

# STRATFORD TIMES

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OCTOBER 17, 2025

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## Norman Kehl honoured at Mayor's Breakfast

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Every year the Mayor's Breakfast honours an organization that makes a difference in the Festival City, collecting donations on its behalf. This year, on Oct. 9, the recipient was the Stratford House of Blessing – and it decided to honour one of their own, Norman Kehl, as well.

In the middle of executive director Eva Hayes' introductory speech, explaining what the food bank does and what impact it has on residents, she invited Kehl up with Drew Shelley, board chair of the charity, for the surprise announcement.

"It is a distinct privilege to be able to join you this morning and to recognize an individual whose quiet dedication and compassion has served the community of Stratford for over four decades," Shelley said about Kehl. "... His faithfulness, his compassion, and his dedication serve as an example to each and every one of us in this community."

Dedication is evidently a pillar of Kehl's character. He is the oldest and longest-serving volunteer of the House of Blessing, having been officially volunteering with the organization since 1989, and has been involved since 1983, when his late-wife Florence Kehl first started it as Operation Blessing.

Now in his 90s, Kehl continues to volunteer every week, picking up donations from bins in grocery stores across the city.

Accepting his award with a succinct "thank you," Kehl received a standing ovation from the crowd,

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Stratford Irish #88, Ryan Migliaccio, picks up the puck along his blue line in the home opener game against the Strathroy Jets on Oct. 11. For more photos by Fred Gonder, and the undefeated start for the team this season, see our story on page 14. (FRED GONDER PHOTO)

## Grand Trunk committee members have mixed feelings about their work

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After two years of volunteering for the ad hoc Grand Trunk renewal committee, 14 of the 19 total members (including working group members) have expressed mixed feelings about their effectiveness, as displayed in a survey presented to Stratford city council on Oct. 14.

When asked what degree of effectiveness did the committee meet its mandate, which stated that it

would "provide support for and a forum for input and exchange of ideas on the renewal of the Grand Trunk building," the lowest score of "ineffective" had 28.6 per cent of the vote (four), "somewhat effective" had 14.3 per cent (two), "moderately effective" had 28.6 per cent (four), "highly effective" had 21.4 per cent (three) and "no opinion" had 7.1 per cent (one).

Although answers were not shared for the general feedback portion of the survey, an AI summary of responses by ChatGPT, provided by the survey's

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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# Grand Trunk renewal committee members have mixed feelings about their work over two-year mandate

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

conductor, said that they reflected “deep dissatisfaction” with the process.

“Recurring concerns include overly rigid, formal meeting formats that discouraged dialogue, limited transparency (especially around consultant selection, agenda control, and sub-committee decisions) and excessive presentations that displaced genuine discussion,” the summary reads. “The working group structure was confusing, uneven, and exclusionary, while onboarding and facilities undermined participation. Positive notes include some well-run meetings, improved settings after leaving council chambers, and valuable early presentations. Outliers emphasized Indigenous engagement as a major gap. Overall, members saw process as staff- or consultant-driven, with poor planning and decision-making, and recommend more open, roundtable-style, transparent and participatory approaches.”

Ray Harsant, a member of a committee working group, addressed the survey when speaking to council about the committee’s final findings and recommendations – clarifying that the survey shared in the

agenda package for that meeting wasn’t “as objectively analyzed” as the corrected version included in an addendum.

“You will see from that survey results that while there were many great things accomplished, there are significant areas of concern,” Harsant said. “And this survey is a fantastic opportunity for council and for the city to start getting it better, to start getting it really right with respect to how we move ahead and hopefully see some shovels in the ground in the next few years.”

Harsant recommended better communication – and for the committee to return.

The committee came to an end in September of this year. Although some members expressed an interest in maintaining the committee in the penultimate meeting in August, Mayor Martin Ritsma told membership that was not currently on the table, though it is an option a member of council could bring forward.

“I myself would hope that the committee could continue,” Coun. Bonnie Henderson said at the October council meeting that night. “... Sometimes you just need a committee pushing for things and reminding council of where we’re at and what we’re doing. ... I kind of envisioned that this committee would guide us and give us ideas on what we could do, but all the information that they’ve gathered and the work that

they’ve done, I would hate to lose that.”

While some would have wanted a decision on whether or not to bring the committee back, council members and staff were more focused on vision that night.

“I don’t see a vision for a project of this size,” Coun. Larry McCabe said. “So I think it’s time to reflect on our approach to this piece of property and possibly something where we go out with a RFP to the development community to see what they can come up with, with the project. I know that there was a lot of good information brought forward, but I’m still a little concerned at the end of two years.”

Speaking at the meeting, committee member Melanie Hare agreed in part with McCabe – there needs to be a clear vision of the project moving forward.

“To move forward with this project, it needs to be – as Coun. McCabe has mentioned – probably more focused in both form and method,” Hare said.

André Morin, chief administrative officer, said that moving forward he will be meeting with Emily Robson, corporate initiatives lead with the city, and Joani Gerber of investStratford to bring council a fulsome report of next steps, advising council and the gallery to “stay tuned.” Moreover, Ritsma reminded council that the city’s consultants, Svec Group, will be back to council with a possible vision and options for the site.

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## Council relooking at 40 km/h speed limit in all residential areas

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Reduced speed limits may be coming for Stratford’s neighbourhoods.

On Oct. 14, after Stratford city council unanimously voted to reignite a discussion on a 40 kilometre an hour

speed limit in all residential areas, Coun. Larry McCabe made a referral motion to re-cost a city-wide implementation.

As he said, he is hoping to increase road safety while keeping costs low for the city.

“I wanted to refer this back to staff to re-cost the plan and possibly come forward with a pilot project for the Avondale area using internal resources,” McCabe said. “Keeping the cost as low as possible, and see whether that is a possibility and can be brought forward.”

In a circa. 2023 report, it was estimated that to implement a city-wide change it would cost \$235,000 to replace 220 signs, though costs have only increased exponentially.

Resident Kate Mulrooney spoke at the meeting, in favour of a change. Having lived on the corner of two residential streets with 50 kilometre an hour limits, she is aware of just how dangerous such an innocuous limit is.

“When I moved onto that street over six years ago, I did not realize how many times I would have to shoot out my own door and rescue people who had been in collisions at that corner,” Mulrooney explained. “It’s quite terrifying to be sitting in your own garden and hear a crunch of two vehicles, hopefully two people in vehicles and not a vehicle and pedestrian. The last time really got me because both vehicles had children in them, one of whom was in the care of CAS. It was just a horrible experience.

“... It’s true that there isn’t one silver bullet that’s going to make every single road in Stratford safe all at the same time,” Mulrooney went on to say. “Traffic calming measures are as simple as a stop sign and as complex as putting a traffic circle in ... Reducing speed limits is a very low bar initial step to bring speed limits within the city down to a level that’s safe for everybody.”

**Correction:** In the “Sept. 22 Stratford city council briefs” article included on page 5 of the Sept. 26 edition of the Times, it was incorrectly stated that Coun. Larry McCabe intended to put forward a motion to table a discussion on 40 km/h limits. Rather, McCabe intended to remove the item from the table. The Times regrets any confusion this caused.

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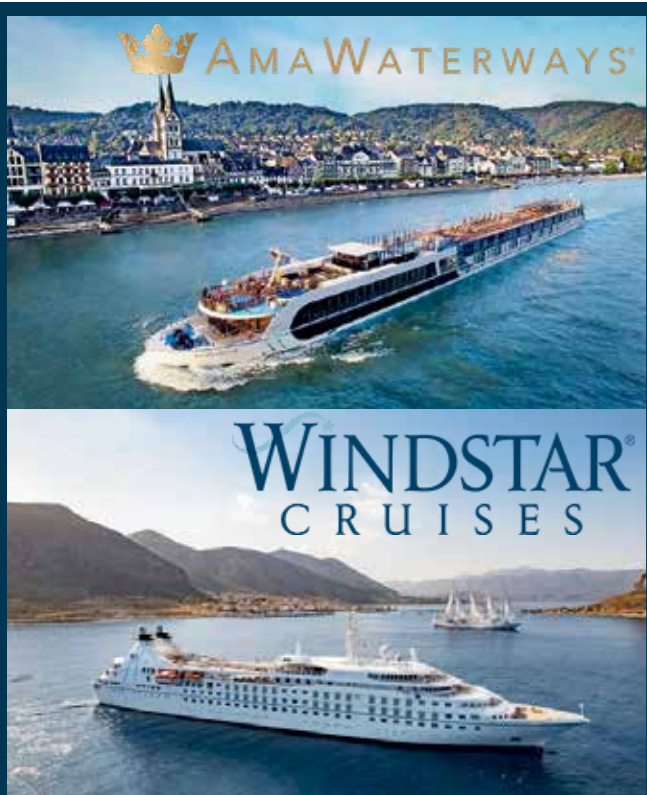
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# Norman Kehl honoured at this year's Mayor's Breakfast

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

before Hayes reminded the breakfast-enjoyers just why volunteers like Kehl are so integral to the city, now more than ever.

The House of Blessing is just one of Stratford's local food banks, and its usage continues to rise year over year, often month over month.

On average, each month brings 33 new individuals to the House of Blessing for its services, Hayes shared with guests that morning. Its delivery service alone reaches an average of 176 individuals every month.

Speaking with the Times in August of this year, Hayes said there had been a 197 per cent increase in usage in the past five years. Demand has nearly tripled.

"With those facing food insecurity on the rise this year faster than any time in our 42 year history, community support

is incredibly important," Hayes said.

Mayor Martin Ritsma expressed how pleased he was that House of Blessing and Kehl in particular were recognized that morning. Not only is the food bank an important asset for the community, but Kehl has been a positive force in his family's life for a long time.

"Norman and I go, way back," Ritsma shared. "Norman and Florence Kehl took my brother Ralph and my sister Ruth, when CAS came into our family. And that was many, many years ago where they had opened their door and their mentorship to two siblings.

"Sadly, those two siblings are not with us today, but if they were, I know they would be most grateful and most honoured to be part of this tribute to you today, Norman."

*With files from Alex Hunt, Times Correspondent.*



Drew Shelley, chair of the Stratford House of Blessing's board, presents Norman Kehl with an award at the Mayor's Breakfast on Oct. 9, honouring his four decades of volunteering with the local food bank. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)



Eva Hayes, executive director of the Stratford House of Blessing, told attendees of the Mayor's Breakfast just how much demand has grown for food bank services in the last few years.

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# Editorial

## The horrors of deviating from set plans



**GALEN SIMMONS**

*Regional Editor*

Now that Thanksgiving is behind us and we turn our full attention to spooky season, I'd like to share with you, dear reader, something that frightens me

above almost everything else.

No, it's not spiders or puppets – though I'm not fond of either – and it's not the notion that we'll all die some day. For me, the thing that scares me more than anything else is a sudden and unexpected change in plans.

I don't think I'm alone in this. You know when you're planning a trip, be it a trip across town or one halfway around the globe, and you've got everything planned down to the most minute details. You know what time you need to wake up, when you need to hit the road, where you'll stop for coffee, what the parking situation is and what to expect

when you arrive at your destination.

It's all planned out and you've even budgeted time in case something doesn't go exactly to plan, but then you hit construction or an accident on the highway and that time you budgeted slowly and painfully ticks down until you know there's no way you'll make it on time.

Or maybe at the last second, somebody falls ill or hurts themselves and they can't make it. Perhaps your babysitter calls and cancels right as you're ready to head out the door. Then, your train is late or it doesn't arrive at all.

Sometimes, it seems the world is throwing every little inconvenience it can muster at you until your precious plans are nothing more than a distant hope, smashed to pieces on the floor of your flooded upstairs bathroom. There's no way you can fix a toilet and make your flight on time, right?

If I had to design a haunted house for adults, I wouldn't include ghosts, goblins and ghouls covered in blood and guts, I'd include missed deadlines, unexpected home repairs, forgotten bills, sudden trips to the hospital and so much backed-up traffic on the 401 even Google Maps' best

reroutes can't turn the clock back enough to make it where you're going on time.

I guess that's why traditional horror movies and haunted houses don't really scare me all that much. How can I be afraid of those things when I face my true fears head on every day?

I guess what I'm saying is if you really want to scare me this time of year, don't jump out of a closet and shout "Boo," call me at the last minute and change a meeting time from 11 a.m. to noon.

I'm already here. What am I supposed to do with that extra hour?

