pair of helpers, scored the game-winner for the Whalers four minutes later. Jacob Lesser followed with an insurance marker and Martin sealed the win with an empty net goal.

Keaton Bartlett, Palubeski, Metcalf and McKellar had two-point performances in a losing effort. Tavistock had been able to control Martin in the first two games as the former Elmira Sugar King star scored just twice.

Ethan Stover led Tavistock in playoff scoring with 39 points, followed by Yann Raskin's 37 and Metcalf's 33.

Braves general manager Brent Lange said there are many people to thank for the team's success this season.

"Right from the top down; president Steve Hohl, the rest of the executive members, coaches, staff and our volunteers. It's been one hell of a ride and I can't say enough good things about everybody involved. I am so proud of the players, the community and our sponsors."

He added the scene in the locker room was tough, particularly for the four players who won't be returning next season, as Dionne, Carter Arsenault, Tyler Bryzenskie and McKellar have all aged out.

"There were a lot of tears. Four very



(BRENT LANGE PHOTO)

The Tavistock Braves are honouring the careers of their four overage players who are not eligible to return next season. Captain Marc Dionne, Tyler Brezynskie, Ryan McKellar and Carter Arseneau all played key roles in the team reaching its first-ever Schmaltz Cup final.

important guys on our team played their last game. It was very emotional, but also for good reasons. It's tough. We took a team like that to three overtime games and we were right there with them the entire series."

Lange said his focus is now on the 2026-2027 version of the Tavistock Braves, though he isn't expecting many roster spots to be available.

"We have about 50 kids coming out to our camp on June 6 and 7, but we are probably only going to have five or six holes to fill. We have our entire defence core and both our goalies eligible to come back, along with our top line. It's looking pretty

impressive for next year."

Lesser earned playoff MVP honours after tallying 19 goals and 33 points in the postseason, highlighted by a two-goal, one-assist performance in the deciding game for the Fergus Whalers.

"This feels unbelievable. I'm so happy for the guys," said Whalers head coach Ryan Black. "They worked hard all year for this moment, and it was a total commitment from everybody. It was a long road to get here, and I give Tavistock a lot of credit. They're a great team."

Black said the first two seasons were a learning curve, which helped the team win the league championship.

"The veterans we brought in this year set the standard pretty high and we had a great culture in the room."

The Whalers have only been in existence for three seasons, with the last Junior C team from that city folding back in 2015. In 2022, Jason Baier, a Stratford businessman and resident, secured a new franchise for Fergus and is the team's president and director of hockey operations.

One of the biggest moments in team history came in 1979-1980 when a 16-year-old defenseman named Steve Smith played for the Fergus Green Machine. Smith went on to win three Stanley Cups with the Edmonton Oilers.

Dionne thankful to Braves organization and its supporters

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Marc Dionne has played his last game for the Tavistock Braves.

The 21-year-old has lived much of his life Tavistock and has been a familiar face around the recreation centre for many years. The Gazette spoke with Dionne 24 hours after a heartbreaking overtime and series loss to Fergus about his incredible Junior C career.

"Being able to look back on the past five

years on the Braves, each year had its own handful of accomplishments and learning curves that allowed the team and returning players to learn and grow from prior experiences," he said.

"Being able to play for this organization for so long, being able to grow with the teammates around me and inch closer and closer to being the team we wanted to be was an experience I will never forget and can't be more thankful for. The way players from out of town took on and embraced what it meant to be a Brave and to play

not only for themselves but for Tavistock is something I will always remember."

When asked if he could put the 2025-2026 season into words, he started with two – memorable and unforgettable.

"Even though we got to a position this year that no other Braves team has ever been, falling short in the finals is still something the whole team is trying to let go. The dedication, heart, drive, grit and perseverance from every single person in the room is what allowed us to be the successful team we were all year," said

Dionne, adding every player on this season's team was on the same page every step of the way.

"The way we were able to overcome adversity after losing four straight and turning it around to go on an 11-game win streak to end the regular season; this team wanted to learn, cared to get better and wanted to do whatever it took to be the best team we could be. What I got to be a part of this year was something so special and something that is truly once in

Continued on page 23

Continued from page 22

a lifetime. From the words of not just me but every player on this Braves team this year, it was the tightest locker room all of us have ever had.”

Dionne was thrilled to be named the team’s captain two seasons ago, something extra special for a hometown kid.

“Growing up in this community ever since I learned how to skate, all I wanted to do was to make Tavi proud and get my teammates around me to feel the same way. It was never just about hockey for me. It was about bringing the community together to make the coaches, parents and hockey supporters of this town understand that the Braves didn’t play for the names on the back of their jersey but the logo on the front.”

He added what fans witnessed this year was what happens when a team doesn’t only play for the success, but when it plays for the community that supports it.

Dionne spent five full seasons with the team, picking up 102 points in 213 games. An emotional general manager, Brent Lange, said those numbers don’t do justice to what the young man has meant to the organization.

“Marc is just an incredible human being. He’s a team-first guy who showed incredible leadership throughout his career. He didn’t put up a lot of points, but his voice

in the room, his presence, he blocks a million shots a year and puts his body on the line game in and game out.”

He added Dionne was also very active off the ice in the community.

“A lot of kids look up to him, and he always took time to hang out with them, even after games. I can’t say enough good things about his leadership.”

Dionne isn’t ruling out a return to hockey in some form but isn’t going to make any quick decisions on what that could look like.

