

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

VOLUME 3 • ISSUE 21

MARCH 13, 2026

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Former Norwich retirement home worker pleads guilty to fraud

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

A former employee of the now shuttered Trillium Care Retirement Home in Norwich is scheduled to be sentenced in April.

Court documents obtained by the Echo show Julie Vitias has pleaded guilty to one count of fraud over \$5,000 under Section 380(1)(a) of the Criminal Code. A judge will hand down the sentence, which carries a maximum of 14 years in prison.

There is no mandatory minimum sentence, but other options include probation, a fine, and restitution. The judge will take into consideration the amount of money involved, whether there was a breach of trust, the offender's criminal history, and the impact on victims.

The now 51-year-old Tillsonburg resident is charged with one count of fraud over \$5,000 in February of 2025, following a six-month investigation by the Oxford OPP. Police found 26 people linked to Trillium Care Norwich had lost more than \$190,000.

The Echo reached out to a former employee who talked with other former Trillium staff. We asked what their thoughts were on the upcoming sentencing. One way to describe the answer would be concern.

"As a group, we have spoken about these questions. The first one is a hard one. Yes, we are glad she is answering for what she has done. But how we feel about it will depend on whether she actually has any consequences. The families of our residents deserve answers, and (Vitias) should have to pay them back. The families need closure, and they deserve it."

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10TH ANNUAL OWIN WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Left to right: Czarina Garcia, Ashley Brown, Deidre McDonald, Samantha Ton and Jamie-Lyn Throne at this year's Women's Day event. The annual event celebrates International Women's Day and aims to empower local women in business while giving them an opportunity to network. Story on page 25.

Ingersoll's Sycamore Centre offers spiritual and other supports for those in need

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

A partnership between three organizations in Ingersoll is bringing much-needed support to people experiencing homelessness or other hardships.

The Oxford Church, Sycamore Centre and Thrift Co are working together to help those in need physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.

Sycamore's coordinator, Levi Veldman, said the project was created as a result of a mission from the church.

"They wanted to find a way to put their faith into action, serve the community and fill a gap. We created this space."

The sycamore tree logo was created with purpose, with the olive-green sign representing life, growth and protection.

Veldman worked with the homeless in Laval, Quebec, before coming to Oxford County. His father, Rev. Dr. Meine Veldman, started the church four and a half years ago, and the younger Veldman made the move.

"I had been praying for a long time about combining humanitarian work and helping street people but also being able to share the gospel freely. I prayed about it and moved here."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 5



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Sentencing scheduled for April 14 in Woodstock courtroom

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The statement added the group would not break confidentiality with family members of victimized residents they speak with. They added their biggest fear is Vitias won't get a harsh enough sentence.

"We are concerned about her not actually facing the consequences she deserves. Those families deserve public acknowledgement and a public apology for what she has done to them. She should have to reimburse them. And serve some time. Let her see what it's like to live under someone's control."

According to reporting and allegations from family members of residents, families were instructed to pay monthly fees via e-transfer. Instead of using an official company email, payments were allegedly sent to a personal email associated with Vitias. Families said they did not receive receipts or proper lease documentation.

The Echo was first alerted to potential wrongdoing at the home by Ingersoll resident Miranda Guitard, who is married to the grandson of a former Trillium resident. She said rent payments were made via e-transfer, but the payment was sent to a non-company address.

"I was very specific on every e-transfer I made. I would put a note for all the

dollars I spent. The email she gave me was a Gmail, and I got a security question. She would fill in the answer and accept the money."

She added at that time, any email address of any employee was a name followed by @trilliumcarecommunities.ca.

"I never got any receipts. When I look back at it, holy s@#t on me," added Guitard.

Residents of a long-term care or retirement home are required to get income tax receipts at the end of the year for income tax purposes as well as monthly receipts following payment.

Vitias was removed from her position at the home in August of 2024 when police were notified and opened an investigation. Trillium closed on Nov. 11 of the same year and provided two weeks' notice to 18 residents and families, giving them little time to find new accommodations and jobs. The company sent an email to residents saying a lack of financial resources to sustain daily operations was the cause.

Vitias is expected to be sentenced on April 14 at 9 a.m. in Courtroom 2 at the Woodstock Courthouse at 415 Hunter Street. Several impact statements are expected to be delivered.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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As communities like Woodstock continue to grow and evolve, municipal government plays an important role in shaping everyday life for residents and local businesses alike. From time to time, it is worth reflecting on what effective local governance looks like and what residents should reasonably expect from those elected to serve their community.

Municipal government occupies a unique place in our democracy. It is the level of government closest to residents, where decisions about roads, infrastructure, recreation, housing, and community services directly shape everyday life and the long-term direction of a community.

Because of that proximity, expectations of elected officials are understandably high. Residents expect transparency, accessibility, and engagement from those they elect to serve. In today's world, much of that engagement happens publicly and online, where communication moves quickly and visibility is often immediate.

But visibility and governance are not the same thing.

Effective leadership is often less visible than people might expect. Much of the work happens away from cameras and social media posts — reviewing staff reports, understanding legislation, attending committee meetings, asking informed questions, and carefully weighing decisions that

carry long-term financial and community impacts.

Good governance requires patience and preparation. It also requires collaboration among people who may not always agree but who share responsibility for moving a community forward in a thoughtful and responsible way.

In recent years, municipal politics across many communities has begun to reflect a broader trend seen elsewhere — the growing overlap between governing and campaigning. Public communication is important, and residents deserve to understand what their council is doing. However, when communication becomes indistinguishable from promotion, the focus can gradually shift away from the work itself.

Campaigning is naturally about messaging and persuasion. Governing, by contrast, is about stewardship and responsibility.

Elected officials are entrusted with significant responsibilities such as managing taxpayer dollars, overseeing public services, and making decisions that may affect a community for decades to come. That responsibility calls for thoughtful decision-making grounded in evidence, respect for process, and an understanding that not every decision lends itself to immediate applause or public recognition.

Some of the most important work council members do will never generate headlines or online attention. Compro-

mise rarely does. Careful budgeting seldom trends. Yet those quieter efforts are often what ensure municipal stability, responsible growth, and long-term success.

Strong councils recognize that progress is rarely achieved through individual performance, but through collective responsibility. The role is not simply to be present in the public conversation, but to contribute meaningfully to informed and balanced decisions that serve the broader community.

Residents ultimately judge their local government not by how often it speaks, but by how well it serves.

Here in Woodstock, like many growing communities, council faces important decisions that will shape the city's future for years to come. Thoughtful debate, respectful disagreement, and careful governance are not signs of weakness; they are signs that the democratic process is working as intended.

At the end of the day, municipal office is not about visibility or positioning for the next election. It is about serving the people who fund and rely on local government every day — the taxpayers they are elected to serve.

Wes Mazur
Woodstock

IT'S TIME TO STOP DONATING TO THE WOODSTOCK HOSPITAL

The time has come for people to stop donating to Woodstock Hospital until they rein in their obscene remuneration, cash grabs and only cutting costs at the bottom.

In January, my wife was taken by ambulance to Woodstock Hospital because of near-fatal blood clots in her lungs.

While my wife received exemplary care from the staff and the food was surprisingly edible, the ever-present extortion for the "privilege" of being ambulated and cost cutting was there.

That \$45 gouging for being ambulated when it is Oxford County that incurs the costs which are paid for through our property taxes is irksome. Overcharging such as this hurts those who are most vulnerable.

Now Woodstock Hospital is wringing everyone who parks on hospital property for \$4.00.

The majority of users of medical services are seniors;

the vast majority are on fixed incomes and multiple appointments each week are the norm. So that \$4 each time over a year is a considerable amount.

My wife, who is a Type 2 diabetic, was in the ER, later ICU and CCU, when her sugars dropped and she needed something to eat immediately to prevent diabetic shock, the staff had to run around to find my wife something to eat because there was nothing in the ER fridge for an issue such as this.

People who are diabetic, Type 1, Type 2, or brittle, come into the hospital all the time Woodstock Hospital has nothing on standby for them?

Woodstock Hospital has free Wi-Fi and TV. Big deal... Woodstock Hospital has edible food. That should be a given, but not with many hospitals.

Hospital CEO's, including Woodstock's are paid outrageous salaries, benefits, perks and pensions. Which peons like us can only dream of.

But for every hospital CEO that is over-educated, over-

paid and under-worked and who only look after their families, cronies and protect themselves from us barbarians there several levels of equally over-paid VP's and other bureaucrats who are there not because of expertise but are someone's toady.

So, when cuts are needed, the bureaucrat's code of conduct kicks in. They have an unwritten rule that their cronies must be protected and to Hades with patients and other sick people.

That means all cuts are at the bottom, where it hurts patients' health and recovery.

It's time that, until hospital bureaucrats' salaries, benefits, perks, pensions, etc. are capped, people should stop donating to not only Woodstock Hospital, but ALL hospitals.

Please consider what I have written here seriously.

Allison Gowling
Woodstock, ON

Great to see that theatre is alive and well. On Wednesday March 4th my wife and I attended the matinee show of Piaf/ Dietrich at the Grand theatre in London.

What an incredible theatre experience.

The music, the characters, the stage, lighting and Direction were all amazing.

If theatre is meant to transport the audience into a world of magic this was it.

The Grand Theatre has 839 seats and every seat was taken.

The audience loved it and the standing ovation was huge.

We have been to the Grand Theatre many times and if there was any doubt that people are not attending live theatre any more.....not at the Grand.

Great to have quality theatre right on our doorstep.

Best Regards
Ian Moyer
Ingersoll

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Funded by the Government of Canada
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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Guiding Principles

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

Initiative sprouted from and supported by attached thrift shop and church

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

It wasn't exactly clear cut what it was going to be, but we knew there was a lot of need."

Veldman met with Mayor Brian Petrie and CAO Michael Graves, and it became obvious there was a demand for increased services.

"I started visiting the resources that existed in Ingersoll and Woodstock to figure out what was available, how the county and funding worked, so we could fill in the gaps, but also when people came in here, I would know where to send them depending on what they needed help with."

There are several food resources available in Ingersoll and the decision was made not to focus on feeding people although healthy snacks and frozen dinners are available.

"This is a space where anybody from any walk of life can walk in and whatever they need, we will be able to help them. If they want to come and sit and just have a coffee, that's fine. We try to get to know them and build relationships," he explained.

If someone is looking for more help, Veldman will fill out an electronic intake form asking about a person's housing and income situation, along with any addictions or other struggles.

"We will then do an intervention plan to figure out what we can do to help onsite or refer them elsewhere."

Representatives from Oxford County Housing and the Canadian Mental Health Association attend weekly and a mobile outreach bus also stops at the centre bi-weekly. Sycamore also offers its clients a hot shower and laundry services, and a computer is available.

The centre has also been able to connect nine people to transitional housing, and there are close to 150 clients who regularly drop in. Dozens are homeless while many couch surf regularly.

Veldman explained while the organization is faith-based, no one is excluded if they aren't religious.

"Absolutely not. We would never refuse someone because of that. We are very open with our values and our mission and we can talk about Jesus freely. If someone disagrees, then we have a discussion about it."

Veldman added the organization can do a lot of healing on the surface, but the ultimate goal is to dig a little deeper.

"How can we get to the actual root of the issue, which is our sin, and turn to Christ. There are so many stories of people turning to Christ in their lives who are transformed."

He added that statistically speaking, Christian rehab programs such as Teen Challenge have success rates of about 75 per cent, whereas the secular ones come in at between six and 10 per cent.

Elizabeth Mol is the manager at Thrift Co,

a thrift store whose profits go directly to the Sycamore Centre. She is hoping the centre will be able to tap into more funding streams.

"They need more funding to make it more successful and keep it going."

The store operates just like any other thrift store, relying on donations from the community. Mol said the space is very welcoming and people are encouraged to come in, have a coffee and talk.

"We get a lot of young people coming in. Some girls sit here and do their nails. It is a safe space for them to hang out. There is a oneness in all three projects where we all come together serving God. There is also a lot of outreach and we have kids from the local high school doing their volunteer hours."

One criticism of the larger thrift stores is their prices are too high for those on a tight budget to afford. Mol explained Thrift Co won't be following that business model.

"Thrift stores right now are really going out of range, and we really want to keep our prices reasonable. We have five donation bins, including two in Woodstock and two in Ingersoll. There is also one in Thamesford."

More information can be found at www.sycamorecentre.ca, www.oxfordchurch.ca and www.thriftco.org.



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

Sycamore Centre Coordinator Levi Veldman (centre) poses with two of the centre's clients in front of the Thames Street location.



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Correction:

In the February 27 edition of the Echo, a reference was made to Robert Munsch being deceased. The author is, in fact, alive. The Echo apologizes for the error.