## One down ... twenty more to go



**CONNOR LUCZKA**

*Times Editor*

Was anyone going to tell me how stressful Thanksgiving is? No, no one?

This was my first year cooking the turkey for our family's Thanksgiving and I think I need to thank my parents and in-laws more for doing it for twenty-plus years. Don't get me wrong, I knew it was a big job – pressure's on – but I really didn't have a clue how intense it is.

It's just a bird, right?

Like so many other families, this Monday my wife and I opened our doors for over twenty extended family members. At this point, our Thanksgivings have been a well-oiled machine for a few years now, with everyone

bringing a perfected dish, but I always feel a little lame. Other than

wife doing deserts, I don't really do much. Hence why I piped up and offered to do it last we were all together.

I spent weeks looking at recipes, videos, preparation options and cooking differences. I picked up the 12-pound turkey a few days ahead of the big day, ordered from a local butcher well in advance, and went to gather my ingredients as a fairly novice home cook.

Wait ... what's the difference between black and pink peppercorns? They don't have any pink peppercorns here and this is the nice grocery store. They were all out of low-sodium soy sauce for the glaze, too. I guess regular soy sauce will have to do.

Hurdles aside, I broke the bird down on Sunday, dry-brining it in the fridge for 24 hours. Everything was going to plan.

Then the big day. Family members started to filter in. "Is the turkey in yet? Why is it on the counter?" My wife asks.

"Well, to decrease cook time

I'm leaving the turkey out for an hour and then putting it in," I said, starting to work on the glaze. "Since I broke it down ahead of time and I'm cooking it on the wire rack, it'll cook more quickly than if it was whole. All I got to do is line the tray with three layers of foil, preheat the oven to 425, and put half a cup of water in the base of the sheet. Once I set the turkey inside, I'll rotate it after ten minutes and then reduce the oven to 300 after another ten minutes, pulling the turkey and applying a layer of glaze in twenty-minute intervals until the breast registers 150 degrees and the thighs register 170. Then it just needs to rest for 60 minutes."

When I turned around from the stove, my wife was already gone.

Oh well, I thought, tasting the glaze and puckering. I guess I know why low-sodium soy sauce was the way to go.

At that moment, a family member tapped me on the shoulder, holding two foil-wrapped baking dishes.

"Any room in the oven?"

When it was all said and done the turkey was ... fine. I think the lack of pink peppercorns really held me back. Despite its mediocrity, we all had a great meal and of course the conversations are what makes the day so special to begin with. In the end, the food tends to disappear in the background as we all catch-up – as it should be.

Still, for something that wasn't particularly noticed, I think it aged me a few years. With my daughter, I can feel my youth eroding away, and that whole experience may have been the death knell.

I got a haircut recently. Coming out of the barbershop and meeting my wife pushing our daughter in her pram, she made a curious expression, cocked her head, and looked at the sides of my head.

"Are those grey hairs?"

Sayonara 20s. Goodbye 30s – it would have been nice to know ya.

Forties, here I come.

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**Publisher**

Stewart Grant • [stew@granthaven.com](mailto:stew@granthaven.com)

**Editor**

Connor Luczka • [connor@granthaven.com](mailto:connor@granthaven.com)

**Times Reporter**

Amanda Modaragamage • [amandajaneewriter@gmail.com](mailto:amandajaneewriter@gmail.com)

**Graphic Design / Sales Inquiries**

Sarah Cairns • [stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

**Business Development**

Heather Dunbar • [heather@granthaven.com](mailto:heather@granthaven.com)

**Billing Administrator**

Cindy Boakes • [boakescindy1576@gmail.com](mailto:boakescindy1576@gmail.com)

**Contributors**

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

36 Water St. St. Marys, ON, PO Box 2310 N4X 1A2  
[stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com) | 519.655.2341 | [granthaven.com](http://granthaven.com)



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# Communities in Bloom National Symposium takes over Stratford Oct. 16-18

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After being a founding member of Communities in Bloom (CiB) 31 years ago, the national symposium is returning to the Festival City this week.

Delegates from across the world will be staying in Stratford from Oct. 16-18, enjoying the cultural vibrancy, picturesque gardens and rich history that it offers.

Along with a host dinner provided by the City of Stratford on opening night, the symposium will take place on Friday and Saturday morning at the Stratford Agriplex. Each morning will feature presentations from a lineup of distinguished speakers, according to CiB's governing body.

Then, the provincial, national and international award ceremonies take over the agriplex on Saturday night.

"You're going to be seeing delegates

from across our great nation, and from people as far as way as Ireland," Stratford city Coun. Brad Beatty, who sits on the local CiB advisory committee, told council on Oct. 14. He informed his colleagues and the public on what they can expect.

"Starting Thursday, we will have people enjoying all the amazing facilities that we have here in Stratford and showcasing everything that we take so much great pride in," Beatty said. "So I just want to say

thank you to all our staff that have done such a great job getting ourselves ready, to all the volunteers on the committee and our citizens at large that will be helping during this time. And I'm hopeful that our delegates will get to enjoy many of our great restaurants and stores when you're in town shopping. But most importantly, I want to thank my colleagues here on Stratford city council for your support in making this event happen."

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# Residents of Stratford apartment building continue to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner together

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Though it is less common these days amid growing isolation, residents of a Stratford apartment building all know each other's name, greet one another when they pass in the halls and enjoy those day-to-day neighbourly interactions that, in many places, seem to be a thing of the past.

Though that wasn't always the case, for over a decade, residents of the apartment building at 25 Cawston St. have been among those who have benefited from Simple Dreams Ministries' annual Thanksgiving Giveaway. While most who take home a ham, a bag of potatoes, frozen vegetables and a pie free of charge do so to feed their family or a smaller group of friends and neighbours on Thanksgiving, the residents at 25 Cawston have used the giveaway as an opportunity to build community within their building.

"Once we got wind (of the giveaway), Rose Feltz from our apartment, she got in touch with (Richard and Ruth Kneider, the founders of Simple Dreams) and I helped her with it over the years," said Gary Goulding, a resident at 25 Cawston. "We just post a sign up on the board; who wants to come and, if they can't come down, we'll take a plate up to them. That's what we've been doing all along, and the odd time, we've had people from outside the building come in – like visitors and families."

According to Goulding, there had been a Thanksgiving dinner organized for residents by the building superintendent prior to this one, but after the Thanksgiving Giveaway began, it made more sense to



Simple Dreams Ministries co-founder Richard Kneider and volunteer Ian McNaughton of Scott's Moving & Cartage hand a ham, potatoes, frozen vegetables and a pie to Gary Goulding and Hugh Livingstone, both residents of the apartment building at 25 Cawston St. For years, the residents of that apartment building have been coming together to cook and eat Thanksgiving Dinner thanks to Simple Dreams' annual Thanksgiving Giveaway.

(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

turn it into a communal effort.

As most of the building's residents are seniors, many of whom live alone, the opportunity to work together to cook a huge meal, and then sit together and enjoy it in fellowship, is too good to pass up each year. Some residents, Goulding explained, even cook dishes of their own to share with their friends and neighbours, ensuring there's more than enough food to go around.

"Right now, we're in a 67-unit building and we've got over half the tenants coming to dinner," said Goulding, adding that this year's meal will be prepared and served on Tuesday so even those residents who have plans for Thanksgiving weekend can attend.

One of the big benefits in hosting this dinner each year is it's the perfect opportunity for new residents to meet their neighbours and make new friends.

"My wife and I just moved in," said Hugh Livingstone, who was on hand with Goulding at Bethel Pentecostal Church Oct. 9 helping to pick up the hams, potatoes, vegetables and pies from the Kneiders and their volunteers. "... Gary asked me if I would help him out, and my wife is going to do some of the cooking. To me, what's the value of a potato in a pot when someone else has nothing to eat? We're all here for a reason, to help out each other. A bag of potatoes doesn't mean as much to one person as it does to 30 or 40."

For Richard and Ruth Kneider, the Thanksgiving tradition at 25 Cawston is illustrative as to why they've worked so hard over the past 14 years to ensure locals have a meal to share with others this time of year.

"It's exciting for us because you're bringing people together who normally may not get together for Thanksgiving," Richard said. "You think of when somebody has just moved into the neighbourhood – they're new to the neighbourhood – then you invite them. Or maybe somebody just lost a loved one – a partner – and they would be spending Thanksgiving by themselves. By doing this, it brings people together, and that's what it's all about."

"(The residents at 25 Cawston are) testimony as to why we're doing this," Ruth added. "Sure, food is something to eat, but it's also something that can make neighbours friendly with one another. When they walk out that door ... now they're reminded, 'Oh, I just ate with you. I am going to have a conversation with you now.' And that's what we want. We just want people to befriend one another and not to be afraid of each other."

"... It's about building community."

## Empty Bowls fundraiser returns to Stratford Rotary Complex

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Stratford House of Blessing Food Bank is delighted to announce the return of its Empty Bowls fundraiser, taking place Friday, Oct. 24, 2025, from 5-8 p.m. at the Stratford Rotary Complex. The beloved community event raises funds to combat food insecurity for families in Stratford and area.

Aaron Balzer, resource co-ordinator at Stratford House of Blessing Food Bank, says he's excited to see the fundraiser back up and running to its full capacity for the first time since 2019.

"With the pandemic and a few changes here, we have made modified versions of our Empty Bowls fundraiser since 2019, so I'm excited to see it back up and running this year for 2025," he said.

Guests will each select a unique bowl hand-painted by local volunteer artists and enjoy sampling delicious entrees, breads and desserts from more than 20 of Stratford and area's top restaurants and caterers, including Anna Mae's, Braai House, Downie St. Bakehouse, Soup Sur-



Stratford House of Blessing Food Bank gears up for the Empty Bowls fundraiser. Volunteers from across Stratford have been stopping in to get ready and paint bowls for attendees.

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

real and many more.

The event aims to raise funds, but Balzer says the empty bowls represent more

in the community.

"The ultimate goal is fundraising for the Stratford House of Blessing Food Bank,"

he said. "But it's also raising awareness. The bowls represent the fact that people in our community face empty bowls and empty cupboards every day, and this is an opportunity for the community to come together to raise awareness and to enjoy community."

The evening will be hosted by Ed-die Matthews and will feature live music from local artists Lauren Neilson, Twas Now and the Bannerman Brothers. Guests can also take part in silent and live auctions, with opportunities to take home locally sourced artwork, experiences and gifts.

"The Empty Bowls event is one of the highlights of our year, bringing together local artists, restaurants, businesses and supporters to make a tangible difference in our community," said Balzer.

All proceeds from Empty Bowls directly support Stratford House of Blessing's food bank, delivery program, Christmas toy program and other essential services, ensuring families in need have access to food and vital resources.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.shob.org/empty-bowls](http://www.shob.org/empty-bowls).

# Stratford Third Age Learning launches fall courses for seniors

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

*Times Reporter*

Registration for Stratford Third Age Learning (S3AL) fall courses are now open for seniors looking to expand their knowledge on worldly topics, including philosophy, literature, gender identity and more.

S3AL is an organization dedicated to providing seniors with opportunities for active learning, which can help promote cognitive resilience and longevity, says Dr. Jean Hewitt, board chair.

“Retirement doesn’t mean you just sit back and think into old age. You can’t. It’s a whole lifetime you have left,” said Hewitt. “We have this amazing opportunity to learn about things that have always been on your bucket list.”

Unlike traditional passive learning methods such as listening to speakers or watching plays, S3AL emphasizes active

engagement, stimulating various parts of the brain and fostering a more dynamic learning experience.

“It’s not sitting and doing a crossword or jigsaw puzzle or even going to listen to a speaker,” she said. “These are what we call passive learning, and they’re fun and they’re worthwhile, but there is a much more critical kind of learning that we need to pay attention to.”

This type of active learning is what S3AL courses are based on. They offer more than just lecture-style classes – they are designed to engage students in participation while fostering open-mindedness and greater learning opportunities by continuing to tap into the prefrontal cortex of the brain.

“We call this the executive functions of the brain,” she said. “When you’re still working, you’re sorting ideas out, you’re planning things, you’re setting targets, you’re discussing with colleagues. When

people retire, they found that, in fact, many of them did not use those functions, and those are the very important functions for retaining cognitive health.”

