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That's a wrap for 2025 Stratford Film Festival

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Film Festival (SFF) held its first ever four-day festival Nov. 6-9, with thirteen screenings that had been whittled down from submissions of over 500 films. Opening night was sold out with a welcoming reception and the screening of the award-winning documentary *Beethoven Nine: Ode to Humanity* directed by Canadian Larry Weinstein. The feature took home the Best Documentary award.

The SFF Award is a special edition print of the painting called *Attentive Eyes* by Stratford artist Tom Campbell. The prints were created specially for the festival and the original painting hangs in the Bruce Hotel. There were ten awards handed out at the end of the festival.

The Audience Favourite, *Behind the Castle Walls: The Origin Story of the Hilarious House of Frightenstein* attracted the most first-time attendees of all the screenings, with fans anxious to meet and be photographed with co-producer Mitch Markowitz – who along with filmmakers Tammy Heisel and Morgan Baker were on hand for a Q-and-A. The session was moderated by journalist Claire Bickley who helped charm the audience with Markowitz and his stories. Many came to the Saturday morning screening appropriately dressed in pyjamas eating the complementary sugary cereals reminiscent of youth.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 12



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

After the Remembrance Day service on Nov. 11, the Stratford Police Pipes and Drums band led the procession from the cenotaph back to the Stratford Armoury. For more photos, see page 8.

Just 16% of children will have access to full-time care: report

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A report just accepted by Stratford city council at its meeting on Nov. 10 paints a dire picture of the area's child-care services.

On average, only about 16 per cent of children up to the age of five have access to licenced, full-time childcare.

"Through the Ministry of Education's Capital Priorities program, which supports the creation of licenced childcare spaces in conjunction with school infrastruc-

ture projects, 176 new full-day, year-round spaces are expected to be opened this year in Perth County," a report from Mandy Koroniak, manager of children's services, said. "These spaces resulted from successful applications made by school boards and endorsed by the City of Stratford ... While progress towards equity of access to licenced childcare is being made, most families remain without access to a space."

A subsequent correction noted that 88 of those spaces will not come online until a later date, though a new

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



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That's a wrap for 2025 Stratford Film Festival

People came from near and far to attend the festival with most screenings virtually or completely sold out. Kimberley MacKenzie had attended just about every screening by the time she and her group took a pause before the closing night screening and reception.

"We boarded the dogs and we're treating it like a vacation. We always wanted to go to TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) but TIFF came to us here at the Stratford Film Festival and it's been amazing. Picking a favourite film is like picking a favourite child. I think *The Blue Trail* (directed by Gabriel Mascaro, Best International Feature award winner) was wonderful because the cinematography was spectacular. The Canadian shorts were great because it made you so proud to be

Canadian," she said.

The coming-of-age film *This Too Shall Pass*, directed by Rob Grant, took home the Best Canadian Feature and was another favourite of Mackenzie. "The soundtrack on that was amazing. I think my favourite is always the last one that we saw," she laughed. "We just saw *Space Cowboy* (directed by Marah Strauch and Bryce Leavitt) and that one blew us away. *Four Mothers*, (Best Feature award winner directed by Darren Thornton) was so good. I think this venue has just got to keep getting bigger and bigger. I love city hall and everything, but it's at capacity and especially after this year, (festival director Megan Smith-Harris) is going to need to grow."

The world debut of the Canadian short film *How We Live On* by first time Stratford filmmaker Heidi Sander was a loving tribute to the memory of her mother Margarete Sander. The film was shot locally and features the song "The Same Way" by local singer/songwriter Dayna Manning.

Based on her award-winning poem, the project started as an accompanying video to commemorate winning the international poetry award from the 2021 International Prime Number Magazine Award for Poetry. Director Kris Von Kleist told Sander that this project was more of a film, and

that's how the two started their journey together.

"From that point, we worked on the script together and did location shooting at the apple orchard on a Stratford farm. It all came together so beautifully, the actresses, it was such an organic experience. We pulled it together in two months and we shot it in two days. It's a tribute to my mom, but it's interesting. People don't want to talk about grief. It's a film that helps people to navigate their grief," said Sander.

Having the first screening of the film here in Stratford was amazing for Sander. "It was just so lovely to have that warm reception to the film and to have so many people say such lovely things about it. It was quite moving to know that something I created as a cathartic journey for myself is speaking to other people," she said.

There was so much conversation before and after each film, strangers in an audience united in the love of cinema and discovery of something that they might not otherwise seek out if not for the bold and creative programming at SFF.

Mother-son duo Josh and Cambria Ravenhill spent family time over the four days of the festival together. Josh, who works in the film industry, travelled in from Toronto for the occasion.

"For a first-time festival this has been really great," said Cambria. "... It's been well organized, well coordinated, wonderful volunteers and very welcoming people."

Josh's favourite film was *This Too Shall Pass* as an '80s inspired film. Cambria liked *A Nice Indian Boy* directed by Roshan Sethi, which won Best Comedy Feature. They both agree that the programming was outstanding.

"We've been chatting to all these people sitting around us, or behind us, people I have not met before in Stratford, so it's been fun. It really is a community event. Having been here, I am thinking I will get an annual pass and pay attention to when the monthly events happen," said Cambria.

Other awards announced include: Best Animated Short – *Dogwood*, Best of Fest Short – *We Need To Talk*, Best Canadian Short – *The Understudy*, Best Emerging Filmmakers – Angelique Molina and Abraham Troen for their film which closed out the festival, *Just Sing*, Best Feature Film – *Four Mothers*.

SFF is a non-profit organization that relies on donations to program the world class films that they have brought to Stratford for the past year. To make a donation, or to find more information about the festival, visit stratfordfilmfestival.com.

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(STRATFORD FILM FESTIVAL STAFF PHOTO)

Festival director Megan Smith-Harris unveils the Stratford Film Festival Award, a special edition print of the original painting by Stratford-based artist Tom Campbell. The piece, entitled "Attentive Eyes," was given out in 10 categories.

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Just 16% of children will have access to full-time care: report

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

98-space centre operated by a for-profit childcare operator will be opening next year.

The gap in coverage is not unique to Stratford and the county, nor to just the province. According to an October report from Stats Canada, 58 per cent of children up to the age of five were in childcare. About half of those parents reported difficulty finding that care, up slightly from the last time that metric was measured in 2023 (46 per cent).

Finding available care was the main challenge (65 per cent of parents), followed by finding affordable childcare (42 per cent of parents) and finding subsidized childcare (35 per cent of parents).

The Province of Ontario has set a provincial access rate target of 37 per cent by 2026, a target that is unlikely to be met,

and even if it is a large portion of parents in the area will remain without access to care.

The average access rate in the region is about 16 per cent. Stratford is wedged in the middle of the pack with 15 per cent while West Perth leads the region with a 25 per cent access rate. North Perth and St. Marys both have a 17 per cent access rate and Perth East trails with only six per cent.

"The children's services division continues to explore opportunities to create new licensed childcare spaces in collaboration with community-based childcare operators," Koroniak's report reads. "And advocate to the Province of Ontario on recognizing and addressing the unique needs related to the creation of new licensed childcare spaces in small urban and rural communities."





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Editorial

Remembering Grandpa Lucky



CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Editor

I never knew my grandfather. He passed away when my dad was in his early twenties, before my dad ever met my mom or had me. Still, all throughout my childhood my sister and I heard stories about old Grandpa Lucky – stories I think about often and on Remembrance Day in particular.

Growing up in a poor, north-eastern part of Poland, Kazimierz Luczka was only a boy when the Second World War broke out. Later in life he wouldn't share much about what happened during the war, but the stories he did were awe-inspiring. I heard a few of them from my dad, aunts and uncles – stories like how he was imprisoned in a Siberian work camp, how he built a makeshift, contraband radio in the attic of the workers' hut to listen to resistance news, how he escaped his logging

camp by clutching the underside of a timber log that flowed downstream from the camp, holding his breath in the freezing water and swimming to shore after he was far enough away. I heard stories about how he fought at Monte Casino with the Second Polish Corps, the famed company that Wojtek the Bear fought with, how he was decorated for his actions during the battle.

These are all stories that, depending on which aunt or uncle (and how much wine was consumed), changed ever so slightly every time they were uttered. That never sat well with me. It's not that I didn't believe my family members, but I just needed to know for sure. That trait has helped me a lot in my vocation, but at the time it was a horrible, gnawing feeling. These were just stories. They weren't fact.

When I was in high school, I heard one of my relatives reference in passing "the transcript." I asked about it and, turns out, when Grandpa Lucky was in the hospital, the place where he would eventually pass away, he tried to dictate his life story to a nurse. The Luczka family lost the recording she made, but we still had the transcript of his final story.

This was a revelation. In a few weeks' time, my aunt Gillian sent over a paper copy, a twenty-odd page document that starts

when Grandpa

Lucky was born in Lublin, and how at the behest of the government of the day, that early Luczka family traveled to the northeast to work a tired and lickspittle plot of land. It went through his early years, the breakout of the Second World War and the early days of what it meant to live in war-torn Poland. Then ... it ended. None of the stories I knew about him were included. There was no radio, no escape, no fighting in Italy. There was none of that, no stories filled with glory and heroic actions.

There were, however, some stories I never knew about.

Like I said, my grandfather's family was poor. He says in this transcript that he never had a pair of new shoes until he was 10 years old. But he was smart. Before the war broke out, a government policy came along introducing new scholarships for even underprivileged boys and an area priest took a shine to him. He was permitted to attend school – even when the local reeve tried to have his nephew take the money in his stead. This priest supposedly fell out with everyone in the area arguing for my grandfather, and when his efforts proved fruitful, he demanded that my grandfather study to be a priest, not at the local agriculture school.

Grandpa Lucky lived twelve kilometres from the train station, which was about three kilometres from the town and

three more kilometres from the school, but he went back and forth studying and working until he was 16, when war broke out. He and a few of the other men in his family fled further east, fearing what the Germans would do to them.

On that long walk, as they passed through a quite affluent city, they were held up by three "Buelo-Russian" bandits, civilians that used the chaos of war to rebel against the Poles in the area. On a dirt road outside this nameless city, they told my grandfather, his brother, a neighbour and his uncle to turn around.

"They put pistols to our backs and asked us where we were from, where we were going and what we had in our packs," Grandpa Lucky remembered. "It was just us four young guys and we thought that this would be our last hour. But fortunately we had with us my uncle, who was a working man, a seasonal worker ... Just as they were about to do us in, my uncle said 'Those boys are not the boys of aristocrats as you might think. They are like me, workers. Look at my hands, full of callouses. We are workers.'"

The bandits spoke in Russian amongst themselves and told my grandfather and his group to go on. They were unharmed.

I was probably close to 16 when I read that, the same age my grandfather was when Germany invaded Warsaw. My

hands were uncalloused then, as they are now when I type this, and I was blissfully unprepared for war. I still am unprepared.

Since reading about that moment on that dirt road, I have thought about that story more times than I can count – more times than I have thought of any of those other glory stories. I have wondered what I would have done, whether I would have been able to handle what he went through, whether I have in me what it takes to deal with such hardship and uncertainty. I don't think so. Being lucky runs in the Luczka family, but it only goes so far.

Just like Grandpa Lucky, our nation's veterans have stories told and stories untold. Both should be honoured this Remembrance Day and indeed every day of the year we are privileged to call ourselves Canadian and exercise the rights and freedoms and responsibilities we do. The stories that I know shape my reality just as much as the stories I never got to know and we have all heard the phrase before, "He didn't like to talk about it when he came back." My relationship with Grandpa Lucky is the same as so many other people in Stratford, Ontario and Canada.

We will never know their stories, not really, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't think about them. Remember the stories we know, yes, but let's have reverence for the stories we never will.

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Winter Wander-Land to return with holiday favourites and new programming

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The unofficial kick off to the winter holiday season will return the last week-end of November, with lots of beloved programming returning.

Winter Wander-Land will take place across Downtown Stratford on Nov. 29 and 30. The event run by the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Association (BIA) will bring back firepits with free Rice Krispie treats to roast, wandering carolers, the Polar Express train ride, food trucks, an outdoor market and, of course, Santa Claus.

“Winter Wander-Land is going to be ‘Wander-ful.’ We have all kinds of stuff going on,” said Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the Downtown Stratford BIA.