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Junior hockey league holds phony press conference without any press



LEE GRIFFI

Editor

The Woodstock Navy Vets will be the Greater Ontario Hockey League's (GOHL) 24th team next season. As you will see in this edition's sports section, the announcement was made last week inside the team's locker room at Southwood Arena.

Exciting news to be sure. The only problem – no media were invited to the so-called news conference. When is a news conference not a news conference? When it is held secretly with no media invited.

I reached out to the team to ask why that was the case and was told by an official the event was run by the GOHL, not the Navy Vets. My question is: why wasn't local media invited? The Echo, Heart FM, and the Sentinel Review were not present. This is an event CTV would have likely attended if invited, as they are also supporters of the league.

I would have asked a few

questions of Craig Spada, the league's commissioner, including why announce the move now when the Navy Vets are beginning their second round PJHL Doherty Division playoff series against Norwich. I find the timing odd, as it risks becoming a distraction for players and coaches who are trying to stay focused on the ice. I would have asked Devon Young, the team's president, the same question.

Darren Stevenson is the executive director of 519 Sports Online. He ran the event, and I would be the first one to say his company does a great job covering area sports, be it high school, minor or junior hockey, and he recently signed on with the Woodstock Wolverines football program to provide coverage. He also works for the GOHL as its director of media and content, which could be one reason why no one else was invited.

The "press conference" was released on YouTube. I only heard about it and watched after being tipped off by a PJHL official who heard there was an announcement coming.

Hey, if the league wanted to keep it on the downlow before the announcement, I 100 per cent understand. In the news world, reporters are often sent sensitive information that is "embargoed." That means we are trusted not to release any details to anyone until the appropriate time. I take that responsibility very seriously and have never broken that trust.

Not inviting local media to at-

tend in person is disrespectful, disappointing and quite frankly, inexcusable. This is a community-based team, not one which is owned privately. Honest mistakes happen, but this was a calculated move by Stevenson and the league. Two people posing as reporters also asked a few softball questions.

I reached out to Spada to explain why no media were invited. He said it was intentional.

"The Greater Ontario Hockey League handled the Woodstock announcement in the manner the league office and our communications team determined was most appropriate. We have appointed experienced people to key positions within the league, and I have full confidence in their judgment and the work they are doing on behalf of the GOHL."

Spada added the format and timing of the announcement were decisions made by the league and the "Woodstock ownership group."

"In today's sports environment, leagues often use a mix of traditional media and league-controlled platforms to communicate directly with fans, partners, and stakeholders."

I wasn't overly satisfied with his response, so I posed the question again. Why, specifically, weren't any members of the press invited? I did not receive a reply. Journalists aren't required to cover local sports. We do it because it is in the public interest and we want to do what we can to get butts in the seats at local arenas. Volunteers work hard to help these teams stay

afloat.

It seems the GOHL doesn't really care about local media coverage. They are hanging their hat on their own publicity through social media and 519 Sports. Doesn't give much of an incentive for hometown media outlets to put forth an effort, does it?

Full disclosure, I was named the league's director of communications back in August of 2022. The league decided to go in the direction of a digital and video communications platform. It's never a happy day when someone self-employed loses a contract, but life goes on. I became full-time with Grant Haven shortly after and it all worked out well. If I were still with the league, I could assure you I would have fought tooth and nail against the secrecy.

The Navy Vets fired all but one of their coaching staff earlier in the season while the team sat in first place. The Echo reached out to General Manager Darren Young at that time for more information, but after saying, "I'll have to get back to you on that." He never did. I also reached out to Young to set up an interview with someone from the team after the first two games of the Woodstock/Norwich series. No reply.

I understand it was an uncomfortable decision for the team to let coaches go, but as a former communications professional, a brief statement welcoming a new coaching staff while thanking the guys who were fired doesn't really cut it for a community-owned team. Specula-

tion was the coaching changes were made to prepare for the jump to a higher level of hockey and that seems to be the case.

The GOHL's decision to shun the media is also a head-scratcher from a communications lens. I found out the presser was filmed on Wednesday in Woodstock, with the video being released on YouTube Thursday. Isn't it odd a simple junior hockey announcement is shrouded in secrecy?

The other odd part about the situation is everyone knew it was coming. As I said in the story I wrote this week, it was the worst-kept secret in junior hockey.

Spada added it was the right time for the GOHL to make the announcement.

"With respect to timing, the franchise approval process is extensive, and once it was completed, it was appropriate for the league to formally introduce the organization. We are confident the Woodstock group can manage both its current on-ice commitments and its future planning without distraction."

No one wants to see a local hockey team succeed more than I do. I grew up in Stratford, cheering for the Cullitons (now Warriors), and I broadcast their games on CJCS radio for 13 years. Now that I live in Woodstock, I want nothing more than success for the Navy Vets. But the way the GOHL handled this is truly bizarre and isn't a great start for the team's jump into a new league.

The video can be watched on the GOHL YouTube channel or on its website at www.gohl.com.

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Oxford County launches online pothole reporting

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

This year has seen a particularly brutal pothole season thanks to fluctuating temperatures and the most precipitation we have seen in many winters.

The good news is Oxford County Public Works crews are working to repair cracks and potholes on the more than 670 centre-line kilometres of county roadways. Anyone who sees a troubling patch of pavement can now help public works crews reduce potential road hazards by reporting cracks and potholes on Oxford County roads online at Service Oxford.

All pothole reports should include the name of the road or street, which lane and the approximate size.

"We have reminded drivers the last few years that this is the time of year you will see potholes form, and we wanted to provide an easy mechanism for reporting so they can get fixed in a timely manner," said Frank Gross, the county's manager of roads.

When winter temperatures constantly fluctuate above and below freezing, wa-

ter gets into tiny cracks in the pavement, freezes and expands, and then thaws again. This repeated freeze-thaw action weakens the road surface and creates potholes as pieces of asphalt break apart under traffic. Late winter into early spring is traditionally when potholes become most visible and numerous – melting and weather shifts make them form quickly, and cold weather can delay permanent repairs.

Gross said this year's winter weather has taken its toll on county roads across Oxford.

"The conditions are prime to see an increase in potholes with the amount of snow. When the temperatures warm up during the day, you get the runoff of melting snow and then freezing temperatures overnight. That's prime for pothole formation."

He added some roads owned by the county are located in lower-tier municipalities, but if people are unsure, they are still welcome to report a problem. For example, Devonshire Street in Woodstock is a county road and has had its fair share of potholes this year.

"If residents want to use the county's

customer service portal to report it, we will forward it on to the appropriate municipality."

Under provincial legislation and safety standards, Oxford County must maintain its roads in good repair for motorists. Potholes reported by residents or spotted during routine patrols are repaired by staff according to provincially defined timelines.

This has been the coldest winter in recent memory, something Gross said will likely lead to a hike in repairs across the county.

"I would say it's been a typical year for winter conditions. The last few years, we have had milder weather and fewer potholes so we will see more potholes than we have seen in recent times."

For vehicle damage potentially caused by potholes, motorists are advised to have their vehicle checked by a mechanic and consider reporting any potential damage to their insurance companies.

"Municipalities have to meet municipal maintenance standards, so there is a minimal timeline based on the size of the pothole to repair it. But, unless the municipality is negligent in any way, it

would be an insurance claim."

Residents can report potholes online on Oxford County's new customer service portal at www.oxfordcounty.ca/serviceoxford. The online form allows residents to pinpoint the pothole location on a map, fill in additional details, upload a photo and choose to receive an update from Oxford County Public Works staff if they would like.

The county is also offering some tips to reduce the chances of striking a pothole while driving, including keeping eyes on the road and avoiding puddles, shoulders and slush on the road where possible.

County staff add it's also a good idea to check vehicle tire pressure regularly and ensure each wheel is inflated to vehicle specifications. If a pothole is unavoidable, reduce driving speed, but only if it's safe to do so and without slamming on the brakes.

"Be aware. Potholes can seemingly occur out of nowhere. Conditions are happening beneath the asphalt, and all of a sudden, it becomes a pothole. What wasn't there in the morning might be there in the afternoon, and drivers need to be aware," said Gross.

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Writing our past for the future: Odyssey Indigo to offer memoir- and grief-writing workshops

GALEN SIMMONS

Echo Contributor

For anyone who has ever thought, “I should really write that down someday,” St. Marys writer, poet and editor Kate Orland Bere is thinking someday might just be this spring.

Orland Bere’s business, Odyssey Indigo Communications & Consulting, is launching a four-week memoir/legacy writing workshop at Riverwalk Commons in St. Marys on Tuesday, March 24. Various ongoing writing workshops will be offered on a rotating 4-week plan in the sun-filled Riverwalk Commons space on Tuesday mornings. Others from the community may come to Riverwalk at 11 a.m. on Tuesdays, after the workshop finishes each week, for just \$10 cash, and stay until 2 p.m. to write.

The following Monday, on March 30, Orland Bere will offer an inaugural Grief Writing workshop at Terra Nova Nordic Spa, just north of Woodstock. On the final Monday morning of each month, she will also be offering rotating writing workshops there. The Grief Writing workshop is focused on healing: grief exploration for the purpose of integrating grief into one’s life and moving through grief from where we stand. The workshop is intended to assist with healing through writing exercises, meditation, poems, stories and music.

A developmental and substantive editor who works closely with clients on their life stories, Orland Bere says the memoir and legacy workshop in St. Marys offers those who have a critical story to tell a dynamic forum to explore their projects.

“Not everyone is going to take on writing a full memoir,” she said. “However, one can write a unique legacy story about their family or business to leave for the generations to follow. For business, their captured narrative carries the potential for exceptional promotion. A well-rendered memoir or story can provide invaluable ballast and deep meaning for those who will follow us. In that writing process, I am a seasoned guide offering workshop

participants a roadmap to their story’s success.”

The workshop is designed as an extended brainstorming session for anyone who has an idea for a memoir, has already started one, or wants to craft a legacy piece. Over four Tuesday mornings, participants will be guided in exploring their narrative and how to shape their experiences into a significant story.

Orland Bere says this work can be challenging yet deeply rewarding.

“It’s the engagement that matters. If people become deeply engaged with their ideas and life experience, incredible projects are born. In a group setting, ideas can explode into something vital. Join us!” she said.

“Writing your memoir or story becomes a meaningful journey. Sometimes it’s about reclaiming parts of ourselves we imagined we had lost; sometimes we just need to write our truth. The workshop provides a dynamic environment to explore where the deepest meaning lies in a particular story, and how best to effectively convey that meaning to readers. As a professional writer and editor, as a poet, I offer my writing expertise and guidance in that essential creative process.”

Beginning March 24, the four-Tuesdays workshop series at Riverwalk Commons will run from 9-11 a.m., and the workshop fee of \$150 includes access to the space until 2 p.m. one all four Tuesdays. Doors open at 8:30 a.m. Participants can bring a lunch or pay for a catered wrap, join an open discussion over lunch, and, if desired, sit down with Kate for an included project consultation. On April 21, the next four-week session will begin, a poetry workshop to celebrate National Poetry Month.

With Odyssey Indigo as her brand, Orland Bere has developed a full slate of additional workshops she plans to roll out over time at Riverwalk, at Terra Nova Nordic Spa and elsewhere. Topics range from grief writing, poetry, and short fiction to creative retirement planning and career transitions (both under the banner



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

St. Marys poet, writer and editor Kate Orland Bere will offer a four-week memoir and legacy writing workshop at Riverwalk Commons beginning March 24.

Gratefully Rewired), brainstorming an art-based business, helping young people to choose a career foundation, and a humanist feminist series entitled SisterThink (Orland Bere writes a column on Substack entitled “SisterTHINK”).

Orland Bere is a trained and experienced career-development professional, offering consulting in both areas. She also has 10 years of post-secondary writing education at McGill University, the University of Toronto, Duke University and the Humber

School of Writing.

To register or to learn more about upcoming workshops at Riverwalk Commons and/or Terra Nova Nordic Spa & Café, email Kate at odysseyindigoccc@gmail.com with “Odyssey Indigo Writing Workshop registration” in the subject line. To see upcoming workshop schedules at both locations or elsewhere, visit the Odyssey Indigo website at www.odysseyindigo.com under the “About/Workshops” tab.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the blue birthstone for March?
2. What day is international Women’s Day celebrated each year?
3. The month of March is named after Mars, the roman god of what?
4. In what year did the first official Paralympic Games take place?
5. How many degrees make up a triangle?
6. The “Ides of March” refers to what famous assassination?
7. What was the name of the first stealth bomber introduced for warfare?
8. Which film franchise features Marty McFly?
9. What is the birth flower for March?
10. What’s the oldest pub in Ireland?

This week’s answers are found on pg. 31

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POLICE BRIEFS

Woodstock Police Service briefs

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Woodstock Police arrest two following drug trafficking investigation

In early 2026, the Woodstock Police Service Street Crime Unit began an investigation into the trafficking of illegal drugs within the city early this year.