Factors like strong social connections, emotional resilience, healthy lifestyles, genetics and continued education all play a role in keeping the brain healthy and strong, according to a study on Super-Agers – those over 80 who maintain the cognitive performance of people 20 to 30 years younger. Hewitt agrees.

“Healthy mental aging is something that we should take as seriously as we do fitness,” she said. “There’s another half we have to pay attention to, and that is keeping the brain as active as possible.”

Not only are the S3AL courses aimed at broader learning opportunities and continued brain development, but Hewitt notes the classes are curated around topics that may help seniors feel more connected to the world and the people around them.

“Senior depression is a very real issue because they feel the world has left them and they don’t understand what’s going on anymore,” she said. “Some seniors get very negative and think everything’s wrong with this younger generation... so by introducing courses that help to explain things (like gender identity), they better understand it, because it could well occur in their own families. Once we learn to understand things better, I think that as a society, we’re better off because of it.”

Class sizes are capped at 16 participants to ensure both small-group and whole-group interactions, promoting a more personalized and engaging learning environment. Classes do fill up, so interested individuals are encouraged to reach out as soon as possible.

For more information or to register for upcoming classes, email Denise Winger at stratford3AL@gmail.com or visit www.s3al.ca.

## If you missed PIF’s panel on constructing futures, there’s still time to see what Stratford’s potential is

CONNOR LUCZKA

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

The Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF), in partnership with the Stratford Public Library and the BMI Group, staged a panel discussion on constructing Stratford’s future on Oct. 16, though residents that missed it can still participate in this year’s Maker Multiverse project.

Eric Ball is the MakerSpace coordinator at the library, helming the workshop where local makers can run labs and programs. He explained that the library has been running what they have been calling the “Multiverse” for the last four or five years, where residents build a giant cardboard model of Stratford.

“Not quite to scale, but close to scale,” Ball said. “With it being Stratford multiverse. You can dream whatever you want, you can design whatever you want, and you can make it happen. We happened to have included in the multiverse a volcano and an all wheels skate park that had hot air balloon floating platforms. I believe there was also an eye of Sauron and the Stratford water tower might have cat ears on it.”

Then, when they heard about PIF’s focus of City of Dreamers, Ball said it was a great connection and partnership to develop.

In conjunction with this year’s PIF events, in August the Multiverse project was created. Unlike other years it was taken on the road and transported down the road to Copperlight, the former Knox Presbyterian Church on the corner of Ontario Street and Waterloo Street.

“And we’re going to continue to build upon what we built this summer, add more to it. And the beginning of that is kicked off with the speaker’s panel on future cities,” Ball said, adding that the project has already been a fantastic success.

The panel was held on Oct. 16, after press time. It featured Helen Kerr of KerrSmith Design and the University of Waterloo Future Cities, Devon Fernandes, a sustainable community builder, Hanna Domagala, director of land development and design with BMI Group, youth voice Rory Auster, Ball and was moderated by Kendra Fry of investStratford.

Audience members were invited to pose questions and ideas that feed directly into the maker labs, but also to explore what makes a small city future-ready – healthy, affordable, culturally vibrant, sustainable and economically dynamic. Panelists explored planning for future cities, Stratford’s global links, tourism, social infrastructure and resilience, youth attraction and the technologies we should embrace or avoid.

Part two of the Maker Universe: Constructing Futures event, which features the MakerSpace’s Multiverse, is where the public can contribute to the conversation. On Oct. 17 from 3-7 p.m., Oct. 18 from 1-4 p.m., Oct. 20 from 3-7 p.m. and on Oct. 21 from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., the Multiverse project will be in the Copperlight basement. Residents are invited to contribute, bringing only their imagination. Tools, materials and friendly guidance will be provided.

From Oct. 23-25, the finished product will be on display at Copperlight for a public exhibition.

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|----------------------------------------|----------|
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| Oct. 06 Lloyd Cook, Caledon            | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 07 Marlene Crerar, Stratford      | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 08 Karen Smith, Shakespeare       | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 09 Neil MacFarlane, Kitchener     | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 10 Diane Eddy, Stratford          | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 11 Glen & Abby Bilyea, Dorchester | \$200.00 |
| Oct. 12 Roxanne Houben, St. Pauls      | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 13 Sam Love, Waterloo             | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 14 Mary Jacob, Stratford          | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 15 Ron Grubb, St. Marys           | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 16 Alan Cinnamon, Sebringville    | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 17 Cole Merkel, St. Pauls         | \$50.00  |
| Oct. 18 Chris Rekker, Stratford        | \$200.00 |

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The MakerSpace’s Multiverse, a cardboard recreation of Stratford, has been built each year – though it is the vehicle for local residents to express their hopes for the future in this year’s Maker Universe: Constructing Futures event, put on by the Provocation Ideas Festival. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

# Huron Perth prepares for respiratory illness season

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is reminding residents to protect themselves as respiratory illness season takes hold, with COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) all circulating in the community.

Since the end of August, five respiratory illness outbreaks have been reported at long-term care homes across Huron and Perth counties.

"The best way to avoid and minimize respiratory illnesses is with immunization," said Dr. Miriam Klassen, medical officer of health for HPPH. "It is very important to stay up to date on the vaccines you are eligible for to protect yourself, your family and the community."

All Ontario residents six months of age and older are eligible to receive influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. Select high-risk groups also qualify for the RSV immunization.

The rollout for flu and COVID-19 vaccines is happening in phases, beginning with priority and high-risk groups such as hospitalized patients, health-care workers, residents of long-term care and congregate settings, and individuals aged 65 and older.

Both vaccines are expected to be available to the general public by the end of October. Residents are encouraged to contact their health-care provider or local pharmacy for more information.

Adults aged 75 and older are now eligible to receive the RSV vaccine under the province's expanded adult RSV preven-

tion program. Those who qualify should contact their primary care provider to arrange vaccination. The RSV vaccine will not be available through pharmacies this year.

Infants and high-risk children can access the RSV monoclonal antibody through birthing centres and health-care providers.

HPPH will also host a series of fall immunization clinics in Stratford for infants and young children who do not have a health-care provider. The clinics will offer RSV monoclonal antibody treatment for infants born on or after April 1, 2025, who are under eight months old at the time of administration, as well as influenza and COVID-19 immunizations for children aged four and under.

Oct. 21: HPPH Stratford West Gore of-

fice, 653 West Gore St., Stratford

Nov. 4: HPPH Stratford West Gore of-

fice, 653 West Gore St., Stratford

Nov. 17: HPPH Stratford West Gore of-

Clincs are by appointment only. Parents can call 1-888-221-2133 ext. 3558 to book a time.

HPPH also recommends the following preventive measures to reduce the spread of respiratory illness:

Wash hands often

Stay home when sick

Cover coughs and sneezes and wear a mask when needed

Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces

Improve indoor ventilation

For more information about respiratory illness prevention and immunization, visit [www.hpph.ca/illness](http://www.hpph.ca/illness)

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# SDSS Eco Club cultivates urban farm community garden with local support

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

In Stratford's West Village, a once-empty strip of grass now overflows with produce. The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Eco Club, with support from residents and City of Stratford staff, has turned the land into a shared community garden.

This year, the city and Communities in Bloom, an advisory committee for Stratford council, contributed funding for fresh topsoil and compost to help the West Village community garden thrive.

The garden, located on the corner of Matilda and Smith Street, has made a visible difference, turning what was once poor soil into a fertile growing space for vegetables and herbs from the support received from the city and Communities in Bloom.

With the city's help and the SDSS Eco Club's continued involvement, the garden has flourished, producing an abundance of food while promoting composting and sustainable practices among residents.

"This garden was started by the SDSS Eco Club two years ago. It was originally just grass, but we partnered with the West Village condo development and the city to turn it into something really special," said Christine Ritsma, advisor to the club. "Now, it's a shared space where anyone in the community, not just residents of the village, can come, pick vegetables, and be part of what we've created."

"We learned a lot from our first year – how to plan better, how to work with the soil and how to make the most of our com-

posters. It's really taken off since then and has been a great success. The culinary class at SDSS is harvesting tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, squash and all kinds of herbs to take back and use in their cooking."

Timothy Elliott, representative of West Village, said food is something everyone needs, but cities have lost their connection to where it comes from. While many people understand that connection intellectually, he said there's something entirely different about getting your hands in the soil pulling up carrots and picking beans yourself.

"I was involved with the Local Community Food Centre, which operates an urban farm behind the Dufferin Arena," Elliott said. "They were looking for new locations for community farms, and since I live in the West Village condo development, I noticed this piece of land and reached out to the Local. That connection led to a partnership with the City of Stratford and Stratford District Secondary School and that's really how this garden came to life."

He encourages people to help themselves to the garden's produce, adding that the experience has been rewarding and a lot of fun for everyone involved.

"It's field to table. Students are coming out here and seeing how it's grown and what's ripe and I think receive a better appreciation of where their food comes from," said Ritsma. "The Eco Club comes out here, and we give it to food banks and other community members, nothing goes to waste."

"We try to promote the idea that students



Grade 11 and 12 culinary class students pick vegetables at Stratford District Secondary School's urban farm to cook back at the school. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

will start coming out here and getting their volunteer hours and working with people and building those experiences."

Ritsma, who served as former teacher and now a staff advisor with the SDSS's Eco Club, said that although she's now retired, she remains actively

involved with the group. She explained that the idea to create a community garden began with the club and West Village, and their first year brought valuable lessons despite challenges with poor soil quality and heavy runoff.

## Shelf help review

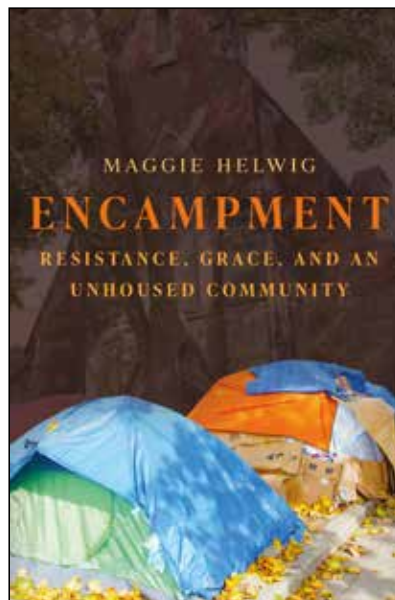
EMMA BROMMER

Stratford Public Library

*Encampment: Resistance, Grace, and an Unhoused Community*

By Maggie Helwig  
@SPL 362.59209713541 Hel

In 2022, as the housing crisis barreled on, some pitched tents on the tiny outdoor space at the Church of St. Stephen-in-the-Fields in Kensington Market, Toronto. For the following three years, social justice activist, writer, poet, and church rector Reverend Canon Maggie Helwig forged a community with the churchyard residents. Together, the church staff, volunteers, activists, and residents fought the political and legal forces of the City of Toronto to keep their community intact.



In *Encampment*, Helwig writes lovingly about the churchyard residents – Jeff, the Artist, Robin, V, Pirate and more – and details the societal failures that kept them unhoused. Gracefully recalled is the community's endurance of chaos and tragedy, and Helwig's tact responses to hostilities from some of their unsympathetic Kensington Market neighbours.

A must-read for those invested in learning more about the homelessness, mental health and toxic drugs crises with compassion and understanding, Helwig offers a frank look into the under-resourced and bureaucratic world of social services in a metropolitan city. And although oftentimes hopeless in its portrayal of the system, *Encampment's* portrait of resistance will encourage the right audience to build connections and fight meaningfully for those most marginalized in our own communities.

## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What musical is the sequel to *The Phantom of the Opera*?
2. Who saves the girl in the first printed edition of *Little Red Riding Hood*?
3. What is the Hawaiian word for "hello"?
4. How many days are there in a fortnight?
5. What was Norm's last name on the TV show *Cheers*?
6. What rock band is led by Bob Dylan's son, Jakob?
7. Acadia was the original name of which Canadian province?
8. Which four U.S. states share a border with Mexico?
9. What was the first video game to be played in space?
10. What was London Airport renamed to in 1966?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

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# The Bruce Hotel hosts October farm tour showcasing Perth County's farmers and makers

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Bruce Hotel is hosting its last farm tour of the season this month. The tour offers guests and community members a curated, luxury experience celebrating the rich agricultural heritage, passionate producers and sustainable food systems throughout Perth County.

The final farm tour will take place on Wednesday, Oct. 22, and guests must have a ticket to participate. Guests will meet at the Bruce Hotel shortly before 9 a.m. and take a luxury bus along the roads of Perth County, stopping at different farms along the way. The experience lasts about four and a half hours.