“I’m going to take some time to focus on my work and personal life away from hockey for the first year or two. Afterwards, I know a couple of my teammates growing up and even from the Braves these past years would love to start coaching. Looking back on the coaches that helped me be the player I am today; I want to be able to give back and do the same thing for the community.”

Dionne ended the interview by thanking everyone he was ever involved with over his five years playing junior hockey.

“I just wanted to say how grateful I am to have played and represented Tavistock throughout my entire hockey career. To all who supported, volunteered and poured their hearts out to make the Tavistock Braves as special as they are, thank you.”



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Marc Dionne’s career as a Tavistock Brave has come to an end, but the legacy he left behind will not soon be forgotten.

South Easthope farm girl returns home to practise law in New Hamburg

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

A young woman raised on a farm in South Easthope Township has returned to the area to begin her legal career in downtown New Hamburg.

Rachel V. Law (Ropp), lawyer and notary, recently joined longtime lawyer William Timothy Lowes at their office located at 67 Huron St. in New Hamburg. In a recent interview, Law said becoming a lawyer was not always part of her plans while growing up and attending Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare and later Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School near Baden.

“I primarily focused on math and science courses and had little interest in reading or writing-intensive subjects,” she said.

However, during Grade 12, Law enrolled in a law class because it fit her timetable, a decision she says ultimately changed her future.

“I was captivated by the interplay of law and policy and their real-world impact,” she said. “That class planted the first seed.”

After high school, Law attended the University of Guelph, where she earned a bachelor of science in agriculture honours degree along with a minor in criminal justice and public policy.

During her second year at university, a law-related humanities elective reignited her interest in the subject.

By the beginning of her third year, she had decided to pursue a career in law.

Following graduation from Guelph, Law entered the juris doctor program at



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Rachel Law and William Lowes enjoy working in downtown New Hamburg and spending time with friends, neighbours and clients in the community.

Western University in London.

While studying law, she developed a growing interest in the relationship between law and agriculture.

One of her favourite courses focused on food law, where she completed a major

research paper examining what lessons the Canadian judicial system could learn from American courts regarding the impact of glyphosate use on individuals and the environment.

Her professor later encouraged her

to present the paper at the Canadian Association of Food Law and Policy Conference, where she received the 2024 Gowling WLG-Joel Taller Prize for Emerging Voices in Food Law.

Law said she is excited to combine her passion for agriculture with her legal career.

“Having grown up with a strong connection to farming and agriculture, ... I feel I can connect with many of my rural clients,” she said.

She added helping farm families with succession planning is one of the most rewarding parts of her work.

“Becoming a lawyer has allowed me to merge two meaningful fields in a way that enables me to serve the agricultural community through informed, practical and impactful legal solutions,” she said.

Law’s parents, Dennis and Heather Ropp, continue to farm east of Sebastopol on Perth Line 29. The family also recently opened Sprucewood Tack Shop in Tavistock after relocating the business from the family farm to Woodstock Street South.

Rachel Law and her husband, Philip Law, also raise beef cattle on the Ropp family farm.

The couple recently purchased a home in Tavistock, just around the corner from her grandparents, Lloyd and Loreen Ropp.

Rachel Law said she is grateful to continue living and working in the same community where she was raised while remaining closely connected to agriculture and family farming.

Spring planting keeps Elhaven Farms busy in South Easthope

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Working the ground on a cool but dry weekend in Perth County's South Easthope Township meant dust in the air as farmers across the region busied themselves planting alfalfa, corn and soybeans.

For the Meadows family of Elhaven Farms, north of Harmony, spring planting season is one of the busiest times of the year on the family's dairy and chicken operation.

David and Christine Meadows laugh when asked about the hectic pace of spring work.

"When isn't it busy?" they said, echoing the sentiment shared by many farm families across Perth County.

With tractors cultivating, planting and stone-picking throughout the countryside, dust filled the air alongside the familiar scent of manure being spread on fields. Livestock farmers often joke that it is "the

smell of money."

For farms like Elhaven Farms, having access to their own natural fertilizer is especially valuable as ongoing global shipping issues and conflict in the Middle East continue to create uncertainty around commercial fertilizer supplies and crop-input costs.

We were lucky enough to climb into the buddy seat beside Dave Meadows as he worked the fields near the family's dairy barn on Perth Line 29, also known locally as Pork Street. Meadows was cultivating land in preparation for seeding an alfalfa and tall fescue grass mix.

Farming in South Easthope Township, where crop yields are often among the best in the country, plays an important role in supporting the economies of Stratford, St. Marys, Tavistock and surrounding communities.

Today, Elhaven Farms milks approximately 125 registered Holstein cows using robotic milking technology. Including dry

cows, heifers and calves, the family cares for about 325 dairy animals at any given time.

The Meadows family also raises more than 35,000 broiler chickens at a farm on Harmony Road. In recent years, the operation has expanded into raising dairy-beef cross calves as part of its beef operation, while Holstein bull calves are raised for the veal sector.

When she is not helping on the farm, Christine Meadows works as a teacher at nearby St. Ambrose Catholic Elementary School.

The couple's sons, 19-year-old Luke and 17-year-old Jacob, are both heavily involved in the local 4-H dairy club and already share a passion for farming that may one day see them take over the family operation as the fourth generation to manage the land.

Dave and Christine Meadows took over the farm from Dave Meadows' parents, Elwood and Carol Meadows, who

spent decades building and caring for the dairy herd and farmland. Crop rotations at Elhaven Farms include corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and rye grass.