That work paid off when, on March 4 at 12:30 p.m., officers arrested a 51-year-old female and a 40-year-old male, both of Woodstock, in the area of Dundas Street and Reeve Street.

Both individuals have been jointly charged with possession of a Schedule I Substance for the purpose of trafficking (fentanyl), possession of a Schedule I Substance for the purpose of trafficking (cocaine), and possession of proceeds of property obtained by crime under \$5,000.

Police say they seized drugs and cash with an estimated total street value of \$1,380 in cocaine, \$1,232 in fentanyl, and \$1,690 in currency. Both accused were released on an undertaking.

“The Woodstock Police Service remains committed to disrupting the trafficking of illegal

drugs and protecting the safety and well-being of our community,” said a police press release.

The Woodstock Police Service would like to encourage anyone with information about this investigation to contact the Woodstock Police Service at 519-537-2323 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Woodstock Police Lay Multiple Charges in Traffic Enforcement Incidents

The Woodstock Police Service said in a press release this week it continues to focus on traffic enforcement and road safety in the city.

Officers recently laid charges in five separate incidents involving suspended driving, dangerous driving behaviours, and related offences.

Police conducting a general patrol stopped a vehicle in the area of Springbank Avenue and Alice Street on the afternoon of March 3 after learning the owner had a suspended driver's licence. The driver, a 32-year-old female from Woodstock, was charged with driving while under suspension and operating a motor vehicle without insurance. The vehicle was towed as a result.

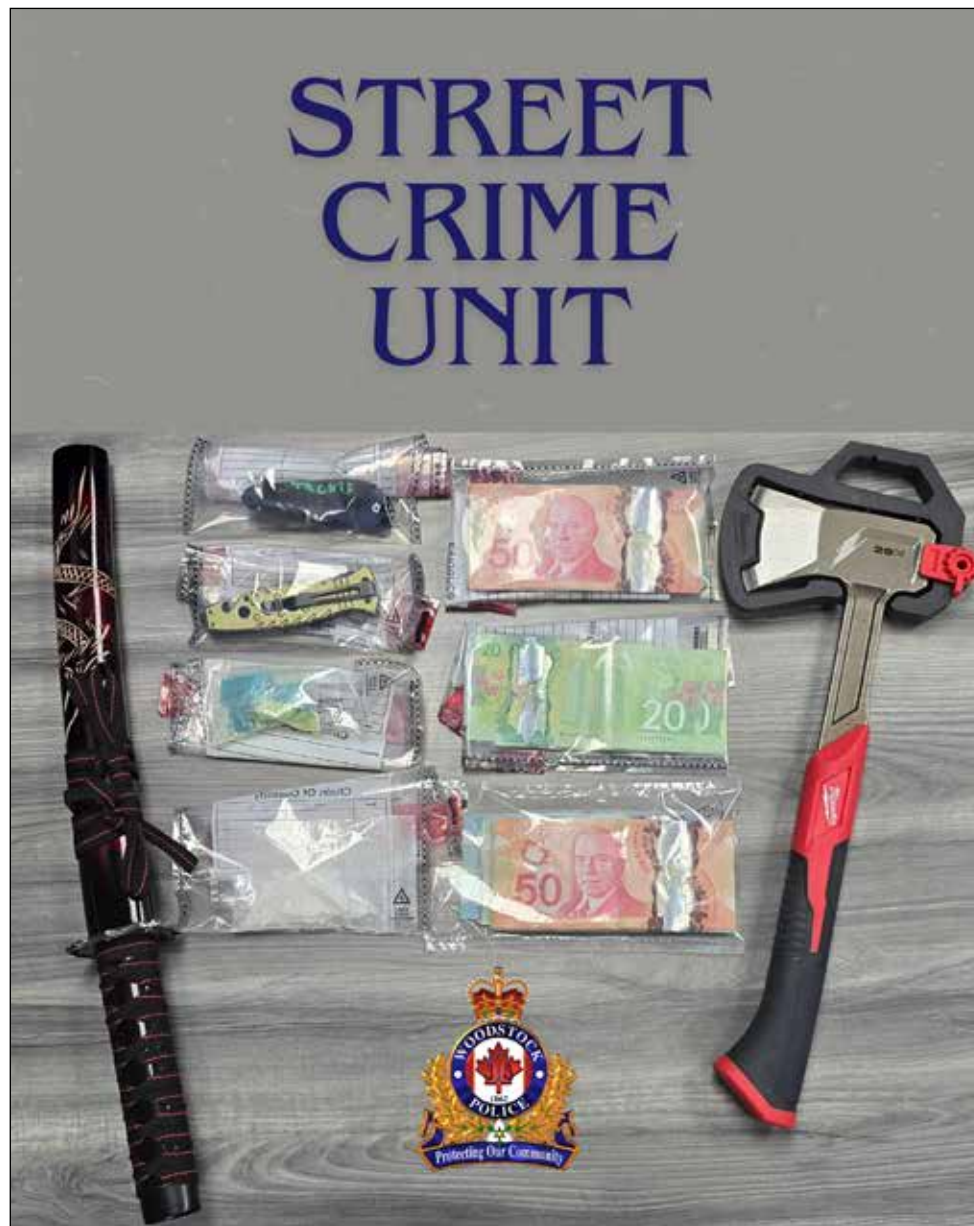
On the same day, officers

conducted a traffic stop in the area of Spencer and Butler Streets. The driver, a 56-year-old female, was arrested and charged with driving while under suspension. She was released from custody with a future court date.

On March 4, officers observed a prohibited driver operating a vehicle in the area of Clarke and Dundas Streets. The driver, a 33-year-old male, resisted arrest when officers attempted to take him into custody. He was charged with driving while prohibited, driving while under suspension, and resisting a peace officer. The vehicle involved was impounded for 45 days.

In another incident during the early morning hours of March 7, police stopped a vehicle on Huron Street after recognizing the driver as being suspended. A 55-year-old female from Woodstock was charged with driving while under suspension.

Officers conducting speed enforcement on Dundas near Stafford Street observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed on March 8. A 23-year-old male was charged with stunt driving and speeding. His driver's licence was suspended, and the vehicle was impounded for 14 days in accordance with



(WOODSTOCK POLICE PHOTO)

Woodstock Police say they took a quantity of suspected cocaine and fentanyl during a recent downtown drug bust.

provincial legislation. The Woodstock Police Service reminds drivers that operating a vehicle

while suspended, uninsured, or engaging in dangerous driving behaviours can result in

significant penalties, including vehicle impoundment, licence suspension, and court proceedings.

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DASO's first Purple Ribbon Campaign raising awareness on IPV and gender-based violence

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Domestic Abuse Services Oxford (DASO) launched its Purple Ribbon campaign in March to show solidarity with survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence.

The organization's first-ever Purple Ribbon campaign will run throughout March in honour of International Women's Day, which was held on March 8. All proceeds from purple ribbon purchases and donations to the campaign will support DASO programming and services.

Ribbons can be purchased for a minimum of \$5 at Whisk and Roll Bakery, Mostly Roses Floral Boutique, Roberts and Co. Ladies Wear, and The Happy Hippo Co. In addition to donating via e-transfer, cash or cheque, sponsorships, and online through Canada Helps Online.

Each \$5 donation will add a purple ribbon to the fence outside of DASO's office, with larger ribbons for larger donations. A name can be printed on one of the ribbons with a donation of \$500 or more. Donations can also be made in memory of or to support someone.

"We developed this campaign to give our community a tangible way to stand in solidarity with survivors. The purple ribbon represents hope, courage, and collective responsibility," said Samantha Ton, DASO's administrative and communications manager.

"When businesses and residents wear or display it, they are publicly affirming that violence is not acceptable and that survivors are supported."

The Purple Ribbon campaign comes during a time when Canada faces a gender-based violence crisis. The Government of Canada declared gender-based violence as an epidemic in 2025, reporting a 14 per cent increase in reported IPV cases from 2018 to 2024.

As of 2024, 78 per cent of those who faced IPV were women and girls, and 42 per cent of the women were killed by their intimate partner or spouse – a rise from 32 per cent in 2023. Indigenous wom-

en and girls also face a much higher lifetime experience of violence. In Oxford County and other rural communities, IPV survivors face challenges such as limited transportation and resources, geographical isolation from services, neighbours, and informal supports, and stigma of IPV.

"Raising awareness through the Purple Ribbon Campaign brings visibility to an issue that is often hidden," Ton said. "It challenges stigma, encourages conversations, and reminds survivors that support is available and that they are believed. Visibility matters because silence allows violence to persist."

The Purple Ribbon campaign also helps DASO towards its annual \$250,000 fundraising goal to cover the costs of running its services year after year.

"It's important to note that while government funding helps cover a portion of staffing expenses, it does not fully sustain our operations," explained Ton.

"Every other aspect of our work — including our emergency shelter, outreach programs, advocacy services, prevention initiatives, building maintenance, and essential supports — relies heavily on donations and fundraising."

Along with wearing the purple ribbon, Ton said the community can learn more about prevention and action on IPV through the Domestic Abuse Resource Team (DART)'s training and education programs, as well as learn about the early warning signs, respond by demonstrating compassion and belief to those affected, challenge harmful attitudes that normalize violence, and support local services by either donating, volunteering, fundraising, or advocating.

"Collective effort is essential to creating lasting change."

Cheques can be made payable to DASO with the note "ribbon." E-transfers with "ribbon" in the note can be sent to donate@daso.ca. Online donations can be made by visiting <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/143947>.

For more information about sponsorship opportunities, send an email to info@daso.ca.



(SAMANTHA TON PHOTO)

Each donation towards DASO's Purple Ribbon campaign, minimum of \$5, will bring a new ribbon to the fence to raise awareness on IPV and gender-based violence.

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SWOX and Zorra Councils considering shared fire chief and deputy fire chief model

DEBBIE KASMAN

Echo Contributor

South-West Oxford Township (SWOX) Council has approved, in principle, a shared fire service leadership model with Zorra Township.

Council first considered a shared model at its Feb. 17 meeting. Subsequently, elected officials in Zorra considered a similar request on Feb. 18.

If given final approval, both the fire chief and

deputy fire chief would be shared positions between the two municipalities. The combined salary and associated employment costs for the two positions would be cost-shared equally between the two municipalities as well.

SWOX Council also authorized staff to begin the recruitment process for a shared deputy fire chief position, subject to finalization of the shared services agreement between both municipalities.

The intention of this model is not to amalgamate

services but

strengthen leadership capacity, improve the continuity of operations, and provide a more sustainable structure for both municipalities while maintaining independent fire services, governance, and community identity.

Staff from both townships came together to prepare a draft shared fire chief and shared deputy fire chief shared services agreement, along with role descriptions for both positions. The draft shared

services agreement outlines proposed job descriptions and key responsibilities for each position.

The agreement also outlines the proposed governance framework, hosting arrangements, cost-sharing structure, reporting relationships, and service expectations for both municipalities.

The agreement is currently in draft form and will require further refinement through continued discussions between staff prior to being brought back to both councils for final approval and execution.

SWOX Township entering into negotiations to finalize new municipal office, library and child care centre

DEBBIE KASMAN

Echo Contributor

At its March 3 council meeting, SWOX Council authorized staff to enter into negotiations with Sierra General Contracting for the commencement of phase 1 pre-construction and detailed design services for the township's new municipal office, library, and child care facility. The building will be located in Mount Elgin.

The procurement process began with a Request for Pre-Qualification, where seven firms were shortlisted. Following the issuance of the Stage 2 RFP, two firms formally withdrew due to existing project commitments and schedul-

ing constraints. Staff received and evaluated a total of five compliant fee proposals.

Sierra General Contracting was the highest-ranked proponent best suited to build the project, beating out AEC Developments, Ball Construction, Melloul-Blarney Construction, and Reid & Deleye Contractors Ltd.

Sierra General Contracting was founded in 1994 and is headquartered in Woodstock. The firm is a locally based, privately owned construction management and general contracting company with over 30 years experience delivering municipal, institutional, and community-focused projects across Southwestern Ontario.

According to staff, Sierra demonstrated a

strong understanding of the township's project objectives, including quality, sustainability, cost transparency, and phased governance. The firm has also expressed alignment with the township's goals for delivering a high-quality, community-focused facility and recognizes the significance of this project within the local community.

Sierra's proposed approach supports continuity of the work completed to date, including the concept design prepared by R. Ritz Architect Inc., preliminary engineering by SPH Engineering Inc., and the carbon analysis and feasibility work undertaken by WalterFedy.

The latest concept drawings depict a two-sto-

rey building with a 2,350-square-foot library on the lower level's north end, a daycare on the south end, and municipal offices and council chambers on the second floor.

A finalized construction management agreement will be brought back to council for review and final authorization before execution by the mayor and CAO.

The phase 1 pre-construction and detailed design services will cost \$369,315 plus HST and will be funded from the township's working capital reserve, which was included in the approved 2026 budget.