"This has been a great year for the farm tours, people really love them," said Chef Nick Benninger, culinary director at the Bruce Hotel. "Whether it be people from outside of the community visiting the hotel who get a chance to explore this region in a really authentic way, or locals who have driven by these properties before, and just never really had the chance to stop in, it's a great experience for everyone."

This October's itinerary includes stops at Pfenning's Organic Farm, Nith Valley Apiaries and Silvercreek Nursery. Each



Margaret Walton, holding freshly picked beets, stands beside Jessica Wynne of Pfenning's Organic Farm during the Bruce Hotel's recent Farm Tour. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

visit offers behind-the-scenes access, tastings and stories of stewardship and sustainability in action.

The Bruce Hotel staff provides picnic-style dining, which coincides with each farm and is shared along the way at each stop.

"That's the charm of the event," said Benninger. "Guests will get to visit and talk to each of the farmers and myself and learn about the connection we have with each other and learn about the different dynamics of relationships throughout Perth County."

As a Feast On-certified establishment, granted by the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, the Bruce Hotel is recognized for its ongoing leadership in supporting the local food economy and reducing its environmental footprint.

"For me, hospitality has always been about connection. Connection is at the heart of everything we do at the Bruce," said Jennifer Birmingham, owner of the Bruce Hotel.

"Perth County continues to be one of the best places to eat anywhere in the world, not just because of the quality of what's grown here, but because of the people who bring it to life," said Benninger. "Experiences like our Farm Tour help guests connect to that story with all their senses – it's food tourism at its most genuine, and it reflects everything the Bruce stands for."

Guests are encouraged to reserve early by contacting [events@thebruce.ca](mailto:events@thebruce.ca) or visiting [thebruce.ca](http://thebruce.ca) for details.

## Sirkel Foods celebrates 20 years in business

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

There are always a bunch of customers popping in and out of Sirkel Foods to grab lunch or dessert.

Known for its delicious sandwiches and salads, and for giving back to local charities through sandwich sales, Sirkel Foods is celebrating its 20th anniversary in business this year.

"It's crazy," owner Kelly Ballantyne said to the Times. "Twenty years is a long time, especially in the restaurant industry. We are pretty proud of ourselves for how far we have come."

Ballantyne said that running Sirkel Foods was going well at first until her ex-business partner had left. She then became overwhelmed.

"Taking on all the business debt and other business stresses was a lot," she said.

Then, her wife Mel Lang quit her full-time job to run the restaurant with Ballantyne, and it was a change for the better.

"We were more consistent with our product. I think it shows now more than

ever with how long we have been around and how much busier we keep getting," Ballantyne said. "It was a real turning point for us. We could both put 100 per cent of our focus on our business."

Up until the COVID-19 pandemic, Sirkel Foods offered dine-in and weekend service. Although many restaurants offer both dine-in and take-out without the restrictions, Sirkel Foods stuck to take-out only service Monday to Friday, along with catering.

"I know some people miss the dine-in, but it's been a real positive move for us," Ballantyne said.

For the future of Sirkel Foods, it'll be business as usual.

"If it isn't broke, don't fix it. We are a perfect size to do what we do and do it well," Ballantyne said. "Someone is always trying to give me advice of what could make Sirkel better, but I think we are doing just fine the way we are. People love it here."

Pop in to Sirkel Foods on 20 Wellington St. or visit their website online <https://sirkelfoods.com/> for more information.



Mel Lang and Kelly Ballantyne of Sirkel Foods are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the beloved lunch spot. (KELLY BALLANTYNE PHOTO)

# Sirkel foods

# Friend of Shakespearean Gardens wants review of decision to dismantle iconic bridge

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Although the fate of the iconic wooden footbridge connecting the Shakespearean Gardens to a small island in the Avon River has been decided, one concerned resident would like a new future for the bridge.

Reg White is a member of the Friends of Shakespearean Gardens, an informal group of citizens that volunteer to support the gardens – either by picking up garbage, creating information leaflets or by advocating on the garden's behalf. He told the Times that when the decision was announced that the bridge would be demolished and not replaced at a council meeting on June 11, he and the other members were surprised. As he said, the bridge is an integral part of the gardens.

"We've seen hundreds and hundreds of kids enjoying that island, and it's a shame to think that a Stratford asset like that is being dismissed as not important," White said. "... To think, that island is sitting there, and it looks like the devil. There's nobody doing anything over there."



Reg White, a member of the informal Friends of the Shakespearean Gardens group, stands in front of the iconic bridge to the island. It is slated to be removed due to deterioration and non-compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, as announced to council on June 11.

In a management report dated May 28 and presented at the meeting in June, council was informed that the bridge was closed in July 2024 due to safety concerns and that the board of park management did not support the bridge's reconstruction,

rather than the island would be naturalized and memorial benches relocated.

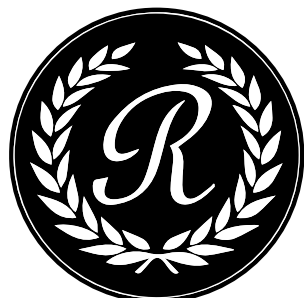
In addition to the state of the bridge and its cost, it isn't barrier-free accessible, nor compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), a

provincial law stating that all public assets must be made accessible by January 2025 (a deadline which was not met across the province). If the bridge would be replaced, the terrain surrounding it would have to be changed and the overall design would be completely different. The original arched shape would be impossible, if it is to be AODA compliant.

In the May management report, city staff estimate the cost to replace the bridge would be \$100,000, though White said his group was informed the cost would be double that, \$200,000.

Regardless, White said that such a cost to just replace the footbridge seems high. Additionally, given the bridge's historical value, he believes it could get an exemption from the AODA.

Moving forward, White is hoping for a review of the decision. As he said, not only is the garden important to the city, but it is also important to the nation. The garden has no other contemporary in Canada, he claimed – while there is another Shakespearean garden in British Columbia, it doesn't compare to the breadth and heritage that the garden in Stratford has.



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## Member of Parliament hopeful for Canada Post labour peace

LEE GRIFFI

Times Reporter

As Canada Post downgrades its full strike into rotating work stoppages, the MP for Perth-Wellington is hopeful for a negotiated settlement to the labour dispute between the employer and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW).

The union is resuming mail delivery on a limited basis on Oct. 11 as it transitions from a countrywide walkout.

"The best-case scenario is an agreement at the negotiating table," explained MP John Nater. "The back and forth has been going on for about a year now and the disagreement is causing a lot of uncertainty not only for Canada Post employees, but those affected by the job action, like small businesses."

Nater said mediation has been offered to both sides of the dispute, and his hope is the government won't have to legislate workers back to work. He added the biggest concerns his office is getting are from small businesses.

"Whether that is the distribution of their advertising through flyers or pamphlets to potential customers, and a lot

of them use Canada Post for their shipping. The strike has had a lot of impact on them."

Nater said the organization needs to get back into the position of being a serious player in the market.

"We saw Canada Post pick up a good chunk of the parcel delivery market about 10 years ago. They've lost that. That's one area they could really benefit from where things are going with online shopping. Right now, they've got such a small market share compared to where they were."

The federal government recently tabled a wish list of changes for the way Canada Post does business, including the eventual end of door-to-door mail delivery for nearly all Canadian households, an end to a moratorium on community mailbox conversions and an end to the moratorium on closing rural post offices that has been in place since 1994.

Joël Lightbound, the minister responsible for Canada Post, says he's encouraged by CUPW's announcement as "Canadians count on mail delivery, and I'm glad to hear it will be moving again while negotiations between the union and Canada Post continue."

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# Gardens' history goes back nearly a century

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Shakespearean Gardens are a common site for tourists, though its history goes back nearly 90 years, back when Stratford wasn't a tourism mecca but a rail town in the middle of southwestern Ontario.

The gardens are located just next to the Perth County Courthouse on Huron Street, just before the stone bridge crossing the Avon River. Like its name suggests, it is a Shakespeare garden, a garden that specifically cultivates some of the plants mentioned in the works of William Shakespeare. They are common globally; however, in Canada there are only a few public gardens known. As such, the garden in Stratford, which has grown over 60 species of plants mentioned in the Bard's plays, attracts thousands of visitors each and every year.

The garden was previously the site of the Dufton Woollen Mill, the chimney of which is the only feature that survived an early 20th century fire and still stands today. Thomas Orr, a community leader, had previously wanted to create a Shakespeare garden downtown and when the

empty lands were put up for sale, he petitioned the council of the day to purchase the land.

The city acquired the land in 1925 and opened the garden in 1936. Due to the Great Depression that same decade, the project took longer than previously thought. The garden was officially opened by then Governor General of Canada, Lord Tweedsmuir.

The garden's relevance only compounded with the Stratford Festival's opening in 1953. Its influence is so entrenched that the chimney tower that still looms over the garden is featured on the city's official logo.

In February of this year, council designated the gardens and certain aspects of the gardens as a heritage site, including the chimney tower, the original stone walls throughout the garden, the lychgate located on Huron Street, the knot garden, the herb garden, the rose garden, the perennial border garden, the walkway lamp lighting, the sundial and the bust of William Shakespeare.

A blue plaque recognizing the history of the heritage site will be the garden's newest feature, though it has yet to be delivered and installed.



The chimney of the Dufton Woollen Mill still stands in the Stratford Shakespearean Gardens, which officially opened in 1936.

(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

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# STRATFORD *TIMES* SPORTS

## Stratford Irish start season with undefeated record

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

*Times Correspondent*

For the Stratford Bentley's Irish head coach and owner, Marco Alexander, the team have one goal in mind for the season ahead.

"Win it all, repeat. Nothing short," Alexander said.

So far, the Irish are off to a great start to the season. It started with the season opener in Acton on Oct. 4 against the Halton Hills Coyotes, where two power-play goals powered the Irish to a 3-2 win.

Christian Polillo, Matthew Montgomery and Stephen Pierog scored for the Irish. Marek Pavlas got the win in goal for the Irish and earned the game's top star honours with a 33-save performance.

In the home opener at the Allman Arena on Oct. 11, the Irish faced the Strathroy Jets. It was the rematch of the Western On-



Zach Magwood #22 clears the rebound from goalie Zack Weir #60 as Carl Stapleton, #14 with the Strathroy Jets, goes after the puck.

(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

fort from the team and the fan support at the arena in the home opener and understands what the goal for the season is.

"It was awesome. I think it was a great first game that we played there. I think we came ready to play, always huge. You can get the win at home to start the season off. We had a good, pretty good fan base out there today, too. That was nice to see as well," Magwood said.

"I think just coming off a championship, I think that's kind of where our mindsets are at. Anything than that, you know, as I wouldn't say it's a disappointment, but that's kind of our expectation, being the reigning champs here in this league, and hopefully we can do that again."

Weir likes how the team is performing to start the season, including the new players in the revamped roster.

"It feels good, especially with a new group of guys, lots of new faces," Weir said. "It's good to see that two games in the season, we're already gelling well and playing the hockey that we finished off playing last year."

Alexander acknowledged that the team is still not at full standard, having played only their second game since winning the championship, but appreciated the effort that ultimately led to the win.

"I think we played very well. I think that, you know, it took a little bit for some of the guys, it was the first time they're on the ice since finishing the finals in April," Alexander said.

"That Strathroy team is a very good team. We played pretty good, and we held our own and kept chipping away. We ended up scoring the winning goal."

Stratford will be playing on the road next weekend, starting with a trip to Tilbury for a match against the Bluebirds on Oct. 18 and then heading to Six Nations for their first-ever matchup with the Ironmen on Oct. 19.

tario Super Hockey League final in which the Irish won a thrilling game seven for their second title in four years.

Sullivan Sparkes got the Irish on the board first at the 3:17 mark of the first period. The Jets responded with a goal late in the period to tie the game at one apiece. The Irish retook the lead fifty seconds into the third period on the goal from captain Zach Magwood.

Strathroy responded a few minutes later to even the game at two, but the late-period goal by Matthew Fuller gave Stratford the eventual game-winner as the home side subdued all efforts from the Jets offence to preserve a 3-2 victory.

Zackery Weir was solid in net with a strong 30-save performance between the pipes for Stratford in the win. Magwood and Thomas Maia led the Irish with two points.

