

STRATFORD *TIMES*

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Kitchen fire closes Braai House

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

A kitchen fire at Braai House, located on the upper level of 34 Brunswick St., forced customers to leave mid-service Thursday evening as smoke spread through the upper level of the building.

In a social media post, manager Jessie Votary confirmed the fire affected both Braai House and the downstairs business, Keystone Alley.

"It's true, friends, Braai House had a fire tonight that has affected both upstairs and downstairs at Keystone Alley," Votary wrote.

The post said all reservations for the weekend had been cancelled and customers would be contacted once a plan was in place.

Stratford Fire Department director of fire prevention Andrew Rogerson said firefighters received multiple 911 calls reporting smoke in the building and responded promptly.

Upon entering the building, firefighters found a working fire in the restaurant's kitchen.

"There was an evacuation in place at the time of our arrival, and we did come across a working fire in the kitchen of the restaurant," Rogerson said. "We received the call shortly after 6:40 p.m., and the fire was under control by 7:23 p.m."

Damage estimates were not immediately available, but Rogerson said firefighters used water to extinguish the blaze.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 4



(GARY WRAY PHOTO)

The 1985-86 OHA Sutherland Cup Champion Stratford Cullitons sit down for a group photo in the Cullitons/Warriors locker room at the William Allman Memorial Arena on July 25. For more on the 40th anniversary reunion, see our story on page 10.

After 22 straight years with SPS, Jason Clarke named new deputy chief

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For Jason Clarke, his hometown was always the plan.

"I'm a Stratford guy, born and raised in Stratford and lived here all my life," Clarke said. "... For me it's always been Stratford. I've loved Stratford my entire life and I love everything about it."

Clarke, who has been with the Stratford Police Service for 22 years now, has been appointed the service's new deputy chief, following an internal selection process that

took nearly a year. Deputy Chief Gerry Foster retired in the summer of 2025.

Clarke brings extensive experience in operational and leadership roles across the organization, according to an announcement from the police services board. Most recently, he served as acting deputy chief for six months, sharing the role with Insp. Mark Taylor for the year. During that time, according to the board, he "demonstrated sound judgment, disciplined leadership and a consistent commitment to organizational excellence and

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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After 22 straight years with SPS, Jason Clarke named new deputy chief

CONTINUED FROM FRONT
public service.”

Clarke was interested in policing at a young age, looking up to local officers when he was a child. After graduating from the law and security program, as it was called then, he began his journey in policing. He got a job in corrections and was asked to interview for an officer position in Stratford shortly after, joining the service in 2004.

Things have changed in the industry a great deal in the last 22 years, according to him.

“The biggest change for policing for me is the oversight and just the public perception of police,” he said. “... There's always been oversight, which I think is very important, especially with all the power and opportunity that we have to affect people's lives in our daily work, but you know, it used to be if the police said something or asked you to move along, people just moved along, right? There wasn't much pushback, so that's really changed in policing, and I think for a good reason. I think policing really has to be transparent because the general public doesn't really know some of the rules that we're playing by.

“And then on the street for us right now, the mental health, addictions, and homelessness – you'll hear those three terms a lot anytime you're talking to police offi-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
After 22 years as a police officer in the Festival City, Jason Clarke is the Stratford Police Service's newest deputy chief.

cers. That's something that's really come to the forefront in our communities now too, and we're spending a ton of time and resources with those types of calls for service versus criminal acts in our community. We're doing both, but we never ever spent the amount of time we're spending these days on those three issues in the community.”

Stepping into the deputy role, Clarke is focused on those issues first and foremost, as well as making sure service members' health and wellbeing are taken care of, and that they know the organization supports them now and in the future.

As deputy chief, the overall success of the service is his responsibility, as is the support of the chief's and police service board's vision and strategic plan (one that is currently being developed and will be released “shortly,” according to Clarke). Since Chief Paul Landers is serving in an interim role at the moment, and the board's strategic plan is being developed, Clarke said his focus is galvanizing his peers as a team.

“Paul's a great team leader, and he's very, very instructive on us gathering each day to meet and talk about the service, what's going on, what needs to happen and how can we best support our membership so we have a healthy workforce here. There's really some great teamwork going on here right now.”

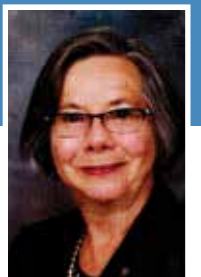
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Kitchen fire closes Braai House

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Rogerson said there is no indication the fire was suspicious.

"Everyone was evacuated safely, and the Stratford Fire Department responded with amazing efficiency," Votary wrote. "We are hoping for the best and will update very soon."

Since then, Braai House remains closed, though Keystone Alley re-opened for service and is taking reservations once again, as of press time. Representatives for the two restaurants posted their thanks to the community in a post on their Facebook page.

"Thanks to everyone who has reached

out to us since the fire," the post read. "We can't tell you how much it means to be a part of this community, and it truly means so much to feel the outpouring of love. We are still closed upstairs, but your support at our sister restaurant (Keystone Alley) on the main floor is much appreciated during this difficult time.

"... We kindly ask for your continued support there – it will help keep our staff working and make a meaningful difference as we recover."

The Times contacted Braai House for further comment but had not received a response by publication time.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Braai House remains closed after a kitchen fire last week.

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Speed limits lowering in northwest neighbourhood

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

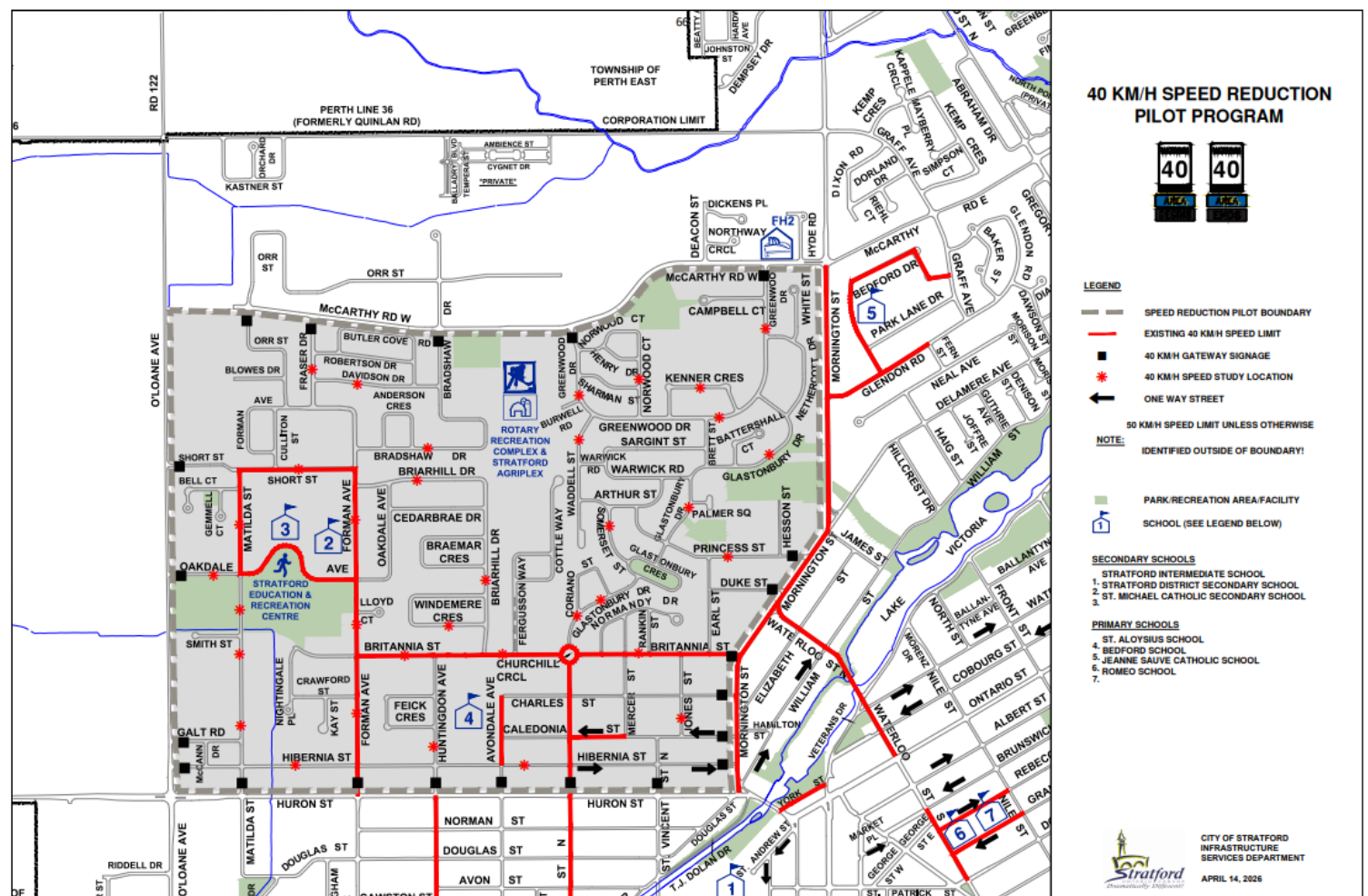
A northwestern Stratford neighbourhood will be slowing down this fall.