The Polar Express train rides, sponsored by On Stage Dance Studio, will once again travel around Stratford City Hall. This year, the train will include a new cart accessible for those requiring mobility devices like wheelchairs. The firepits will be in Market Square and York Street, as well as B and C Custom Landscaping’s Christmas Tree farms.

The Downtown Stratford BIA also has the “Take a Selfie with an Elfie” contest where passersby can take selfies with Christmas elves roaming around downtown for a chance to win a prize.

Guided tours and wagon rides will start at Memorial Gardens, with Lauri Leduc of Stratford Walking Tours. DJ Ethan Maac will spin both traditional and non-traditional Christmas tunes. The evening of Nov. 29, a Saturday, will have live music by Retro Resonance on York Street from 5-8 p.m. as well as hot food from the Boathouse, a drink from the Stratford Al Fresco bar and dancing for an event geared towards adults.

“We can get people in the Christmas spirit, get people downtown and it's really just saying thanks to everybody who can come, thanks to all the folks of Stratford because all year, throughout the spring, summer and fall, there's a lot of people that cater to the tourists. This is really for the people of Stratford,” Pritchard said. “Thanks, from downtown. Come on out with your family, have some fun.”

More information can be found online by visiting <https://downtownstratford.ca/winter-wander-land>.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Get ready to get on board! The Winter Wander-Land Polar Express train ride, pictured here during 2024's festivities, will return to take passengers around Stratford City Hall this November.

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Perth County Paramedics recognized by Governor General for excellence in emergency medical care and community involvement

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Members of the Perth County Paramedic Services earned prestigious awards for excellence in emergency medical care and community service.

Brian Stoeser, Tracy Cleary, Monia Tousignant, Steve Potz and Jacquie Ussher earned the Governor General's Emergency Medical Services Exemplary Service medals for 2025. The national awards recognize its recipients for their years of service and hours of involvement in the community. Between 100 to 110 in Ontario received the federal award in 2025.

"That's a lot of dedication, both at work and in their personal lives that both strive to better our communities and our patient care," said Tristan Barter, deputy chief of operations. "They should be really proud of that accomplishment and in turn, we're obviously super excited and proud for

them."

The award recipients' involvement in the community includes, but is certainly not limited to, coaching youth hockey, carrying wreaths at Remembrance Day ceremonies, volunteering at schools and participating in special events such as funerals. The Perth County Paramedics Services team also runs food drives, public education programming and will help out with the Downie Optimist Club with water safety days.

Barter said the awards speak to the leadership of the paramedics who received them.

"It just goes to show that those true leaders at any job or any service lead by example, so this is an example of somebody who not only comes to work and does a great job at work, but also involves themselves in the community and is a leader as a paramedic, as an employee, as a coworker, so that just shows the true colours of those people," he said.



(TRISTAN BARTER PHOTO)

Brian Stoeser, Tracy Cleary, Monia Tousignant, Steve Potz and Jacquie Ussher received the Governor General's Emergency Medical Services Exemplary Service medals for 2025. Pictured here, from left to right, are Cleary, Tousignant, Ussher and Potz.

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‘They gave their lives to break the power of the sword’: Remembrance Day 2025 in Stratford



Parade Marshal Patrick Cade keeps the 2025 Stratford Remembrance Day parade organized and focused – even in the wintry conditions that fell over Stratford and area that day.



The Stratford Police Pipes and Drums band leads the parade from the Stratford Armoury, down Albert Street and up Downie Street towards the cenotaph, passing Stratford City Hall in the process.



The parade heads down Erie Street and Veterans Drive.



Service members line up as the squalls pick back up. Behind, a huge turnout filled the parkland for the annual ceremonies.



After the ceremonies, the procession makes its way back to the armoury, wrapping up this year's Remembrance Day festivities – but not remembrance writ large.



Loreena McKennitt was one of the speakers for the ceremonies, singing *O Canada* and the royal anthem “God Save The King.”

(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)

‘They gave their lives to break the power of the sword’: Remembrance Day 2025 in Stratford



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)

Guards hold vigil at the cenotaph. Sculpted by famed artist Walter S. Allward (who also designed the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France), it bears the inscription “They gave their lives to break the power of the sword.”



Honoured guests line up with wreaths, ready to place them on the cenotaph steps.



Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae directs Ainsley Nater on where to place her wreath. Nater was there representing her father, MP John Nater.



The Canadian Flag, one of many flags that were borne, blows in the frigid wind that ripped through the parkland during the ceremonies.



Area businesses, service clubs and organizations had previously laid wreaths, leaving only the area's service members and first-responders to lay wreaths during the ceremonies.

Stratford marks first Youth Homelessness Awareness Day Nov. 17; MP pushes for federal recognition

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Shelterlink Youth Services is proud to announce that Nov. 17, 2025, marks the inaugural Youth Homelessness Awareness Day in Stratford.

This important day, officially declared by the City of Stratford and the Town of St. Marys, shines a light on the growing issue of youth homelessness in the community and the need for continued action, awareness and compassion.

Shelterlink invites community members, partners and supporters to join them at Stratford City Hall at 9 a.m. on Nov. 17 for the official flag-raising ceremony.

"Youth homelessness is often hidden, but it's a reality for far too many young people across Perth County," said Cate Trudeau, executive director of Shelterlink Youth Services. "Having a dedicated day of recognition helps us raise awareness, reduce stigma and advocate for the supports and housing young people need to thrive."

MP John Nater supports the initiative and has done his part to bring federal attention to Shelterlink's request, hoping to make Nov. 17 National Youth Homelessness Awareness Day across Canada.

Nater wrote to Minister of Housing and Infrastructure Gregor Robertson on May



26, 2025, to share Shelterlink's interest in having the federal government recognize Nov. 17 as National Youth Homelessness Awareness Day.

"I was pleased to support the petition for a National Youth Homelessness Awareness Day as part of an initiative of Shelterlink Youth Services in Stratford," said Nater. "When a petition is tabled, the government is required to provide its response within 45 calendar days. I look forward to Minister Robertson and the government's formal response."

"While I recognize that some may see declaring an awareness day as a symbolic move, it is nonetheless an important way to bring the public's attention to this issue," continued Nater.

For more than 30 years, Shelterlink Youth Services in Stratford has supported youth aged 14 to 24 who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homeless-

ness. Through outreach, emergency shelter and post-shelter supports, Shelterlink helps youth build stability, independence and long-term housing security.

The organization believes community awareness and collaboration are essential to breaking the cycle of homelessness and ensuring all youth have a safe place to call home.

In 2024-25, Shelterlink served 107 youth in Perth County; 49 in shelter and 25 in outreach. It also introduced a new post-shelter program supporting 12 youth in maintaining housing. The initiative aims to reduce youth homelessness by preventing entry into the system through community support and family connections.

According to the federal report by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 46 per cent of chronically homeless adults had their first experience of homelessness before the age of 25.

Trudeau notes that nationally, one in five Canadians experiencing homelessness are youth between the ages of 13 and 24, and 40 per cent of homeless youth first experience homelessness before the age of 16.

"Nearly half of chronically homeless adults first experienced homelessness before the age of 25," said Trudeau. "If we really want to look at prevention and ad-

ressing homelessness in general, we really need to start with our youth."

Young people are often experiencing homelessness for the first time, without the life skills, financial stability or social supports adults may have developed. Many youth are fleeing unsafe homes, family conflict or aging out of care systems, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, mental health challenges and barriers to education and employment.

"Far too often, I hear the concerns of our community about youth homelessness and the challenges faced by young people trying to find stable and affordable housing," said Nater. "I will continue to call on the government to take meaningful action to address the challenges of housing in our community."

Shelterlink expresses its gratitude to the City of Stratford, the Town of St. Marys and Nater for recognizing this critical issue and taking a stand through the official declaration.

Shelterlink looks forward to the federal government's final decision within the next month.

"Having a national awareness day is an opportunity to reduce stigma, share accurate information about youth and raise awareness of the importance of having safe and stable housing for young people," said Trudeau.

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Marian deWever shares lessons after 11 years leading Home & Country – and winning this year's Business Leader Award

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Over 11 years leading the ever-more successful Home & Country Real Estate Corp. Brokerage, and decades of professional experience prior to that, Marian deWever learned the recipe for success is simple, if long.

"Success is built with intention, integrity and about 1,000 lessons learned the hard way," deWever said to a packed audience at the Tom Patterson Theatre on Nov. 6. She was the keynote speaker during the Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce's Business Excellence Awards this year, as winner of the 2025 Business Leader Award. In her address, she shared 10 principles that those 1,000 lessons taught her.

"Number one, trust yourself," deWever said. "Don't dig up in doubt what you have planted in faith. It's easy to second guess yourself, especially when voices around you offer unsolicited advice. But remember, you know your business, your market and your people better than anyone else. When your gut and values are aligned, trust that – confidence is contagious."

Being knowledgeable about every aspect of your business, leading by example, always being open to collaboration, treating connections like currency, being steadfast when it comes to your brand, focusing on intention and actions rather than just results and never becoming complacent were some more principles, along with number 10:

"With success comes responsibility," deWever shared. "A quote from McDonald's founder Ray Kroc has always reso-



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Marian deWever is the winner of the 2025 Business Leader Award, presented by the Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce during its Business Excellence Awards ceremony this year.

nated with me. 'We have an obligation to give something back to the community that gives so much to us.' We take that seriously and literally. Our visibility and involvement in the community are not marketing strategies. They are a reflection of our core values. Giving back is part of the cycle of success. When our business strengthens the community, that community, in turn, strengthens our business. It's a cornerstone of our brand.

"At the end of the day, it's the how that makes the difference. It's what separates good intentions from real results, and that's

where the true measure of being remarkable lies, not in accolades or awards, but in the quiet, consistent choices we make, the dedication, the care, the integrity we bring to our work and our community."

Many other businesses in Stratford and area were recognized for their impact to the business landscape and economic health of the region. Along with deWever, this year's winners were Linton Window & Door (the Skilled Trades Award, presented by TD Canada Trust), the Bunker Performance Lounge &

Café (the Emerging Business Award, presented by Wild Hog Country Market), the Stratford Country Club (the Hospitality Award, presented by 107.1 CJCS - Stratford and 107.7 2Day FM Stratford), Pinnacle Fieldhouse Training Academy (the Trailblazing Award, presented by University of Waterloo Stratford School of Interaction Design and Business), New-Form Tools (the Enterprise Award, presented by Famme & Co. Chartered Professional Accountants), L'Arche Stratford (the Nonprofit/Charitable Award, presented by KDB Law), KDB Law (the Professional Award, presented by UpAuto), Corner Store Candy Co. (the Retail Award, presented by Downtown Stratford BIA), Gush Studio (the Service Award, presented by IG Wealth Management Blum & Yanchus) and New-Form Tools again, for the Business of the Year Award.

Along with deWever, Jim Jantzi, president and co-owner of New-Form Tools, highlighted the importance of community to running a business. He told attendees that the team at New-Form Tools are very grateful for all the institutions that have helped them along the way.

"New-Form tools has about 75 associates here in town," Jantzi said. "... We have a very good group of people, and our employees are the strongest part of our team. We have never had such a good group of employees as we do now. We have just an absolutely tremendous, tremendous team. I want to thank you all. Thank you for the professionals here."

Queer Book of the Month

HEATHER LISTER

Stratford Public Library

Call Me Gray by Andrew Larsen and Bells Larsen

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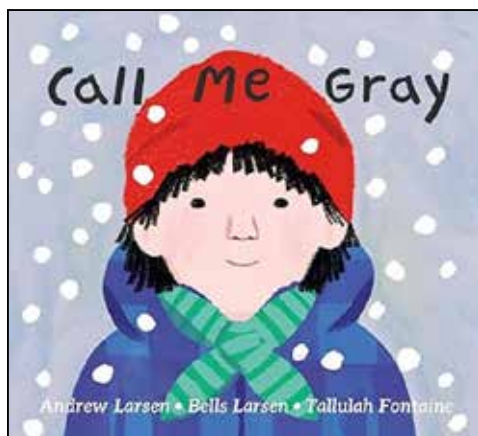
Written in the first person, *Call Me Gray* is about a small child who looks forward to helping their dad in the annual tradition of building an ice rink in the backyard. This is something they do together every year, and something that never changes. But this year they feel different in themselves. They try to explain to their dad that while they look like a boy on the outside, inside they feel like a girl.

The father listens patiently as the child explains that their name feels like an itchy sweater, and they would

like to change it to Gray. It takes a lot of confidence for Gray to tell their dad about these feelings. As they sit and drink their hot chocolate after a first evening skate, it's as if a huge weight has been lifted from the child's shoulders and they have taken a first step to becoming their true self.