After the game, Magwood was pleased with the ef-



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# Warriors spin past Cyclones and take down defending champion Maroons

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY  
*Times Correspondent*

In team practice preparing for game week, Stratford Warriors veterans Jonas Schmidt and Quinn Kipfer said the team is having excellent practices and believes they are turning the corner as they prepare for Listowel and Chatham.

"I think for us right now, it's just playing our own game, working on the things that the coaching staff has brought to us, trying to execute our game plan, and I think maybe later in the season we'll learn more about the teams we're playing against," Schmidt said.

"We know they're both going to be tough opponents. Listowel is always good against us, and Chatham has been really good this year," Kipfer said.

"We'll look at some video, being ready, and just come out hard and compete against those teams."

On Oct. 10, the Warriors hosted their regional rivals, the Listowel Cyclones, at the William Allman Memorial Arena in their first game of the season, dubbed the "Battle of Perth County." Earlier in the game, the Warriors announced that the patch honouring the team's late former general manager Glen Childerley will be worn on the players' helmets for the remainder of the season.

After a defensive stalemate in the first period, the Warriors broke through with a pair of goals in a span of fifty seconds. Jack McGurn scored his second of the season at 4:13, and Colin Slattery notched his third of the season at 5:03.

Goaltender Gage Hurst and the Warriors kept the Cyclones in check before Grady Murphy tallied a pair of his own late in the period to give the home side a 4-0 win. Hurst improved to 2-0 in the season and recorded his first career Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) shutout.

Warriors Head Coach Dave Williams liked how the Warriors bounced back from a tough start in the first period and found a way in the final two periods to beat one of the contending teams in the Western Conference.

"I didn't think we really liked our start.

I thought maybe the first couple of shifts, we looked like we had a little bit of jump in energy, but for the vast majority of that first period, I felt like we were chasing a lot of pucks. We didn't manage it very well," Williams said.

"We get to the dressing room and get talking about how we have to play. There's so much parity in this league any given night, when you look at the scores, different teams are beating other teams. We have to find that consistency in our game if we're going to give ourselves the best chance to win every night."

Both McGurn and Murphy said it is good to beat their rivals and get the victory.

"It feels good to beat the rival team. We didn't come out hot. But we finished strong and got the two points," McGurn said.

"With the Perth County kind of battle going on, then we knew it was gonna be a big game," Murphy said. "They came out hot, and then we kind of weathered the storm, and we kept them there."

Hurst said the team's performance reflects the effort shown in practices, particularly on defence.

"It feels great. The guys are doing a great job running our system. They're doing a great job playing in front of me," Hurst said.

"We're working every day, showing up, being consistent, and we're getting the results."

On Oct. 12, the Warriors faced the defending Sutherland Cup champion Chatham Maroons at the Chatham Memorial Arena.

After a scoreless opening twenty minutes of play, the Maroons struck first less than a minute into the period and went up 2-0 at the 2:55 mark. But the Warriors drew one back with 3:33 left in the period on the goal from McGurn's third of the season.

Stratford controlled the early stages of the third period, and their effort paid dividends on the power play with Max Wildfong scoring his second of the season at 4:33 of the period. Wildfong led all Warriors with two points in the game.

With the game going to a shootout after

a scoreless overtime period, it took seven rounds until McGurn stepped up for the game-winning goal to give the big Warriors a win. Noah Bender gets his second win as a member of the Warriors with 40 saves and a clutch save on the seventh round of the shootout.

An elated McGurn was pleased to score the winning goal and leave Chatham with the big two points.

"It feels great. We were down 2-0 and came back. Feels even better going to come back (to Stratford)," McGurn said. "The bus ride back is gonna be great."

Williams was satisfied with the two wins and the team's effort to secure a road victory at one of the league's most challenging arenas.

"Well, I think that's a great way to end the weekend. I thought we had a solid game on Friday and hopefully a bit of a character win for us being down 2-0 against a very good team here in Chatham," Williams said.

"To battle our way back, and we even got to some penalty trouble there, and they're having to kill off three minors, and found a way to work our way through it. Really excited for the guys to pull out a win in the shootout."

The Warriors play host to the LaSalle Vipers at the Allman Arena on Oct. 17, and travel to St. Thomas for a matchup with the Stars on Oct. 19.

## Stratford Warriors 2025-26 Stats (as of October 13, 2025)

| Player           | Pos           | GP         | G           | A | PTS |
|------------------|---------------|------------|-------------|---|-----|
| Jonas Schmidt    | F             | 7          | 3           | 4 | 7   |
| Jack McGurn      | F             | 8          | 3           | 3 | 6   |
| Lucas Minard     | F             | 8          | 4           | 1 | 5   |
| Max Wildfong     | F             | 8          | 3           | 2 | 5   |
| Rhyse Brown      | F             | 8          | 0           | 5 | 5   |
| Colin Slattery   | F             | 8          | 3           | 1 | 4   |
| Aaron Green      | D             | 4          | 2           | 2 | 4   |
| Quinn Kipfer     | F             | 8          | 2           | 2 | 4   |
| Grady Murphy     | F             | 7          | 3           | 0 | 3   |
| Dominic Marshall | F             | 8          | 1           | 2 | 3   |
| Matthew Blake    | D             | 7          | 0           | 3 | 3   |
| Dax Vader        | F             | 8          | 1           | 1 | 2   |
| Joseph Curtin    | D             | 7          | 0           | 2 | 2   |
| Will Coward      | D             | 8          | 0           | 2 | 2   |
| Coen Galbraith   | F             | 8          | 0           | 2 | 2   |
| McQuen HayLock   | F             | 8          | 0           | 2 | 2   |
| Drew Hodge       | D             | 8          | 0           | 2 | 2   |
| Mateo Craievich  | D             | 7          | 0           | 1 | 1   |
| Haden Frayne     | D             | 7          | 0           | 1 | 1   |
| Beckham McLeod   | D             | 2          | 0           | 0 | 0   |
| <b>Goalies</b>   | <b>Record</b> | <b>GAA</b> | <b>SV-%</b> |   |     |
| Noah Bender      | 2-1-0-0       | 1.62       | 0.937       |   |     |
| Gage Hurst       | 2-0-0-0       | 0.50       | 0.981       |   |     |
| Connor Davis     | 1-1-1-0       | 3.34       | 0.841       |   |     |



Stratford Branch 008

## Poppy Campaign Financial Results for 2024

### INCOME

|                         |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Donations from Campaign | \$31,620        |
| Donations in Memory     | \$2,050         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>\$33,670</b> |

### EXPENSES

|                                           |         |
|-------------------------------------------|---------|
| Poppies, Centers, Wreaths, Bracelets etc. | \$5,278 |
| General Administration                    | \$1,261 |

### DONATIONS

|                                                                        |                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Veterans Support including Homeless Veterans                           | \$5,827         |
| Parkwood Institute                                                     | \$7,000         |
| Stratford General Hospital Foundation                                  | \$7,500         |
| Bursaries                                                              | \$2,000         |
| Legion Charitable, Hospital, RCEL, Ontario Poppy                       | \$4,000         |
| 19 Squadron Air & 223 Army cadet units                                 | \$3,000         |
| Resource centers(Camp Maple Leaf) for children of serving and veterans | \$1,000         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                           | <b>\$36,866</b> |

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## GOHL Western Conference Standings

(as of October 13, 2025)

| Team                | W | L  | OTL | SOL | PTS | GF | GA |
|---------------------|---|----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|
| London Nationals    | 9 | 2  | 0   | 0   | 18  | 50 | 35 |
| Elmira Sugar Kings  | 8 | 2  | 0   | 0   | 16  | 53 | 23 |
| St. Marys Lincolns  | 7 | 3  | 1   | 0   | 15  | 37 | 25 |
| Chatham Maroons     | 6 | 2  | 0   | 2   | 14  | 47 | 33 |
| LaSalle Vipers      | 6 | 4  | 1   | 0   | 13  | 36 | 35 |
| St. Thomas Stars    | 6 | 4  | 0   | 0   | 12  | 44 | 29 |
| Stratford Warriors  | 5 | 2  | 1   | 0   | 11  | 25 | 17 |
| Waterloo Siskins    | 4 | 2  | 3   | 0   | 11  | 27 | 23 |
| Komoka Kings        | 5 | 4  | 1   | 0   | 11  | 36 | 43 |
| Strathroy Rockets   | 3 | 6  | 1   | 0   | 7   | 39 | 44 |
| Listowel Cyclones   | 2 | 7  | 1   | 0   | 5   | 19 | 34 |
| Sarnia Legionnaires | 0 | 10 | 0   | 0   | 0   | 12 | 64 |

# Stratford Summer Music brings big shows and community spirit this fall

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

For 25 years, Stratford Summer Music (SSM) has been a cornerstone of the local arts scene – and this fall the organization is keeping that tradition alive with a season of concerts that connect the community through music.

Starting off on Oct. 19 there will be Stratford's own five-piece rock band taking the stage as part of SSM's Brewstage Series at Jobsite Brewing Co. The group consists of Andy Allen on guitars and keys, lead vocalist Scott Beaudin, Peter Dixon on bass, Mark Ippersiel on drums and Eric Lundgren on lead guitar. The event will start at 2 p.m. with tickets at \$35.

"In the spring and fall, we tend to focus on more traditional programming, with great folk and classical shows. Summer,



Mark Fewer, artistic director of Stratford Summer Music in front of Stratford City Hall. Starting this October, Stratford Summer Music keeps the community connected with its fall season. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

on the other hand, is much more intense and packed, often featuring educational components," said Mark Fewer, artistic director at SSM.

"Next summer, we'll be launching an adult amateur music academy, in addition to continuing our successful jazz series."

SSM will bring two centuries of music together. On Oct. 22 at 7 p.m., Lazaridis Hall will host the world premiere of a new octet by Canadian composer Jared Miller, commissioned by Stratford supporter Robert Lemon in memory of Robert Le-  
dingham.

"I feel like Oct. 22 is going to be a mindblower," said Fewer. "There will be familiar music that audiences will love, performed by a fantastic lineup of world-class musicians, and a brand-new work will be premiered. This is truly going to be a special performance."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 17

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STRATFORD NISSAN



# SDSS grads' film, *When The Party's Over*, a finalist in Forest City Youth Film Festival

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For former Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) students Peer Wahlquist and Emelia Auster, writing, directing and producing their film, *When The Party's Over*, with help from their friends and family was the perfect send-off to high school as they embarked on their post-secondary lives.

Now, that film is a finalist for best narrative at the Forest City Youth Film Festival in London – something both had dreamt of for as long as they'd been making movies with their friends as part of SDSS' award-winning film club, BearCast, founded by Wahlquist, the club's head director and editor, in 2023, and with Auster serving as head writer.

"It's about a group of friends at the unexplained, mysterious, end-of-the-world, apocalyptic event, and they decide the way they want to spend the last day of their lives is by having a little party at one of their houses," Auster said. "It was very much inspired by the kind of parties Peer and I went to with our friends; we shot it in one of their houses where we regularly had those parties. They're just kind of hanging out and seeing how they can balance each other's emotions in the midst of everything going on."

"I believe it was really written around the thought of, obviously, all of these parties we would go to with our friends, and really the thought that at the end of this year of high school, we would pretty much grow distant from these friends and not see them as often," Wahlquist added.



***When The Party's Over*, a film by Peer Wahlquist, Emelia Auster and the Stratford District Secondary School film club, BearCast, has been named a finalist for best narrative at the Forest City Youth Film Festival in London.** (PEER WAHLQUIST PHOTO)

"That was almost representative of our end-of-the-world theme, and that's what kind of ties it all together."

While looking ahead to his final year of high school at the end of Grade 11, Wahlquist said one thing he wanted the BearCast club to accomplish before everyone finished high school was to make a film worthy enough to be a finalist at the Forest City Youth Film Festival.

With that as their goal, Auster set to work writing a script over their Grade 12 Christmas break.

"The script was outlined over the course of a couple weeks and then I wrote it when we were stuck in a snowbank driving home after Christmas," Auster said. "I wrote the original script in probably a

couple of hours and then we rewrote and edited it with the rest of our team once we started working together in February."

The film was shot over the course of one very long, 12-hour day inside their friend's house, with their friends serving as actors and crew, each coming and going as they were needed while Wahlquist and Auster stuck it out for the entire shoot.

"It wasn't great for our friends who had a calculus test the next day," Auster laughed.

"They weren't very happy about that," added Wahlquist.