The success of Elhaven Farms would also not be possible without the dedication of longtime herdsman Dan Dunsmore. A local resident who first began working on the farm while still in high school, Dunsmore has now spent the past decade helping manage the operation alongside his wife, Vanessa, and their newborn son, Daniel Joseph.

Dave Meadows and Dunsmore are also known for lending a hand to a neighbouring farm family facing serious health challenges, helping with planting and harvesting alongside other local farmers.

"It's just the right thing to do," Dave Meadows said. "That's what caring farming neighbours do when someone is going through difficult times."



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Dave Meadows operates his 400-horsepower John Deere 9330 four-wheel-drive tractor while cultivating a 50-foot swath of land at a time near Harmony. The tractor's GPS guidance system allows for precise fieldwork with no overlap, helping save time and fuel.



Modern farming equipment has dramatically changed over the decades. Where farmers once used 40- to 50-horsepower tractors pulling 12-foot cultivators, today's larger farms rely on advanced technology and significantly larger machinery to efficiently work the land.



Looking back from the cab of Dave Meadows' John Deere 9330 tractor as the 50-foot cultivator works the field. Meadows says the operation can cultivate 25-30 acres per hour at about five miles per hour.

This is Doug.

Doug is an active member of his community.

Doug knows he can stay up to date by checking the local newspaper, in print and online, for the community calendar and other details about upcoming events and social gatherings.

Doug is smart.

Be like Doug.

#localnewspaper



Southern Perth County farmers push ahead with spring planting



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Dairy and crop farmer Andrew Danen plants corn 12 rows at a time Tuesday in a field along Perth Road 59, just north of Sebastopol and Tavistock. The family farm, Danendale Holsteins Ltd., milks 300 registered Holsteins. Danen is a third-generation dairy farmer in South Easthope Township and a direct descendant of Tony and Jane Danen.

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Corn planters and seeders were running at full speed across southern Perth County this week as farmers took advantage of dry weather conditions ahead of forecasted rain.

Tuesday saw fields throughout the area filled with tractors and planters as growers worked to get corn and soybean seed into the ground before the expected moisture arrived.

Farmers reported that planting conditions throughout the spring have been

nearly ideal, with limited rainfall allowing equipment to remain active and reducing downtime during one of the busiest times of the year.

Many producers also noted most alfalfa and grass seedings have already been completed as the calendar moves into the middle of May.

Soybeans have also been going into the ground steadily across the region, with many acres already planted.

The planting of coloured beans, another major crop grown throughout the area, is expected to begin within the next two to three weeks.

Gazette Puzzles

VICTORIA DAY LONG WEEKEND FUN

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SHOW US YOUR WILMOT



(PHOTO COURTESY OF SHOW US YOUR WILMOT)

Charles Okum recently shared this photo of a pair of proud, new parents and their goslings along the Nith River in New Hamburg to the Show Us Your Wilmot Facebook page.

Pet of the Week

POLLY

Meet Polly, a quiet, gentle bunny with a heart full of love just waiting to bloom. At six-years-old, Polly may be a little nervous at first, but with patience and kindness, her sweet personality truly shines.

Once she feels safe, Polly loves cozy cuddles, playful moments, and spending time close to the people she trusts most. She's looking for a calm, loving home where she can feel cherished and secure, and in return, she'll be the most devoted little companion.

If you believe the best friendships are worth the wait, Polly may be the perfect match for you. She's available for adoption at the Stratford Centre. Find Polly here: <https://kwsphumane.ca/adopt/small-animals>



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Spinach is a superfood!

HEAPS OF HEALTHY TIPS

By Mercedes Kay Gold



Marvellous May has landed and with warmer weather it's time to embrace aboveground veggies. Why? Winter is over and we can eat fewer hearty, body-warming, belowground or root vegetables.

Aboveground produce has a higher water content. Hot and humid days equal hydration helpers. Spinach is on this holistic nutritionist's radar.

Spinach is stunning. This super-nutritious, leafy green is related to beets and chards. There are three types of spinach. Savoy is darker in colour, curly and my favourite fresh. Love frozen spinach? Chances are you are cooking smooth leaves. Last but not least is semi-savoy, a hybrid spinach.

Spinach is a yum or yuck food

for sure. Young spinach is tender, becoming chewier as it ages. The flavour is fantastic for those with a love of an earthy, straight-from-the-garden, fresh-grown goodness.

Healthy? Beyond body-boosting. Spinach is gorgeous and green, which translates to chlorophyll content. This natural pigment is linked to overall detoxification of the body. Gads of greens lead to clearer skin and less body odor naturally.

Spinach is high in non-heme iron. Yes, spinach salads are sensational but the key to absorbing non-animal-based iron is steaming. The other key point is vitamin C. Plants must be steamed and require a squeeze

of citrus to increase absorption. If smoothies are a dream, steam greens ahead of time or use leftovers but make sure they are combined with berries for insane iron.

Spinach equals load of lutein and zeaxanthin. This dynamic duo is essential for eye protection. Spinach is immune boosting thanks to the trio of vitamins A, C and E. One forgotten but essential vitamin in spinach is the crazy K content. This vitamin is extremely important for absorbing calcium and vitamin D. Bone health is key to aging.

Spinach is low in calories and carbohydrates but high in fibre, the key to feeling full and a glorious gut.

Yes, spinach contains oxalates, but everything is about eating a balanced menu. Don't worry about oxalates, my future Popeyes, you can safely eat up to two cups a day. Whether you eat a spinach salad, layer in lasagna, add to a sandwich or smoothie, spinach is one superfood.