Interestingly, father and child, Andrew and Bells Larson, collaborated on this story that came out of Bells' experience as a transgender person. The book is simply but warmly illustrated by Tallulah Fontaine, with Gray's red hat beautifully punctuating every drawing!

Call Me Gray is a heart-warming story of gender affirmation, of tradition and of acceptance. It's a lesson that it doesn't hurt that some things stay the same, but others change.



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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. According to the Bible, which apostle was a tentmaker?
2. What city is home to the Spanish Steps?
3. "Heaven is a Place on Earth" by Belinda Carlisle was released in what year?
4. What do you call a word that sounds like what it describes?
5. What is the sum of angles in a quadrilateral?
6. At what time of day did guns fall silent on November 11, 1918?
7. Who is the main character in *The Lego Movie*?
8. What kind of species can live on both water and land?
9. The First World War officially ended with the signing of which treaty?
10. Which company introduced "Comet" cleanser back in 1956?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

220 Stratford and area businesses included in 2026 Passport to Savings

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

With each year that passes, the number of businesses included in the annual Passport to Savings increases, but the price for the coupon booklet stays steady at \$50.

Do the math. Unlike almost everything else, the passport's cost-to-savings ratio keeps getting better and better. Now in its 13th year, the booklet – sold annually as a fundraiser for Stratford House of Blessing, Simple Dreams Ministries and the Kiwanis Club of Stratford – includes savings for 220 businesses across Stratford, Mitchell, St. Marys and Tavistock, an increase of 27

businesses over last year's passport.

"It's not just restaurants," said House of Blessing resource coordinator Aaron Balzer. "There's lots of great restaurant deals, but there's lots of services like your oil changes, your eyeglasses, so there's a lot of different services you can get savings on."

"I've read the book here," added Kiwanis Club of Stratford member Barrie Beech, "and it's things like accommodations, entertainment, health and beauty, home décor and gifts, restaurants are very popular – lots of restaurant listings – specialty foods, sports and fitness, technology and more. There's a wide range of savings."

Those responsible for the passport each year say it's one of those all-to-rare win-win-win situations. Not only do those who purchase the passports have the chance to realize thousands of dollars in savings, but the participating businesses get the opportunity to attract new customers through their doors.

Meanwhile, all three of the organizations that benefit from the annual fundraiser split the proceeds equally. Last year, House of Blessing, Simple Dreams and the Kiwanis Club each netted \$19,000 in support of the work they do in the community.

"It certainly helps us purchase food and a lot of other items that are needed for our clients," House of Blessing executive director Eva Hayes said. "It goes into our funds and we use that to keep our (food bank) shelves full so we can keep people fed. The need just keeps going up. We were just saying we've seen a 197 per-cent increase in demand over the last five years, and the numbers keep growing."



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

The 2026 Passport to Savings is now available for purchase. Pictured from left outside Stratford House of Blessing are House of Blessing resource coordinator Aaron Balzer, executive director Eva Hayes, Simple Dreams Ministries co-founder Richard Kneider and Kiwanis Club of Stratford member Barrie Beech.

Though the need keeps rising, Hayes said there are only so many people in the community to support House of Blessing's work. That's why the money raised through Passport to Savings is so crucial; it gives locals the opportunity not only to buy passports for themselves, but also as gifts for friends and loved ones.

"(The passports) certainly help fund some of what we do," Simple Dreams co-founder Richard Kneider said. "The biggest thing we give away on a regular basis is beds. ... It also supports things like our To Stratford With Love community dinner, our Thanksgiving ham giveaway and just different needs within the community that we can help with. There's just so many of them, but Stratford is a very, very giving community and we're certainly thankful and blessed by that."

On the Kiwanis side, Beech said the money raised supports club initiatives like the annual Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts and live Sunday Concerts

in the Park at Queen's Park each summer. The club also uses the money to help the city rejuvenate playgrounds, including at the Milton, Inverness and Shakespeare street parks, and support community organizations including House of Blessing, the Local Community Food Centre and the Huron-Perth Centre for Children and Youth.

Passports to Savings are available for purchase at numerous businesses and organizations across Stratford and beyond, including at House of Blessing, Marlin Travel, Stratford Home Furniture, Jiffy Lube, at the Stratford Farmers' Market on Saturdays located at the Burnside Agriplex, Your Neighbourhood Credit Unions in Stratford and Mitchell and the Little Falls Artisan Market in St. Marys.

Passports can also be purchased from any member of the Kiwanis Club of Stratford and online through the House of Blessing website at www.shob.org with options for pickup and delivery available.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Members of the St. Peter's Lutheran Church Mary Martha Society Sandy Kaebfleisch, Carol Irwin and Gloria Hutchison prepare tourtiere pies for the church's annual Starlite Bazaar Nov. 29 from 9 a.m. to noon. The bazaar, held at the church at 115 Cambria St. in Stratford, will feature Christmas pudding with sauce, tourtiere pies, a bake table, a deli table, gift baskets, crafts, wreaths and treasures galore.

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Nov. 06	Charlene Demewenaere, Drumbo	\$50.00
Nov. 07	April Innes, St. Pauls	\$50.00
Nov. 08	Sergio Boscarato, St. Marys	\$200.00
Nov. 09	Ron McKay, Stratford	\$50.00
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Nov. 11	Sara Sicilia, London	\$50.00
Nov. 12	Ross Miller, Bayfield	\$50.00
Nov. 13	Ewen Ross, Stratford	\$50.00
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Soulstice Collective Fall Market brings wellness, connection and community spirit to St. Marys

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

With the changing of the seasons and the approach of winter, the Soulstice Collective Fall Market offers a space to pause and reconnect – to nourish body and spirit through local wellness, handcrafted goods and community energy.

The Soulstice Collective Fall Market returns to St. Marys Golf & Country Club (Hideaway Room) on Friday, Nov. 22, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., promising a day of wellness, creativity and community connection. Co-founders Samantha Thompson and Kate Warren first launched the market last spring after a single conversation about holistic healing turned into a movement.

“We started with an idea that felt too big to tackle alone,” said Thompson. “Six weeks later, the first market came together.”

That debut drew hundreds of visitors; this season, organizers expect more than double.

“It began as a way to connect people with local healers and makers,” said Warren. “Now, it’s also about helping small businesses thrive and collaborate.”

More than 50 vendors from the area will fill the space with everything from organic coffee, teas and skincare to Reiki, fascia stretch and homeopathic remedies. Visitors can sample, shop, or simply explore.

“There’s something for everyone,” said Thompson. “Whether you want a good cup of coffee or an introduction to energy healing, you’ll find a welcoming, pressure-free space.”

The first 100 guests will receive swag bags with local products and coupons. Families are encouraged to attend – there will be a children’s colouring contest, giveaways and donations collected for local charities.

Each vendor brings a unique perspective on wellness. Haley Bowler-Cooke, founder of Uplift Lifestyle Inc., says the market mirrors her mission.

“Anytime we gather in community with a shared vision of supporting and enhancing an economy of love and intention, we leave a positive impact,” she said. “The Soulstice Market aligns perfectly with that.”

For Christy Muddle of To Bean or Not to Bean Coffee Roasting Co., the market represents renewal.

“We haven’t done markets since before COVID,” she said. “Being surrounded by vendors who care about health, healing and intentional living – it’s an easy yes. We’ll have fresh-roasted coffee and community connection brewing all day.”

“The organizers, vendors and location will make for an enchanting day,” said Karen Hartwick, tea sommelier and owner of Stratford Tea Leaves. “I’ll be steeping healing herbs and teas, sharing knowledge as we sip and sample. It’s all about being intentional and finding calm in a cup.”

Rooted in the natural rhythm of the solstice, the fall market celebrates nourishment and restoration before winter’s arrival.

“As we head into the colder months, it’s about supporting ourselves – body, mind and spirit – with warmth and community,” Thompson said.

Visitors can expect cozy décor, thoughtful conversation and an atmosphere described by many as “warm, inviting and full of good energy.”

“We just want people to come, explore and feel inspired,” said Warren. “It’s free, family-friendly and built for everyone.”

Don’t miss the Soulstice Collective Fall Market at St. Marys Golf & Country Club – Hideaway Room – on Friday, Nov. 22, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Free admission. First 100 guests receive swag bags.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

More than 50 holistic vendors will gather at the Soulstice Collective Fall Market, offering treatments and products to help attendees relax, recharge and prepare for the winter season.

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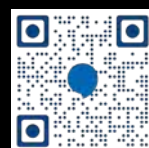
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STRATFORDTIMESSPORTS

Schmidt returns in historic fashion as Warriors sweep past Maroons and Kings

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors were getting ready to resume the season after a weekend-long trip to Bowling Green on Halloween weekend. Head coach Dave Williams tells the Times that the team is adjusting back to form and is pleased with the players' response to their first practice session on Nov. 3.

"I thought we had a good speed here. We hadn't skated since Wednesday (Oct. 29), so that's always a concern," Williams said.

"When you go away, you kind of get all your routine and your rhythm, but to the guys' credit, we got some of the rust off that we expected as coaches but thought the effort and the execution was excellent."

Rookies Mateo Craievich and McQuen Haylock both said they are adjusting to the Warriors very nicely and commended the positive vibes from the team and the city.

"It's great. I love the guys here and I love the community and coaching staff and everything," Craievich said.

"It's been amazing. So far, I've got awe-

some billets. It's awesome to be around the community that loves to play hockey and great fans that come support us every day, every Friday night," Haylock said.

"It's been really fun. So far, it's been a great team and environment. I'm having a great time."

On Nov. 7, the Warriors welcomed the reigning GOHL champion Chatham Maroons to the Allman Arena for the first time this season. Before the game, a Remembrance Day ceremony took place, which included the Last Post, the reading of "In Flanders Fields," a two-minute moment of silence, and the playing of O Canada.

After a scoreless first period, which also featured a combined total of ten shots on goal, the Maroons broke the deadlock with a late goal, 3:48 left in the second period, to lead 1-0 heading into the third period.

The tightly contested defensive game turned into a scoring frenzy in the final period as Grady Murphy brought the Warriors back at one apiece. Chatham responded thirty seconds later to lead 2-1, but a powerplay goal from Max Wildfong and the go-ahead marker from the returning Jonas Schmidt put the home side ahead 3-2 going into the final minute.

At one point during the penalty kill in the period, the Warriors had a golden opportunity to double their lead as the Maroons' netminder, Blake Verberne, but the rookie Haylock made a last-second miscue and missed the net.

With an extra attacker on shortly after killing off the Stratford powerplay, the Maroons tied the game with 44.4 seconds in regulation following a mad scramble in front of the Warriors' netminder, Noah Bender and sent the game to overtime.

It only took 84 seconds into the extra session for the Warriors to prevail as Schmidt scored the game-winner and his 100th career point in the GOHL, and only the tenth player to join the historic milestone with the franchise since the team returned to the Warriors name in



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Stratford's Jonas Schmidt watches his shot go past the Chatham netminder Blake Verberne for the winning goal in overtime at the Allman Arena on Nov.7.

the 2016-17 season. Bender saved 25 shots to pick up his fifth win of the season for the home side. With the win, the Warriors extended their unbeaten home record at the Allman to 6-0-1-0 this season.

Postgame, Schmidt was excited to play after missing the previous six games due to an injury and playing a key role in the win.

"I was eager to get back in the lineup, travelling and watching hockey. It sucks, and can be hard at times, but it's a good opportunity to reflect on your own game, watching hockey, and kind of see what you can do out there to utilize your own skills. But obviously it was an exciting third period, and it was good to get the win," Schmidt said.

For hitting the career century point mark, the veteran forward Schmidt credited his teammates who helped him along the way.

"I mean, obviously there's a really impressive group of players ahead of me that have done this, but I got to give all the credit to my linemates and my teammates throughout my junior career in Stratford, so credit to them," Schmidt said.

Williams commended the team's effort, especially for their ability to bounce back and win the game in overtime.

"It was quiet there for the first couple of periods. I know we didn't generate a ton of shots in the first period, but I thought we came out and skated well. Lost our way, maybe a little bit in the second. They (Chatham) found some momentum," Williams said.

"They're a good team with some skilled players, and, you know, a bit of a character win, hopefully for us, battling back after getting that game tied, and then, you know, the next shift, giving up the second goal. I think the guys should feel good about their effort tonight."