Once the film was shot, Wahlquist spent several months editing it to perfection, relying on the advice of a few professional editors and sound mixers he knows to get

it exactly how both he and Auster had envisioned.

By May, the film was ready to submit to the film festival, and in August, they received word that *When The Party's Over* had been named one of five finalists for best narrative. The film will have its premiere screening on Oct. 28 during the Forest City Youth Film Festival Screening and Awards Show at London's Wolf Performance Hall. The films that perform well at the London film festival will then advance to the Ontario Youth Film Festival.

While Wahlquist, who is currently studying film studies at Sheridan College in Oakville, will attend the screening and awards ceremony in London, Auster said she will try to watch the ceremony live from her dorm room at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, where she is studying English literature.

"It's kind of surreal because we did it and then immediately moved on to these totally different portions of our life," Auster said. "Sometimes Peer texts me saying, 'Oh, we got rejected from this other (film festival),' and, 'We got into this other one.' And I would be like, 'Oh, I kind of forgot we did that because I've been studying for three hours.' It's actually really lovely because it makes sure Peer and I and the rest of our team are still connected."

While the film won't be made available on YouTube until after it is screened at the film festival later this month, previous films by the BearCast film club can be found on Instagram under the handle, @SDSS.bearcast.

## ...Summer Music

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

The work will be paired with Felix Mendelssohn's classic Octet, celebrating its 200th anniversary. The evening promises a playful back-and-forth between past and present. Hosted by Tom Allen, it is a 60-minute performance with no intermission. There is also an optional Meet the Artists reception for \$25, with show tickets slated for \$50.

Then on Dec. 4, Stratford audiences can get a jump on the holiday season with Christmas with The Ennis Sisters. The trio, Maureen, Karen and Teresa, will bring their signature sibling harmonies, award-winning tunes and some Newfoundland style to an evening of carols, original songs and heartwarming family stories.

"The community absolutely loves The Ennis Sisters, they bring a unique Christmas flavour with their Newfoundland flair, and we couldn't resist inviting them back to Stratford.

They're fan favorites, and I'm sure this performance will draw a fantastic crowd."

With over 25 years of making music, the sisters mix holiday classics, humorous recitations, and even a little Irish step-dancing for a festive show that promises to warm even the chilliest winter night. One night only, this performance will begin at 7 p.m.

Fewer said that SSM has seen strong community support for its year-round programming, offering opportunities for people to reconnect through shared musical experiences.

Fewer adds that the initiative is a way to bring in community engagement, noting that after 25 years, the focus on building connections remains unchanged. The organization is also exploring new venues to host performances, maximizing the use of each space and giving audiences a variety of locations in which to enjoy the music.

## Homelessness committee creating proposal to improve emergency, long-term solutions

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

On behalf of the Ending Homelessness committee, United Way Perth-Huron and the Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth (CMHA Huron Perth) are providing a short update ahead of final meetings before a proposal to improve emergency and long-term solutions for people experiencing homelessness in the community is revealed.

Discussions among hospital officials, the City of Stratford, and the Council of Churches are quickly moving toward a response to council's request from their Sept. 8 meeting.

"In just a few weeks, organizations and city officials have rallied. I'm proud of the strong relationships and partnerships that allow us to move forward when called upon," said Ryan Erb, United Way executive director. "Everyone is working hard to ensure we find more help for people facing significant challenges today, while also looking

toward longer-term solutions."

In the meanwhile, Catherine Hardman, CEO of CMHA Huron Perth, which operates the United Way Connection Centre in Stratford, is reminding people about the best way to help now.

"The Stratford Connection Centre is our homelessness hub, and my staff know everyone who is living unsheltered in this city. We have the relationships to provide care and support, so we ask the community to support our efforts," added Hardman.

Monetary donations toward the operation of the centre can be made through United Way. Donations of practical items such as hygiene products, single serving snacks, coffee, sugar, single use beverages are gratefully accepted. The centre is also collecting gently used winter coats and boots, weather-resistant gloves, hand warmers, hats and scarves. People can drop items off between 9 a.m. and noon, Monday to Friday, at the Stratford Connection Centre located at 9 Douro St. in St. Paul's Anglican Church.

# Stratford Dance Co student Pierce MacNeil heading to Prague with Team Canada Dance

LISA CHESTER

*Times Correspondent*

Tap dancing sensation Pierce MacNeil, who is currently training with Stratford Dance Co, has joined Team Canada Dance/International Dance Organization (IDO) to compete at the World Tap Championships in Prague, Czechia. The competition takes place Oct. 22-26.

The IDO is a world dance and dance-sport federation with a membership of over 90 countries representing more than 250,000 dancers across six continents. The best dancers worldwide will compete for the World Championship title. Team Canada Dance is a non-profit national member organization (NMO) with IDO. They audition dancers and recruit the best choreographers to represent Canada for the World Championship.

MacNeil has been studying tap since the tender age of three and to be on Team Canada Dance at the age of eleven is thrilling to her. Unbeknownst to Pierce, her mother Stacey saw a call for dancers and upon consideration with family, submitted videos of Pierce dancing.

"There was a public call on social media that said they were still looking for strong tappers age 12 and under, message if interested. That was on Canada Day, so I said to my dad and my husband that I was going to send in her videos. I sent in her solo and duet video without telling her, and thought if it works and (we) decide to do it and can attempt it, great, but if she doesn't get accepted then no worries, she doesn't even know. At 7 a.m. the next morning we got a message saying she was accepted," said Stacey.

Together as a family the decision was made and Pierce was so excited. They had heard really good things about the experience and felt this was just the perfect opportunity to kickstart a trajectory at a time that Pierce perhaps needed the

push.

Each dancer on the team is given two routines automatically: a large group called Formation and Production, which is all ages and a large seven-minute routine. From there, further consideration is given, and extras can be offered.

"Pierce was fortunate to be offered a small group with seven dancers and a trio with three dancers, both choreographed by Mike Glenney. He won the world championship last year for the adult division so he is well known in the tap world," said Stacey.

Making the team was a surprise for Pierce, "It felt good, I

was surprised. I was wondering why she was watching videos at the kitchen table. It means a lot to represent Canada because I have worked hard to get here," said Pierce.

She has been training since July and during the summer months would train nine hours a day in studio for a week, then take two weeks off and practice at home. That routine was followed until school started again and now her training is mostly weekends.

"The challenge is that it is a

lot of hours (of practice). During the summer, before school, I would have a weeks' practice and I would take two weeks off and do it again. But now it's every weekend," said Pierce.

With over 90 countries involved, competition will be wide and varied. She has been shown videos of competitors and standouts appear to be Mexico, Croatia and the United States. Last year, Team Canada Dance placed at the podium and now there is high expectations for the team.

The routine Pierce is most looking forward to is with the trio dancing to the tune, "Meet Me at the Roxy." One of the girls she is dancing with was one that she competed against last year and they have become fast friends. What tap has taught Pierce the most is patience.

"When I'm learning a new move or something like that I would practice and I have to be patient and know that I will get it with patience," said Pierce.

After Prague, her goals are to get better and to learn new skills. She will be doing a tap solo with Stratford Dance Co and beyond stage, her confidence has grown.

"I would like to thank those that helped me, especially my family and for the space at Stratford Dance Co that allows me to practice," said Pierce.

There will be four categories that Pierce will dance in: Trio, choreography by Mike Glenney, Small Group, choreography by Mike Glenney, Formation, choreography by Kim Barker and rehearsal coach Theresa Domingues, and Production, which includes dancers from all age groups (under 12, under 16, and over 16), choreography by Matthew Clark.

Team Canada Dance is comprised of two groups that have come together as one team: Canada East and Canada West.



Meet Pierce MacNeil, representing Canada with Team Canada Dance/IDO at the World Tap Championships in Prague.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## United Nations' 80th anniversary celebrated with "dynamic youth-lead event"

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

[stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

"Youth are the greatest source of hope for our planet," affirms UN Secretary-General António Guterres. That message will come to life in Stratford when the community gathers to celebrate the United Nations' 80th anniversary with a dynamic youth-led event focused on service, justice, and global citizenship.

Stratford and area residents are warmly invited to attend the event on Oct. 24 at 7:30 p.m. in Stratford City

Hall's auditorium. It aims to highlight the power of youth to build stronger, more compassionate communities – locally and globally.

Mayor Martin Ritsma, as keynote speaker, will share a compelling story of how restorative justice helped reconcile students facing suspension for fighting, demonstrating the transformative impact of dialogue and empathy.

Attendees will hear from change-makers and learn how to get involved in meaningful initiatives, including:

- Forming neighbourhood junior

youth groups to foster friendship and a spirit of service.

- Volunteering at the Local Community Food Centre to combat food insecurity.

- Collaborating with Climate Momentum on impactful climate action projects.

- Joining a high school Model UN to explore global issues like guaranteed minimum income, gender and racial equality and peace-building.

In a world facing complex challenges, youth are stepping up with courage and creativity. Locally, they're build-

ing bridges and solving problems. Globally, the United Nations continues its mission to promote peace, justice, and human rights – from disaster relief and education to international law and peacekeeping, where Canadians have played a proud role in 74 missions worldwide.

This event celebrates the UN's legacy and future by recognizing youth as the torchbearers of hope and change. It's not just for young people – it's for everyone who believes in supporting youth-led initiatives and building a better world together.

# Stratford Perth Museum launches Black History project with *Aunt Harriet* screening

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

After *Aunt Harriet*'s first run at the Stratford Perth Museum, the audience applauded and were eager to share their positive feedback and questions about the film installation.

The Stratford Perth Museum launched its Black History project on site with a screening of the short film *Aunt Harriet* on Oct. 11. *Aunt Harriet*, directed by award-winning filmmaker HAUI and starring adhri zhina mandiel (azm), will be continuously running at the museum as an installation until January 2026.

The film honours Aunt Harriet Miller, a singer from Wellington County who spent her final years at Guelph's St. Joseph's Hospital up until her passing in 1932 after she lost her memory and family. Miller, played by zhina mandiel, is sitting in her rocking chair and smoking a pipe as she reflects on her life.

*Aunt Harriet* was filmed on the Stratford Perth Museum's trails and is based on materials from the Guelph Museum archives and St. Joseph's Health Centre Guelph archives. In addition to the Stratford Perth Museum, the Guelph Black Heritage Society and Jade Ferguson and Deidre McCorkindale collaborated on the film.

HAUI made the film to reframe Miller's story, as it had been the subject of mis-



Michelle Robbins, HAUI, adhri zhina mandiel, Jade Ferguson and Garvia Bailey had an engaging panel discussion following the *Aunt Harriet* screening part of the Black History project launch at the Stratford Perth Museum. (EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

information and racial stereotypes and is pleased with general manager Kelly McIntosh and curator Megan Patterson's allyship. HAUI is proud to be part of the Black History project, still processing the reception to his film installation during the interview with the Times.

"It's really beautiful," HAUI said. "I feel like Kelly and Megan really understand allyship and listening and I think that's partly what this moment needs is those

that deeply listen. It's a really difficult skill to have and I think they do it so beautifully."

The Black History project is a multi-year initiative by the Stratford Perth Museum. Garvia Bailey, co-founder of Media Girlfriends and multi-media journalist known for her work with CBC and Jazz FM, returned to Stratford, her hometown, to curate an exhibit featuring photographs and audio documentaries about Black families

in the region and their histories of the past, present and future.

"As we know, history just doesn't live in the past. It is part of our present. It is part of our future so collecting stories, talking to people about their own experiences and then also telling the stories of the building of Stratford through the lens some of those Black folks that were there in the 1800s and the 1830s," she said. "There's some remarkable stories that I think Stratford and Perth County will be not only surprised by but would be proud to tell and to share and to keep and to be able to have a part of who we are."

Bailey also hosted a panel discussion on *Aunt Harriet* after the first screening, featuring HAUI, zhina mandiel, Ferguson and Buxton National Historic Site and Museum curator Michelle Robbins. The discussion between the panelists and the engaged audience included challenging stereotypes and misinformation while re-searching history, including archived material.

"It was really heartening to see how open everyone was to the conversation. It was a great crowd. It was so mixed with people from all over different regions, ethnicities, ages, all of that so that confirms to me that we're on the right path," Bailey said.

Anyone looking to contribute can send an email to [yourstory@stratfordperthmuseum.ca](mailto:yourstory@stratfordperthmuseum.ca).