My bestie has shared with me his mom's recipe, a simple sidekick to lamb or chicken. I am obsessed with this Greek

style spinach and rice in a tomato sauce called spanakorizo. Let's cook.

Spanakorizo

Ingredients:

- 1 cup long grain rice
- 1 medium cooking onion
- 1 8 oz can of plain unsalted tomato sauce
- 1 bag of fresh spinach
- 2 cloves fresh garlic
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 ½ cups chicken broth (plant-based eaters use vegetable broth)
- 1 lemon
- Fresh dill (I used about a ¼ cup)
- Himalayan pink salt to taste
- Fresh ground pepper to taste
- Greek feta (I use goat and sheep feta)
- *1-2 tbsp plain tomato paste

Directions:

1. Wash the spinach and set it aside.
2. Soak the rice while the onions are cooking.
3. Dice the onions.
4. Peel and crush the garlic.
5. Wash the dill. Remove the

- leaves from the stem.
6. Heat the olive oil in a large pot over medium heat and add the onions.
7. Cook the onions, stirring frequently until softened.
8. Drain and rinse the rice.
9. Into the pot, add a can of tomato sauce, rice and spinach. Stir. The spinach will wilt and shrink.
10. Add garlic and dill. Season with salt and pepper. I used 1tsp of salt and ½ tsp pepper.
11. Stir in the chicken or veggie broth.
12. Squeeze in the juice of one lemon.
13. Bring to a boil then reduce, cover and simmer until the rice is soft.
14. *To thicken the sauce, simply stir in tomato paste. This is about preference. Broth or thick sauce?!
15. Serve warm with a drizzle of olive oil and top with crumbled feta. The dish pairs well with a loaf of bread or favourite meat.

Happycooking.Haveaquestion?
mercedeskaygoldfitness@gmail.com

Are we training a puppy, or are we training ourselves?

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Galen Simmons



For the past few weeks, Julia and I have been taking our 10-month-old beagle puppy, Piper, for training at our local PetSmart.

We waited until she was a little older so she could fully benefit from and participate in the training course – or at least that's what I tell myself when, really, we just didn't get around to it until now. In the meantime, she developed a somewhat wild streak, especially when other dogs are around, or she's playing with her sister, Phoebe, or she smells something particularly interesting – which is everything.

She used to get so excited when people came to the door or when we came home after being out, and she would be hard to control, which often led to her jumping up on us or our visitors, scratches from those sharp, little puppy

claws, or even her falling off furniture.

Don't worry, she's indestructible and nothing seems to phase her except when she gets a needle at the vet. For those, she'll cry bloody murder.

Piper is the first puppy I've ever owned. I didn't grow up with dogs and Julia got Phoebe before we met, which means I missed that all-important puppy-training stage. As someone who is used to owning cats, the notion of being actively involved in training and demonstrating that we are the leaders of our little family pack was somewhat unknown to me.

Beyond learning to use the litter boxes, cats are entirely independent and there is no doubt they rule the roost.

Now, I've come to realize the importance of my own body lan-



(ALICIA MARTIN PHOTO)

Piper the 10-month-old Beagle and Phoebe the three-year-old mini cockapoo.

guage and posture, and that I need to communicate with our dogs in a way they understand, not the other way around.

So, to any of our neighbours who have heard Julia and I growling at our dogs while out on our walks or in the backyard, I apologize, but it's something you're going to have to get used to. I promise, we're not crazy. We're just learning how to communicate

effectively with another species.

So far, we've definitely seen a behavioural shift in both dogs, not just Piper. Phoebe no longer feels she needs to discipline Piper when she steps out of line, which has meant fewer snarly standoffs between the two dogs.

For her part, Piper is taking to the training very well. She loves hanging out with the other dogs in class, she really loves the

treats we used to reinforce the behaviour we like, and she's quickly become the teacher's pet – taking after both Julia and I.

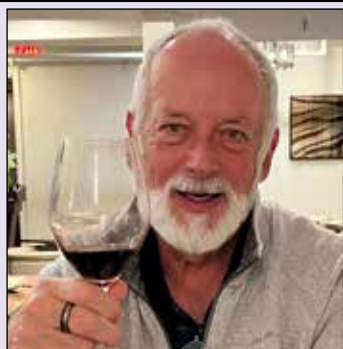
And on our part, Julia and I are much more comfortable taking our rightful places as pack leaders, ensuring the dogs obey our commands instead of us cowering down to their demands.

Are they perfect? No, but they're getting better every day.

Uncovering a dark story in Canadian history

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO

By Paul Knowles



We couldn't help noticing a collection of large boulders scattered around the park in front of the Steveston Tram museum. My friend, Rod, called me over and pointed to an inscription on the first of the boulders.

"Steveston Nikkei Memorial," it read in large letters. "Nikkei" refers to people of Japanese descent who are living outside Japan.

Steveston is the community at the extreme south end of Richmond, B.C., which in turn is just south of Vancouver. We were in Steveston as part of a tour of the area during the 2026 Travel Media Association of Canada annual conference, which was hosted by Richmond.

The Nikkei Memorial was set up in 2019 and the first inscription explains "This Nikkei Memorial marks the 75th anniversary of the forced removal of Steveston's Japanese Canadian community in 1942, during World War II."