At the July 28 Stratford city council meeting, council unanimously approved a pilot program beginning at the end of August that will see all the roads in the area between McCarthy and Huron to the north and south and Mornington and O'Loane to the east and west be reduced to 40 kilometres an hour. The area includes three schools, the Stratford Education and Recreation Centre and the Rotary Complex.

Thirty-five new gateway speed limit signs are proposed for installation at entry points to the neighbourhood area and numerous traffic studies will be conducted across it for the year the pilot project is conducted. The findings of the studies will be compared to baseline data from the 36 studies completed in the area since 2027.

Four public information signs will be installed at Hibernia Street and Forman Avenue, Mornington Street and Hibernia Street, McCarthy Road West and Greenwood Drive and O'Loane Avenue and McCarthy Road West to provide information about the pilot program and direct residents to the project's page on Engage Stratford. Throughout the pilot period, surveys and polls will be conducted through that platform to gather feedback.

Council and city staff are considering the lowering of speed limits in residential areas for the safety of pedestrians and drivers alike. According to an earlier management report from staff, "the likelihood of survival in a collision between a



vehicle and a pedestrian is approximately 40 per cent when the vehicle is travelling at 50 kilometres an hour. However, the likelihood of survival increases to 75 per cent when the vehicle is travelling at 40 kilometres an hour or below. Driving at lower speeds enables drivers to stop within a shorter distance, have a wider field of vision and provide more time to react to

road hazards or other road users."

It isn't the first time council considered a reduction. In 2023, council considered two options: to implement a city-wide speed limit reductions in all residential areas, or to conduct a pilot project (like the one just recently approved). Council opted to table the options, meaning that no further action was to be taken at that

time, until Coun. Larry McCabe reignited the discussion last fall.

The pilot project is set to end in the fall of 2027. Further notification about the program will be publicized through the Engage Stratford project page, large-format information boards at the pilot boundaries, social media posts, newspaper and radio notices and in-person outreach.

City to look into diverting trucks from downtown core

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

City staff will soon be preparing information and a report ahead of initiating discussions with the province on transport trucks in the downtown core.

Coun. Mark Hunter made the referral motion at the regular Stratford city council meeting on July 27. The report will provide council and the public with high-level information on diverting commercial vehicles from the downtown, the current situation, key considerations and potential next steps.

As Coun. Bonnie Henderson recalled, trucks in the downtown core has been a conversation in the Festival City for many years – and discussions have been had with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO) in the past; however, Ontario Street and Erie Street are main highways in the King's Highway system and since many trucks are delivering to stores along those streets, it was not something that could be done.

"It'd be interesting to see if anything's changed," she said.

"Personally, I've had conversations with the province on this, and it didn't

have much traction," Mayor Martin Ritsma said. "And to that end, I have sent out early on over 40 letters to local truckers that come through here regularly that really don't need to be in (the) downtown. We know there are transports that have to come in ... but, you know, just asking those trucking companies and the dispatchers there to encourage the drivers to use our truck routes. So I'm not opposed to that. I think it's worth asking and pushing a little bit for us for the safety of our residents."

After a friendly amendment from

Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach, the inquiry to the MTO will also broach a bypass on Lorne Avenue, another proposal that has come and gone over the years. Hunter stated that he didn't include that in his motion because, per conversations with director of infrastructure Taylor Crinklaw, he did not think it was a possibility in the foreseeable future – a sentiment Henderson agreed with.

"They've been saying that since I was 16," she shared.

The amended motion was passed unanimously with only Coun. Geza Wordofa absent.

Police investigating Perth South collision

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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The Stratford Police Service is investigating a Perth South collision last Sunday.

On July 26, around 10:30 p.m., police received a call regarding a collision on Perth Road 163 and Perth Line 8. Two vehicles travelling north on Road 163 had collided with each other.

Paramedics assessed all individuals,

with several being transported to St. Marys Hospital for further evaluation. Two were subsequently sent to Victoria Hospital in London for further medical treatment. None of the injuries were life threatening, according

to police.

Police are continuing to investigate. If anyone has information regarding the incident, they are being asked to contact police at 519-271-4141.

Festival Theatre nets \$2M in provincial support

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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The Ontario government is investing over \$2 million in the Stratford Festival Theatre to support good jobs, empower local artists and help community arts organizations thrive, according to a media release from Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae's office.

The Stratford Festival Theatre will receive \$2,056,998 through the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. This funding is part of the government's plan to protect Ontario by supporting workers, businesses and communities in the

face of ongoing economic uncertainty.

"Our government recognizes the important role arts and cultural organizations play in strengthening communities and growing local economies," said Rae in the announcement. "This investment will help the Stratford Festival continue delivering world-class performances while supporting tourism, creating good jobs and generating economic benefits for Stratford and Perth County."

This grant is being awarded through the Ontario Arts Council's Major Organizations: Contribution Agreements program. The program provides operating support to major arts organizations that are significant to their sectors and

regions through their artistic activity, community role and organizational capacity. In Stratford, this funding will enable the Stratford Festival Theatre to continue presenting Shakespeare's plays and the best of classic and contemporary theatre across their four stages along with providing arts educational programming for all ages.

"The Ontario Arts Council provides important support," said executive director Anita Gaffney. "This annual operating investment is directed towards mounting a season of 12 to 14 plays and enabling the festival to bring together an accomplished team of artists and artisans to breathe life into these

plays. This investment, in turn, generates prosperity for Stratford and the surrounding region with \$277 million in economic impact as a result of the festival's output."

The Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, provides grants to Ontario-based individual artists and arts professionals, ad hoc groups, collectives and organizations, supporting a range of arts activities and disciplines.

In 2025-26, OAC invested nearly \$52 million in 208 communities across all 124 Ontario ridings, providing approximately 2,000 grants to individual artists and 1,000 grants to organizations.

Residents invited to help imagine Avon River's future at upcoming events

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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What should Stratford's Avon River look like 10, 20 or even 50 years from now?

Could it become a place for floating gardens and wild-life habitat, public art and gathering spaces, outdoor performances, accessible pathways, winter activities, richer storytelling or entirely new ways of connecting people with nature and one another?

Those questions are at the heart of Flowing Futures: Avon River Design Challenge, a community-wide initiative that is quickly becoming one of Stratford's largest public conversations about the future of one of the city's most treasured places.