Stratford travelled to Komoka for a Saturday night matchup against the Kings on Nov. 8.

Wildfong got the Warriors on the board with a powerplay goal at the 3:01 mark of the first period. Komoka tied the game with a powerplay goal of their own midway through the period, but Dominic Marshall responded for the visitors with a late goal, his fifth of the season, to take the lead heading into the second period.

The Kings tied the game again at 3:04 of the second period, only for Lucas Minard to score his seventh of the season midway through the period, on the powerplay, to give the lead back to the Warriors. Haylock atoned for his mistake from the previous game and scored his first career GOHL goal late in the period to provide Stratford with a 4-2 lead through forty minutes.

Komoka climbed to within one with their second powerplay goal of the game with 5:07 left in the third. Despite taking multiple penalties down the stretch, the Stratford defence withstood the offensive push from Komoka and iced the

Stratford Warriors						
2025-26 Stats						
(as of November 10, 2025)						
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS	
Colin Slattery	F	15	4	8	12	
Max Wildfong	F	15	7	4	11	
Jack McGurn	F	15	3	8	11	
Jonas Schmidt	F	9	5	5	10	
Quinn Kipfer	F	13	3	7	10	
Lucas Minard	F	15	7	2	9	
Rhyse Brown	F	15	2	7	9	
Will Coward	D	15	0	8	8	
Dominic Marshall	F	15	5	2	7	
Aaron Green	D	9	2	4	6	
Dax Vader	F	14	2	4	6	
Grady Murphy	F	14	5	0	5	
Evan Arnold	F	7	4	1	5	
McQuen HayLock	F	15	1	3	4	
Matthew Blake	D	13	0	4	4	
Joseph Curtin	D	14	0	4	4	
Coen Galbraith	F	14	0	4	4	
Haden Frayne	D	13	1	2	3	
Mateo Craievich	D	11	0	3	3	
Drew Hodge	D	14	0	3	3	
Beckham McLeod	D	5	0	0	0	
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%			
Noah Bender	6-2-0-1	2.17	0.926			
Gage Hurst	2-0-0-1	0.96	0.965			
Connor Davis	1-1-1-0	3.34	0.841			

GOHL Western Conference Standings							
(as of November 10, 2025)							
Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
Elmira Sugar Kings	15	2	1	0	31	91	39
Chatham Maroons	14	2	1	2	31	92	56
St. Marys Lincolns	12	5	1	0	25	64	40
St. Thomas Stars	12	5	0	1	25	78	57
London Nationals	12	7	0	0	24	81	69
Waterloo Siskins	9	4	3	1	22	48	43
Stratford Warriors	9	3	1	2	21	52	37
LaSalle Vipers	8	10	2	0	18	60	75
Komoka Kings	6	10	2	0	14	54	74
Listowel Cyclones	6	11	1	0	13	44	54
Strathroy Rockets	5	12	1	0	11	67	78
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	19	0	0	0	3	132

Stratford Irish edged the Orangeville Blitz in their lone NPHL weekend action

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On Nov. 7, the Stratford Irish returned to action from a two-week absence and put on a scoring clinic early in the first period as they ended their losing streak in a 7-5 win over the previously unbeaten Orangeville Blitz.

Stratford opened the scoring by Luca Marandola less than 90 seconds into the game, then Jaden Peca notched one 14 seconds later. A goal from Christian Polillo at 2:44 made it three unanswered goals in under three minutes of the game for the visitors.

Peca scored his second goal of the game midway through the opening frame to cap off a solid start for the Irish and led 4-0 after 20 minutes of play.

But Orangeville responded in the second period with three unanswered goals of their own to cut the deficit to 4-3 before Cole Thiessen responded for Stratford, only for the Blitz to respond with a goal of their own to cut the Irish lead to 5-4 going into the third period.

Just 97 seconds into the final frame, Orangeville tied the game at five, but Stephen Pierog scored the game-winning goal with 9:26 remaining, and Matthew Montgomery added insurance in the closing seconds to preserve the big win over first-place Orangeville.

Thiessen led the Irish with three points, while Zachery Weir picked up the win with a 22-save performance in goal.

Next up for the Irish is a road game in Strathroy against the Jets on Nov. 14.

Send in your sports reports

Coaches and/or parents are invited to send in your sports reports and pictures to the Stratford Times to let Stratford and area know how your teams are doing throughout the 2025/26 season (and to create some great scrapbook material to be reflected upon in future years).

Game reports should be kept to a maximum of

100 words. Please include a brief description of what happened during your games, including the names of those who scored and any special efforts made by your players.

Please have all reports and pictures in by the end of the month by emailing stratfordtimes@gmail.com.

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MINOR SPORTS **SCRAPBOOK**



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Aubrey Smith skates into the offensive zone and fires a shot during last Saturday's U13 B Stratford Aces game.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Ryder Bishop passes the puck along the blue line during the U15 Stratford Warriors game last Friday.

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MINOR SPORTS **SCRAPBOOK**



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)
Hayden Carter launches the puck on goal from the blueline during the U11 Stratford Warriors game last Friday.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)
Miles Marshall loads up a shot from the high slot during last Friday's U14 Stratford Warriors game.

Schmidt returns in historic fashion as the Warriors sweep past Maroons and Kings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

game with the empty netter from Rhyse Brown with less than two minutes left. Bender notched his sixth win of the season with a 32-save performance.

This marked the first time the Warriors won on the road since the dramatic shootout win in Chatham on Oct. 12.

After the game, Williams knew the team needed to be more careful when

taking the penalties at the pivotal points of the game.

"They (Komoka) are a much-improved team from last year. We had to battle to the end. We need to figure out that we can make it easy on ourselves," Williams said.

"Killing eight minutes of penalties in the third period isn't typically a very good recipe to try and win, right? I think some

of our grief the last three or four games on the road has had to do a little bit with taking penalties late in the game."

On a positive note, Haylock was very pleased to score his first career goal in the GOHL and felt vindicated after what happened the previous game.

"I was pretty upset about yesterday, even though we came out of the win, I definitely left it out there and didn't put

away a pretty easy goal," Haylock said. "But I decided to clear my head, and it worked out here, and I ended up in the back of the net."

The Warriors return to cross-conference play this weekend, hosting the Welland Jr. Canadians on Nov. 14 at the Allman Arena and travelling to play the Caledonia Corvairs on the road the following night, Nov. 15.

**Yes, it's that time again —
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Pierce MacNeil returns from Prague a more determined dancer

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

After the opportunity to travel to Prague for international competition with Team Canada Dance, Pierce MacNeil has returned to Stratford Dance Co. a more determined tap dancer who wants nothing more than the opportunity to do it all over again next year. The St. Marys resident and District Collegiate and Vocational Institute (DCVI) student is still grinning greatly for the experience.

The competition lasted for five days, and MacNeil danced three of those days in four events. In total there were 1,692 dancers from 21 countries to compete against. The venue, the UNYP Arena, was a large auditorium style arena with bleachers around the perimeter, seven levels high. The crowd in attendance, made up of family, friends and fans, was the largest to date that MacNeil has danced for.

"I wasn't nervous though. Usually before I go on when I am backstage, I'm a little bit nervous, but not there. The floor was slippery so we had to tape our tap-shoes so we didn't slip. It was still a bit slippery though," said MacNeil.

Despite the challenge, Team Canada Dance did remarkably well. Success was within reach with a fifth-place finish as MacNeil danced in the Trio category to "Meet Me At the Roxy." In the Small Group category MacNeil and her fellow dancers performed to the tune "Get Ready"

and came in 11th. In the Formation category the group of 14 performers had a close finish at fourth and finally, in the Production category, the group came in sixth.

"The first one, my trio, was not very good, because it was my first time on stage and I was a bit nervous. I did slip a couple times, but it was fine, we made it through to semis," said MacNeil.

Within each category the dancers would perform their routine, and the teams are narrowed down to twelve. Then they dance the same routine again in semi-finals where again the teams are narrowed down for finals.

"There was a couple of really good countries: Mexico and the U.S.A. For my age group (the team from) U.S.A. were pretty good. They got first, second and third in the Trio category. Mexico was also really awesome. They don't bring a lot (of people) but they bring good skills," said MacNeil.

"One of the really cool things for the kids that were in Formation, there was a female soloist and a male soloist from Canada that made it to the finals," added proud mother Stacy MacNeil. "Those two kids also did a duet and made it to the finals, and also Pierce's Trio made it to finals so out of all of the Canadian kids (about 100), those five made it to finals for solo, duet and Trio. So, it was really cool that Pierce was one of them."

Dancing in the finals was a different experience because the arena was packed, but Pierce felt prepared for

CONTINUED TO PAGE 19



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Pierce MacNeil readies herself to tap-dance her heart out at the World Championships in Prague.



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2025 living wage is \$24.60 – up 6.7% from last year

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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Fueled by ever-rising costs, the 2025 living wage for the Perth-Huron region is up 6.7 per cent from last year, \$24.60 per hour.

That statistic is according to the Unit-

ed Way Perth-Huron, which released the findings reached by it and the Ontario Living Wage Network on social media on Nov. 10.

“A living wage is the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and participate in their community,” a media release from the Ontario

Living Wage Network stated. “The Ontario Living Wage Network’s 2025 calculations show an average living wage increase across our 10 regions of 5.3 per cent, reflecting a higher increase compared to the 2024 rate announcement last year. This is reflective of increased accuracy of rental costs being included in the

calculation.”

The Bruce Grey Huron Perth Simcoe region is the highest in the province outside of the Greater Toronto Area, which sits at \$27.20. Nearby, the Dufferin Guelph Wellington Waterloo region sits at \$23 and the London Elgin Oxford region sits at \$21.05.

Warm, cozy and a little bit cheeky: *Giggle Bells* brings improv joy to Stratford

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

When the theatre lights dim and the holiday lights start to glow across Stratford, a different kind of show takes centre stage – one filled with laughter, quick wit and just the right amount of festive mischief. *Giggle Bells*, a holiday-themed improv show created by longtime friends and performers Rebecca Northan and Kevin Kruchkywich, returns to Brch & Wyn this November and December for a series of unscripted, unpredictable nights of comedy.

“Kevin and I have been friends for 35 years,” Northan laughs. “It’s kind of a gift that we give to each other ... It’s the night

of the week that we look forward to the most at this time of year.”

The duo’s performances – affectionately dubbed comedy by locals, for locals – have become a kind of off-season tradition. While the Stratford Festival takes its winter pause, *Giggle Bells* fills the gap with spontaneous storytelling and character-driven hilarity.

Unlike a typical comedy night or theatre performance, nothing about *Giggle Bells* is rehearsed. Each 75-minute show unfolds in real time, shaped entirely by the chemistry between Northan and Kruchkywich. “We don’t script anything, and we don’t plan the story ahead,” says Northan. “We’re improvising a play as we go – with a beginning,

middle and end. Sometimes we surprise the audience, but mostly we surprise each other.”

The atmosphere at Brch & Wyn, the downtown Stratford venue that hosts the shows, adds another layer of charm. “It’s warm and cozy – the food is amazing, and Johnny, the owner, has an incredible wine list,” Northan says. “People come for dinner, stay for the show, and it becomes this intimate, community-driven night. It’s like a warm, cozy winter giggle festival.”

The audience has grown so much that seats often fill up fast. “Last time we had to turn people away,” Northan admits. “So come early – if you roll in at 10 to seven, you might end up standing.”

Tickets are just \$20 cash – but there’s a twist. “Act one is free,” Northan illuminated. “If you liked it, you pay at intermission to see act two. If not, you can leave. No hard feelings!”

“The show is best suited for adults, anyone who loves theatre, comedy or just a good laugh,” Northan says. “It’s definitely not a family show, though older teens would be fine in the audience.”

Mark your calendars for a night filled with laughter and bells. *Giggle Bells* runs Nov. 7, 14 and 21, and Dec. 3, 4, 5, 17, 18 and 19 at Brch and Wyn. Seating is first-come, first-served, so early arrivals are encouraged – ideally with a glass of wine in hand.

Pierce MacNeil returns from Prague a more determined dancer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

the competition.

“The studio that we trained at mostly, it is called Access, the one room is really slippery so that helped prepare us for the slippery stage. It was actually less slippery than the floor at Access so it did feel a lot better to dance on,” said MacNeil.

The experience performing on the world stage is one that will not soon be forgotten. Her favourite part of the trip, aside from dancing, was having the opportunity to meet so many new people and network. She also enjoyed the sightseeing that she and her family who accompanied her did.