The rough estimate for the total project, from design through to construction, is just under \$14 million plus HST.



WOODSTOCK HOSPITAL

JOIN THE WOODSTOCK HOSPITAL BOARD OF TRUST

Woodstock Hospital is recruiting one volunteer board member to join the Board of Trust. Applicants must either live or work in Woodstock or its immediate surrounding area.

The Board serves as the governing body for the Woodstock Hospital and is a skills-based Board. We are seeking Board members that have a technology, finance and/or government background. We strive to provide excellent patient care and promote health and wellness for those we serve.

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- Strategic Planning
- Financial Stewardship
- Quality and Performance Monitoring

Learn more about the hospital's strategic initiatives and

mission, vision and values statements by visiting the hospital website at www.woodstockhospital.ca

In addition to monthly meetings that occur on the last Tuesday of the month (except July, August and December) at 5:00 p.m., Board members may also be appointed to one or more Standing Committees of the Board.

Term of Office

The duration of each term is 3 years. Board members may serve a maximum of 4 terms.

How to Apply

Prospective candidates are invited to email their resume to Heather Scherer at hscherer@woodstockhospital.ca Please include a cover letter detailing why you would be the ideal candidate.

Deadline

The deadline for submissions is **Monday, March 16, 2026 at 4:00 pm.**



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CEDARVIEW

Oxford municipalities hosting candidate information meeting

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

Oxford County's eight area municipalities are partnering to host a candidate information session in preparation for the 2026 municipal and school board election.

The session will take place on Thursday, March 26, at 6 p.m., virtually and in person in the Council Chambers at the Oxford County Administration Building, 21 Reeve St., Woodstock.

New, returning or interested candidates and members of the public are invited to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of council, who is eligible to run, the nomination process, and campaign finance and advertising rules.

The session will include presentations from the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and municipal consultant Nigel Bellchamber. Attendees are encouraged to send questions in advance to their municipal clerk. Those wishing to partici-

pate in the session virtually can register by emailing election@cityofwoodstock.ca.

"Serving on council is a significant commitment. Elected officials are responsible for making decisions that directly affect the lives of residents in our communities. This session is an opportunity for potential candidates to learn about the process, ask questions and receive guidance so that they can make an informed decision about running for office," said Jeff Bunn, Manager of Legislative Services, Deputy City Clerk and Returning Officer for the City of Woodstock.

Oxford County's municipalities include the Township of Norwich, Township of Zorra, Township of South-West Oxford, Township of East Zorra-Tavistock, Township of Blandford-Blenheim, Town of Ingersoll, Town of Tillsonburg and the City of Woodstock.

The nomination period for candidates will be open from May 1 to Aug. 21. Election Day will take place on Monday, Oct. 26 and advance polling will also be available in each municipality.

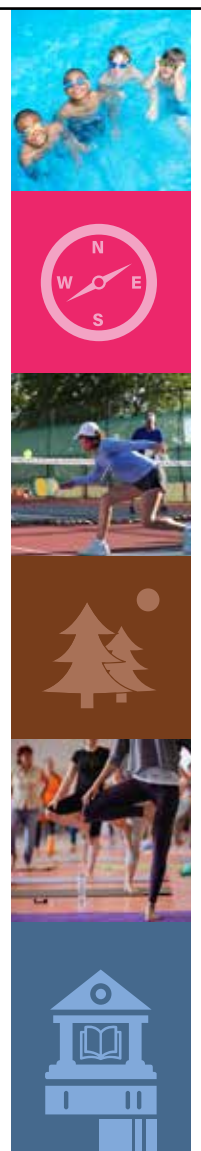


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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo **SPORTS**

Double-time overtime pays off in CASS Knights junior hoops WOSSAA AA gold



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The WOSSAA AA and TVRA Southeast junior boys basketball champion CASS Knights: (front row, left to right) Brody Martin, Harper Knight, Justin Zhou, Kristian Etoria and Faiad Alezzi. In the back row, are coach Trevor Pemberton, Macx Sanderson, Nathan Ugar, Dylan Hirsu, Kameron Roos, Lukas Mickevicius, Greyson Padfield, Tyler VanMarrum, Declan Greig, Easton Freeman and coach Scott Awde.

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

The Woodstock College Avenue junior basketball Knights worked double-time overtime on the way to a Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletic Association (WOSSAA) AA championship victory on Feb. 25 at Stratford St. Mike's.

"That's something they'll have forever," said coach Scott Awde. "No one can take it away."

The Knights secured their WOSSAA AA championship with a 57-39 win over the St. Thomas Parkside Colts, which, according to Awde, was closer than the final 18-point margin.

"It never felt safe," said Awde. "In junior boys basketball, you don't feel comfortable until you get pretty close to the end."

The Knights bench boss may have been flashing back to his squad's narrow 56-54 overtime victory over the same Colts in the Thames Valley Regional Athletics (TVRA) AA Southeast title game two days earlier at CASS.

The Knights had come out strong in the first quarter, dominating play at both ends of the court. However, their struggles to finish offensively saw them trailing 10-9 after the opening eight minutes and 29-22 at the half against a Parkside team that sank four three-pointers in the second period. CASS headed into the fourth quarter down by six. In those final eight minutes, captain Greyson Padfield scored eight of his team's 16 points, four-for-four from the free throw line, as the Knights pulled back to even (49-49) at the final buzzer.

In the extra four-minute period, Lukas Mickevicius went four-for-four from the free throw line, and Kameron Roos

added three points to offensively fuel a tight win.

On the game, Padfield had 18 points for the Knights, Mickevicius added 15, Roos 12, Easton Freeman seven, Dylan Hirsu one field goal and Nathan Ugar one free throw.

College Avenue entered the WOSSAA draw as the top TVRA Southeast seed, opening the four-team affair against London Westminster Wildcats. Once again, the Knights would be pushed to the limit, playing an additional four minutes of overtime before downing the Wildcats 60-53.

"It was our defensive effort that made the difference," said Awde.

The Knights have two dominant big men (Padfield and Mickevicius) and collectively scored a lot of points in a lot of games during the season the coach continued. But when push came to shove with their season on the line, he could also rely on a gritty effort in his team's side of the court.

"In those games you need seven or eight guys to step up defensively and get it done, to get stops. Especially in overtime, you need to get stops."

The game was high-energy and high intensity Awde added, with technical fouls assessed to each team and one fan ejected.

"It's heated, right?"

The Knights finished their regular TVRA Southeast season with an 8-0 record, 23-3 overall through their 2025/26 campaign. Awde cited resilience as a team strength, noting CASS had trailed at halftime in a number of their outings.

"They don't quit," he credited of a squad which went 4-0 in the post-season with two OT thrillers. "They accomplished that and will have it forever."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The TVRA Southeast champion and WOSSAA AA bronze medalist Woodstock CI Red Devils: (front row, left to right) Zack Molinaro, Jack Carnegie, Will Halward, Derek Gravel and Preston Hilderley. In the back row are Graeme Arthur (stats), Nick Hagen-Johnson, Diangelo Sanfilippo, Preston Dopf, Angus Jacques, Oscar Berkely, Daniyal Faisal, Kael Wettlaufer, Leronard Hobbs, Brooks Runstedler, coach Chris Coyle and coach Eric Molinaro. Coach Andrew Heggie was absent from the photo.

Senior WOSSAA AA

The Woodstock CI Red Devils finished off a four-year run under coach Eric Molinaro with a WOSSAA medal, its lustre slightly diminished by a bronze rather than golden hue.

"It would have been better if it were gold," he said following an 87-66 victory over the host Listowel Lightning on Feb. 25, arguably the most emotional basketball game of his coaching career.

This season's run included a 55-41 TVRA Southeast senior boys championship victory over the St. Thomas St. Joe's Rams. Officially, the win gave the Red Devils the top TVRA seed heading into the WOSSAA AA draw, but strategically, that meant opening against a powerful London Regina Mundi Titans squad.

"It was in our best interests to tank," said Molinaro. "In hindsight, it may have been a mistake, but it's not in me as a coach, and as a person to model for players and students, that's a way to live. We're happy with the TVRA Southeast championship but not pleased with WOSSAA bronze."

The Red Devils' coaching staff had scouted the Titans and formulated a game plan that kept them within a basket at halftime.

"But our defence needed to be better in the second half," said Molinaro of an eventual 81-65 loss. "We just didn't execute the whole gameplan to hang in there with them."

St. Joe's downed the Lightning 73-49 in their semi-final, going on to take WOSSAA AA gold with an 85-77 overtime win over RMC in the final.

"It's our strong belief we did St. Joe's a favour by tiring them out in the semis," said Molinaro.

The tournament's emotional content

included disappointment in the fact the Red Devils were playing for pride rather than the hoped-for AA provincial tournament berth also up for grabs in the gold medal game. Molinaro had known many of the players, including son Zack, well before they reached high school. He thoroughly enjoyed a shared journey, arguably highlighted by the previous season's Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations A silver medal performance.

"It wasn't because we lost, it was because it was over," Molinaro concluded.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

CASS Knight Easton Freeman (left) takes care of the ball during the TVRA Southeast championship game.

Woodstock CI Red Devils, Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers contesting WOSSAA A/AA girls' hockey title

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

The best-of-three Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast championship series between the Woodstock CI Red Devils and the Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers was not the girls hockey equivalent of a soccer friendly.

But it was friendly enough.

"All these girls play together, so it's like friends versus friends out there," said Red Devils assistant coach Martha Trepanier on Feb. 23 at the Woodstock Community Complex Arena.

Both teams had already achieved success, earning Southeast finalist status, and have qualified for the Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletic Association (WOSSAA) A/AA tournament on March 10 at London's Stronach Arena.

Getting to WOSSAA was a big goal, said Blue Bomber Brooklyn Janzen.

"The first time in around ten years," added teammate Charlotte DeWit.

The Red Devils are scheduled to open their WOSSAA A/AA draw at 9 a.m. against the TVRA Central champion, the Blue Bombers, and at 9:15 against the Huron-Perth representative. The gold medal game is set to face off at 1:30 p.m., the bronze a half-hour earlier.

But as friendly as the rivalry may be, both TVRA Southeast teams have aspirations of going further; the reality being that only one Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association (OFSAA) berth exists for those four contending teams.

"This is what the girls are playing for," said Red Devils head coach Lindsay McCoy, who oversees a veteran-laden roster she calls WCI's 'best in years.'

The Blue Bombers fired the first scoring shot in the 'friendly enough' opening battle of the TVRA Southeast, Janzen redirecting a Reece Ellery blast home during four-on-four

action at the 5:44 mark of the 15-minute second period.

She was providing her own screen on the play, said Janzen.

"And tipped it in."

"With a goalie like that, the only way we're going to be able to score is to take away her eyes," added DeWit.

The lead was short-lived, WCI's Emma Holme answering with an unassisted shot to the top corner, squaring accounts just 15 seconds later. Forty-one seconds after that, while still playing four-on-four, Jillian Trepanier scored what would stand as the game-winner, driving to the net on an assist from Holme.

The narrow one-goal lead stood until the 5:21 mark of the third period, Grade 9 rookie Whitney Fraser extending the Red Devils advantage to two. The Red Devils were on a power play at the time, Fraser teeing up a slapshot from the high slot on the rush.

"I think she was screened," said Fraser, who was assisted by Trepanier on the play. "I kind of just shot it."

"It was scary there for a while," said her Grade 11 sister, defender Eden Fraser. "Especially four-on-four. But we pulled it back, got the two goals, and it was nice to get the lead. Less nerve-wracking, especially on D."

The Red Devils wrapped up the TVRA Southeast championship two days later inside the Ingersoll District Memorial Centre, sweeping the best-of-three final series by an identical 3-1 score.

The Woodstock Huron Park Huskies took the TVRA Southeast B Pool championship by a 2-1 margin over the St. Thomas Parkside Stampeters on March 5 inside the Joe Thornton Arena in St. Thomas. The Huskies earned their way into the final with a high-scoring 7-5 win over the Woodstock St. Mary's CHS Warriors on Feb. 26. The Stampeters took their B Pool semi-final by a narrow 1-0 margin over the Lord Dorchester Beavers.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Ingersoll Blue Bombers goalie Jolene Allair (left) denies WCI's Annika Beaton (right) during their TVRA Southeast final series opener.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Ingersoll DCI Blue Bomber Charlotte Baker (left) pursues WCI's Whitney Fraser (right).



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock CI Red Devil Makena Barron (centre) battles IDCI Blue Bombers Cameron Adkins (right) and Charlie Parsons (left) for possession of the puck.

IDCI girls, WCI boys heading to WOSSAA curling championships

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

The life of the Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers girls curling team's Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletic Association (WOSSAA) dream flashed before their collective eyes.