This is something those of us who live in southwestern Ontario don't hear a lot about. In fact, this is only one of many stories of racism and cruelty that are glossed over or ignored in our comfortable communities. Think about the treatment of Black people escaping slavery via the "Underground Railway," who were not, in fact, well received in Ontario. Or the shipload of German Jews who were barred from landing in Canada, and who Prime Minister Mackenzie King sent back to Germany to die in concentration camps. Or First Nations people who continue to bear the scars of systemic maltreatment by the Canadian government.

I have come to believe travelling should involve significant doses of both entertainment and education. And sometimes, that education involves rather shocking revelations. I learned a lot during my brief visit to Steveston. The first lessons came from the stone monuments in that Nikkei Memorial.

During World War II, those in power decided people of Japanese descent were a potential threat, since Canada was officially at war with Japan. In Richmond alone, more than 2,000 Nikkei residents were relocated to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, or to farms in Alberta,

Manitoba and Ontario. Even more astonishing, some Canadian-born Nikkei people were deported to Japan, a country where they had never lived.

It gets worse. World War II ended in 1945, but it took four more years before the Nikkei were permitted to return to the B.C. coast. Surprisingly, some did!

Evidence of this officially sanctioned atrocity is everywhere in Steveston. We visited the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site and the Gulf of Georgia Cannery. A poignant poster about BC Packers explains, "At the height of the canning industry there were European, First Nations, Chinese, Japanese and Indian workers all working on the site. ... A surprising number of women worked here, some keeping their babies with them during the work day."

But "rigid racial separation was considered normal." And, come 1942, all of the Nikkei people were gone. There had been 250 families living on the Steveston waterfront. Then there were none.

At the Britannia Shipyards, we visited the small wooden home of Otokichi and Asayo Murakami and their 10 children. Otokichi was a prominent shipbuilder and fisher; Asayo worked on the canning lines and was a devoted gardener. Their family moved into the home in 1929, and they thrived until 1942, when they were sent into internment.

As noted, some of the Nikkei actually returned to their communities when that was allowed in 1949 – some years later than this happened in the United States. But they came back to nothing – their homes and their fishing boats had been seized by the government and sold, mainly to white buyers. The money raised was brazenly allocated by the Canadian government to pay for the cost of the Nikkei's internment.

There was evidence of this dark period in Canada's history all over Steveston, which is otherwise a delightful small community. But the good news is there is that evidence. The story of the Nikkei is being told in these historic sites. And finally, since 2022, it has been included in the history curriculum in British Columbia schools. Better very late than never, I suppose.

And it turns out the Nikkei story is not the only account of blatant prejudice visitors can discover at these meaningful historic sites. We also learned about the Chinese head tax, which had its greatest impact in British Columbia. Today, the City of Richmond's population is 70 per cent of Asian origin.

Chinese workers were welcomed during construction of the railway, especially the Canadian Pacific Railway which linked western Canada to the east. But when the railway was completed, white Canadians no longer wanted to share "their country" with Chinese immigrants. The head tax was implemented by the Canadian government. At first, any person of Chinese origin immigrating to Canada had to pay \$50. By 1900, it was \$100. Three years later, it climbed to \$500 (more than a year's salary). Yet hopeful Chinese people paid (about 81,000 people up to 1923), often borrowing the money from employers. Imagine what happened to those people when the shipbuilding and cannery businesses shut down.

I had heard about Japanese internment, and vaguely knew of a "head tax," whatever that meant, but my day as a tourist in Steveston was an eye-opening one, an experience I highly recommend to any traveller. Not a lot of laughter, but a very healthy dose of learning.

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.



This statue, at the Britannia Shipyards National Historic Site, is "dedicated to the pioneering Japanese fishermen."

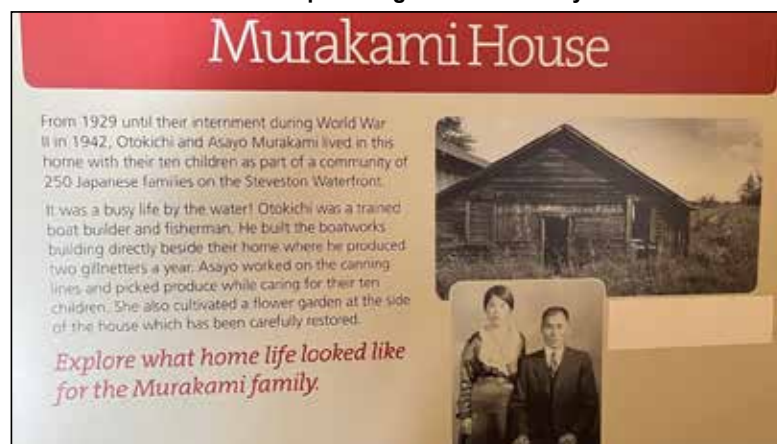


(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

The boulders in the Nikkei Memorial, which commemorate the internment from 1942-1949, come from Québec – the farthest point in Canada where Nikkei internees were unwillingly sent.



The onetime home of the shipbuilding Murakami family.



A panel explains some of the history of the Murakami family, including the couple's wedding photo.

Keep after it – your style is not on autopilot

DRESS SHARP. SPEND SMART.

By Scott Dunstall



If there's one idea that keeps getting repeated in men's fashion, it's that once you figure out your style, you're done. You reach a point where everything in your closet works and you can just coast from there.

Style is something that needs attention over time. Clothes wear out, fits change, trends shift and what worked a few years ago can start to feel off without you realizing it. The men who consistently look put together are not guessing each morning. They have built a habit of checking what they own, replacing pieces that are past their best and making sure what they buy actually works with what is already in their closet.