“We did two full days, we went a day early and stayed a day later, two days of just us going sightseeing. We went to the Prague Castle, the John Lennon Wall, the Charleston Bridge, the boat cruise that the majority of the team came on, the astronomical clock which is right in old town

Prague. We got to walk along cobblestone streets, it was really beautiful there. Obviously, we went for the dance, but we made it a family vacation too,” said Stacey.

In any experience, there are lessons learned. For Pierce, she knows she has to work hard and practice outside of rehearsal. “You also have to be patient, because when you are learning it, it is really hard as you learn (steps) fast. I learned a lot of new steps which is a lot harder to get into your brain than older steps,” said MacNeil.

With the growth that she experienced since the summer and confidence in her improvement, she has stepped up her game. She looks forward to the next year where now she will age into the next group of dancers. There were some on this year’s Junior Team that she connected with and looked up to. And now, her little nine-year-old sister Neve, who also dances, wants to compete on the world stage as well.



Stratford Branch 008

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

The Branch Chaplain can provide Mental and Moral support. Veterans and spouses are entitled to CF1 cards which provide discounts at various locations. Veterans are also entitled to an identification card “NDI75” which can be used to indicate that they have served.

**Please contact Branch 8 - 519-271-4540
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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Head to Agora Gallery this weekend to attend the opening of **KIM WILKIE**, a self-titled exhibition which celebrates the artist's recent explorations in painting, textile and sculpture. **KIM WILKIE** has its opening night Nov. 15, 7-9 p.m. and will be on display until Dec. 14.



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Here For Now Theatre Review: Jessica B. Hill is a one-woman whirlwind as she explores universal chaos in *Pandora*

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Whether she was set up by the gods as a scapegoat for all things chaotic or curiosity got the better of her, Pandora was always going to open that box, allegedly unleashing all the evils of mankind.

In *Pandora*, the first-ever production to be staged as part of a winter season for Here For Now Theatre, the play's writer and sole actor, Jessica B. Hill as Pandora, takes the audience on a wild ride through space and time, exploring the juxtaposition between order and disorder in the universe, and how human history is dictated by cause and effect as well as what seems like random chance, all in search of a grand unifying theory of everything.

While on a macro scale, the universe seems to follow the rules of physics, Hill takes her audiences on a philosophical dive into the concept of quantum entanglement – a fundamental phenomenon in quantum physics where particles on a microscopic scale become interconnected, such that the state of one particle instantly influences the state of another, regardless of the distance separating them.

And she extends that concept to how people influence one another; how someone in



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

Jessica B. Hill as Pandora in Here For Now Theatre's 2025 winter-season production of *Pandora*.

one place or time can have untold impacts on people on the other side of the globe or thousands of years later, despite never physically coming in contact with one another.

Through stories from our collective history that Pandora witnessed first-hand, having been cursed by the gods to watch the chaos she unleashed, backed by stunning

visuals projected onto a simple backdrop, or illuminated from behind it – the only set piece in this production aside from Pandora's Box itself – and underscored by an ethereal soundscape, Hill's tireless monologue poses question after question about humankind's innate need to explore the unknown, regardless of whatever that unknown might unleash.

Pandora also questions her own role in history. Is she truly to blame for all things bad in the world, from genetic baldness and daily traffic congestion to the development of the atomic bomb and humankind's scientific curiosity that could one day consume us all? And is there a way she can make it right?

Having admired Hill's performances in recent productions at the Stratford Festival like *Sense and Sensibility* and *As You Like It*, I can safely say this production is an opportunity to see the actor and writer in an entirely different light. She's funny, she engages with the audience and she tells Pandora's stories in such a way that takes those of us lucky enough to hear them to disparate places and times without having to rely on extravagant costumes and sets.

Sitting in Here For Now Theatre's small, black-box theatre, it felt as though Pandora had gathered us all, there and then, for a reason. Was it to be entertained or was it so we could experience something together that will never again repeat itself exactly as it did on opening night?

Personally, I got both out of this play, and I highly recommend you go see it before it closes so you can too.

Pandora runs at Here For Now Theatre (24 St. Andrew St.) until Nov. 16.



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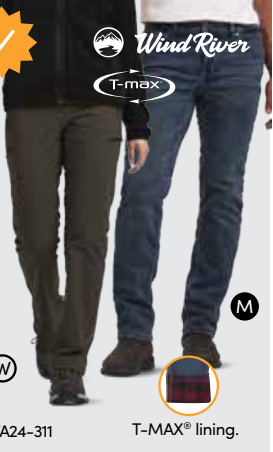
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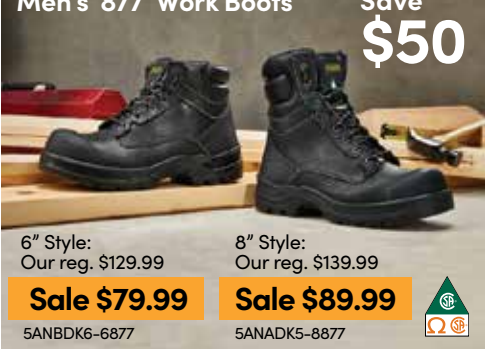
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Brittlestar brings laughter home with Northern Wit: Comedy as the Canadian Shield

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

On Friday, Nov. 28, from 7-9:30 p.m. at the Stratford City Hall auditorium, the gloves come off and the punchlines land in this one-night, hilarious evening stacked with comedic fame.

In the first set, host Stewart Reynolds – famously known as Brittlestar – welcomes award-winning comedian Martha Chaves with a no-holds-barred set of satire, storytelling and gut-busting honesty, riffing on clichés, cultural identity and the glorious contradictions of Canadian life.

“Martha is fantastic,” said Reynolds, who is looking forward to performing in his hometown, though he admits it’s slightly intimidating.

“Doing any sort of performance in your hometown is daunting and challenging, because you can’t just put on the persona of the stage – the persona that you have when you grab the microphone and start talking to people – because you’re really just that guy, the same one that they saw at Sobeys earlier that day.”

In the second set, audience members will join CBC Ideas host Nahlah Ayed in conversation with Chaves, Deb McGrath and Reynolds for a sharp, hilarious and thought-provoking discussion on how comedy shapes who we are: what satire can reveal about Canada, how comedians complicate our national myths and why laughing at ourselves is so quintessentially Canadian.

“We wanted a night where Canada could look in the mirror and not flinch: first through Martha Chaves’ fearless stand-up, then through a live CBC Ideas con-

versation,” said Mark Rosenfeld, founding director of the Provocation Ideas Festival. “In a small city like Stratford, that mix of laughter and reflection feels exactly right – intimate, honest and unexpectedly revealing.”

The evening is expected to be filled with belly laughs for all those in attendance, and Rosenfeld says he hopes people walk away with memories that will last.

“I want the audience to take away three things: first, that we recognized ourselves – our myths, contradictions and quirks – and laughed together,” he said. “Second, that satire isn’t just snark; it’s a way to tell the truth kindly and clearly. And third, that Stratford can host national-calibre conversations with a neighbourly feel. If people leave saying, ‘I laughed hard – and I’m still thinking about it,’ we’ve done our job.”

For those interested in attending the star-packed performance, Reynolds said he believes everyone who walks through the door will leave feeling like they love Canada just a little bit more than they already did.

“I think it’s going to be great,” he said. “My hope is that people who attend are going to really enjoy themselves – that’ll be inevitable. I think if you’re there, you’re going to have an amazing time, you’re going to be entertained, and you’re also going to feel better about being Canadian and better about being a smart-ass as well.”

Presented in partnership with CBC Ideas and Destination Stratford as part of the Provocation Ideas Festival.

Seats are limited. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/52a7p2t9> for more information.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Brittlestar hits the stage for a jam packed night of comedy this month

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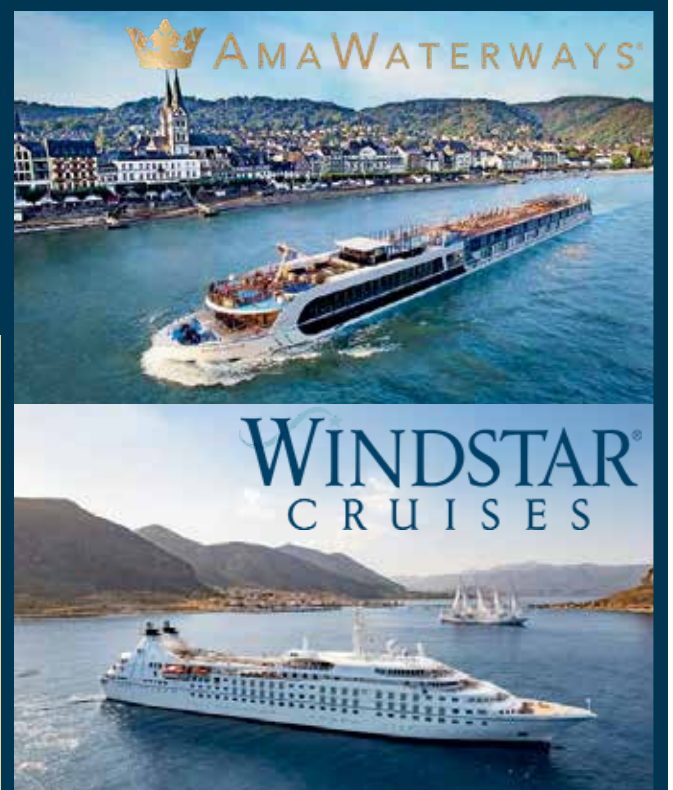
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Roots Ramble Concert Series continues with music stars Michelle Willis and Lori Cullen

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Barry James Payne and String Bone Presents!, in association with OnRush Music Festival, are once again bringing world class musicians to Stratford for an intimate concert Nov. 21 at Revival House.

Michelle Willis and Lori Cullen have just recently embarked on a tour called the “Winter Amity Tour” with Stratford the second stop of ten dates.

Willis is a Scottish-born, Canadian-raised singer/songwriter that most notably worked with the late David Crosby for 10 years as his writing partner and bandmate. She was last in Stratford for the extraordinary performance of “The Songs of Nick Drake” last year at Copperlight. It was there where Payne, who also performed, met Willis and talked about performing again here in town.

Cullen is a Canadian singer/songwriter that Stratford ought to be familiar with already, as she has performed here in the past where she shared the stage with songwriting sensation Ron Sexsmith at Tom Patterson Theatre for his “Ron at 60” celebration.

“Stratford holds a special place in my heart. It’s the only place I’ve ever seriously considered moving to outside of Toronto. My friend and collaborator Ron Sexsmith and his partner Colleen have introduced me to Stratford’s lively and welcoming social scene,” wrote Cullen in an email.

It has often been said that Stratford

punches above its weight artistically and musically and these two coming to town for a one-night performance on their tour reinforces the sentiment.

“Another Stratford favourite, Aaron Davis, will be my special guest on Nov. 21. We’ve played the Revival House before, and I can’t wait to share the stage with him again in this beautiful town I love so much. Michelle and I are really looking forward to showing you what we do best and hope you can join us,” added Cullen. Davis was a founding member of the Holly Cole Trio.

The evening will feature the two musicians each performing a set while supporting the other. The audience can expect music in the veins of sultry jazz, pop and folk from their respective new albums. David Crosby has said that Willis is one of the best singers he has ever heard, which puts her in fine company given he is of the generation of Aretha Franklin, Joni Mitchell and Bonnie Raitt.

“Lori and I have both been writing and releasing a lot of music in the last few years. We’re fans of each other’s music as much as we are friends. I’m so glad to perform these songs together across our home province, from great venues like Revival House to the eastbound living rooms of music lovers along the way towards Montreal in Quebec. It’s going to be gorgeous,” wrote Willis in an email.

The concert takes place Nov. 21 at 8 p.m. at Revival House. Tickets can be purchased for \$35 by visiting stringbone.ca/the-roots-ramble.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Michelle Willis and Lori Cullen join forces for the Winter Amity Tour coming to Stratford Nov. 21 at Revival House.

Celebrate the spirit of the season when Stratford Concert Choir presents ‘Christmas in Canada’

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Stratford Concert Choir (SCC) invites the public to join them in a celebration of the season as they present the “Christmas in Canada” concert Nov. 29 at St. James Anglican Church beginning at 7:30 p.m.