"That was terrifying!" exclaimed second Marley Papais as she headed off the ice following an upbeat, chaotic and one-of-a-kind 9-6 Thames Valley Regional Athletics (TVRA) championship victory over the visiting St. Thomas Parkside Stampede on Feb. 25 at the Ingersoll District Curling Club.

"Stressful," added Skip Taylor Posthumus. "You could throw in a couple of other words."

"Emotional," said Vice Jaelynn MacLeod.

The Blue Bombers had exited the fifth end with a comfortable 8-2 lead, stealing two as MacLeod successfully executed a takeout with her second stone, easing behind cover to lie second shot. Following an unsuccessful Parkside raise attempt, Posthumus set up a guard, leading to a steal of two.

Parkside took one in the sixth end, giving the Blue Bombers hammer, still with a comfortable five-point lead for the seventh. However, in a house full of Stampede stones, the skips traded takeouts, leaving Parkside sitting two against Posthumus' final stone. It wrecked on a guard, and rather than the planned takeout, ended up raising a third Stampede rock into scoring position for a steal of three. IDCI took a suddenly much-tighter 8-6 advantage headed into the final end, still with hammer.

The crucial shot in another houseful of stones would be MacLeod's second, a takeout which slid to sit as shot rock behind a trio of heavy cover in front of the house. The result was not her primary intent, IDCI's vice admitted, not even Plan B.

"Plan probably Z," she smiled.

"But it worked out," said Posthumus. "That's what got us our point."

The Stampede skip's first rock was a narrowly unsuccessful raise attempt which could have left the visitors sitting three. Her final stone was slightly wide, leaving the Bombers sitting one, Posthumus able to defer on her final stone.

IDCI had scored one in the first, stealing three in the second as Parkside's 'hammer' wrecked on a guard. Posthumus executed a delicate takeout in the third to limit the Stampede to two, adding two more in the fourth to take a 6-2 lead.

"We could have done better," MacLeod admitted.

"But we'll take the WOSSAA win," said Posthumus.

Getting to WOSSAA was the team's

goal not only this year, but throughout their high school curling careers. It's an achievement not enjoyed by a Blue Bombers girls team since 2004, confirmed coach Elaine Di Stefano.

"We are excited."

WOSSAA was to be contested in Listowel on March 9, semi-finals taking to the ice at 8:30 a.m., bronze and gold-medal games to follow at 12:15 p.m. The Woodstock CI Red Devils boys curling team punched their ticket to the event with a comparatively calmer 10-8 victory over the Blue Bombers boys squad.

"Great stuff, guys... guys and gals," said Red Devils coach Scott MacIntosh at the game's conclusion.

"He does it all the time," laughed Red Devils skip Alexis Schaeffer of his modified congratulation, encompassing her considerable contributions.

Schaeffer had made a great shot in particular during the second end, said MacIntosh, scoring three to take a 3-2 lead at the time. The Red Devils stole two in the subsequent two ends, gave up a couple in the fifth and then added a decisive three in the sixth to take a 10-4 lead.

Schaeffer makes some great shots, but is set up by a strong front end, said her coach, with vice Mikhail Petrukhov also proficient at the takeout game.

"All four of them contribute," says MacIntosh, pleased to see the Red Devils follow a familiar gameplan of hitting the broom, getting the weight and putting rocks in play.

"It worked for us all year and it worked for us today."

IDCI skip Karsen Zylstra made a great shot of his own in the seventh to score three, credited MacIntosh.

"That brought them back in."

The WCI lead was large enough in the eighth end, and Schaeffer could pass on her final stone, shaking hands and giving up what technically was a steal of one in the 10-8 final.

Schaeffer, who was also on the ice later that day at provincial U20 women's championships with the Bolton rink, was looking forward to WOSSAA competition.

"Just play our best, try for a medal."

"Very exciting," added Petrukhov. "Play as we play right now and try our best."

The result was not the one the Blue Bombers boys' rink had hoped for, but part of a successful season that had its share of the good, the bad, and the ugly.

"That's how curling works," summed up Zylstra, who has been curling since Grade 5.

On the positive side, the entire Blue Bombers team is eligible to return, said coach Mike Bryson, anticipating another competitive season in 2026-2027.

"The pool is deep."



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

IDCI sweepers Lucy Zimmerman (left) and Marley Papais bring a rock toward the house.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock CI sweepers Ryan DeWit (left) and Hart Langford follow a stone thrown by skip Alexis Schaeffer (background).

PJHL ROUNDUP

Wild start to Doherty Division semi-finals

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

If the first week of semi-final action is any indication of the entertainment value of the two series, fans are in for one heck of a ride.

Tavistock leads Wellesley 3-0 while Woodstock and Norwich were tied at a win apiece before Wednesday night's game after the Echo's deadline in Provincial Junior Hockey League playoff action.

The Braves took a commanding lead after a 4-2 win on home ice Tuesday. Keegan Metcalf scored the game-winning goal with three and a half minutes remaining in the third. He also scored the game-tying marker and assisted on Yann Raskin's second-period goal.

The Braves outshot the Applejacks 46-27. Wellesley did take a 2-1 lead late in the second

period on a shorthanded goal by Jake L'Heureux.

Ethan Stover was in on all three Tavistock goals in game two on Saturday night, scoring twice and adding an assist in a 3-1 win. Stover gave the visitors a 1-0 lead with just three seconds left in the first period and added an empty-net marker late in the third to seal the victory.

Keegan Metcalf gave the Braves a 2-0 lead with his second-period goal before Riley Noble scored for the Applejacks to cut the lead in half. Wellesley was outshot 16-4 in the third period and 37-31 overall.

The two teams combined for 106 penalty minutes, the majority of which came with eight seconds remaining. Tavistock's Evan Palubeski squared off against Wellesley's Spencer Davidson and a total of five ten-minute misconducts were handed out. The Braves went 0 for 10 on the power

play while the Applejacks were scoreless in seven opportunities.

Game one was a much different affair as Tavistock rallied back from a 5-2 deficit to earn a 9-6 win.

Tyler Brezynskie scored the game-winning goal from captain Marc Dionne at the 12:30 mark of the third period. Ryan McKellar added a shorthanded insurance marker four minutes later to push the lead to 8-5 before the teams traded goals.

Keaton Bartlett and Kegan Metcalf led the Braves offence with two goals and two assists each, with Yann Raksin, Ethan Stover, Jacob Reid-Brant and Carter Arseneau adding two points each. Bartlett sits 10th among all playoff scorers and tied among all PJHL defencemen with 14 points.

Woodstock took game one of their series with

Norwich by a 3-2 score in front of over 1,000 fans at Southwood Arena. It ended in dramatic fashion as Cooper Vickerman found the back of the net with less than one second remaining in the third period on a three-way passing play involving Charley Barnes and Michael Lee.

The Navy Vets jumped out to a 2-0 lead by the 11:54 mark of the second period. The Merchants tied it up with a pair of markers in the third, setting the stage for Vickerman's heroics.

Norwich took game two with a 3-2 come-from-behind victory. Kyle Arthur scored twice as the Navy Vets had a 2-1 lead by the 2:19 mark of the third period. The Merchants would tie it up 23 seconds later and score the winner a few minutes later.

Norwich packed 700 fans into the town's community centre and outshot Woodstock 34-23.

Woodstock Navy Vets joining GOHL next season

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

The Woodstock Navy Vets will be the Greater Ontario Hockey League's (GOHL) 24th team next season.

The move was announced at an event in Woodstock yesterday inside the team's locker room but may have been the worst-kept secret in the world of junior hockey.

"It is a proud and exciting day for the GOHL. To add our 24th franchise is very special, and it's my pleasure to make that announcement at this time," said league commissioner Craig Spada.

"(The Navy Vets) vision aligns with the GOHL, and that corresponds most importantly to player development, fan base, sponsorship, and great leadership within this organization. Woodstock is a hockey town, and that came to light very clearly in the vote with our 23 existing members," he added.

Navy Vets President Devon Young thanked everyone involved with the team for their support as they embark on a new challenge.

"Players have been amazing over the years. The facility managers, city council and every-

one we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis have been phenomenal. To all of our volunteer staff, we wouldn't be here without you and thank you to our fans. Our fans are the best in the league, and we hope they're going to be the best in the GOHL. I have no doubt that they will be."

Young added the GOHL initiated the conversation about Woodstock leaving the PJHL.

"Craig called us in mid-November. From there, a few conversations with the board, getting our ducks in a row, and then there were several items that needed to be checked off. Some of those were at the GOHL level, others at the (Ontario Hockey Association) level."

Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione was also a part of the announcement, contributing a pre-recorded message.

"It's fantastic news for our community. The Woodstock Navy Vets have a proud history in our city and seeing them move into the GOHL is something our entire community can be excited about. This doesn't just happen by chance. It takes leadership and commitment."

He also thanked the organization's behind-the-scenes staff for helping make the team successful.

"Their dedication creates opportunities for great competition, strong community pride, and keeps our city's deep hockey tradition alive. Hockey is such an important part of Canadian culture, and here in the city, we are fortunate to have passionate volunteers and leaders making sure the game continues to thrive at such a high level."

The Woodstock Warriors were charter members of the new Central Junior Hockey League in 1954-55 and went on to win the city's only

Sutherland Cup that season. After a one-year hiatus in 1956-57, the Warriors moved to the Western Junior Hockey League, where they competed through the end of the 1961-62 campaign. The Woodstock Navy Vets came to be through the granting of a new Junior C franchise for the 1966-67 season. In 1969, they won the city's only Junior C Schmalz cup championship.

Further details regarding the team's transition to the GOHL will be announced at a later date.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Devon Young, left, and GOHL Commissioner Craig Spada hold up a Navy Vets jersey at a pre-recorded event in Woodstock on Wednesday. Woodstock is leaving the PJHL to become that league's 24th franchise during the 2026-27 season.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Opening



Oxford County seeks an engaged citizen to join the Accessibility Advisory Committee for the remainder of the 2023-2026 council term.

This committee of council provides input on the Oxford County Multi-Year Accessibility Plan and advocates for people living with disabilities in Oxford County.

Please apply in writing with a resume and cover letter outlining lived experience and desire to improve accessibility in Oxford County by **Thursday, April 2, 2026**, to Lindsey Mansbridge, Clerk, Oxford County. Email: clerksoffice@oxfordcounty.ca, Phone: 519-539-9800 ext. 3001

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Blue Bomber junior girls volleyballers break out the cellies for WOSSAA silver medals

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

The Ingersoll DCI Blue Bomber junior volleyball girls do love their cellies.

And to be fair, they had much to celebrate not only through a Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletic Association AA silver medal performance on Feb. 25 at London South CI, but the Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast regular season and playoff championship leading up to it.

"We're a cheery team," smiled Blue Bomber Mia Pardy. "It was a great year."

There are some who may theorize that one loses the gold as much as one wins the silver. They, however, were not in attendance during WOSSAA semi-finals as the Blue Bombers undeniably won their way into the gold medal game through a gutsy 25-20, 22-25, 16-25, 25-21, 15-8 win over the host Lions and an extremely energetic partisan crowd.

A gym and balcony full of South supporters was further energized by a drummer whose practised cadence raised the decibel level further with each Lions point. A fantastic playoff atmosphere at times strayed over the line to the point the head official warned fans to remain silent during IDCI serves, but the Blue Bombers' challenge included a 'seventh opponent.'

"Everybody screaming and the counting they did (on serves)," said IDCI's Lauren Cumberland. "It made me play harder for sure, want it more."

"It was definitely fun being the bad guys."

The Blue Bombers broke away from a 15-14 lead in the first set to 21-16 and 24-18 advantages, closed out with a tandem centre block courtesy of Pardy and Izzy Hanlon.

South battled back in the second set on the strength of defensive tenacity and tips over IDCI's strength at the net, closing out the victory on back-to-back scoring dumps over the block. The Lions carried momentum from this set into the third, taking what at the time could have been construed as a pivotal nine-point victory.

The Bombers got off to an early 4-1 lead in the fourth set on a Hanlon power kill, Olivia Krajewski's service ace just inside the back line, and a dig on a South tip attempt by libero Peyton Boddy. Power at the net, strength of service leading to aces, service winners and advantage through South struggles with the first pass and reading tips would be keys to Ingersoll's success.

"We definitely adjusted a bit (to the tips)," said Boddy.

The Bombers led 16-10, but the Lions reeled them in and took a 19-17 lead, IDCI coach Mike Pelton breaking off a five-point run with a time-out. Following a South service out, Cumberland service winner and Hanlon cross-court kill, it was the Lions turn to call for time.

"Just go, crush it as hard as I can," said the Grade 9 Hanlon of her mentality.

"When we need points, she gets them," credited Boddy.

IDCI's Brooklynn Ruddy closed out the set victory with a kill off the block and out, setting the stage for a 15-point sprint for a berth to the championship game.