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# Megan Smith-Harris wins Best Feature Screenplay at Burbank International Film Festival

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Stratford local Megan Smith-Harris has returned from California triumphant in her win of Best Feature Screenplay for her script titled *The Ghost of You* at the Burbank International Film Festival (BIFF). The award was presented during a star-studded ceremony following a tribute and hour-long presentation honouring filmmaker Quentin Tarantino.

Smith-Harris was stunned upon hearing her name called as winner in her category. "I was up against four male screenwriters, I was the only female scriptwriter, and my film didn't have any car chases or CIA operatives. So, what are the chances I am going to win? It's a character driven film with an actress over forty. It's a quieter film with a low- to mid-range budget, so I was really shocked," she said.

She has always been a storyteller, but in different mediums. This is her favourite medium and she loves writing, wishing she could write full-time, however, she doesn't have that luxury so to have her script honoured and to be recognized by such a prestigious event was really exciting.

"I hope they responded to the story which is emotionally resonant, and very human, and something that affects us all; the loss of someone we love deeply, and in this case the loss of a young adult child. On the heels of COVID where so many people lost family members, friends, colleagues, it affected the world in a collective way. Everyone experienced some kind of loss," said Smith-Harris.

The *Ghost of You* is a darkly comic, moving exploration of love, loss and resilience. The story follows a grieving mother who's not just haunted by regret, but by the unpredictable ghost of her teenage son. His otherworldly mission: to help his emotionally fragile mother confront the wreckage of her life and begin piecing together a new reality. This poignant dramedy touches upon motherhood, loss, and the messy path to healing.

The story was inspired by the tragic life events of a personal friend who lost her son at the age of 22. It was devastating for her and then a year later, her other son died on Father's Day. Watching her close friend



Megan Smith-Harris is pleased to return to Stratford with her award for the Best Featured Screenplay for her script, *The Ghost of You*, at the Burbank International Film Festival. (ROBIN HOIK PHILLIPS PHOTO)

navigate the pain and grief of the unthinkable, and as the mother of an only child, Smith-Harris found it instilled a kind of fear in her as this was not the natural order of things.

Once the COVID-19 pandemic started, she projected what would happen if she lost her son suddenly. Watching with great empathy what her friend went through with gossip and conjecture within the town, subsequent to the loss of her sons, Smith-Harris found herself feeling upset and anxious. When she has fear or anxiety, she processes those feelings by writing

creatively.

"Because of my work as a comedy writer, it's a drama infused with comedy. I like to explore what happens when you lose everything and how do you find the where-withal to get up and fight back to regain yourself," she added.

It is also an exploration in connection with a mother and son and the sense of presence. While there are supernatural elements given that one character is a ghost, she tapped into that connection and explored her worst fears.

"(Writing) was cathartic in many ways.

It was a way to process all the anxiety I was feeling and also the fear as well as what my friend went through. I first wrote it as a play and sent it to her. I told her it wasn't about her family but was inspired by her loss and the memory of her sons. I wanted her to read it and be ok with it. She loved it," said Smith-Harris.

Now the hard part comes. It is challenging and difficult to have a script in the right place at the right time. Reaching out and developing relationships is difficult when living in a town of 33,000 people.

"It is a youth-oriented business, but there is much to be said about those with lived experience who are writing from their reality and an imagined reality while they also understand how and why people are motivated. There's always an agenda that meshes together in this messy tapestry of life. I would like to do a reading here in Stratford. It's so important as a writer to hear it read aloud," she said.

Looking forward, she will be seeking representation with a literary agent and look for a producer interested in a low- to mid-range budget film. She would love to be a producer on the project, but really, she just wants to see it made and enjoyed by an audience.

"Writing is lonely and solitary, which is necessary. My advice is to come up with a story and just get it down. Ann Lamott wrote an essay called 'S\*\*\*\*\* First Drafts' that everybody should read. Just spill it all out; it can be maudlin, it can be cliché, it doesn't matter. That first expulsion of your story from your brain allows you to do revisions. Don't limit yourself by thinking you need the perfect writing space or the perfect schedule or massive grant. If you're a writer, write what and where you can," said Smith-Harris. "Be confident and think of yourself as a writer."

She went on to say it has been said that there are only so many stories to tell, but an infinite number of permutations to bring so many different outcomes. "Like music, there are a finite number of notes, but an infinite number of ways of putting them together," she concluded.

While audiences will have to wait for this film to be made, they can look forward to Smith-Harris' inaugural Stratford Film Festival coming next month.

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# Opinions

## Slowing down to the rhythms of life



**IRENE ROTH**

*Times Columnist*

In our fast-paced, hyperconnected world, “busy” has become both a badge of honour and a burden. We rush from one commitment to the next, measure our worth by productivity and fill every silence with noise – digital or otherwise. Yet beneath the endless stream of notifications and the relentless hum of modern life, there’s a quieter rhythm waiting for us to notice it: the natural rhythm of life itself.

Slowing down isn’t easy. We’ve been conditioned to believe that stillness equals laziness

and that rest is something we must earn. But the truth is, life’s deepest wisdom often unfolds not in moments of acceleration, but in pause. Like the seasons, our lives have their own cycles – times to plant, to nurture, to harvest and to rest. Ignoring those natural ebbs and flows leads to burnout, anxiety and a subtle disconnection from who we truly are.

Nature models this beautifully. Trees don’t rush to bud before the frost has passed. Rivers don’t resist the curve of their banks; they flow with patience, shaping the land over time. Even the sun and moon, in their steady exchange of light and dark, remind us that balance – not constant brightness – is what sustains life.

When we move too quickly, we lose touch with that balance. We stop noticing the way morning light dances on the leaves or the quiet comfort of a shared meal. We forget to breathe deeply, to taste our food, to look one another in the eyes. Life becomes something we skim through instead of something we inhabit.

Slowing down is an act of courage in a culture addicted to speed. It means saying no to the myth that our worth depends on constant output. It means honouring the pace that allows us to live more fully, not just more efficiently. And it starts with small, intentional choices.

It could be as simple as taking a walk without your phone, feeling the air on your skin and the steady rhythm of your footsteps. It might mean lingering a few minutes longer over your morning coffee, letting your thoughts settle before the day begins. Or perhaps it’s learning to listen – really listen – when someone speaks, without rushing to respond or multitask. These are humble practices, but together they create a profound shift.

When we slow down, our senses awaken. We begin to notice the details that rush blurs out – the way laughter softens a hard day, the comfort of familiar rituals, the quiet joy of doing one thing at a time. Our relationships deepen because we show up with presence rather than distraction.

Creativity blossoms because the mind, unhurried, finds space to wander and wonder. Even our bodies respond, easing from tension into alignment with a more natural tempo.

There’s also a spiritual dimension to slowing down. Many ancient traditions – from Sabbath rest to mindfulness meditation – recognize stillness as sacred. In silence, we reconnect with something larger than ourselves: the pulse of creation, the quiet whisper of intuition, the knowing that we are part of a rhythm that existed long before us and will continue long after.

In slowing down, we remember that we are not machines. We are living, breathing beings meant to move in harmony with life’s changing tempo. There will be seasons of growth and striving, yes, but also seasons of stillness and renewal. Both are necessary. Both are holy.

Of course, slowing down doesn’t mean abandoning responsibility or ambition. It means approaching them differently – anchored in awareness

rather than anxiety. It’s about being fully present in what we do instead of rushing through it. Ironically, when we slow down, we often become more effective. Our minds clear, our decisions sharpen, and our sense of purpose strengthens.

Perhaps the most radical thing we can do today is to reclaim our right to live at a human pace. To listen for the quiet rhythms beneath the noise – the rhythm of our heartbeat, our breath, the turning of the earth. These are the rhythms that remind us of what truly matters.

So, the next time you feel swept up in the rush of it all, pause. Step outside for a moment. Watch the clouds drift, listen to the wind, feel the pulse of your own life syncing with something timeless. In that space of stillness, you’ll find what the world so often forgets to offer: peace, clarity and connection.

The world will keep spinning at its dizzying pace, but we don’t have to. We can choose to slow down – to live not by the clock, but by the heartbeat of life itself.

## Loving someone with Depression



**BRUCE WHITAKER**

*Times Columnist*

I’ve been to a couple of funerals this year for friends struggling with mental health. Attendees shared funny and touching stories, but not much was said about the illness itself or what we can learn from it. We were all searching for answers, but none were given.

Depression doesn’t walk in the front door and announce itself. It sneaks in quietly. It cancels Saturday night plans. It takes you out of the game and puts you in bed early. You can sometimes see it in a person’s eyes like they’re still there, but standing very far away.

I’ve been through depression myself, and I’ve talked to people who live with it. It’s hard to describe how heavy it can feel, and even harder to know what to say when someone you care about is going through it. You don’t want to make it worse, but you also don’t want to stay silent.

Winston Churchill once described depression as a “black dog.” It follows you everywhere – a shadow that drains your energy and never leaves. For some of those depressed, pulling away feels like the kindest thing to do,

like protecting their loved ones from the storm inside. The heartbreaking logic is: I’ll stay away because I love you too much to hurt you with this.

That’s why certain comments, even well-meaning ones, can sting. Saying things like, “But you have so much to be grateful for” or “Maybe you just need to focus on positive thoughts” can feel dismissive. It builds walls instead of opening doors.

People with depression often can’t talk openly about it. They’ve probably tried before and felt misunderstood and alone. So they stop answering texts, let calls go and the silence starts to feed on itself. Shame grows, and the distance gets worse.

Leaving them alone in that pain isn’t the answer. What they need to know is that you love all of them, even the parts you

don’t understand or that are causing them harm. They’re already carrying enough guilt and self-blame. The last thing they need is to feel like their illness makes them unlovable.

That doesn’t mean you pretend everything’s fine. Don’t sugarcoat it with inspirational quotes or try to “fix” them. Instead, be honest. You can admit it’s hard for you too, but remind them that it’s not a burden, it’s just part of who they are, and you’re not going anywhere.

We don’t always need the right answers. Sometimes, the best thing is to just listen. Really listen to their words, their silences, their body language. Show up and be there for them when they need you.

Just remember that their pain is not your fault. Their healing is not your responsibility. Love isn’t

about burning yourself down to keep someone else warm. This familiar quote makes so much sense: “You can’t stop the rain. But you can stand under the umbrella with them.”

Loving someone with depression isn’t about making them happy. It’s about making space for them to be themselves – even when that self is struggling. If depression never fully goes away, then love should mean I’ll be here anyway.

So don’t overwhelm them. Don’t guilt them. Instead, send simple reminders that you care. A text that says, “Thinking of you,” or “I saw something that reminded me of you.” Little lifelines, no strings attached.

That quiet, steady presence says: I see you. I’m here. You don’t have to be okay for me to stay.

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# Opinions

## WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH THE PUDDLES



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

Plentiful, fresh water has always been appreciated in Ontario, from the canoe to the water glass. Recent changes in water-taking regulations suggest that it is time to remind ourselves of how important it is to treasure that water. Like the Earth, water is a closed system on our planet. We are not making new quantities of this important resource.

In Stratford we benefit from the tapping of 11 deep aquifers, water that comes from deep in the ground, and has been there for thousands of years. It is within the Upper Thames River Source Protection Area (SPA), where monitoring of that re-

source is carefully done. Purity is assessed, flow, and security from unwelcome additives, including chemicals, sewage and fuel. Each wellhead has a 100 metre circumference protection zone around it and is rated for risk contamination on a scale from one to 10.

However, other water-taking also occurs, in wells for a number of purposes, drawing on water closer to the surface than Stratford's deep aquifers. Each request for over 50,000 litres of water in a day must obtain a PTTW (Permit to Take Water). This permit entails a stringent process of assessment, including information on the business, water source, and purpose of the taking, as well as daily data collection and reporting of the volume of water taken to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MOECP).

We have also had a recent report from the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority noting a decreasing trend in groundwater levels at many provincial groundwater monitoring network wells since 2001. "These findings highlight the

importance of proactive groundwater conservation to protect both groundwater and surface water resources for future use," the statement read.

In July of this year, the province proposed streamlining water-taking regulations. The proposal was to enable water taking permits to be directly transferred from one owner to the next, without the usual reassessment of the water-taking. That assessment when one permit expires is deemed essential, as was pointed out by numerous respondents during the hearings this past summer. There was deep concern voiced by Indigenous peoples (many of whom do not yet have access to clean water), ecologists, environmentalists, conservation authorities, and most telling, by the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA).