The spirit of Christmas will come alive with the wonderful concept of combining song with spoken word. The concert is framed around the book, *Sleds, Sleighs, and Snow: A Canadian Christmas Carol* by Anne Templeman-Kluit and will feature readings by well known voices of Stratford: author and musician Kelly Walker, former CBC broadcaster Judy Maddren and Blythe playwright Duncan McGregor.

Artistic director Alexander Cann came across the book about 10 years ago while always on the lookout for new and inventive ways to program Christmas concerts.

“I was looking for something that

would enliven a Christmas program or connect with a Christmas choral concert audience today. That’s why it really caught my attention,” said Cann in a release.

Christine Dowdell is currently in her fourteenth season with the choir of 45 voices. In the context of Christmas, she believes this is the first time that spoken word unites with the choir.

“I think it’s a really exciting project because the stories contained in that book are amazing with different snippets from people’s lives from all over the country. That will make it very, very special and we have lovely people coming to read,” said Dowdell.

Brad Stager is a retired schoolteacher who joined the choir in the winter of 2021. As a former teacher, he found the concept of incorporating the spoken word with song intriguing.

“I think that’s great, that’s something I have always loved delving into, the story behind music. Stories and music are really inspiring,” said Stager.

The book gathered a diverse collection of stories, from poems, newspaper reports and personal experiences, to paint a picture of the Christmas experience across Canada. The stories span 400 years of Canadian, French, Indigenous culture. Passages from the book will be intertwined with song to weave a story of the history of Canada with the tradition of carol singing.

The music features a sequence of acapella arrangements by well-known Canadian conductor and composer Jon Washburn and well as classics by other great Canadian composers like Healy Willan, Mark Sirett and Derek Holman. Organist Stephen Boda and pianist Paula Ortelli will accompany the choir and audience in many Christmas favourites.

“I think Mark Sirett’s ‘Love Came Down at Christmas’ is a favourite. I think the words are just beautiful because it’s just showing the love that came in Jesus for us and God’s love in sending him to us. The tune of it, the melody is just beautiful,” said Dowdell.

This concert will appeal to anyone of any walk and stage of life, families, young and old.

“There will be something for everyone to identify with. Families can come and learn and join in the songs, there are some traditional ones and familiar ones,” said Dowdell.

“Come in with an open mind and just sit and take it all in with your ears and mind. I hope they walk out saying it’s a beautiful show. I’m looking forward to it. Getting to that dress rehearsal week and getting to hear the readings as well will be really cool,” said Stager.

Dowdell too hopes the audience will start their Christmas season with a variety of different music and songs, some that they will know very well, and others may be something they never thought of doing that way before.

Tickets can be purchased at stratford-concertchoir.org, in person at Blowes Stationary or at the door of St. James Anglican Church, Nov. 29. The concert starts at 7:30 p.m.

Josh Bean is first local artist highlighted at Lights On

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Now entering its sixth year, the multi-award-winning Lights On Stratford annual winter festival will once again transform Stratford's heritage downtown and park system with luminous art and interactive light installations over the course of six weekends in the darkest and coldest part of the year.

In addition to the recently announced premieres of CHRONOHARP in Market Square and BIRDS OF A FEATHER on Tom Patterson Island, Lights On Stratford is excited to announce a new Local Artist Spotlight series hosted at the Destination Stratford Welcome Centre.

"An important part of our vision for Lights On Stratford is to celebrate our community's creativity as well as to elevate and support light artists within Canada," said Zac Gribble, executive director of Destination Stratford. "We are thrilled to launch the Local Artist Spotlight series this winter that will highlight local artist Josh Bean with the premiere of WAYFINDING."

WAYFINDING is an immersive installation about moving through darkness – not as something to fear, but as an opportunity for reflection. Inspired by the quiet lives of moths, and the power of the moon, it reflects on the ways we grow and change.

Moths aren't simply drawn to light; they're guided by it. They evolved to navigate by the moon, keeping its glow over their backs to stay oriented in the dark. Artificial lights disrupt this ancient instinct, pulling them off course. Yet the moon remains their compass.

That quiet persistence – the instinct to trust, adapt and continue – mirrors the moon's own cycle of renewal, and the resilience found in those who navigate profound change, illness, and disability.

Together, the moth and the moon are symbols of intuition, transformation, and renewal – one a seeker, the other a steady guide. Across spiritual traditions – from astrology to tarot – they appear as companions in the journey through darkness and into rebirth.

Created by Planet of the Apiaries, an artist collective exploring the intersections of nature, symbolism and lived experience, WAYFINDING invites a deeper kinship with the humble moth, the moon and the



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford-based artist Josh Bean constructs the interactive moon component of WAYFINDING. The art exhibit highlighting the relationship between moths and the moon is the newest announced exhibit in this year's Lights On Stratford winter festival – and Bean is the first local artist featured.

world around you.

"Having WAYFINDING debut here in Stratford carries a special kind of weight," said Bean, a Stratford-based artist and member of the Planet of the Apiaries artist collective. "I moved here five years ago, just before becoming severely ill with Long COVID, and for a long time my world was very small. This piece marks my return to creativity and to community – under the same winter lights I once only watched from afar. It's not just a sculpture; it's a symbol of renewal, and of finding my way back into the world."

At the centre of WAYFINDING are two celestial companions – a wooden moth and its luminous moon. The moth rests on a wooden base, its body capable of slowly turning 270 degrees and tilting 45 degrees

in graceful arcs, as though searching for its guiding light. The moon, faceted with 92 geometric cells, glows softly in response to touch. Eighty of these can be awakened by the audience, each one holding light, sound and motion within its surface.

"This piece began as a small idea – a single moth – something I could do myself," said Bean. "I work out of a makerspace in Kitchener called Kwartzlab. And it's a really collaborative space. What started as sketches and late-night conversations became a full collaboration between artists, engineers and friends. As a disabled artist I'm still quite limited in what I can do physically. So I rely heavily on the other members of the collective to complete a project like this. It's a reflection of what happens when people share curiosity and

creativity freely – how collective making can turn an idea into something more."

Lights On Stratford is free to the public and set to launch on Dec. 12 when interactive displays will light up nightly Thursday through Sunday from 5-10 p.m. Lights On Stratford runs until Jan. 18.

The Lights On Stratford 2025/26 theme is RADIANCE. Officially defined as a "type of glowing: either from a light source like the sun or a healthy, beaming person," event organizers extend the concept of radiance to reflect a community that comes together on a winter's night to celebrate art and light.

Visit lightsonstratford.ca for more details on the annual festival and planetoftheapiaries.ca for more information on WAYFINDING.

SLOW DISSOLVE

(on the occasion of Stratford Film Festival's closing night)

The films have done
their work again

blown dust off
the bones of wonder,
brought anguish to its knees,
let desire walk barefoot
through our blood.

That screen is a sky
torn open, sometimes

the weakened seam that
lets our dreams escape,
sometimes the wound through
which pours the ashes
of the human soul.

Cinema remembers for us
the interiors we might
otherwise forget.
Only the sighing canisters
know the secrets
of the slow reveal,
the 24 frames per second
scalpel that widens hearts
and lets us walk together,

hands clasped,
into amazement.

And so tonight we gather
before the slow dissolve,
the final frame
that will embrace us all
in the magic
of its illumination.

We came here as ourselves,
eager to believe
or to abandon logic,
yet leave a part of all
that we have seen,

each of us a fragment
of that last freeze frame
wedge of memory
that lets us slip homeward
into the night,

maybe swingin' on
a lamppost here and there

finding time for a little
dance number

maybe even a little
singin' in the rain.

-- David Stones, Stratford poet laureate



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- Support claim operations during auto adjuster absences or times of increased workload.

What You Bring to the Table (Our Ideal Candidate Profile):

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Education & Designations:

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The Perks & Rewards (What We Offer):

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Philanthropist donates quarter of a million dollars for humane society's Better Together Campaign

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo & Stratford Perth (HSKWSP) is thrilled to announce a generous \$250,000 contribution from philanthropist Mike Schout, in support of the Better Together campaign. In recognition of this remarkable investment, the organization's Community Room will be named in honour of his beloved dog as the Grace Mae Schout Outreach Room.

Schout shared that his motivation stems from a desire to invest in the future of the community.

"The humane society is a vital community asset — neither government-funded nor for-profit — and I believe those who can make a positive difference should," Schout is quoted in a media release. "This is my way of helping ensure the humane society's work continues to thrive for generations to come."

Schout was particularly inspired by the scope of HSKWSP's programs, which reach far beyond animal sheltering.

"I was impressed by how much the or-

ganization does for both animals and people, from outreach and medical services to supporting animals who are healing and waiting for their forever families," he said. "It's so much more than just a shelter."

HSKWSP CEO, Victoria Baby, expressed deep appreciation for Schout's kindness and vision.

"This gift represents true community spirit," said Baby. "Naming the Gracie Mae Schout Outreach Room is a heartfelt tribute that reflects the powerful bond between people and their pets. Mike's investment will have a lasting impact on the lives of countless animals and families in our region."

The Better Together Campaign is dedicated to ensuring that every pet and family receives the support they need, specifically going towards a new Community Outreach Centre that will house office space, a pet pantry, space for pet wellness education, training programs, adoption events and summer camps.

As of publication, over \$4.3 million has been raised towards its \$6 million goal.

To learn more or to get involved, visit www.kwsphumane.ca/better-together.

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Opinions

Stratford's ideal neighbourhood



BRUCE WHITAKER

Times Columnist

After two years of deliberations, the ad hoc Grand Trunk renewal committee presented its findings to Stratford city council. While some progress was made, particularly in engaging the local community, the overall report was disappointing, due in part to a weak mandate from the city that limited meaningful advancement.

As a city with one of Ontario's oldest populations, attracting

young residents is essential, not just to fill jobs in restaurants, healthcare and entertainment, but to infuse our community with energy and vitality. Young people bring the innovation and dynamism that transform a good city into a great one.

Equally important is creating diverse, affordable housing options. Building upward rather than outward can help meet housing demands without driving up costs. A mix of one- to four-bedroom units will accommodate families as they grow, allowing residents to stay in the same neighbourhood over time.

Why not turn the Cooper site into a forward-thinking, 21st-century neighbourhood? Imagine a lively community that balances current needs with future growth, an authentic live-work-play environment. Part of the existing Cooper building could become office space for a tech firm, while high-density residential towers could be con-

structed nearby.

We should also take into consideration our experiences from other developments. The Queensland Condominium project, for example, missed the opportunity for community-building by lacking retail spaces and green areas, forcing residents to travel for services and leisure. Effective neighbourhoods should offer quick, walkable access to shops, parks and community centres promoting activity, health and social engagement.

Services like grocery stores, cafés and car-sharing facilities should be integrated so residents can access essentials without leaving the neighbourhood. A well-designed community fosters more than just buildings; it cultivates connections and shared purpose. Picture ground-floor units occupied by seniors, above them families, and on the upper floors, young professionals or students. Strong

neighbourhoods are built on a foundation of trust, cooperation and mutual support, values that attract investment and create a sense of security and belonging.

A great neighbourhood is diverse, inclusive and welcoming to people of all backgrounds and income levels. Pedestrian and bike-friendly designs reduce emissions and boost sustainability. Developing neighbourhoods with unique identity through heritage preservation, vibrant social scenes or local character helps residents feel truly at home.

To succeed, we must be realistic about our financial limitations. Investments should be fiscally responsible and revenue-generating, supporting community amenities without burdening city resources. With careful planning, recreational facilities including a swimming pool can be added gradually as the project becomes sustainable.

Where do we begin? By

bringing in passionate partners committed to community development. An innovative, reputable developer experienced in sustainable and community-oriented projects and willing to assume financial risk will be essential. Perhaps, the University of Waterloo, already situated on-site, can serve as a vital collaborator, either as a contractor or as an academic advisor. Engaging departments of architecture, engineering, urban design and sociology can help craft a neighbourhood model for other small cities to emulate.

Moving forward, the key is to focus on our core needs: affordable housing, opportunities for young workers and support for families. With the right partners and a clear strategy, we can transform the Cooper site into a model neighbourhood, one that's sustainable, vibrant and inclusive, making our city a better place to live today and into the future.

Repeal Bill 5, part four: Municipalities



MARK HUNTER

Guest Columnist

I have been asked to comment on Bill 5 from a municipal perspective. Bill 5 paved the way for the Special Economic Zones Act which allows many current rules to be set aside so that certain "designated" projects can be completed faster. In the municipal context, the act allows cabinet to override municipal bylaws (including official plans) which impede the designated project. There is little guidance as to which projects may be designated but it seems to be anything the province thinks is important enough to justify setting the normal rules aside.