Since launching this spring, Flowing Futures has attracted proposals from artists, designers, environmental advocates, historians, educators, students and community members exploring everything from ecological restoration and climate resilience to storytelling, public art, accessibility, recreation and cultural programming.

Now, the Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF) is inviting the broader community to become part of that conversation through two free public events this August.

"One of the most exciting things about Flowing Futures is that it isn't simply a design challenge – it's becoming a community conversation," said Mark Rosenfeld, founding director of PIF in a media release. "From youth imagining

floating playgrounds to seniors sharing decades of memories about the Avon River, people are contributing ideas, stories and perspectives that together are helping shape a richer vision for Stratford's future. Whether someone has a fully developed proposal or simply a memory, an observation or an idea to share, we'd love to hear from them."

Visitors are invited to drop into the interactive Flowing Futures Community Studio, the first community event, where they can share favourite memories of the Avon River, record short video reflections, sketch ideas for the river's future, contribute to the Community Idea Wall, meet members of the Flowing Futures team and learn more about the Avon River Design Challenge.

The Community Studio is designed for everyone—from lifelong Stratford residents to first-time visitors, from children to seniors. No artistic or technical experience is required—only curiosity and imagination.

Many of the ideas, stories and reflections gathered throughout the weekend may become part of the Flowing Futures Exhibition, taking place throughout Stratford from October 1–17, 2026.

The Flowing Futures Community Studio takes place during the World in a Weekend festival. It will operate 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Aug. 1 to Aug. 2 and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Aug. 3.

The second community event is the Flowing Futures River Clinic, an engaging evening that combines a guid-

ed walk along the Avon River with an interactive workshop led by specialists from MTE Consultants and BMI Group. Participants will explore the Avon River through a guided walk, learn about river ecology, watershed health and habitat restoration, discover how climate resilience can shape future river planning, receive feedback on Flowing Futures ideas and proposals and meet environmental specialists and community members interested in the river's future.

While the River Clinic will help participants strengthen proposals for the design challenge, it is equally intended for anyone who simply wants to learn more about Stratford's river and participate in the conversation.

The Flowing Futures River Clinic takes place Tuesday, Aug. 11 from 5-7 p.m. Participants will meet at Copperlight (Knox Church), 142 Ontario St.

The River Clinic is free, but registration is requested. Register at: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/flowing-future-river-clinic>.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is extracted from the ore cassiterite?
2. How many weeks are there in a fortnight?
3. Who tight roped across the twin towers?
4. What animal is known as the king of the jungle?
5. What company was initially known as "Blue Ribbon Sports"?
6. What is the hottest planet in our solar system?
7. What was the original name of the Boston Red Sox?
8. What is the main ingredient in hummus?
9. Ash Wednesday marks the first day of what?
10. What is the name for the process of electing a Pope?

This week's answers are found on pg. 23

Fifth annual Sk8 Jam 4 Sam returns

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Skateboarders and enthusiasts of all skill levels will be coming together to raise money to honour the life of an enthusiastic member of the community.

The fifth annual Sk8 Jam 4 Sam will take place at the Stratford All Wheels Park on Sept. 26. The fundraiser for Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth will begin with a youth competition for young skaters up to 15-years-old and will follow with three main adult skate competitions including lines, best tricks and games such as jumping over a limbo pole. Sk8 Jam 4 Sam will also include live music, food by donation, local vendors, raffles and t-shirts for sale.

The skate jam honours the memory of Sam Beauchamp, a skateboarder who died from brain cancer at 27-years-old and spent his final days in hospice care.

"We found that doing this in honour of him was also

fulfilling his final wishes in terms of the support that he got for Rotary Hospice and what his parents hoped for us to build off his legacy," said Brendon Whetham, one of the Sk8 Jam 4 Sam organizers.

Whetham aims to raise \$4,000 for Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth at this year's Sk8 Jam 4 Sam event. He met Beauchamp later in his life and is pleased to continue his legacy by supporting the hospice.

"He was always such a great energy to be around, super supportive so being able to almost carry on what he wished he could have, there's really no words to describe how great that feels," Whetham said. "We know that it brings a lot of joy to his family and the community and it's just a great feeling overall to bring this sense of community and awareness to Rotary Hospice and that cancer does take young kids as much as older people."

Event registration will be on-site at the skate park on 270 Downie St. starting at 12 p.m., with the youth competition to follow starting at 1 p.m.

Stratford retirement homes launch seniors bocce league to promote health and connection

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

McCarthy Place and Cedarcroft Place retirement residences have joined forces to bring both homes together in a lightly competitive seniors bocce league, where the homes compete against each other for the title of All Seniors Care Bocce Ball League champions.

Stacy Jordan, lifestyle director and regional manager, said the idea was to help bring the sister retirement homes together and advocate for better mental and physical health through a fun competition.

“Physical activity is imperative for seniors and their mental and physical health,” she said. “It gives them purpose and the opportunity to get out and try something

new while also giving them the ability to be part of a team again.”

Jordan, who is actively involved in Stratford’s local sports community and is known for her competitive spirit, thought it would be a fun way for residents to travel, represent their home and cheer each other on.

“Out of all the events we have organized, this has been my favourite,” she said. “Watching the residents become so excited, show their competitive side, travel for games and proudly represent their home has been incredible. It really brings out the kid in them.”

The residents initially took part in a try-out process that was “lightly competitive,” Jordan said.

“Each player eagerly looks forward to

every matchup, and at Cedarcroft Place they even joke about following ‘Coach Stacy’s strict bedtime curfew’ to be well-rested for the next day’s games.”

Players from both teams practise during the day and work hard at keeping up their bocce skills for the final tournament on Aug. 20, where the undefeated Cedarcroft Place team will try to retain its title as the 2026 champion.

“It has given me something to look forward to, and it’s been a lot of fun — especially when we win,” teammate Stuart Romphf said.

Another Cedarcroft Place teammate, Danny Hatherell, said he joined because it was an interesting sport and he wanted to try something new.

“I really like to try new things,” he said.

“And bocce seemed like something new and different. Once I started playing, I learned how much I really enjoy it.”

Hatherell also said he hopes the league will continue year after year, which he believes will help bring people together and foster relationships between the sister homes.

“It’s been really great to meet people you didn’t know beforehand. You learn a little bit about them, where they’re from, and it’s nice to see everyone come together and play a really good game of bocce,” he said.

The final game will be celebrated with a barbecue lunch and an awards ceremony. Organizers hope to make the event an annual tradition, with the winning team keeping the league trophy at its home for the year.



Player Danny Hatherell competes in the All Seniors Care Bocce Ball League champions, where McCarthy Place and Cedarcroft Place retirement residences come together for a light competition and a fun game of bocce ball.



Marilyn Kreuter, Liliane Harris, Connie Shackleton, Phyllis Roberton, Mary Helen Dupuis, Joan Hooegeveen, Mike Regier, Stuart Romphf and Danny Hatherell come together to enjoy the outdoors while competing in the bocce ball tournament between the sister homes.

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SEBRINGVILLE

Dave's Diner

Esso - Huron Rd

Household food insecurity rising across southwestern Ontario: Public health units call for action

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Public health units across the region are calling on all levels of government to address growing concerns about food insecurity in Ontario.

In a recent press release, they said the number of households struggling to afford basic needs, including food, is growing year over year.

In 2024, the release notes that one in four households in southwestern Ontario experienced food insecurity, meaning they lacked reliable access to enough food due to financial challenges. Rising housing costs and the cost of living also force many families and individuals to choose between paying rent and purchasing food.

“Many residents are having to make difficult choices between paying for rent, utilities, medications, transportation, childcare, buying groceries and other life expenses to make ends meet,” said public health nutritionist Shannon Edmonstone. “Some households are stretching food further than what is healthy by purchasing lower-cost food that may not meet their needs, skipping meals or relying on emergency food programs for ongoing support.