To me, this is fundamental to keeping your fashion up to date and saving money. If you are planning all the time, that dials you into sales events and end-of-season blowouts.

Part of that comes down to

noticing things that most people ignore. A shirt that has lost its structure and looks like you just came out of a bar fight. Jeans that have crossed from worn into worn out. Shoes that have lost their shape and will to live. These are small details, but they add up.

At the same time, there is the issue of gaps. You buy a jacket and realize you do not have the right shirt or pants to go with it. That is not a mistake, it is part of building a wardrobe. Over time, you start to think less about individual items and more about how everything connects. Colours begin to make sense together. You learn what combinations are reliable and where you can take a chance. The key word is learn. It doesn't have to be overwhelming if you take it in learning steps

But all of this takes a level of awareness, and awareness usually starts with motivation. For me, that shift happened about 14 years

ago when two major events happened at the same time. A close cousin of mine, almost exactly my age, passed away from sarcoma. We were only three months apart in age, and it had an impact that stayed with me. Around that same time, my wife took a position at her company's head office in Cleveland. It was a great opportunity, but it meant she was away most of the week.

What we thought would be temporary turned into several years of that routine.

During that time, I did not want to spend my evenings sitting at home. I wanted to be around people, even if it was just being out in a public space. I started going to the mall and walking. At first, it was just a way to get out of the house, but over time, I started losing some weight without really planning it. As that happened, I became more open to stepping into stores, trying things on and talking to the people working there. It was not a complete shift all at once. It built gradually through repetition and exposure.

At the same time, I began paying closer attention to how other men dressed. When I saw someone who looked sharp, I tried to understand why. I would look at the fit of the jacket, the cut of the pants, the way colours were combined and how the shoes finished the look.

Breaking it down into parts made it easier to understand what was working. That led to spending time looking online at different designers and retailers – not to buy everything I saw, but to get a sense of what was out there and how styles were changing.

That combination of being out more, paying attention and slowly adjusting what I wore is what started the process. It was not driven by a single purchase or a sudden decision to change everything. It was a series of small steps that built on each other. Over time, it becomes easier to spot what works and what does not. You begin to replace items before they drag down the rest of what you are wearing. You start to build combinations instead of relying on individual pieces.

The practical side still matters. Most men are not dressing for formal settings every day. They are working in environments where clothes need to hold up and still look presentable. That requires choosing pieces that balance durability and appearance. It also means accepting that some items will wear out faster and need to be replaced more often. Staying on top of that is part of maintaining a consistent look.

People notice these things even if they do not say it to your face. Looking put together affects how you are perceived in everyday

situations. It does not require anything extreme. It comes from showing that you pay attention to how you present yourself. That carries into how others view your work and your approach in general.

Style develops through repetition and adjustment. There are times when you get it wrong, and that is part of it. What matters is recognizing it and making changes. Over time, the process becomes more natural and the effort behind it is less visible.

The result is not something that happens once. It is something that continues, built through small decisions made consistently.

Scott Dunstall has been on a stylistic journey for over 10 years. His belief is that every guy has a style of their own. When it's discovered, it empowers and builds confidence. Scott has appeared several times on Rogers TV Kitchener as a guest on DAYTIME. His writing has been republished by LinkedIn Top Influencer and INC. Magazine contributing editor, Jeff Haden. He has also written several pieces for the Baden Outlook. You can follow Scott on Instagram @everydaystylebyscott or on LinkedIn @scottdunstall or Life & Style Wilmot on Facebook. Feel free to ask questions or propose collaborations: everydaystylebyscott1@gmail.com.

The era of social media and chatbot bans

LOREENA MCKENNITT

Submitted to the Gazette

When I heard presenter Kulbir Colin Singh Dhillon beckon parents to stop referring to AI as a "tool" or "technology," but rather as a "species" and that our children would need to "walk through dystopia before reaching Utopia," it dawned on me that things were more serious than I thought. Many heard these insights at a recent presentation for parents at Stratford District Secondary School on the use of AI. All with a mixture of curiosity, concern and trepidation.

Although the presentation was not intended to be a consultation, as some parents had hoped, the 15-minute overview came in the same weeks that the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan announced their intention to ban social media and AI chatbots for youth under 16. In so doing, they joined a growing number of governments around the world embarking on similar measures.

There are two striking commonalities between social media and AI. First, neither category of products has been adequately researched or proven safe for society, particularly for children and youth. Vass Bednar addresses this in her May 6, 2026, The Globe and Mail article, "AI products

are defective and dangerous. Why are we using them at all?"

Second, there has been an absence of protective framework of regulation and accountability. Bans, like an emergency brake, now offer governments the time and opportunity to study and respond with appropriate legislation.

Australian Communications Minister Anika Wells, when commenting on a three-month update on that country's social media ban, cautions that a ban is not a cure, but rather, part of a treatment plan which will need other measures to bring about the desired effects over time.

Many reference points are needed when developing regulations, such as digital sovereignty, privacy and age appropriateness.

Governments will be taking into account that a handful of tech companies are propping up the stock market while spending vast amounts of money on data centres – all of which have yet to turn a profit. They will be taking into account a deeply skeptical public who fear for their jobs and democracies.

They will be listening to those with concerns for the environment or the disappearance of farmland, alarmed at the proliferation of data centres, drawing vast amounts of water and energy such as reported in the May 9 edition of the Toronto

Star "Power Play."