The act is a response to the

economic needs of our province which have shifted significantly in response to increased U.S. protectionism. It is also a response to public pressure to act quickly. To evaluate whether it is a good response, I will give some background information.

Government moves at a very slow pace. We have public consultations, three readings of bills (or bylaws), and, at the federal level, Senate review. Even when you rush decisions, this process just takes time. It's good to remember that government processes are slow by design. Think of the epithet for the Senate, the institution of "sober second thought." We need this process to be deliberate because we elect our leaders from within our communities – they are our neighbours. Some bring skills to the role while others may just be good representatives of their community. Even if some are subject matter experts, none can be expert in every area of government concern. We don't need them to be experts. We hire subject matter experts who provide their professional recommendations to the elected body. That body then reviews the recom-

mendations and makes community-based policy by complete or partial acceptance or by an outright rejection of the recommendations. This is a simplification of what can be a complex process, but good decisions just take time. We need the debate between leaders who collectively possess more experience than any one of them alone. We also need to let our experts inform our decisions.

This slow, deliberate process conflicts with our current culture of expecting immediate gratification. Politicians face real pressure to act quickly. Our premier has business skills built in a private company. Decisions can be made very quickly in private business. A private business might take one day to fully execute a decision whereas the same decision in government might take weeks.

There are three reasons for this. First, the private business owner's opinion is the only relevant consideration. Second, that owner is the only one who suffers the loss for wrong decisions. Last, and most important, successful business owners are experts in their business. They typically

have many years of experience shaping their decisions. Even when they aren't conscious of its impact, that experience usually results in better outcomes. People with this background are used to having full control and are good at making quick decisions. It's an easy transition to take that approach to government decisions. In my opinion, that can be a mistake. It's not the politician's money at stake, there is a breadth of opinion to consider and no single politician can be expert at everything. We need to rely on others.

Another factor worth consideration is the party system in Ontario. All parties restrict free votes to some extent. In other words, members must vote with the leader of the party or risk being removed from the party. This has an insulating effect from full debate and gives the party leader complete control.

I believe that Bill 5 is the result of the above. We have a premier who is used to having full control and making quick decisions. He is responding to a real need in our province and to public pressure to act quickly. In my opinion, legislation designed to im-

prove the speed of decisions is a laudable goal, but we need some well-thought guardrails to be in place. The Special Economic Zones Act mentions the need for such guardrails but is short on details. It seems that the motivation from the legislature was to get something done quickly and sort the details later.

If we make only good decisions, speed is good. If we make poor decisions, speed is irrelevant at best. I argue that slow, good decisions are better than fast wrong ones. I support the desire to improve efficiency, but we needed to take more time deliberating the path to that efficiency. If the decisions made are wrong, it is all of us who will pay the bill.

For more information visit repealbill5.ca.

Submitted by Repeal Bill 5, a local coalition of advocates dedicated to repealing the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, on behalf of Mark Hunter. Hunter is in-house counsel for Hunter Steel Sales and a Stratford city councillor. He has a background in corporate law and over two decades of leadership in the steel industry.

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Opinions

How to weather the storms of life



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

Life is rarely a smooth and predictable journey. Just when we begin to find our footing, something shifts – a sudden illness, a fractured relationship, an unexpected loss or a disappointment that shakes our confidence. In those moments, it can feel as though the ground has disappeared beneath our feet.

Yet, these very moments also offer us the chance to discover the depth of our resilience and the strength of our spirit. The storms of life are not punishments; they are invitations to grow, to trust and to become more compassionate toward

ourselves and others.

Here are a few ways to weather the storms we face in our daily lives with grace and resilience.

1. Accept what you can't control

The first step in weathering any storm is to recognize what is – and isn't – within your control. Much of our suffering stems from trying to resist what is happening or wishing life were different. Acceptance is not the same as resignation; it's the courage to face reality as it is. When we stop fighting the uncontrollable, we free up the energy to respond wisely rather than react impulsively.

Try saying to yourself, "This is hard, but I can handle it." By naming your reality and affirming your strength, you begin to find calm in the chaos. Acceptance opens the door to peace and the possibility of change.

2. Anchor yourself in faith and values

When the winds howl, we need something strong to hold on to. For many, that anchor is faith – whether in God, the universe or the belief that every challenge has purpose and

meaning. For others, it may be a commitment to deeply held values such as compassion, honesty or perseverance.

Ask yourself: What do I stand for, even when life feels unstable? Living in alignment with your values offers direction when everything else seems uncertain. Faith and integrity provide the inner compass that keeps you from drifting too far from your true self.

3. Reach out – don't weather it alone

Storms can make us feel isolated, but connection is often the lifeline that pulls us through. It takes courage to admit when we need help, but no one is meant to navigate life's hardest moments alone. Talk to a trusted friend, family member, counselor or faith leader. Sharing your fears or pain doesn't make you weak; it makes you human.

Even simple acts of kindness, such as sending a message, joining a support group or volunteering, can remind us that we are part of something larger. When we reach out, we find not only support but also strength.

4. Practice stillness and self-care

Amid chaos, it's vital to create moments of calm. Take time each day to breathe, walk, meditate or simply sit in silence. Stillness doesn't mean inactivity. Instead, it's about centering yourself in the eye of the storm.

Caring for your body and mind is an act of resilience. Eat nourishing foods, rest when you can and engage in activities that ground you, such as reading, journaling, listening to music or spending time in nature. These small rituals act as anchors that steady the heart and renew the spirit.

5. Look for the lessons hidden in the rain

Every storm leaves something behind – a broken branch, yes, but also fresh soil where new life can take root. Painful experiences often teach us what comfort never could. They build compassion, humility and strength.

After the storm passes, take time to reflect: What did this teach me? How did I grow? Sometimes, adversity reveals courage we didn't know we had or helps us see what truly matters. With perspective, even the darkest moments can become

stepping stones toward deeper wisdom and resilience.

6. Remember that no storm lasts forever

When you're in the middle of a storm, it can feel endless. But even the fiercest wind eventually quiets and the sun returns. Life is cyclical, and so are its hardships. Trust that healing will come, even if it's slow.

Remind yourself of past challenges you've survived – times when you thought you'd never make it, yet you did. Each survival story becomes proof of your resilience, a lantern to guide you through the next dark night.

The storms of life test us, but they also refine us. They strip away what's superficial and reveal what's real – our endurance, our capacity to love, our ability to rise again.

So, when the next storm comes, and it will, stand firm. Anchor yourself in faith, reach out for support, nurture your spirit, and remember that even the darkest clouds bring rain to nourish the earth. In time, you will emerge not only intact but transformed, stronger, wiser and more radiant than before.

WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH SHINRIN-YOKU



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

Some days the news is just too much. It calls for my secret weapon: nature. I find a time and a place to go nature-bathing, or Shinrin-Yoku. It is more usually known by the term "forest-bathing," first named in Japan in the early 1980s. In fact, the Japanese characters for the term refer to the forest. The first character is composed of three trees and means "forest," the second character is two trees and refers to the interconnectedness of the forest, and the third character connotes the luxury of being fully engulfed in the abundance

that surrounds you (Julia Plevin, *The Healing Magic of Forest Bathing*, 2019).

Not always having a forest at hand, I often substitute the plants that surround me in my meadow or in my backyard shade garden. Shinrin-Yoku is simply immersing yourself in the forest, or in nature. It can be a walk, it can be a sit, but what it involves is breathing deeply and being aware of the nature around you. It isn't a speed walk; it's a slow walk, a "looking" walk, a mindful walk.

It could be a prescription for reducing stress and depression, lowering heart rate and boosting the immune system! Scientists have actually found a beneficial substance that comes from leaves, phytoncides, oils exuded by certain trees and plants. Phytoncides are compounds to protect trees and plants from insects and fungi. When inhaled by humans, they can improve the immune system, reduce stress by lowering cortisol levels and improve mood and sleep. The National Institute of Health has identified phytoncides as the

chief mechanism for the multiple benefits of Shinrin-Yoku.

A neighbour who grew up in Japan told me that there is a special reverence for nature in Japan, where forest-bathing is part of the culture. She told me that certain beliefs in Japan held that elements of nature (Kami) were considered as gods and honoured in shrines.

Our CFUW climate group enjoyed a walk in a beautiful area designed to provide storm ponds to protect against flooding. Storm ponds work to absorb excess water in major storms and are kept healthy much as wetlands are. They are surrounded by native plants that in turn are inhabited by native insects, turtles, frogs, birds and even otters.

Because it was autumn, we were surrounded by native plants in seed. We identified goldenrod, black-eyed Susan, Joe Pyeweed, asters, native grasses, cattails and boneset. A flock of seedeaters were flying in all directions, feasting on nature's bounty or perhaps preparing for migration. Native trees had also been placed throughout the area,

to help hold the soil. There were oak trees, among others, the stars of native trees, home to over 300 native insects!

The T.J. Dolan Trail is another place in Stratford that offers forest-bathing. With the natural growth beneath the trees, it offers much to look at and is home to many native species of wildlife. We should all be grateful to the ecological working group of the City of Stratford's energy and environment committee who have worked hard to remove invasive species from the area. Several non-native plants such as periwinkle have escaped from gardens into the T.J. Dolan. They quickly spread and overwhelmed the native plants needed by birds and insects, and to form a healthy environment for the trees and shrubs.

Don't let the daily news get you down. We need to be aware of the world and all its challenges, but there are definitely times when we need a break. Try Shinrin-Yoku. It's amazing what you can see, and how it takes the news of the day and sends it to a galaxy far, far away – lovely!

UPDATES:

1. Kudos to the leaf heroes, who left their leaves this year! The soil thanks you, the helping insects thank you, and biodiversity thanks you. The leaves will naturally mulch down and add plant-based fertilizer to your lawn (better than a fossil fuel product!).

Be sure to sign up for the rotary event on Saturday, Nov. 29, 1-4 p.m. The ultimate hero of time in nature is coming to Stratford! Adam Shoalts, Canadian explorer, will be describing his time in the wildlands of Canada, and reminding us of how important those spaces are. This would be a wonderful event for all ages! Come and see Canada's Indiana Jones, at the Rotary Centre – for free! The link to the event is, <https://www.zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/wild-places-for-today-and-forever>.

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.

New recycling carts being delivered for new year shift

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Starting Jan. 1, 2026, Ontario will switch to a new Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) recycling system. This means that the companies that make or import products will take full responsibility for collecting, managing and recycling

their packaging materials, rather than the municipality. In other words, the cost and responsibility for recycling will move from municipalities (and taxpayers) to the producers.

This will also see local recycling shift to a cart-based automated collection system, using 360-litre wheeled recycling carts.

The collection contractor, Emterra, has begun delivering those carts in Stratford. Residents should receive one within the next few weeks. The city is asking residents not to set these carts on the curbside until after Dec. 31.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact Emterra at 1-888-597-1541 or email customer-care@emterra.ca

For more information about the recycling changes coming in the new year, visit www.stratford.ca/recycling or circularmaterials.ca/stratford.

The bi-weekly pickup schedule in the city will remain the same. However, pickup will start at 7 a.m. Please have your materials on the curbside ready for collection at this time.

COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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

CROCKINOLE

Every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1-4 p.m.

ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH CHRISTMAS MARKET

Saturday November 15; 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

96 Huron Street, Stratford

Parish hall off of Hibernia Street.

Everything you need to get into the Christmas spirit! Crafts, baking, silent auction and lunch counter. Hope to see you there!

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRE

Friday Nov. 21.

Legion 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford

Doors open at 6 pm, play starts at 6:30 pm. Register your team of 2 people for \$20. Prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place. Call Dave at 519-703-6544, Anne at 519-301-0914 or the Legion at 519-271-4540 to register your team.

EXPERIENCE FANSHAWE AT OPEN HOUSE

All locations are open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, November 29

- Meet faculty and current students from all areas of Fanshawe
- Drop-in and ask about your program interests, career options and becoming a Fanshawe student
- Hear from college experts on student life, admissions, financial aid, and more!

financial aid, and more!