Edmonstone also said the health unit continues to hear from community partners that they are seeing increased demand from a wide range of people, including employed people, seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, unat-

tached adults and single-parent families. Kristin Crane, United Way vice-president of community impact and research, agrees.

“The biggest chunk of a person’s income goes toward housing, whether that’s rent or mortgage payments,” said Crane. “As you’re seeing, both of those have risen quite sharply. Some of those costs have started to level off, although it has taken a bit longer in rural regions because we don’t see shifts in demand as significantly as urban centres.”

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) stresses that household food insecurity is linked to poorer physical and mental health, a higher risk of chronic disease and increased pressure on the health-care system. Among children and youth, it impacts concentration, memory, mood and motor skills, making it harder to succeed in school.

“Food insecurity impacts people at every stage of life in Huron-Perth,” said Dr. Miriam Klassen, medical officer of health for HPPH. “Local trends show that affordability is becoming more of a challenge, leaving many households struggling to keep up. Long-term solutions will require a focus on income and financial stability.”

Many households are now relying on emergency food programs or facing impossible trade-offs, such as skipping meals. While many low- and modest-income households face challenges after covering housing and other essential costs, individuals on social assistance pro-

grams such as Ontario Works often cannot afford both rent and food, even with careful spending.

The Ontario Dietitians of Public Health also weighed in and said that, in order to address the root cause of household food insecurity – inadequate income – they propose increasing social assistance rates, including Ontario Works, improving income supports for low- and modest-income households and improving policies that reduce the cost of housing and essential living expenses.

“We’re seeing that the trend is moving in the wrong direction; both local and provincial data show that affordability has become increasingly challenging as food costs, housing, utilities and other essentials continue to outpace many household incomes,” said Edmonstone.

Ontario public health units monitor food affordability by comparing food and rent costs across various household income scenarios. In 2024, these scenarios showed that a single adult receiving Ontario Works in southwestern Ontario cannot afford both food and rent, facing a monthly deficit ranging from \$301 to \$859.

Edmonstone said that while long-term solutions would need to address affordable housing and other rising costs, increasing income support would have an immediate and meaningful impact for families across Ontario.

“We know that food insecurity is fundamentally an income issue,” said Edmonstone. “When people don’t have enough

money left after paying for housing and other essentials, affording nutritious food becomes very challenging. Improving income adequacy would provide greater stability and dignity, while allowing people to make food choices that reflect their health, culture and family needs.”

Edmonstone also stressed the importance of addressing stigma when talking about food insecurity and said that household food insecurity is a serious but preventable public health issue. She said addressing it requires coordinated action at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

“It’s often viewed as a result of poor choice or a lack of budgeting, but more evidence is showing that it is driven by inadequate income and rising living costs,” she said. “More than half of food-insecure households rely on employment income and still struggle to afford essentials such as housing, transportation and child care.

The Ontario Dietitians of Public Health continue to advocate for communities across southwestern Ontario and are calling on all levels of government to implement social and economic policies that address the root causes of household food insecurity and intentionally shift away from food-based responses toward income-based solutions.

“If we focus on economic conditions that make it difficult to meet basic needs, rather than individual behaviour, we can build greater understanding and support with meaningful solutions,” said Edmonstone.

City’s home child care costs approved

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After establishing the City of Stratford Home Child Care Program in March, city council has approved the prices for the new licenced child care agency.

The approval came at the July 27 regular council meeting without debate.

Infants up to the age of two will cost parents \$22 a day, from ages two to three they will cost \$21.33 a day, from ages four to six they will cost \$18.42 a day (\$12 for before or after school care) and children aged six to twelve will have varied costs.

Before or after care will cost \$14.50 (\$26.50 for both), \$42 for care up to 10 hours, \$52 for up to 18 hours and \$72 for up to 23 hours.

According to a March staff report, the intent for the new agency is to establish 15 homes under supervision of the agency and a full-time home child-care visitor. Each home may support six children total and can be located in Stratford, St. Marys or Perth County, for a total of 90 spaces in the region. Through the new Stratford Home Child Care Program, the home daycares may be licenced, making them eligible for the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system.

These spaces are meant to significantly bolster the city’s child care spaces, which are lacking.

Late last year and early this year, 88 licenced spaces

were open. Additionally, 106 spaces are also scheduled to open this year. Despite that recent surge, licenced child care remains a sore point for many area parents. According to a late-2025 report, on average only about 16 per cent of area children up to the age of five have access to licenced, full-time child care.

The gap in coverage is not unique to the area, nor to just the province. According to an October 2025 report from Stats Canada, 58 per cent of children up to the age of five were in child care. About half of those parents reported difficulty finding that care, up slightly from the last time that metric was measured in 2023 (46 per cent).

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

The Province of Ontario has set a provincial access rate target of 37 per cent by 2026, a target that is unlikely to be met, and even if it is a large portion of parents in the area will remain without access to care.

Stratford was given a goal of 461 CWELCC spaces for children aged zero to five for its service area. The city has 261 CWELCC spaces remaining under its directed growth targets and if all targets are met, the area will have a maximum access rate of 29 per cent.

As of Dec. 31, 2025, there were 1,772 children aged zero to five on the waitlist for licenced child care.

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Alzheimer Society session to help families navigate dementia and driving

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For many people living with dementia, giving up the keys can be one of the most difficult transitions they face. An upcoming education session hosted by the Alzheimer Society Perth Huron aims to make that conversation easier.

The society, in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, will host a Dementia and Driving education session Aug. 18 at 1:30 p.m. The session will be offered in a hybrid format, allowing participants to attend in person at the society's Stratford office or virtually through Zoom.

Jessica Lawson, public education coordinator with the Alzheimer Society Perth Huron, said the session was created after she noticed more people in the community struggling to understand how cognitive changes associated with dementia can affect driving.

"Driving is one of the most common things we do in the community. It's how we get from here to there," Lawson said. "It's not to tell someone they can't drive. We're not telling people when to give up their licence. It's more about that education piece and that support and how to



(TIMES FILE PHOTO)

Participants of the IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's danced it out before embarking on the charity march last month. The Alzheimer Society is hosting a session aimed at dementia and driving on Aug. 18.

have those conversations."

The session is open to people living with dementia, family members and care partners, health-care providers, friends and anyone interested in learning more about the topic.

Lawson said driving depends on a range

of cognitive abilities, including memory, judgment, attention, problem solving, reaction time and visual-spatial skills. Because dementia affects everyone differently, there is no single point at which a person should stop driving.

"There isn't one single sign that tells us

it's time for someone to stop driving," she said. "It really differs from person to person and overall functioning."

However, she said warning signs can include getting lost on familiar routes, becoming confused behind the wheel, slower reaction times, difficulty making decisions at intersections or roundabouts, unexplained dents or scrapes on a vehicle, or increasing concern from family members.

Beyond explaining how dementia can affect driving, the session will outline the Ministry of Transportation's medical review process and connect participants with community transportation options available when driving is no longer safe.

"If someone loses the ability to drive, that is a huge loss of independence," Lawson said. "Just because you lost your driving ability doesn't mean that you can't still get from A to B."

Ultimately, Lawson hopes the session encourages people to start talking about driving before it becomes a crisis.

"When we talk about it early, approach it with compassion and understand the resources available, we can help people living with dementia and their families navigate these decisions with confidence and dignity," she said.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority's Southern Ontario At Risk Reptiles (SOARR) crew has been hard at work rescuing turtle eggs from unsafe locations. All six native turtle species in the watershed are listed as at risk in Canada. Collecting and incubating the eggs of these vulnerable animals helps to protect their populations – and 2026 is a record year with eggs being rescued from over 950 nests.

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New bridge celebrates power of community in Harrington

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

After nearly four years of fundraising, planning and navigating approvals, the Harrington and Area Community Association is inviting local communities to celebrate the completion of a new bridge over the pond along the trail at Harrington Conservation Area.