The Bombers opened with a service advantage courtesy of Krajewski, taking the first point on a Gabby Vander Baan/

Hanlon block, adding two more for an early 3-0 lead. IDCI switched ends on a three-point run, a Hanlon kill, rejection at the net and Pardy centre block, giving them a five-point advantage. Ruddy kept the momentum going with an ace from the other end of the court, Pardy kill, and a second Ruddy service winner, creating an eight-point advantage which lived through the 15-8 final.

"It did get tense," Cumberland admitted. "They're a good team."

The Bombers would face a second 'good team' in the WOSSAA AA final, Stratford St. Mike's taking a four-set, 25-16, 21-25, 25-22, 25-18 match victory.

"We won silver, and they earned the gold," summed up Pardy.

Bombers setter Mackenna Moskal felt the four-hour break between matches hadn't helped.

"I would rather just be game and game and game."

Likening the break between matches to an early-morning game, Cumberland said IDCI had 'woken up.'

"(But) we didn't keep the flow of the second set going."

Despite the loss, Avery Perry will remember the 'environment' of the medal ceremony as a highlight, teammates cheering as each received their silver.

"We were just all kind of happy for each other."

"I was very pleased," agreed Emily Phillips. "I'm so proud of everyone. This is one of the best seasons we've had."

"Even though we didn't win, we won in our hearts."

Coach Pelton praised his team's resilience, '100 per cent winning the silver', particularly in the face of the combined challenge from South and its fans.

"They didn't stop believing in themselves, they stayed in the game," as he credited a great team and a great group of girls. They should be really proud of themselves."

"Senior is going to be great," Cumberland added in conclusion.

"Watch out for next year," Moskal agreed.

WOSSAA AA Senior Girls Volleyball

The Woodstock CI Red Devils senior girls volleyball team knew it would be a challenge to step up from A to AA competition this year.

Nevertheless, they collectively set a pre-season goal of qualifying for the WOSSAA tournament.

"Even though we knew how hard that goal would be and man, did they deliver!" said coach Pauline Schubert.

The Red Devils' route to WOSSAA AA bronze went the hard way, opening with a three-set (25-20, 25-17, 25-20) loss to Stratford St. Mike's.

"They had some real good hitters and defence," credited WCI's MJ Rabe.

In the other semi-final, the host St. Thomas Parkside Stampeders downed London Central Golden Ghosts 25-20, 25-15, 25-16, and would go on to take WOSSAA AA gold with a 25-23, 25-18, 25-13 win over St. Mike's.

"Obviously, it was a bumme to not go to a for-sure medal game," Rabe admitted. "But I think we handled it pretty well and reset for the bronze game."



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Ingersoll DCI's Lauren Cumberland (left) has a front-row seat as libero Peyton Boddy hits the deck.

The Red Devils had opened against St. Mike's with six missed serves, said Bickell, and started a little nervous against the Ghosts, but settled in for a 27-25 win.

"I felt it gave everyone motivation, we really can win this."

A see-saw match saw Central take set two, the Red Devils set three, again by a narrow two-point margin, before falling behind in the fourth. Despite losing, a late rally helped build confidence for the fifth and deciding set. WCI trailed 12-9 before a run of Lily Melanson serves pulled them even at 13. The Red Devils closed it out, taking an extremely tight bronze medal victory by a total of six points in their three winning sets. Facing a taller opponent, one player in particular, WCI, focused on hitting line (aiming down the line rather than cross court), utilizing tips and really digging in and covering with tenacious defence.

"We ended up getting a medal, which exceeded our expectations," said Bickell.

"We played our game for sure," Rabe agreed, happy to hang a bronze medal around her neck. "It's nice to finish on a win for sure."

Schubert looked back on 'an amazing year', balancing elevated AA competition with the confidence she had a good team both in terms of talent and 'personality.'

"Great volleyball and great for us to come out with bronze. I know we were satisfied. We were so happy with our performance."

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ROUTE TO THE PAST

HISTORY

Finding a Doctor

SCOTT GILLIES

Echo Contributor

The age-old problem of finding a doctor seems to have plagued people for centuries. Here in Oxford County, shortly after Confederation, the situation was equally perplexing. To help solve the challenge of finding a qualified physician, a publication was released entitled "Medical Directory for the Province of Ontario, 1869". It was produced by none other than Dr. Strange!

The following are stories about some of the identified medicos from this directory. All were registered under the Ontario Medical Act. To be registered, a doctor had to be over the age of 21, have undergone written and oral exams after four years of study in the following areas: Anatomy, Chemistry, Theory of Medical Practice, Principles and Practice of Surgery, Midwifery, and Diseases of Women and Children, and Pharmacy. These were to be followed by short courses on clinical medicine, clinical surgery and botany. They must also have spent upwards of a year working in a hospital.

The population of Tillsonburg was growing to roughly 1,600 by the time this directory was published, and yet there was only one register doctor for the town – Dr. John Ault. Dr. Sylvanus Joy would later have a lasting influence on this community but in 1869 he was working in Woodstock.

Brinton Paine Brown, had been born in 1797, married in 1817, and fathered 12 children. With roots in the village of Brownsville, Brinton was practicing medicine in Woodstock in 1869, while his son Dr. Isaac Brown had a similar practice in Ingersoll and Beachville after having studied at Victoria College in Cobourg. Before this Isaac had served as a medical officer in Nova Scotia and California.

Brinton Brown passed in Woodstock in 1883 and was buried in the Old

Delmer Cemetery. Isaac however died at the young age of 57. It seems that early death was a recurring theme amongst these early doctors. A post-mortem conducted by his colleagues found that the good doctor had been suffering for months from pancreatic cancer.

Daniel William "DW" Carroll was born in 1838 in Ingersoll, grandson of John Carroll the first settler of Beachville. When he died in 1912, he bequeathed a large parcel of property to the Town of Ingersoll so that it could be turned into a park. Today, he is honoured by Memorial Park.

Dr. John Foote Coad, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, was born in 1812 in Devonshire England. He and Scottish-born Susan Moysey were wed in 1835 and together raised a large family. Dr. Coad passed in 1884 and was buried in the Woodstock Anglican Cemetery. His wife lived another 20 years until she was 90. They had emigrated to Canada with their 8 children and set up medical practice in East Zorra Township sometime between 1852 and 1858 when their 9th child was born.

Dr. Addison Joseph Collver lived between 1836 and 1921, spending most of his days in Otterville. His first wife, passed away at the age of 48; he later remarried schoolteacher Miss Mary Ellen Dix who lived to be the village's oldest resident (94) at the time of her death.

Massachusetts-born Ephraim Cooke was licenced by the Medical Board of Upper Canada as the first physician in Norwich Township in 1831. He was an outspoken advocate for the rebellious efforts of the locals in 1837 and for his efforts, he was sentenced to death by the colonial authorities. He was sent to England to stand trial but after several months in jail, was pardoned and allowed to return to Canada. Being a friend to all the families who received his medical attention, they bestowed on him every high honour. He was Nor-



Brinton Paine Brown. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

wich's second postmaster, its first bank manager, and a director of the Port Dover and Lake Huron Railway. His son George constructed a large home named "Hadley Place" which would eventually become site of the first Norwich high school.

Dr. Hugh MacKay was born in Zorra township. He graduated in 1867 from Victoria College medical school in Cobourg and practiced medicine in Woodstock until his death at age 54 in 1890. Meanwhile, two other Scots, Drs. McCallum and McDonald were based in Culloden, and Hugh McLeod looked after the highlanders of Harrington.

Marshall Bidwell McCausland practiced medicine in Ingersoll until his death. Originally born in Elgin County, he was interred there following his

death in 1895. His son and namesake also became a doctor, but in Michigan.

Dr. Levi Hoyt Swan, born in 1834, was named after his grandfather, Dr. Levi Hoyt Perry, the first teacher and doctor in Woodstock. Dr. Swan had a practice in Embro in 1869 but returned home and founded the Woodstock Sanitarium in the early 1880s, described as a "medical home for invalids, (with) a full system of Turkish and other baths... mineral waters for kidney infections. The Baths and Electricity are the best treatment in the world for rheumatism and chronic diseases." Dr. Swan was part of a delegation heading to Toronto in 1889 when he was killed in a train derailment.

Dr. John Turquand was born in Malta and when his family came to Canada in 1820, he spent three years at Upper Canada College before graduating in Medicine at McGill University in 1836. Family connections brought him to Woodstock, where he commenced his medical practice the following year.

Turquand became the first President of the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1867. He was a respected member of the Royal College of Surgeons, England, and the College of Physicians in Edinburgh. Dr. Turquand was appointed Surgeon for the Oxford County Gaol in 1870 after having served the Oxford Militia in that capacity since 1838. In 1878, when the Oxford County Medical Association was formed, he was appointed its first president. When he passed away on May 18, 1880, all the businesses in Woodstock suspended operations so that the citizens could pay their respects to a life of service well spent.

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OAP Community Theatre's Whimsy State production tells (mostly) true story of a fishermen-built micro-nation

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

A group of fishermen creating their own micro-nation is part of our Canadian History, and One Act Players (OAP) Community Theatre will bring it to life later this March.

OAP Community Theatre will present Whimsy State (or the Principality of Outer Baldonia) on March 27 and 28 at St. David's United Church. Whimsy State by Canadian Playwright A.J. Demers is based on a now-defunct micro-nation, The Principality of Outer Baldonia, formed by Russell M. Arundel, a fisherman, a lawyer, and a chairman of Pepsi Cola Bottling Company in Long Island, NY.

"It's kind of a bizarre story and the other thing is this is the first time I've come across something that I would call a historical comedy. It's based on fact and it's a funny play," said director Ted McLauchlin.

In 1948, Arundel purchased four acres of Outer Bald Tusket Island, near Nova Scotia's Southernmost corner, for \$750. He then created a stone building for himself and his friends called "The Royal Palace." He created the Declaration of

Independence of Outer Baldonia with his fellow fishermen Ron Wallace and Elson Bordeau during a night of rum-drinking.

"The motivation at the time was based around the fact that at the time, the Canadian government was opening up fishing rights to other countries in and around the Bay of Fundy area and where Blue Fin tuna, which was the prize at the time, was quite abundant and these guys decided by becoming their own micro-nation, they could control the fishing around that island," said McLauchlin.

"That was the motivation, but they went off the rails, and it became a little bit of a joke where they created their own coat of arms, their own money and their own charter of rights and freedoms."

The Declaration of Independence of Outer Baldonia can still be found in the Yarmouth County Museum. All of the actors performing in Whimsy State have lots of experience in theatre.

"These are all actors who have spent years on the stage, so I'm happy for that and it's a challenging play to put on," McLauchlin said. "There are 18 scenes in the play, so it's a lot of movement. It's a lot of area that we're covering to depict all of these things, but they're coming along really well. They're having a good time."



(Left to right) Aaron Gorlick, Joanna Sweete, and Lionel Santos

(ALEX BISH PHOTO)

Performances will be held on Friday, March 27, at 7:30 p.m., and Saturday, March 28, at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. An adjudicator from the Western Ontario Drama League (WODL) is evaluating the performance on opening night and providing feedback after the show. Demers, the playwright of Whimsy State, will also be in attendance.

"This is the first time a lot of them have ever got to perform for the actual play-

wright," McLauchlin said of the cast. "We invited him, not really thinking he'd accept that invitation, but low and behold, he is coming, and it's on the night that the play is being adjudicated, so you know, no pressure, right? But they're excited about it. It'll be a great performance."

Tickets can be purchased at Carman's Photo Source in Woodstock's Springbank Plaza or online via <https://www.oapcommunitytheatre.com>.



(Left to right) Lionel Santos and Jeff Sweete.

(ALEX BISH PHOTO)



Karen Trick.

(ALEX BISH PHOTO)

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Keep your dollars in Canada to strengthen communities and support local businesses, including your local newspaper.

 News Media Canada
Médias d'Info Canada



Oxford Women in Networking celebrates 10th annual sold-out International Women's Day Event

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

Oxford Women in Networking (OWIN) hosted their 10th annual International Women's Day celebration at Woodstock's South Gate Centre on March 4. The sold-out event welcomed 151 attendees from across Oxford County.

Inside the venue, the atmosphere was lively and welcoming. Women of all ages mingled and chatted, reconnecting with colleagues and meeting fellow business owners from across Oxford County. Guests also had the opportunity to participate in a popular Wine Pull fundraiser. This year's theme, #GiveToGain, highlighted the power of generosity and collaboration.

Heart FM's Marcie Culbert served as the evening's MC, opening the event with a warm welcome and the first round of door prizes.

"I'm thrilled and honoured to be part of this wonderful event, surrounded by so many amazing, energetic, empowering, and encouraging people," Culbert said. Pausing with a smile, she added, "It's wonderful to see so many beautiful faces at a sold-out event, I might add."

Carol Erickson, Vice President of OWIN, followed with remarks that reflected on the organization's impact and mission.