- Explore our campuses at London, Woodstock, Simcoe, St. Thomas, Clinton and Tiverton

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Saturday November 29; 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

St James Anglican Church

41 Mornington Street, Stratford

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Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.
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- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
 - Coming Events Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
 - Coming Events Boxed Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
 - Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

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STRATFORD TIMES

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Stratford Mazda
7-Eleven - Erie St
Joe's Diner
The Urban Barber
Erie Convenience
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Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario
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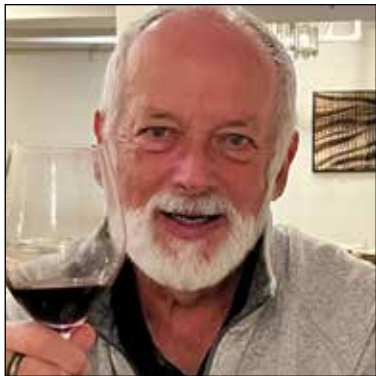
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: You can visit The Roaring Lion any time you like



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

Everyone has been following the story of the huge jewel heist at the Louvre Museum in Paris. I have watched with special interest, relieved that the name, "Knowles," has not appeared among the suspects because we were at the Louvre only a few days before the theft took place. But I'm innocent, I tell you, innocent!

There is something a bit surreal about having been on the spot shortly before such a major crime occurred. As you may know, the authorities have arrested and charged a number of people, but as I write this, they have not recovered any of the missing jewels.

I thought about this a couple of weeks after we were at the Louvre because we were in another great city – this one in Canada – and were enjoying a visit to a significant Canadian work of art, one that was also stolen in recent years (actually, not long after we visited the site) which was found, returned and restored to the spot from which it vanished. And it's an iconic artifact that you can visit, free of charge!

The piece of art? Yousuf Karsh's famous photographic



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Your faithful reporter, entirely innocent at the Louvre.

portrait of Winston Churchill, signed by Karsh, which hangs in Zoe's Lounge in the Chateau Laurier hotel in Ottawa. It's there because Karsh lived and worked at the hotel for 19 years.

The story of this photo is fascinating. In Karsh's own words, "My portrait of Winston Churchill changed my life. I knew after I had taken it that it was an important picture, but I could hardly have dreamed that it would become one of the most widely reproduced images in the history of photography. In 1941, Churchill visited first Washington and then Ottawa. The prime minister, Mackenzie King, invited me to be present. After the electrifying speech, I waited in the Speaker's Chamber where, the evening before, I had set up my lights and camera. The prime minister, arm-in-arm with Churchill and

followed by his entourage, started to lead him into the room. I switched on my floodlights; a surprised Churchill growled, 'What's this, what's this?' No one had the courage to explain. I timorously stepped forward and said, 'Sir, I hope I will be fortunate enough to make a portrait worthy of this historic occasion.' He glanced at me and demanded, 'Why was I not told?' When his entourage began to laugh, this hardly helped matters for me. Churchill lit a fresh cigar, puffed at it with a mischievous air, and then magnanimously relented. 'You may take one.' Churchill's cigar was ever present. I held out an ashtray, but he would not dispose of it. I went back to my camera and made sure that everything was all right technically. I waited; he continued to chomp vigorously at his cigar. I waited.

Then I stepped toward him and, without premeditation, but ever so respectfully, I said, 'Forgive me, sir,' and plucked the cigar out of his mouth. By the time I got back to my camera, he looked so belligerent he could have devoured me. It was at that instant that I took the photograph."

It was Churchill's stern facial expression that caused the portrait to be named "The Roaring Lion." It became an instant symbol of wartime resistance. The autographed photograph – taken in 1941 – was donated to the hotel by Karsh and his wife in 1998, four years before Karsh's death. It hung in the lounge – alongside several other wonderful Karsh portraits, including one of Albert Einstein – until sometime between Dec. 25, 2021, and Jan. 6, 2022.

That's when a thief removed

the photo from the wall on which it hung, replaced it with a reproduction and fled. Remarkably, even though the phony photo was in an entirely different frame, no one noticed the substitution for about eight months! Then, the hunt was on. Eventually, the stolen, signed Karsh found its way into an auction; it was purchased by a collector in Italy, who had no idea it was a hot item. When the story of the theft unfolded, the purchaser returned the photo. It was turned over to Canadian authorities in September 2024. It was back on display at Chateau Laurier in December of last year. The crook was caught, by the way.

It's reported that security has been greatly increased around the photograph. In small measure, when we were there in October, that was obvious because several entrances to the lounge are blocked by planters and furniture, and you can only get in past the greeters' desk. I'm sure there is other, more sophisticated security in place as well.

But the thing I like about all this is, anyone can visit the repatriated Karsh portrait. Just tell the staff member at the host desk you want to see the piece, and you will be welcomed in. And there you will find the Roaring Lion, Winston Churchill, with his personality on full display!

I recommend this short stop as part of any visit to our nation's capital. And it's a lot handier – and less expensive – than going to the Louvre.

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.



Visitors to the Winston Churchill portrait will inevitably see themselves along with Churchill.



Appropriately, the Parliament Hill statue of Sir Wilfrid Laurier overlooks the famous hotel that bears his name.

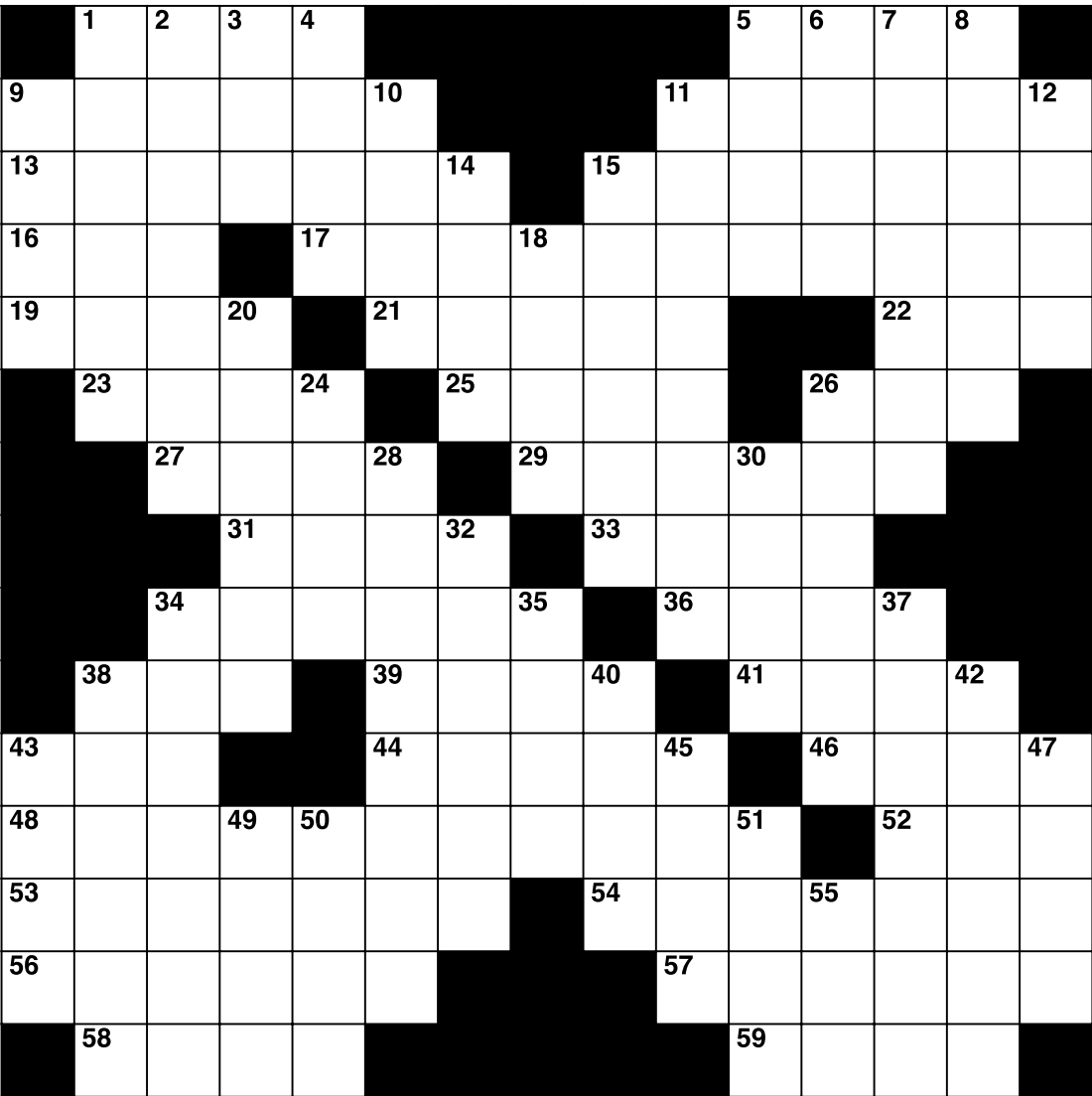
Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Difficult
- 5. Coarsely ground corn
- 9. There's one for the "world"
- 11. Loved Romeo
- 13. Sticky situation
- 15. Pelvic areas
- 16. An informal debt instrument
- 17. Cannot be repaired surgically
- 19. A device attached to a workbench
- 21. Related on the mother's side
- 22. Sound unit
- 23. ___ Sagan, astronomer
- 25. Utah city
- 26. A disappointing effort
- 27. Steal goods during a riot
- 29. Wakes up
- 31. Hair salon service
- 33. Serenaded
- 34. Looked intensely
- 36. U.S. Air Force expert Robert F.
- 38. A type of cast
- 39. One's duty
- 41. Where golfers begin
- 43. Make a mistake
- 44. Semitic sun god
- 46. Ancient Greek City
- 48. Having had the head cut off
- 52. A place to stay
- 53. Unwise
- 54. Most unnatural
- 56. Dennis is a notable one
- 57. Ointments
- 58. Students' exam
- 59. Leaked blood

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Brave
- 2. Act of awakening
- 3. Jest at
- 4. Sandwich store
- 5. Chapter of the Koran
- 6. Dismounted
- 7. Small vehicle
- 8. Irrked
- 9. One who earns by disreputable dealings
- 10. Monetary unit of Samoa
- 11. Long, mournful lamentation
- 12. Weight unit
- 14. Alone, single
- 15. Decreases
- 18. Indicates beside
- 20. Worn by exposure to the weather
- 24. A body of traditions
- 26. College students' ultimate goal
- 28. Amino acid
- 30. Nasal mucus
- 32. US government entity
- 34. Swinish
- 35. Legislative body in Russia
- 37. Grant an exemption to
- 38. Put in advance
- 40. Satisfy
- 42. Felt
- 43. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls
- 45. Witnesses
- 47. Picnic invaders
- 49. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
- 50. Ancient person of Scotland
- 51. Cheerless
- 55. Unwell



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Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 31

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If you are moving or cleaning out stuff please contact me - 519-570-6920.

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New ownership at Shakespeare Brewing Co.

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The Keg Taps and the Craft Brewing Stainless Kettle's ownership was handed over last week to the new owners of the very popular Shakespeare Brewing Company.

With nearly nine years of brewing classic craft ale and lager, the former owners Ayden and Katie Gautreaux have sold their well-established local brewery on Line 34, Shakespeare's Main Street. The new owners are John and Tracey Segeren, who have lived just north of the brewery since 2005.

In an interview with the new owners, John said he has been making wine and beer at home since he was 18 years of age. His wife Tracey grew up in Shakespeare.

They hope to still brew favourites like Grumpy Goat IPA, Shakespeare 75 and Coffee Pale Ale to name only a few. The ingredients will still all be Ontario grown, with a true Ontario craft beer taste. They will also be coming up with some new brews that beer lovers should enjoy.

The Segeren's have three children, with only one still at home.

The Gautreaux family hope many of their loyal patrons will visit the new owners, and wish to thank all their long-time customers over the years for supporting them throughout their journey.

They thank everyone in the Shakespeare area, and hope John and Tracey will be shown the same down home country welcome as they were shown since opening their business almost nine years ago.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Segeren and Gautreaux families meet for the first day of new ownership by the Segeren family, as they take over the Shakespeare Brewing Co. on Shakespeare's Main Street.



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1. Paul
2. Rome, Italy
3. 1987
4. Onomatopoeia
5. 360°
6. 11:00 a.m.
7. Emmet0
8. Amphibians
9. The Treaty of Versailles
10. Procter & Gamble (P&G)

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V	I	S	E		E	N	A	T	E		B	E	L		
C	A	R	L		O	R	E	M		D	U	D			
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	P	E	E	R	E	D		D	O	R					
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