Educators and parents will share their concerns about the loss of human agency in their children's education such as with critical thinking, or cursive writing which was just brought back to the curriculum – at the same time, adopting technology that can do almost everything for them.

So, what more can parents do while they wait for the bans and other regulation to fall into place?

The good news is there have been plenty of experts who have led the way in understanding the complexity of human development in relation to technology. They include clinical psychiatrist Dr. Mari Swingle, author of *i-Minds: How Cell Phones, Computers, Gaming and Social Media Are Changing Our Brains, Our Behavior, and the Evolution of Our Species*, Dr. Jean Twenge, addiction specialist Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, Dr. Ruston, producer of the award-winning *Screenagers* films, Dr. Aric Sigman's report to the European Union on medical concerns, or former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy's report on mental health.

Most recently, it has been Jonathan Haidt's book, *The Anxious Generation*, which has launched the global wave of government responses.

One of the many individuals supporting

Haidt's efforts is Katherine Martinko, whose book, *Childhood Unplugged*, will form the basis of her presentation at St. Michael Catholic Secondary School on Monday, May 25, from 7-8:30 p.m. It offers accessible and no-nonsense guidance for parents looking to mitigate the most consequential social media and smartphone behaviour at home.

We know there is so much to benefit from well-designed and regulated technology as we are seeing particularly in the medical field. The goal of our government on behalf of its citizens should be deliberate and thoughtful in its process. They need to take the necessary time for due diligence, identifying the highest standards and best practices and taking lessons learned from other jurisdictions. We must ensure that whatever decisions we make now will be good for many generations to come.

Each and every family has their own, unique experience and I welcome hearing from anyone who wishes to share or reach out to info@wisecommunities.org.

Loreena McKennitt is a member of The Order of Canada, director of The Falstaff Family Centre (Stratford) and founder of The Stolen Child Project and Wise Communities.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR - MAY/JUNE 2026

SATURDAY, MAY 16

Tavistock & District Historical Society Museum Open
1-4 p.m. (other times by appointment)
Email: info@tavistockhistory.ca or call 519-655-3334. All welcome.
37 Maria Street, Tavistock

TUESDAY, MAY 19

Free Caregiver Connection peer support groups
6:30-8:30 p.m.
Are you worried about your child or youth? Parents and Caregivers for Mental Health (PCMH) is here to listen, support, and walk alongside you on this journey. Our free Caregiver Connection peer support groups offer parents and caregivers a community of support. Can't make it in person? Join one of our virtual or hybrid groups! Visit family.cmho.org or email oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca for more information.
Revel Realty Woodstock,
111 Huron Street, Woodstock

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

Community Care Concepts Lunch and Fellowship
12 p.m.
Please register by May 15 by calling 519-664-1900 or Toll Free: 1-855-664-1900
Wilmot Rec Complex,
1291 Nafziger Rd, Baden

East Zorra-Tavistock Council meeting
7 p.m.
Council Chambers
89 Loveys Street East, Hickson

Perth East council meeting
7 p.m.
Council chambers
25 Mill Street East, Milverton

THURSDAY, MAY 21

Wilmot Special Council meeting
6-8 p.m.
Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road W., Baden

Tavistock Mens Club Meeting Dinner at 6.15 p.m.
Welcome to attend. Phone: 519-655-3573
Website: tavistockmensclub.ca
78 Woodstock St N

SATURDAY, MAY 23

Let's Tree Wilmot Tree Planting
9 a.m. - 12 noon
Let's Tree Wilmot is partnering with Wilmot Township in a new special project, Mannheim Carolinian Corner. We are planting the second phase of the two hectare site at the NW edge of Mannheim which will become a wooded area with a trail system. <https://letstreewilmot.ca/events/>
Milne Drive, Mannheim

Taste the Culture: Spring Around the World
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Join us for a special event with entertainers, food trucks, local vendors, crafts for children and culture and educational tables. All ages welcome. Free admission.
Bill Gies Recreation Centre
1401 Queens Bush Rd, Wellesley

SUNDAY, MAY 24

Optimist Club of Petersburg Breakfast in the Park
8:30 a.m. - Noon
Petersburg Park
1338 Notre Dame Dr., Petersburg

Faith Builders Chorale
7:00 p.m.
Free concert hosted by Oasis Mennonite Church. For more info contact Richard Bean 226-339-0781
Presented at Steinmann Mennonite Church
1316 Snyder's Road W, Baden

MONDAY, MAY 25

Food Trucks at Grace United Church Tavistock
4:30-7:30 p.m.
El Milagro, Wild Boar, Fo Cheezy, Beavertails
Donations to Grace United Church
116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Wilmot Council meeting
7-10 p.m.
Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road W., Baden

TUESDAY, MAY 26

Get Pumped!
7:00 p.m.
The Nith Valley EcoBoosters are hosting a free information session about heat pumps with local experts. More information at nvecoboosters.com
Wilmot Rec Complex
1291 Nafziger Road, Baden

Plattsville & District Heritage Society
7:00 p.m.
Growing Stronger Together in celebration of Plattsville's 175. Liz Dommasch from Oxford County Archives will share stories of Plattsville and the surrounding area. Free. Refreshments.
Peace United,
20 Samuel Street, Plattsville

Oxford Philatelic Society Stamp Club
7-9 p.m.
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>
Church of the Epiphany
560 Dundas Street, Woodstock