She began by acknowledging the impressive turnout.

"Seriously, I heard last year Toronto couldn't even pull that off," Erickson joked. "That says something about who we are and what we're building together."

Erickson described OWIN as a place where women come together to learn, grow, and support one another.

"We grow. Not just our businesses. We grow ourselves, our confidence, our courage, and our community. Tonight is about celebrating that."

She took time to thank the evening's sponsors, the organization's board of directors, and the volunteers whose hard work and dedication helped bring the event together.

Erickson also reflected on her own long-standing connection to the organization, sharing that she has been a proud member of OWIN for more than 30 years. She and her husband have also owned a business in Woodstock for over five decades.

"It's the collaboration, the kindness, the generosity, and the true spirit of community that I've learned from our members," Erickson said. "I value the acceptance and respect I feel here. Sometimes it's worth remembering how far we've come."

She then shared a personal story illustrating the progress that has been made.

"At my first job in Woodstock, my



Attendees at OWIN Sold-Out Women's Day Event 2026.

(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)



Allison Henkel from BDO Canada, giving a speech at OWIN.

(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

brother hired me for \$85 a week," she said. "Six months later, he hired my husband for \$180 a week."

While the experience initially left her feeling frustrated by the blatant inequality, Erickson noted that times have changed, though there is still more work to be done.

"Real change doesn't happen in a headline," she said. "It happens in rooms like this, where women connect, back each other up, and build something stronger together."

Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione also addressed the audience, sharing how the influence of strong women has shaped his own life.

"I'm the oldest son of a single mother of five," Acchione said. "I witnessed resilience, discipline, and determination firsthand between my mom and my three sisters."

He spoke about how those experiences continue to guide him today.

"My mother gave everything she had for her children, and what she gained was strength in her family and a legacy that continues to this day," he said. "I've also been blessed with two daughters and now two granddaughters. Watching them grow reinforces why this work matters."

Acchione noted that women's leadership is something he sees regularly in his own role.

"I don't just support women's leadership in theory. I experience it daily," he said,

noting that five of the seven members of Woodstock City Council are women.

"When women gain leadership, organizations gain performance," he added. "When diverse perspectives are present, everything becomes more balanced and thoughtful."

Throughout the evening, additional door prizes were handed out as guests enjoyed a buffet-style dinner accompanied by live music from Patrick Jackson Murphy.

The program also featured three guest speakers: Janet Somers, Liz Wismer-Van Meer, and Allison Henkell, who each shared powerful personal stories and reflections on leadership, resilience, and the importance of supporting the amazing women in our community.

Wismer-Van Meer perhaps captured the spirit of the evening best.

"Give not because you expect anything in return," she said. "Give because that is how we build a world where women rise together. We don't divide success; we multiply it."

As a young woman, I found the event inspiring and going back through my notes, I cannot express how moving the speeches were. While it would be impossible to capture every moment in one article, the sense of encouragement and support in the room was undeniable.

If this year's celebration was any indication, OWIN's International Women's Day event will continue to be a highlight for the community for years to come.

Visit us online at theecho.ca

theecho.ca

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

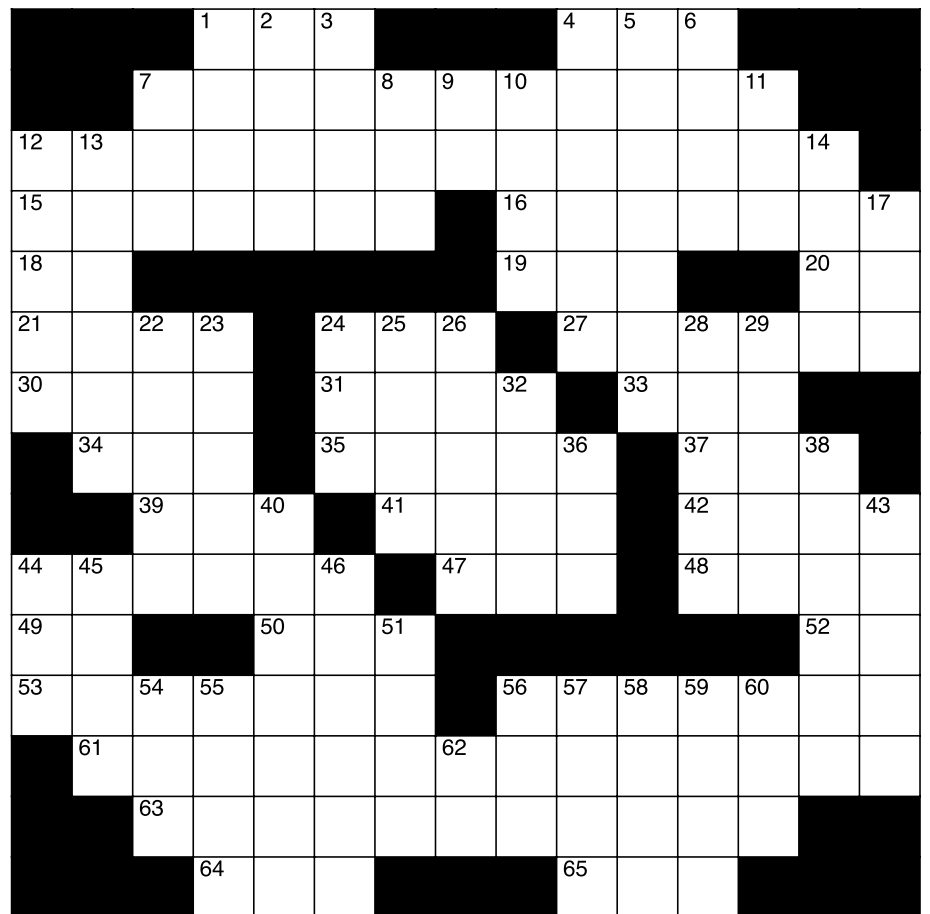
PART-TIME NEWSPAPER DELIVERY PERSON

The Woodstock-Ingersoll Echo is seeking a part-time employee to deliver newspapers to our several pick-up locations in Woodstock and Ingersoll on a weekly (Thursday / Friday) basis. The applicant will require use of their own vehicle but will be paid for time plus kilometer allowance.

Interested parties should contact **Stewart Grant** at stew@granthaven.com.



CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Blockchain-based entity
- 4. A woolen cap of Scottish origin
- 7. Painted with glue
- 12. Legendary crooner
- 15. Structure made with strips of wood
- 16. Tropical fruits
- 18. Commercial
- 19. Comedienne Gasteyer
- 20. The Ocean State
- 21. Ancient Scot
- 24. Basics
- 27. Stated propositions
- 30. Scottish island group
- 31. Expression of annoyance
- 33. Large tree
- 34. Engine additive
- 35. Conspiracy
- 37. Drunkard
- 39. Someone who is morally reprehensible
- 41. Ancient Syrian city
- 42. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls
- 44. Carry (slang)
- 47. Sweet potato
- 48. European river
- 49. The Golden State
- 50. Windy City ballplayer
- 52. New Testament
- 53. Possess spiritually
- 56. A treeless grassy plain
- 61. Popular historical novel
- 63. In a law-abiding way
- 64. A place to sleep
- 65. Criticize

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Impression in a surface
- 2. Computer language
- 3. Relating to the ear
- 4. Occupant
- 5. Member of Great Plains people
- 6. Social media firm
- 7. Digital audiotape
- 8. Midway between east and southeast
- 9. Chronic, progressive disease
- 10. Chinese lute
- 11. Not wet
- 12. Moves wings up and down
- 13. Communication devices
- 14. Swiss river
- 17. Female sibling
- 22. Receive
- 23. Relating to a type
- 24. General's assistant (abbr.)
- 25. Steep bank
- 26. Taxi driver
- 28. Moves into without difficulty
- 29. Bicycle manufacturer
- 32. Traditional rhythmic pattern
- 36. Fugitives are on it
- 38. Bitter-tasting organic substance
- 40. Die
- 43. Matched
- 44. Literary genre ___-fi
- 45. Cannot
- 46. Pounded
- 51. British rock group
- 54. Debt relief order
- 55. 2006 NL Cy Young winner
- 56. Green vegetable
- 57. Tough outer skin of fruit
- 58. ___ Spumante (Italian wine)
- 59. Ailments
- 60. Famed singer Charles
- 62. Camper

Answers found on Page 31

Local News Lives Here

There was a time when small-town newspapers told the stories that mattered most: the people, the milestones, the challenges, and the triumphs of the community.

At Grant Haven Media, we're proud to carry on that tradition. Our newspapers are built around truly local content. Written for the community, about the community, by the community.

From council decisions to community events, local businesses to local achievements, we believe every town deserves a strong, independent voice.

**Restoring Small-Town Journalism,
One Community at a Time.**



United Way Oxford's Coldest Night of the Year events a success

STAFF

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

United Way Oxford is proud to announce that the 2026 Coldest Night of the Year events in Tillsonburg and Ingersoll raised over \$104,000 for the two towns' Light Houses.

The two communities welcomed over 275 people to the Feb. 28 events, with every dollar staying in the community where it was raised.

"Transitional housing provides safe, supportive, and affordable housing that supports each resident's unique needs and allows them time, space, and the assistance required to create a better future life. The amazing staff from our community partner, the Oxford County Community Health Centre, are there to lend a helping hand to every resident. CNOY funding helps United Way ensure that both Ingersoll and Tillsonburg have this vital housing program," said Kelly Gilson, Executive Director of

United Way Oxford.

The Ingersoll Light House, which opened in April 2025, has already assisted 14 individuals, providing stability, connection, and a pathway to independence.

"Transitional housing has become an essential addition to our small community, filling a critical gap in support for residents when local services are limited. When we invest our resources in a housing-first approach, we're investing in proven solutions that help residents regain stability and stay connected to their community," said Lindsay Wilson, Community Impact and Engagement Manager for United Way Oxford.

United Way Oxford would like to thank all the walkers, donors, volunteers, and community partners who made the events a success. Special appreciation goes to all the sponsors, including lead sponsors EARTH Power and GM, as well as The Mill Inn & Eatery, for providing a light dinner so participants could gather and celebrate the walk.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The United Way is calling the 2026 version of the Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser a huge success. Over \$100,000 was raised to support affordable housing in Ingersoll and Tillsonburg



WOODSTOCK COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)

The Friendly City version of the event raised just over \$186,000 for Operation Sharing. The event brought together families, community groups, businesses, and volunteers determined to make a difference for those facing hunger and homelessness. Woodstock distinguished itself nationally by leading in walker and team registrations, underscoring the community's commitment to caring for its neighbours.



Alexandra Hospital Ingersoll
Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital

NOW RECRUITING VOLUNTEER BOARD MEMBERS

Recruiting for board members for Rural Roads Health Services (RRHS), representing Alexandra Hospital, Ingersoll, and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital.

The Alexandra Hospital, Ingersoll and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital are your community hospitals. We strive to provide excellent patient care and promote health and wellness for those we serve. As of April 1, 2026, our hospitals have integrated as Rural Roads Health Services in order to keep healthcare close to home.

RRHS Board members have a unique opportunity to help shape healthcare for our community. The Board's governance responsibilities include oversight and accountability for both hospitals:

- Mission, Vision and Values
- Strategic planning
- Financial stewardship
- Quality and performance monitoring
- Public and partner relations

We encourage applicants with a broad range of skills and experience to apply for consideration. Applicants should be prepared to attend 2-4 meetings per month. Successful candidates will reside or conduct business in Ingersoll, Tillsonburg or the surrounding catchment areas.

If this opportunity interests you, please forward a completed application form found at <https://www.ruralroadshealthservices.ca/about/board-of-directors/> plus your resume and references to:

Attention: Board Chair, Rural Roads Health Services
c/o Lisa Dahm, Executive Assistant lisa.dahm@rrhs.ca

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 12:00pm Monday, April 13, 2026

Thank You from VON Sakura House

Thank you to the companies below for being Beacon sponsors in support of Sakura House. These companies supported Sakura House at all 3 of our signature events in 25/26. Thank you for being beacons of kindness and support in our community!



COMING EVENTS

MARCH

MARCH 17, & 31 | 1 PM

SACRED HEART PARISH EUCHRE

Henderson Hall, 133 John Street, Ingersoll
We invite everyone to join us for a Euchre afternoon.
Refreshments provided.

MARCH 14 | 9 AM

PANCAKE BREAKFAST AND WALK

Ingersoll Municipal Parking Lot behind the arena
INGERSOLL DISTRICT NATURE CLUB invites you to carpool for an outing to Springwater Conservation Area for a pancake breakfast followed by a visit and walk in the nearby Archie Coulter Conservation Area near Aylmer.