The bridge officially reconnects the six-kilometre trail loop around the Mill Pond. Before the bridge, hikers would need to walk around the pond or through the water.

The family-friendly celebration will take place Saturday, Aug. 8, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Harrington Conservation Area, 963656 Elizabeth St., Harrington. The event includes a tour of the restored grist mill, a bridge ceremony, live music, a magic show, a food truck, a historical bridge display and other activities.

While the celebration marks the completion of the bridge, association member Michael Kukhta said the project represents much more than that. It reflects years of determination and the willingness of a small community to work together toward a common goal.

"We haven't had a bridge for about, I'm going to say, maybe four years, and through various trials, it's always... always hard to get one of these things done because of the different people involved."

The Harrington and Area Community Association has managed the conservation area since the early 2000s, raising funds to maintain and improve the site for visitors. Replacing the bridge became one of its biggest projects after the previous crossing was



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Harrington will celebrate the completion of the new bridge located at the Harrington Conservation Area on Aug. 8. All are welcome to come out to explore all Harrington has to offer.

removed.

Before the new bridge was installed, visitors relied on a makeshift concrete slab. Once that was removed, they either had to walk through the water or detour around the pond, making it impossible to complete the trail loop.

"For years, we had no bridge so everyone had to walk to one side and then walk back the other and not be able to complete the loop," said Kukhta. "That's pretty frustrating; when you have a pond, you want to be able to walk over it. You can walk through

the water if you want, balance on the rocks if you're up for it, but your bound to get wet."

Kukhta said bringing the project to life required support beyond Harrington itself. Throughout the process, the association built new working relationships with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and the Township of Zorra, which helped navigate administrative requirements and approvals.

He said those partnerships became just as meaningful as the bridge itself.

"Through all the bureaucracy, we followed the tedious processes, and we got a beautiful bridge, and we're happy to to celebrate that and build bridges, but not just physically, but with people and with the community outside the community who helped."

Although Harrington is home to only about 150 residents, Kukhta said the project demonstrates what a small community can accomplish when people work together.

"We often feel left out," said Kukhta. "You know, we're a small cluster of about 150 people up in the north end of nowhere. For our shopping or getting out, we often go to Tavistock, Stratford, or St. Marys and to host an event like this, we really needed to scrimp and save, but we want to showcase our community. It's something we are all very proud of."

"There is a pride, maybe even a stubborn pride in what we accomplished and what we were able to pull off, and we want to showcase that."

The Harrington Conservation Area has long been a gathering place for the community. Interest in preserving the site dates back to 1948, and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority purchased the dam and pond in 1952 before later acquiring the historic grist mill in 1966. The mill, rebuilt after a 1923 fire, remains one of the few surviving water-powered grist mills in western Ontario.

For the association, the new bridge is the latest chapter in that history — one built not only with steel and timber, but through years of community support, fundraising and volunteer effort.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Many car owners were entering in draws under the Zehr Insurance Tent on July 23. The weather was perfect for the annual Zehr Insurance Classic Car and Truck Show after rain delayed the show for one day. Shown on the right is Kurtis Waymouth, branch manager of Zehr Insurance and show organizer, along with the next generation, Noah, 10, and Violet, 8.

STRATFORD TIMES

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STRATFORD *TIMES* SPORTS

Former Cullitons gather for 40th anniversary reunion

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Several members of the 1985-1986 Ontario Hockey Association (OHA) Sutherland Cup champion Stratford Cullitons gathered for a special weekend. On July 24, the team participated in a golf tournament at the Stratford Country Club, and on July 25, they toured the William Allman Memorial Arena, then known as the Stratford Arena during that historic season.

During the '85-'86 regular season, the Cullitons finished atop the Midwestern Junior B Hockey League (MWJHL) with a 36-3-1 record. Meanwhile, Stratford went 8-0 in the MWJHL playoffs against the Elmira Sugar Kings and Waterloo Siskins, claiming the Cherrey Cup for the seventh time in 10 seasons.

From a historical perspective, the 1985-86 team established franchise records with a .912 winning percentage and a 25-game winning streak. Both records still hold today.

Stratford advanced to the OHA Sutherland Cup playoffs, beating the St. Catharines Falcons in the quarterfinals, St. Thomas Stars in the semifinals and sweeping the Streetsville Derbys to win the franchise's third-ever Sutherland Cup.

Denis Flanagan Jr., head coach of the 1986 Cullitons, praised the dedication and teamwork of the players he coached, highlighting their commitment during the championship run and how it shaped their future careers.

"Well, it's a wonderful experience to get back with all these fellas that I coached 40 years ago, and I haven't seen many of them in, some of them, 40 years really since the season ended," Flanagan said. "... It's nice to see them find out where they're at now in life and rehash the good old stories that we created 40 years ago.

"But speaking of that team, you know that it was a pleasure to coach that team, and it's always easy to remember the teams that have success. There are some years where maybe the team didn't go as far as you'd like, but I think anytime you coach a group of players this age, and you know, trying to help them advance their hockey and enjoy the game of hockey – it's always special. But that year was unique, and I was blessed with having just a good group of guys."

Don "General" MacArthur, currently entering his 46th year with the organization and now a life director and broadcaster for the Stratford Hockey Club, served as one of the Cullitons' directors during the 1985-86 campaign. Speaking to the Times, MacArthur was very appreciative of the opportunity to take part in the reunion and reflected on the memorable campaign.

"I'm just thrilled that the boys still remember me and asked me to be included," MacArthur said.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Members of the 1985-86 Stratford Cullitons pose for a group photo with the Sutherland Cup trophy at the Stratford Country Club on July 24.

"Very exciting for me, and I became a director of the hockey club in 1982, and then we won this championship 40 years ago, and that was my first experience of being on a championship team in in any sort of way, and that was very thrilling and great that the boys decided to have this get together and probably even a little more exciting and had a bit more meaning to it because two of the players on that team also billed at our house. So very good memories and very fond memories."

Nelson Emerson, the Cullitons' leading goal scorer in the 85-86 season with 54 goals, was ecstatic about joining the reunion and getting back in touch with the team.

"Ah, it's incredible. I'm glad they put this together. The guys deserve it. It's just an incredible feeling to get to see everybody again," Emerson said.

Having played in 771 NHL games in 12 seasons with six different teams and won two Stanley Cups as an executive with the Los Angeles Kings, Emerson credited his time in Stratford as a valuable experience for his professional career and his Cullitons' teammates.

"I think what we learned here, what we did here, it was a foundation of not only me but everybody and what they've gone on to do in their lives and what everyone's done, whether it's sports or whatever. The foundation put in place by the Flanagans, the board and the team helps everybody do what they're doing now."

Alongside Emerson, Warren Bullock led the MWJHL with 112 points in 1985-86. Like his teammates, Bullock was joyful about the reunion and the turnout of former teammates from across the continent who attended the special event.

"The effort they made to come from

California, Florida, Boston, Indiana, just speaks to how special it is for everyone to be together and what that team meant even 40 years later," Bullock said.

The third member of the 50-goal club with the Cullitons in the season, Shawn Heaphy, along with Scott Rex and Bryn Gladding, echoed the same positive sentiment about the reunion.

"It's awesome. I haven't seen some of these guys since I was 17 years old. So, the real neat thing is when you get back, it's like we never left. So, it's a lot of fun. We're looking forward to the golf and the weekend, Heaphy said.

"I think the ultimate goal is the Stanley Cup. But when you get to be part of such a great group here, where you have all the pieces and the success we had, that's something where you have a really strong bond and remember forever. So very lucky and fortunate to be part of it."