CELA pointed out that these changes risk undermining essential environmental safeguards. They recommend that full environmental review, public participation and consideration of a proponent's qualifications remain mandatory for permits. These measures are crucial to

protect Ontario's water resources. Nevertheless, the measures were passed on July 1 and are now enshrined as revised regulations whereby water-taking permits may simply pass from one owner to another, without scrutiny or review.

It is worth noting that both Guelph and Stratford rejected Xinyi glass plant proposals in part due to water-taking that the plant would require. Would we have that opportunity if a permit was simply transferred from one owner to another?

Similarly to Permit by Rule/Registration, that feeling of the fox guarding the henhouse is sitting on my shoulder. If science and Indigenous communities are all saying that automatically transferring water-taking permits from one owner to the next is not a wise decision, I'm inclined to listen. As Micahel Robinson, Indigenous artist and poet, wrote, "The Earth never offered man water as a gift."

### UPDATES:

1. Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of Oct. 13, 2025: 422.27 ppm.

2. Big Hint: Take a Google trip with your plants, both current

and intended. Go to the Google box, put in your plant name, and then put "host plant" (Use the quote marks to keep the concept together) and then put wildlife. We know our pollinators need host plants for their eggs and caterpillars. Nectar plants alone will not support native insects; they need host plants. Take the plants around your house for that trip. Find out how much space and support you are offering to the native insects so needed by us and by our birds.

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

### The Earth never offered man water as a gift

*Water was part of her  
It is her blood  
Her moving force  
And in this, she said  
You will see your greed  
Your mistakes  
Your Image  
But few will see me.*

- Michael Robinson, Indigenous artist and poet

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### STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

### COIN SHOW

#### STRATFORD 62TH ANNUAL COIN SHOW

Sunday October 19th 2025; 9:00 am to 3 pm  
Best Western Arden Park Hotel 552 Ontario St. Stratford.

Admission \$3.00 (under 16 free). 65th Anniversary Cake Celebration at 2 pm.

### BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Thursday Oct. 23

Legion 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford

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### OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY CIRCUIT BOOK FAIR

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Monday, November 3; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "Pollinator Pathways", Dianne Wheler and Don Farwell, Tri-County Master Gardeners Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

## HAVE A SPECIAL EVENT COMING UP?

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# STRATFORD TIMES

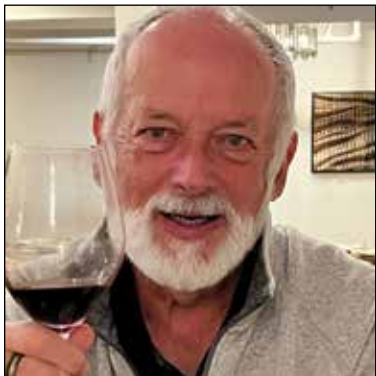
Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

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## PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

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

# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Standing in the footsteps of Vincent Van Gogh



PAUL KNOWLES

*Times Columnist*

Over the years, I have become increasingly intrigued by the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh. His story is a terribly tragic one, as the artist struggled with mental illness and almost complete failure in a commercial sense. There is a myth that he sold none of his approximately 2,000 works while he was alive, but that's undoubtedly an exaggeration. But he most certainly was not a highly successful artist.

Multiplying the tragedy, he died, perhaps of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, at age 37. More of this below.

Today, of course, it's a whole other story. Van Gogh is recognized as perhaps the most important Post-Impressionist artist and his paintings have sold for more than \$150 million, none of which goes to Van Gogh's estate, of course.

The finest collection of Van Gogh paintings is on display at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam – which seems appropriate enough since Van Gogh was born in the Netherlands. If you are in Amsterdam, it's a must see.

But I have enjoyed seeing Van Gogh paintings and sketches in



The author's attempt to recreate Van Gogh's creation in 2025.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

locations as diverse as the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and a very surprising small gallery in Solothurn, Switzerland, among other cultural institutions. Outside of Amsterdam, the best place to enjoy Van Gogh's work – and that of other Impressionists and Post-Impressionists – is the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, which we had the chance to visit a couple of weeks ago. (Hint to travellers: use the Paris City Pass, a great deal that admits you to many wonderful attractions).

My biggest surprise, though, was that I really felt I touched Van Gogh's life and times in a city in southern France, where no gallery, or anyone for that matter, owns a Van Gogh.

The city is Arles in Provence where Van Gogh lived for more

than a year, creating a new painting or drawing nearly every day. Many of his best-known works, including two of the three "Starry Night" paintings, were created right here. We visited Arles as part of a wonderful Viking cruise on the Rhone River.

Our guide on the unusual, almost disjointed city tour – lots of Roman stuff and then lots of Van Gogh – explained that Van Goghs have become so expensive that there would be a taxpayer revolt if public money was used to purchase one. So, Arles has none.

But what Arles has done, and done well, is create a Van Gogh route, erecting poster boards with the images of his paintings in the precise locations where he placed his easel. And for anyone who is a fan of the artist, there is something magical in standing in the actual footsteps of Van Gogh.

Easily, my favourite location was Le Jardin de la Maison de Santé à Arles. It's an enclosed garden and the municipality has restored it to look precisely like it did when Van Gogh painted the scene in 1888. I could not resist grabbing my smart phone and trying to replicate the painting. Van Gogh did it better. (I will admit, it's wise to consider the scene from Van Gogh's perspective. If you walk to the other side of the garden, the view includes a plethora of souvenir shops.)

There are plenty of other explanatory plaques along the route. Van Gogh's famous painting of his own house, "La Mainse Jaune" (The Yellow House), is erected at a busy corner. The house, sadly, is gone, but the other buildings in the painting remain, including a café that Van Gogh often frequented.

The locale that has changed even more is the site where he paint-

ed the hugely famous "La Nuit Étoilée" (The Starry Night). The view when we visited (admittedly not at night) showed mostly the top decks of docked cruise boats, impeding the view of the Rhone. But nonetheless, Van Gogh had produced his fabulous work right here.

Our very well-informed guide told us two stories that really caught my attention. First, despite overwhelming consensus, she said Van Gogh's death might not have been suicide. She suggested it could have been an accident involving some children playing with a gun.

The other story is both rather sad and rather amusing. She had led us to the exact café depicted in the artist's "Café Terrace at Night." It's now the Café Van Gogh, but it's closed. Why? Because after years of the owners asking to be paid in cash because "our credit card machine is broken," the authorities cottoned on, examined their books and the owners went to jail for tax evasion.

Our guide is sure the café is awaiting some clever entrepreneur as one of the most visited sites in Arles, but she cautioned there is undoubtedly red tape involved – which is something of a national sport in France.

Until then, art lovers can enjoy the scenes that inspired this brilliant, troubled, artistic icon. To quote songwriter Don Mclean, "But I could have told you, Vincent, This world was never meant for one as beautiful as you."

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](mailto:pknowles@golden.net).



Panels identifying Van Gogh's precise location when he made his now-famous paintings abound in Arles. This is the garden of the institution where he stayed, dealing with mental illness.



The Arles guide explains the odd story behind what is now known as the Café Van Gogh – closed because of tax evasion!



The locale where Van Gogh painted Starry Night has been altered to allow river cruise longships to dock.

# Riddles

**Why did the cow win an award?**  
Because she was outstanding in her field!

**What do you call a fish wearing a bowtie?**  
Sofishticated.

**Why don't elephants use computers?**  
They're afraid of the mouse.

**What do you call an alligator in a vest?**  
An investigator.

**Why did the dog sit in the shade?**  
Because it didn't want to be a hot dog.

**What do you get when you cross a sheep and a kangaroo?**  
A woolly jumper.

**What do you call a bear with no ears?**  
B!

**Why do seagulls fly over the sea?**  
Because if they flew over the bay, they'd be bagels.

**What do you call a lazy kangaroo?**  
A pouch potato.

**Why did the duck get a job?**  
To make a little extra "bill" money.

**What do you call a pig that knows karate?**  
A pork chop.

# Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

# Pet of the week



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## WHAT'S POPPIN'

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| G | X | I | M | P | X | F | Y | K | U | E | X | L | U | P | L | A | G | C | G |
| N | T | Q | O | K | H | A | C | A | E | L | W | G | K | Z | J | V | L | L | S |
| I | L | J | J | R | J | E | P | H | Y | T | E | F | T | M | V | N | Y | T | V |
| N | F | L | U | F | F | Y | M | Y | E | C | T | Q | R | R | O | Q | D | Y | Z |
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| E | I | X | F | B | J | G | G | A | W | V | C | P | G | Q | R | B | K | A | J |
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| Y | S | Z | A | L | Q | P | Q | V | S | C | C | F | H | J | K | Q | T | M | X |
| V | Z | N | U | G | D | E | Z | G | T | Z | C | A | R | A | M | E | L | H | H |
| J | B | E | W | A | N | B | D | W | O | Q | J | Y | H | X | B | V | F | V | O |
| P | I | U | J | B | F | I | V | F | V | X | M | P | H | S | E | S | I | T | R |
| C | K | X | T | R | J | X | P | J | E | R | G | O | C | C | X | C | O | Q | A |
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- AIR
- BAG
- BUCKET
- BUTTER
- CARAMEL
- CHEESE
- CORN
- CRUNCHY
- FLUFFY
- HULL
- KERNEL
- KETTLE
- MICROWAVE
- MOVIE NIGHT
- OIL
- POPPING
- SALT
- SEASONING
- SNACK
- STOVETOP
- THEATER

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## OBITUARY



### SHIRLEY ISABEL ATTRIDGE

Shirley Isabel Attridge, age 96 of Stratford, passed away suddenly at Stratford General Hospital on Tuesday, October 7, 2025. Born on January 30, 1929, on the family farm in Alma Township. She was the daughter of the late Albert and Marguerite (Hammond) Ohm. Shirley was predeceased by her beloved husband William Ellis Attridge, whom she married on October 26, 1946. Bill predeceased her in 1998.

She was the proud mother of Dianne (Jim) Ward, Janice (Gary) Barker, Michael, Richard (Kim) Attridge and Ted (Minky) Attridge. Loving grandmother of Shane (Carrie) Barker, Stephen Ward (Ellen Whaling), Kendra Barker (Drew Trimble), Sean (Erin) Attridge, Christine Ward (Craig Vella), Jessica Attridge (Jason Hardee), Judd (Meaghan) Attridge and Drew Attridge (Melody Ong). Great grandmother of Evey, Rylee, Clementine, Freddie, Tilly, Flynn, Rory, Andrew, Callie, Jake, Sammy, Oscar and Felix. She will be fondly remembered by her sister-in-law, Joanne Ohm.

Shirley and Bill farmed near Milverton until 1967 when they moved to Stratford. Shirley worked for many years as a server for many years in the hospitality industry, where her warmth and friendly nature made her a favourite among co-workers and customers alike. She was a devoted member of Avondale United Church, and previously a member of Parkview and Centennial United Churches. Shirley especially loved spending time at her second home on the beach in Kincardine, where she found great joy and relaxation. Above all, Shirley treasured her family and friends. She will be deeply missed by all who were fortunate to know her.

In addition to her parents and husband, Shirley was predeceased by her brother, Murray Ohm, and her daughter-in-law, Donna Attridge.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to the doctors, nurses, and staff at Stratford General Hospital for their excellent care and compassion.

A celebration of Shirley's Life will be held on Saturday, November 8, 2025, at Avondale United Church (Emmanuel Hall), 194 Avondale Avenue, Stratford from 2:00-4:00 p.m. with words of remembrance at 3:00 p.m.

As expressions of sympathy memorial donations may be made to Avondale United Church or Sleeping Children Around the World through the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron St, Stratford, ON. [www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com](http://www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com)

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

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10. Heathrow Airport

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Stratford Honda  
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Papa Johns  
Fore Everyone Golf  
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A&W  
Toner & Ink Shop  
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Athens Greek Restaurant  
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Gino's Pizza  
Rosso's  
Buzz Stop  
Union Barber  
Mornington Variety  
Split Rail  
Stratford Rotary Complex  
Agriplex  
No Frills  
Cozyn's  
Sebringville Esso  
Dave's Diner - Sebringville  
Stratford-Perth Museum  
Sobey's

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron  
Circle K - Huron  
West End Pharmacy  
Tim Hortons - Huron  
Stratford Hospital  
Video 99 - Erie St  
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