MARCH 14 | 11 AM - 3 PM

BEST U HEALTH EXPO 2026

South Gate Centre, 191 Old Wellington St. S. Woodstock, 519-539-9817

Exhibitors, vendors, presentations on Health, Wellness and Safety. FREE ADMISSION. Thank you to the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario and the Province of Ontario for supporting this health fair.

MARCH 21 | 9:30 AM - 4 PM

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

St. Mary's Catholic High School, 431 Juliana Drive, Woodstock, ON, N4V 1E8

Free admission and parking. Framed and Judged exhibits, Stamp dealers, youth gift bags, Sales Circuit, draw prizes.
Contact: dhfe@silomail.com
Web: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

MARCH 21 | 9 - 11 AM

MEN'S BREAKFAST

Huron Park Baptist Church, 99 Berwick St, Woodstock, ON

Please call 519-421-4722 for more information.

MARCH 24 | 2 - 4 PM

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

190TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS SPRING TEA AND BAKE SALE WITH SEASONAL MUSICAL INTERLUDES

St. John's Church, 685860 Hwy#2, Eastwood, ON

519-458-4282

Wear your Easter bonnet!

MARCH 24 | 7 PM

"LIFE WORTH LIVING"

Woodstock Polish Hall, 878 Dufferin Street, Woodstock

The one-hour film was produced by Woodstock native, Alex Schadenberg, Executive Director of Euthanasia Prevention Coalition and will be followed by a Q & A session with Alex. Admission is free. For more information, please email info@oxfordcountyrighttolife.com

MARCH 25 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY BURGESS HOMESTEAD

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock

The train has been delayed so we are switching tracks!! Join us for a presentation on the Burgess Homestead. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

MARCH 26 | 12 PM

SENIORS LUNCH

Huron Park Baptist Church, 99 Berwick St, Woodstock, ON

Please call 519-421-4722 for more information.

MARCH 28 | 10 AM - 2 PM

EXPERIENCE FANSHAWE AT OPEN HOUSE

All locations are open. Explore our campuses at London, Woodstock, Simcoe, St. Thomas, Clinton and Tiverton

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!

APRIL

APRIL 3 | 8 PM

"COME, TOUCH THE ROBE" AND OTHER SELECTED WORKS

Sacred Heart Church, Ingersoll

Join the Ingersoll Choral Society on Good Friday evening in a stirring performance of Pepper Choplin's cantata, "Come, Touch the Robe" and other selected works. With orchestral accompaniment. Free will offering will be received. www.ingersollchoralsociety.ca or visit us on FB.

APRIL 18 | 1:30 - 4:30 PM

GEMS & JAVA - FUNDRAISER FOR ETHIOPIA

Hearts for Ethiopia is hosting Gems & Java, a fundraiser that changes lives in Ethiopia. Tickets available at www.heartsforethiopia.com. Until March 21st tickets are \$60. March 22nd tickets are \$65. Tables of 8 are \$460.00. For cash purchases, contact Heather hmckinnon15@gmail.com or (519) 535-9535. Maranatha Christian Reformed Church, 735 Frontenac Cres., Woodstock.

APRIL 29 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY MIGHTY MEN OF ZORRA

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock

"History and land helped them rise to the 1893 World Champions". Special presentation by William (Bill) Butt, Playwright. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

MAY

MAY 27 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock

"A Celebration of Oxford County's Past". Guest speaker Liz Dommasch, Oxford County Archivist. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

JULY

JULY 6-10 | 9 AM - 12:30 PM

BASKETBALL POWER CAMP

Huron Park Baptist Church, 199 Berwick St, Woodstock, ON N4S 7L6

Ages 5 to 14. Please call 519-421-4722 for more information.

ONGOING CLASSES, CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS

EVERY OTHER FRIDAY | 1 - 4 PM

IN 2026 IT'S YOUR FIX! INGERSOLL COUNTRY MUSIC JAMBOREE

Masonic Hall, 190 Thames St. S., Ingersoll

Join us, walk ins welcome. Qualifications - love 50-70's country music. Perform, listen, dance & enjoy! March 20, April 10 & 17, May 1, 15 & 29, June 5 & 19.

EVERY FRIDAY | 1 PM

TILLSONBURG DUPLICATE BRIDGE CLUB

Tillsonbur Senior Centre, 45 Hardy Ave, Tillsonburg

Don't have a partner? Come anyway and we will match you up with someone. For more information, visit their Facebook page: TburgBridge.

2ND TUES. OF MONTH (SEPT. TO MAY) | 2 - 4 PM

4TH TUES. OF MONTH (SEPT. TO MAY) | 7 - 9 PM

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY

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

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

LAST TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH | 10 AM - 12 PM

MONTHLY VON BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Ingersoll Pharmasave, 19 King St. E., Ingersoll

Last Tuesday of every Month.

3RD WED. OF MONTH

COLOURING THROUGH GRIEF

Caring Hearts Support Network: St. David's United Church, 190 Springbank Ave., Woodstock ON

One time fee of \$15. Registration is required.

Call 519-536-3370. Check out website

www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

3RD WED. OF MONTH | 6:30 - 8:30 PM

PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

21 Wellington St., Woodstock

(Virtual options available)

PCMH is a peer support program providing support to parents and caregivers across Ontario with lived experience raising children and youth with mental health challenges. For more information, please visit family.cmho.org or oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca. We are also on Facebook: Parents for Children's Mental Health ~ Oxford County

VON OXFORD GRIEF CARE:

FREE MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

Register at: oxford.griefsupport@von.ca or 519-539-1231 Ext 6299 or 6296

TILLSONBURG

WHEN: 2nd Tuesday of every month

WHERE: VON Oxford Office 24 Brock St. W., Tillsonburg

TIME: 6:30PM-8:00PM

INGERSOLL

WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month

WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll

TIME: 10:30AM-12:00Noon

WOODSTOCK

WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month

WHERE: Sakura House Hospice 715180 Oxford Rd.4, Woodstock

TIME: 10:30AM-12:00 Noon



Fresh Lake Erie Perch

BACK FOR THE SEASON

Now Available

No need to go to Port Dover!

ONLY AT CRISPY'S FISH & CHIPS

194 Springbank Ave N, Woodstock 519-290-8800

Stay tuned for Good Friday pre-orders...

COMING EVENTS

4TH WED. OF MONTH | 1 - 2:30 PM

GRIEF SUPPORT FOR MAID RELATED LOSS Thamesford Library, 165 Dundas St., Thamesford

This monthly in-person grief support group for loss related to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) offers a compassionate, safe space to explore this unique loss. **The next meeting will be on March 25th from 1 – 2:30 p.m.** The group is free of charge and pre-registration is requested. To register or inquire about an evening group, contact 519-866-3016 or email faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca.

OXFORD COUNTY DIABETES EDUCATION PROGRAM

Are you looking for support with your Diabetes? Our Team of Registered Nurses, Registered Dietitians and a Social Worker is here to support YOUR goals. We can help with medication adjustments, lifestyle and diet changes, stress management, weight reduction strategies and more. Appointments are available at Alexandra Hospital Ingersoll and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital and by phone. **SELF REFERRALS ARE WELCOME.** Please call 519-485-9611 to book an appointment. Let's work together!

THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF OXFORD COUNTY

The Optimists bring out the best in Youth, Community, and Themselves. If anyone is interested in coming out to meet us and learn more about us please email brenda7621@outlook.com

THE LIONS CLUB OF WOODSTOCK

The Lions Club of Woodstock has been serving the community and Oxford County with kindness and generosity since 1931. The Lions always place the needs of neighbours and communities first. Through the dedication and hard work of our volunteer members, we are serving those in need together. If you are interested in becoming a member or simply wish to learn more by attending one of our monthly meetings, please email Steve Iorio at steveiorio4@gmail.com for more information.

OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS

Are you looking to start a summer pastime? Are you interested in your family history? Oxford Branch has an extensive collection of family history and genealogical resources that can help you.

Come visit our Resource Centre at 82 Light Street, Courthouse Square, Woodstock. We are open Tuesdays to Thursdays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Volunteers are ready to help you get started or help you research for missing information. You can also connect with us on the web at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting genealogical research in Oxford County. Hope to see you through the summer!

FREEZER MEALS PROVIDED BY ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

We know life is busy for many families today, and it can be so nice to have things in the freezer to allow us to eat well, and quickly. St. Paul's Church in Ingersoll has been busy making different items you can simply pull out of the freezer! We have frozen ham & pea soup, cabbage rolls and cabbage roll casseroles, as well as individual turkey pies. We also have some lovely frozen apple and blueberry fruit pies ready for your oven! We'd love to make life easier for you this winter. For more details on what we have, and the prices, please call our church office at 519-485-3390 or by email: stpauls@execulink.com.

BEACHVILLE LEGION EVENTS: 434852 ZorraLine, Beachville

THURSDAYS | 7 PM
EUCHRE

THURSDAYS | 7 - 8 PM
LINE DANCING

THURSDAYS | 8:15 - 9:15 PM
RUMBA AND BACHATA DANCING
No partner required.

FRIDAYS | 8 PM
DARTS

SATURDAYS | 1 - 4 PM
THAMES VALLEY BLUEGRASS AND OLD TIME
COUNTRY PICKERS
Open Mic(acoustic only). Come enjoy the music.

MARCH 18 | 4:30 - 6 PM
OX ON THE RUN LIBRARY BOOK MOBILE

MARCH 28 | 5 - 9 PM
OXFORD COUNTY FELINE WELLNESS AND
OUTREACH PASTA DINNER FUNDRAISER
Call 226-228-3567 for reservations.

MARCH 28 | 7 - 11 PM
KARAOKE

APRIL 3 | 5 PM
FISH AND CHIPS DINNER
Call 519-423-6363 to order to avoid disappointment.

APRIL 11 | REG. 9 - 9:45 AM, PLAY BEGINS 10 AM
OXFORD COUNTY DART TOURNAMENT
Doubles followed by singles \$10 per person, per event. All entry money paid out.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 55 EVENTS: 642 Dundas St, Woodstock, ON

THURSDAYS | 1:30 PM
SHUFFLEBOARD

MONDAY EVENINGS
CADETS

TUESDAY - FRIDAY EVENINGS
DART LEAGUE

MARCH 15 | 5 - 6 PM
FISH N CHIPS

Pre-Order & Pay No later March 10th, Dessert is extra, Call the Office for details 519-537-3112.

MARCH 22 | 5 - 6 PM
CORN BEEF & CABBAGE
Pre-Order & Pay No later March 17th, Dessert is extra, Call the Office for details 519-537-3112

MARCH 28 | 4:30 - 6 PM
WING NIGHT

Wings w/Fries, Pre-Order & Pay No later March 24th. Call the Office for details.

APRIL 12
SMOTHERED CHICKEN

APRIL 14-21
RUMMAGE SALE

APRIL 19
FISH N CHIPS

APRIL 25
WING NIGHT

SATURDAY EVENING ENTERTAINMENT:

MARCH 7 | 6 PM - 1 PM
PRIVATE FUNCTION
Canteen still open.

MARCH 14 | 7 PM - 11 PM
MIKE THROPE

MARCH 21 | 7 PM - 11 PM
50-60 BROS

MARCH 28 | 7 PM - 11 PM
DJ KELLY

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR HOUSE IS



Keep your dollars in Canada to strengthen communities and support local businesses, including your local newspaper.

Riddles

How many gold coins can a leprechaun throw in an empty pot?

One. After that, it's no longer empty.

What kind of spells do leprechauns use?

Lucky Charms!

What do you call a fake Irish stone?

A Shamrock!

What is at the end of a rainbow?

The letter W.

Why should you never iron a 4-leaf clover?

You don't want to press your luck!

Why can't you borrow money from a leprechaun?

Because they're always a little short.

What type of music do leprechauns love?

Sham-rock.

Why do leprechauns recycle?

They like to go green.

What do you get when you cross poison ivy with a four-leaf clover?

A rash of good luck

What type of bow can't be tied?

A rainbow!

Why is St. Patrick's Day a frog's favorite holiday?

Because they wear green all the time!

What baseball position do leprechauns play?

Shortstop!

What is Irish and sits on the back porch?

Paddy O'Furniture!

Sudoku

by PeterS 2026

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

Solutions on page 31

Featured Pet



JETT

He arrived on October 29 on a WestJet flight at Hamilton Airport on a cold, rainy night. He was four months old.

I hadn't thought of a name yet, so I looked at the invoice and said, "Well, your name is going to be Jet, because you flew on WestJet."

He's an all-black purebred Chihuahua and was the size of a pop can when he arrived, weighing just 2.2 pounds. At his peak he reached 10.5 pounds.

He's an awesome companion, always happy to see me when I come through the door, no matter how many hours I was working overtime during my 30-year career at CAMI Automotive.

For half of that time, he was always at the door waiting for me when I pulled in, morning or night.

He loves his truck rides and trips to the dog park.

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- IRELAND
- SHAMROCK
- LEPRECHAUN
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