"Oh, it's an honour, and it was an honour 40 years ago to put the equipment on with these same guys," Rex said. "So it's the tightest group I've ever been a part of. Like everybody, it was incredible in the dressing room and what everybody brought, and no egos, and we just went out and won. It was incredible. It's so good. So many of these guys, a lot of these guys, I haven't seen in 40 years. They're such an important part of selfishly my own life. Just great human beings," Rex said.

"Well, it's a great feeling to think that all of these guys have come back to meet and spend time together on this weekend, and we've got great weather here, and just a great group of guys. And you don't win a championship unless you have a real cohesive team, and we had a great team that year, and we played the way we played together better than anyone else, and it's

probably one of the best teams I've ever played on," Gladding said.

The goaltending tandem of Matt Merten and rookie Gary Wray manned the crease for the Cullitons in the regular season and playoffs, with Merten leading the way with a regular-season record of 23-2-0 with a 3.44 goals-against-average in 27 games. Wray went 13-1-0 with a goals-against-average of 3.10 in 18 games.

Originally from Uxbridge, Mass., Merten was a ninth-round pick of the Vancouver Canucks in the 1986 NHL Draft. Merten cherished his time in Stratford, particularly the friendships he developed with Wray and Emerson.

"Oh, I mean, Razor (Wray) and I got along great. He's a tremendous, tremendous kid. I was a little bit older than he was, but we were really close, and he was so helpful in getting to know the community and getting to know everyone who was going on, as were some of my other teammates," Merten said.

"I had the absolute pleasure of rooming with Nelson Emerson, who was that man. He was incredible to me as well, because I know that there were other imports that had tough, tough times here, and that was not the case. I got really close with a lot of the boys, and that was really what made it such a special experience."

Wray, a hometown native who joined the Cullitons at age 16 in 1985, says playing with Merten was a beneficial experience.

"Matt was an unbelievable goalie. I learned a lot from him. Vancouver Canucks draft pick, he had a full scholarship to Providence College, and he was a couple years older than me. But I watched him in practice, and he was just a consummate professional, and I learned a ton from him."

Every Culliton who spoke to the Times said that playing in the Allman was a special experience.

"It was remarkable. It just made it. It was a special feeling. You know that everyone cared about you. The city did. The town did. They're behind you, and with that, you had the pressure of, you know, performing for them," Emerson said.

"Super special for us. I think the town kind of knew very early that they were watching a pretty special team, and by the time we reached the playoffs, I'd often come in an hour and a half before game time and barely get my own parking spot because the fans were like they wanted to be part of warm-up. Friday nights were incredible," Bullock said.

"It's interesting. My kid plays junior hockey now, and I still tell stories from 1986 about how you get 2,000 fans in a game for a junior hockey game," Heaphy said. "So, again, very fortunate to be involved and get to play in Stratford. Completely awesome."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 11

Stratford Nationals Weekly Recap: Both teams head for final stretch of regular season

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

On July 23, the Stratford 15U Nationals started their final road trip of the Intercounty Baseball Association (ICBA) regular season with a single-day doubleheader in Guelph against the Plawiuik Royals.

In the first game, Stratford got into an early 4-0 lead through an inning and a half with RBI singles from Landen McCann and Dexter Powell in the first, Jackson Goebel in the second and a Guelph defensive error that allowed Goebel to score from first base for the fourth run.

But the Royals responded with ten unanswered runs off the Nationals starter, Goebel, and three off reliever Reid Musselman as the Nationals lost 13-5 through six innings. Powell led the Nationals with a pair of hits and two RBIs.

In the late evening game, Will Molenhuis drove in four RBIs along with four hits as the Nationals overcame an early deficit to outrun the home side 17-6. Powell, Cole Morris and Blake Mogk had the other RBIs for Stratford.

Powell got the start on the mound and struck out four while allowing four earned runs on three hits and five walks through three innings. Max Barter came on in relief and held Guelph scoreless in the remaining three innings before the league-mandated mercy rule came into effect.

The Nationals were back in Guelph to face the Royals Team 1 on July 24. Stratford's pitching staff and defence were humbled by the Royals' offence with a ten-run third inning and only managed to produce two hits offensively en route to a 14-0 loss in five innings. Molenhuis and McCann provided the only hits for the visitors.

In the final road game of the regular sea-



Stratford's James Robinson looks on from second base during the game versus the Kitchener Diemert Panthers on July 24 at Stratford National Stadium.

son, the Nationals travelled to Cambridge to face the Cubs. Stratford got to an early 3-0 lead through the first three innings before putting the close game away with five unanswered runs in the sixth and seventh as they defeated Cambridge 10-3.

James Antonio went 3-for-3 with four RBIs to lead the Nationals, while Morris had two RBIs and McCann led the Nationals with three runs scored. Stratford starting pitcher Jake Price went four innings with four strikeouts, allowing an earned run on five hits and three walks. Musselman preserved the victory with three innings of unearned ball.

The Nationals conclude their ICBA regular season with a pair of games at home against Ancaster on July 28 and Waterloo Tigers on July 29 at Stratford National Stadium (after press time).

Following the end of the bad weather that cancelled the London tournament last week,

the Stratford 18U Nationals, who had won three of their last four regular-season games, played their final home game of the season against the Kitchener Diemert Panthers at Stratford National Stadium on July 24.

Stratford overcame two four-run deficits to walk off the Panthers 8-7. The late rally started with one out when Reed Bowles walked, Cooper Yantzi singled and James Robinson walked to put the Nationals in a bases-loaded situation. Dawson Davidson issued a walk for Bowles to score to make it 7-4, and Ev-

erett's two-run RBI single cut the Kitchener lead to 7-6.

Caden Diehl's RBI single allowed Davidson to score to tie the game, and Colin Priestap's sacrifice fly turned out to be a Kitchener outfield defensive error, allowing Alex Everett to score from third base for the game-winning run.

Stratford head coach Mud Grasby was pleased with the team battling back from a tough start to win the final home game of the season.

"It was a great comeback. We had chances early in the game that were bases loaded, nobody out and we didn't score. Bases loaded, one out and don't score. Just the last inning, they weren't trying to hit the ball 400 feet. They were just making contact and finding holes, and that's what you've got to do. And it worked out," Grasby said.

"We made them try to make some plays. Their pitcher walked a few batters, which goes in your favour. But that's two games in a row now that we battled back in the last inning to win. So things are looking positive, hopefully."

The 18U Nationals conclude their ICBA regular season play on the road against the Kitchener Hassan Panthers in Kitchener on July 29. Then, on Civic Holiday weekend, the Nationals will compete against the Guelph Royals to qualify for the OBA provincials in Brantford on Aug. 1.

Former Cullitons gathered for 40th anniversary reunion

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

"The fans in Stratford were second to none. We had the best booster club. We had the best organization, the fans' commitment to the team. You know, they really showed their pride," Gladding said.

"Oh, it was fantastic. I mean, coming from America ... hockey is a sport, and the high school I played at had tremendous following, but here it's the sport, and as an American it was awesome to come to a hotbed, a wonderful town with all kinds of rich culture, and the rink was packed all the time, and all the people were tremendous to me while I was here, incredible experience," Merten said.

"It was incredible ... I'm from Brantford, and I wish every Brantford kid could play for the Cullitons and now for the Warriors.

Everybody in southern Ontario should have the opportunity to play a Friday night home game in Stratford, especially in the playoffs. Incredible. That run was magical," Rex said.

"It was a different time back in the mid-'80s. There wasn't Netflix or the NHL Centre Ice Package, so people would come to the Allman for entertainment on Friday nights, and I remember lineups for advance ticket sales all the way up Morenz Drive up to New Orleans Pizza. It was just crazy and packed to the rafters. It was nice to see something similar like that with St. Marys and Stratford this year in the playoffs, and we were just very blessed and fortunate that we caught lightning in a bottle that year," Wray said.

Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance Join Our Board of Directors and Community Council

The Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance (HPHA) Board of Directors is recruiting for the following volunteer opportunities:

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Application deadline: August 10, 2026



Stratford Strikers Weekly Recap: A winning week for the Strikers

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U15 Strikers Girls continued their undefeated run with two convincing wins over the past week. On July 22 at the Stratford Education Recreation Centre (SERC) tennis field, the Strikers defeated Kitchener TFC U14/15 7-2. Peyton Ward and Resse Campbell each scored a brace, with Danica Voros, Jessica Blake and Kinsley McIntosh each scoring a goal for Stratford.

On July 27, the Strikers hosted Storm FC at VFG Field at Festival Hydro Park. The home side took an early first-half lead and cruised to a 9-0 win. Voros led the Strikers with a hat trick, while McIntosh,

Blake, Campbell, Payton Herman, Ashley Van Stratten and Mya Groenestege scored for Stratford in the rout.

With the two wins, the Strikers kept themselves distanced from the Guelph Jr. Gryphons with a perfect 10-0-0 record, two points clear of first place in the Southwest District Soccer League (SWDSL) U15 Girls League Division. Stratford plays next on Aug. 5 against the Kitchener TFC U15 in Kitchener.

The Stratford U16 Strikers Boys extended their winning streak with victories over Huron-Perth United and Owen Sound United. On July 21, Stratford defeated Huron-Perth 3-1 with goals from Dominic McGurkin and a brace from Logan Wilson. Three days later, on July 24, the



Stratford's Danica Voros does the corner kick versus Storm FC at VFG Field on July 27.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Peyton Van Stratten (11) of Stratford U15 Girls Strikers scores the goal early in the second half against Storm FC at VFG Field on July 27.

Strikers defeated Owen Sound United 2-0 with goals from Ashton Van Kooten and Cole Weyers.

Stratford improved to 6-1-3 in fifth place in the SWDSL U16 Boys Division, four points behind first-place Waterloo United. Next up for the Strikers is against Kitchener TFC in their final game of the five-match road trip on July 28. The final result will be included in next week's edition of the Times.

In their lone match of the week, the Stratford U16 Strikers Girls continued their unbeaten run in SWDSL regular-season play with

a 3-0 win as Resse Campbell scored a brace along with Arabelle Garland. The win puts the first-place Strikers four points ahead of the second-place Puslinch Predators in the SWDSL U16 Girls Division. Stratford's next match is against Cambridge United at Cowan Field on August 4.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Stratford goalkeeper Grace Elliott does the short goal kick in the first half against Storm FC at VFG Field on July 27.



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Creators of the Classic City: Joseph Rankin

PAUL WILKER

Times Contributor

"I'll meet you at Rankin's!" was a popular invitation in late 19th and 20th centuries Stratford. Those five little words brought together generations of Stratford families and friends to enjoy good times and the many special treats at Rankin's that included everything homemade from meals to ice cream and hand-rolled candies.

For about 90 years, until the business closed in 1960, the Rankin name was well known in Stratford in the baking, confectionery, candy, ice cream and restaurant business. The names Rankin's candy, Rankin's hand-rolled chocolates, Rankin's own ice cream, sodas, sundaes and milkshakes are still able to make mouths water for many Stratford residents.

Joseph and Katherine Rankin opened their first confectioner's store in 1874, after purchasing the handsome Mowat bank building at the corner of Downie and Wellington Streets. They also owned a bake-

shop with two Dempster ovens on the corner of Brunswick and Downie. In 1900, Joseph had a wholesale-retail store at 28 Ontario St., and then at 32 Ontario St., which was later the Beattie grocery store.

An early Rankin advertisement in the Beacon proclaimed "Special attention will be given to catering to private parties and school entertainments." As well, in those days, it was considered fashionable to have the bride's cake "made at Rankin's." The Rankins also advertised toys, mutton and mince pies, oysters, lobsters, buns and cakes.

After Joseph's death in 1905, the business passed to the oldest of his eight sons, Charles R. Rankin, who moved the family business to its final and best-known location at 81 Ontario St. by 1907. That same location later housed the Centre Restaurant and then Gene's Restaurant. Charles Rankin would run the business only briefly until his own untimely death at the age of 31 in 1907 in a train derailment near Guelph. His younger brother, Gordon Harry Rankin, known as Dick, then took



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Joseph Rankin started the family business Rankin's in 1874, a business that persisted until 1960.

over the family business.

The interior of Rankin's was elegant with dark, polished mahogany paneling in the booths at the rear of the restaurant. Generations of Stratford families and friends ate their toasted salmon sandwiches and drank their sodas and teas while oscillating fans created soft breezes overhead. All was reflected in the Palladian segmented mirrors over each table, with Art Deco frosted glass lights.

Rankin's was famous for the delightful concoctions whipped up at that magic fountain, with its fancy fizzing soda taps and deep cold wells of frosty homemade Rankin's ice cream. Patrons' favourites included the Gold Dust Twins and a Tin Roof. A banana split cost 20 cents.

Taken from *Creators of the Classic City*: www.streetsofstratford.ca.

"*Creators of the Classic City*" is an ongoing *Times* series written by Paul Wilker, co-author of the e-book of the same name by him and Gord Conroy. Interested readers can find the free book online at <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ypken/pqiv/>.

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COMING EVENTS

Saturday, August 15 Yard and Bake Sale, 8-12 p.m., donations accepted. Accepting donations at the following times: Aug 8; 3 p.m.-6p.m., Aug. 10, 12, 13; 4 p.m. - 6 p.m., Aug. 11; 9 a.m. - 12 p.m., Aug. 14 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Small household items, tools, miscellaneous items, books, etc. Please no kids outside toys or large items.

Wednesday, Sept. 9 Ladies' Cold Salad Plate Luncheon, \$16 per person. Call Mary Helen 519-273-3789 for tickets.

Friday, Sept 11 Friday Night Euchre, \$20 per team, doors open at 6, play starts at 6:30 p.m. Reservation ONLY, call Anne 519-301-9014, Dave 519-703-6544 or the Legion 519-271-4540

Sunday, Sept 13 Chicken Parmesan Dinner – take out 4:30 p.m., dine in 5 p.m., \$30 per person (tax included). Call Frank 519-271-9669, Pearl 519-305-2757 or the Legion 519-271-4540

Friday, Sept 18 Veteran's Dinner, Ham and Scalloped Potatoes, 6 p.m. dine in only, VETERANS ONLY. For tickets call Frank 519-271-9669, Steve 519-305-1125 or the Legion

Saturday, Sept 19 Toronto Argonauts vs Edmonton Elks, BMO Field 3 p.m. kick off, bus leaves Cooper Lot 12 p.m. \$105 pp, call Dean 519-273-4463. Tickets MUST be purchased by August 19

Thursday, Sept 24 Oktoberfest Sausage, Kraut and Fries. Service starts at 6 p.m. NO reservations needed

Tuesday Morning Buddy Check, 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. OPEN to all Veterans Widows and First Responders

Saturday Afternoon Meat Draw doors open at 2:00 p.m., meat draw starts at 4:00 p.m.

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Fantasy fans invited to celebrate *The Hobbit* at Stratford Perth Museum

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Fantasy literature fans will have the chance to dive deeper into the world of J.R.R. Tolkien and the enduring themes behind *The Hobbit* during a special evening celebrating the Stratford Perth Museum's current exhibit, "Sharing An Adventure."

Beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Aug. 13, the museum will host an exhibit celebration event featuring presentations, a guest lecture by St. Marys resident and Western University professor Dr. Gabrielle Ceraldi and an interactive fantasy-themed challenge throughout the exhibit space.

The exhibit was inspired by the Stratford Festival's production of *The Hobbit*, currently on stage at the Avon Theatre, and explores the lasting influence of Tolkien's work and the fantasy genre.