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

Community Care Concepts Lunch and Fellowship
12 p.m.
Please register by May 22 by calling 519-664-1900 or Toll Free: 1-855-664-1900
Linwood Community Centre,
5279 Ament Line, Linwood

SATURDAY, MAY 30

The Nith Valley EcoBoosters Repair Café
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Skilled volunteer fixers will be on hand for mechanical, woodworking, sewing, mending, knitting, crocheting, jewelry and book repairs. Contact us at: nvebrepaircafe@gmail.com or check out www.nvecoboosters.com
Zion United Church,
215 Peel St., New Hamburg

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

World Crokinole Championship
All day
Competitors will compete for the prestigious title of greatest crokinole player on the planet, at the 25th edition of the World Crokinole Championship. Website: worldcrokinole.com
Spectators are welcome and can watch for free.
Tavistock & District Recreation Centre
1 Adam St, Tavistock

MONDAY, JUNE 8

Food Trucks at Grace United Church Tavistock
4:30-7:30 p.m.
Berlin 95, Los Rolling Tacos, Born2Eat, Fo Cheezy
Donations to Camp Bimini
116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

Wellesley Council meeting
6:45 p.m.
Council chambers
4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

Community Care Concepts Lunch and Fellowship
12 p.m.
Please register by June 5 by calling 519-664-1900 or Toll Free: 1-855-664-1900
Wellesley Recreation Complex,
1401 Queen's Bush Rd., Wellesley

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

Shakespeare's 79th Annual Field Day and Fish Fry
Festivities begin at 8 a.m.
Parade theme is "Life's a Beach". Shakespeare Firefighters Breakfast, Mini Kids Midway, and Fish Fry and lots more. More info and tickets for Fish Fry - call Deb at 519-276-8109.
SCAA Park and Optimist Hall
Shakespeare, ON

MONDAY, JUNE 15

Food Trucks at Grace United Church Tavistock
4:30-7:30 p.m.
Wild Boar, El Milagro, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails
Donations to Grace United Church
116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

Community Care Concepts Lunch and Fellowship
12 p.m.
Please register by June 12 by calling 519-664-1900 or Toll Free: 1-855-664-1900
Wilmot Rec Complex,
1291 Nafziger Rd, Baden

EVERY WEDNESDAY

TOPS - Taking off Pounds Sensibly
Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m.
TOPS is a non-judgmental weight loss support group. Need help on your weight loss journey. For info call Cathie 519-662-9273.
St James Church, Baden

Wednesday Night Euchre at the New Hamburg Legion
Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
65 Boulee St., New Hamburg

FREE SENIORS ACTIVITIES

Tavistock Seniors Activities @ Tavistock Memorial Hall, 1 Adam St. Tavistock ON, except Shuffleboard
Inside walking Monday & Wednesday morning 8:30-12. Contact: Larry Brown 519-240-6715 (October to March)
Pickleball Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoon, 12-4. Contact: Don Junker 519-535-7052
Cards Monday, afternoon 1-4, euchre, crib (bring board), etc. Just drop in to play, good to bring someone. Contact: Bob Routly 519-301-2118
Shuffleboard @ arena, Wednesday 12.30-4 and Thursday 10-4. Contact: Don Junker 519-535-7052. (October to April)
VON Smart Seniors Exercise, Tuesday and Thursday morning 9-10; Village Manor 10:25-11:25. Contact: 519-539-1231 x 6285

TAVISTOCK & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM DISPLAYS

Travelling Museum Display: "25th Tournament of the Tavistock World Crokinole Championship". The display features a very early handcrafted crokinole board, buttons, history on the cancelled Tavistock World crokinole postage stamp, newspaper articles, and logoed clothing prizes. This display runs until June 22, 2026.

Hours: Open 7 days a week
Location: Tavistock & District Recreation Centre (arena lobby), 2 Adam Street, Tavistock
Travelling Museum Display: "The Glasgow Warehouse". Resembles a Lemp Studio Photo of the original storefront at the center of Tavistock in 1874. The storefront is filled with oil lamps, chinaware, gramophone, and the history of a raisin & currant cleaning machine. The owner Fred Krug, owner and operator from 1874-1917 is prominently displayed. This display runs for a month or two.

Hours: Can be viewed anytime
Location: Front window of Tavistock Home Hardware, 24 Woodstock Street S., Tavistock
Travelling Museum Display: "The theme is "Heritage of Hickson Post Office" - history of the Hickson post office that opened in 1883. Names of Postmasters, and a showcase full of vintage cards, magazines, newspapers processed through the mail service before the world of computers, internet and social media. Pictorial Stamps of Canada from 1851-1972 and area cancelled stamps are part of the display. TDHS partnered with the Hickson 4-H Club for this display that runs until July 13, 2026.
Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30 am-4:30 pm
Location: EZT Township Administration Building (lobby), 89 Loveys Street, Hickson

PLATTSVILLE & DISTRICT HERITAGE SOCIETY

June 6 to September 19 | Saturdays 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Join us for our 2026 exhibit - "Holidays & Celebrations That Bring Us Together". Donations accepted. Refreshments. For private viewing email plattsvilledistrictheritage@gmail.com or call 519.535.1417.
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Events submitted for the community calendar will be published as space permits.
Submission does not guarantee publication, and events may not appear every week prior to the event date.

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Quiz Time Answers

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 1. Hypothesis | 6. Howard Carter |
| 2. Video Home System | 7. Six |
| 3. John Cena | 8. 2016 |
| 4. Isreal and Jordan | 9. Kyoto |
| 5. A killer whale | 10. Four |

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