Museum manager of education and exhibits Megan Patterson said the exhibit was added to the museum's long-term plans as part of a new strategy to celebrate productions appearing at the Stratford Festival.

"We're celebrating our contemporary community heritage," Patterson said. "The Hobbit seemed to be something unique. We did The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, and that one was a huge success, so we thought, 'Why don't we do another fantasy exhibit?'"

Rather than focusing solely on Tolkien, Patterson said the exhibit explores the broader themes that have made fantasy literature resonate with generations of readers.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Stratford Perth Museum manager of exhibits and education doing a little writing in the museum's hobbit hole.

"It talks a little bit about Tolkien, but also the archetypes behind fantasy as a whole and how those messages and literary devices are integral to what's happening in our society today," she said. "Power and corruption being the big one, environmentalism being another one."

The exhibit also features two large fantasy-inspired sculptures created by local artists – a dragon sculpture created by Maaïke Roosendaal and Olivia Taylor and a sculpture entitled "The Creature" by the Earle family – props and artifacts on loan from the Stratford Festival warehouse, and

an immersive setting that allows visitors to step into a world reminiscent of Bilbo Baggins' home.

Patterson said the community played a major role in bringing the exhibit to life.

"They went and surpassed our expectations when it comes to the proposals, and we're thrilled," she said. "The sculptures showed up and we were like, 'Wow.' It was way beyond what we could have imagined."

Both the dragon sculpture and "The Creature" are on loan from their creators and are available for purchase.

The Aug. 13 celebration will feature

Ceraldi, who lives in St. Marys and teaches courses on children's literature, fantasy fiction and Harry Potter at Western University. During her presentation, she will examine the history of fantasy literature and the common archetypes found in Tolkien's works and those of other influential authors.

Patterson said inviting a local expert was an easy decision.

"She's actually from St. Marys, so she's within our county, which is why I brought her in," Patterson said. "When we reached out to her and said what we were doing, she said, 'Oh yeah, I can come and talk about that.'"

Following the presentations, visitors will be invited to complete a fantasy-themed challenge featuring riddles, scavenger-hunt style clues and interactive tasks throughout the exhibit. Participants will search for key objects connected to *The Hobbit*, solve Tolkien-inspired riddles, sign a scroll with a quill pen and complete a series of quests for the chance to win a prize.

"It's like an escape room," Patterson said. "There'll be a bit of a scavenger hunt, answering some riddles."

Ultimately, Patterson hopes visitors leave with a greater appreciation for fantasy as more than simple entertainment.

"I hope they'll learn a little bit that there's more to fantasy than just fun and entertainment," she said. "I hope they see there's parallels between our modern society and what's happening."

"There is an escapism quality to it, but then there's also a reality quality to it when we talk about the themes."



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

Is this breakfast, second breakfast, elevenses, luncheon, afternoon tea, dinner or supper? Much of the food on display in the museum's "Sharing An Adventure" exhibit is on loan from the Stratford Festival costume warehouse.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

This dragon sculpture on display at the museum was created by Maaïke Roosendaal and Olivia Taylor.

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World in a Weekend brings the globe to downtown Stratford this weekend

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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Get ready for an unforgettable August long weekend with the return of World in a Weekend: International Puppet Festival.

Presented by SpringWorks~PuppetWorks!, Stratford will be animated with world-class puppetry from July 30 to Aug. 3, celebrating artistry through captivating performances, interactive workshops, outdoor entertainment and family-friendly activities.

Over five days, Stratford comes alive with international artists, larger-than-life stilt walkers, hands-on experiences and performances ranging from traditional storytelling to innovative contemporary productions. Whether you're discovering puppetry for the first time or you're a long-time fan, organizers say there's something for every age to enjoy.

The highlights this year include free outdoor performances and activities along Veterans Drive and the Avon River, family-friendly workshops in shadow puppetry, mask making and storytelling, international artists and performers from around the world, silent dance parties for both families and adults and a mix of free, by-donation and ticketed events throughout the weekend.

Plus, as a special celebration of Stratford's intersection of art and industry, SpringWorks~PuppetWorks will be debuting an original giant puppet at this year's festival. Named The Phoenix, this puppet takes inspiration from the city's railroad steam locomotive history to celebrate Stratford's creativity and capacity for reinvention as a centre for cultural excellence.

For more information on the festival, visit <https://www.springworksfestival.ca/>.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Experience the puppet performance of *The Bellhop* by Spanish puppetry group Hilarilar Marionetas during this year's World in a Weekend festival, July 30 to Aug. 3.







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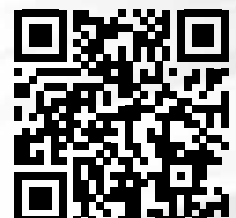
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Editorial

For the first time since I've lived here, I didn't have to drive to Toronto



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Feet up, headphones on and a game on my phone to pass the time.

That's how I prefer to travel, whether it be across the country or just an hour or two away. Low stress and relative comfort is the name of the game for me, but since I've lived in Stratford, that hasn't always been possible.

For too long, residents of Stratford, St. Marys, Perth County, East Zorra-Tavistock, Wilmot and Wellesley had gone without a reliable and cost-effective form of public transportation that could take us to London, Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto and beyond.

That simple reality of rural life – only those who can drive their own cars can escape the confines of our agricultural surround-

ings – has begun to change as new forms of public transit have been introduced, re-introduced or promised to the region. Flix Bus has started serving riders in Stratford and St. Marys; a Grand River Transit expansion is in the works for residents of Wellesley and Wilmot; and my beloved Go Train has returned to Stratford, hopefully permanently, after it was discontinued following a failed pilot several years ago.

While I don't tend to use public transit to get to London or Kitchener-Waterloo – it's just easier for me to drive myself – travelling to Toronto is another story.

I hate everything about it – the traffic on the highway, the congested city streets, the other drivers who just seem to know when to abruptly change lanes without causing an accident. It's all very overwhelming and I avoid it whenever I can.

But I have friends in Toronto who I like to visit and there is plenty to see and do in the big city, so, until very recently, I would brave the often-two-hour drive in rush hour on a Friday night just so I could have a little fun and spend some time with the people I care about.

Recently, I had the opportunity to review a Toronto Fringe Festival Play, Orbit, that a



(TIMES FILE PHOTO)

The GO Train, pictured here at the Stratford Train Station on April 17, is a welcome relief for area residents.

friend was starring in. I was excited about the opportunity to see a Fringe Festival play, but I wasn't so excited about driving two hours to Toronto for a 10:15 p.m. performance on a Saturday night.

My friend asked if I was planning to take the train or the bus and I quickly realized, for the first time since I've lived in Stratford, those were both viable options. So, I looked into taking the Go Train, something I used to do all the time as a kid growing up

in the Hamilton and Burlington area.

It turns out, Metrolinx, the company that operates Go Transit, had just introduced a \$10 weekend day pass that allows for unlimited rides on Go Trains and Go Buses for a single day on the weekend. Looking at the weekend train schedule, I saw the Go Train leaves Stratford at 6:15 p.m. and arrives at Union Station in Toronto at 8:45 p.m. – perfect timing for me to make it to the play.

And though it was an early start after a late night with my friends, the Go Train left Toronto at 8:45 a.m. the next morning and arrived in Stratford at 11:15 a.m., giving me plenty of my Sunday to sleep off the previous night's festivities.

So, for a grand total of \$20 and a sandwich I made at home to eat on the train, I managed to get to Toronto, see the play, spend time with friends and return home the next morning.

Now that's how I like to travel.

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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Opinions

UNTIL SOON. LIVE WELL: EXIT



STUART LENDER

Times Columnist

At the moment of the entrance, in the space of a few seconds before the introductions, when you walk into the dying person's room – someone you don't know, who is going to get their "affairs" in order – there is a profound sense of respect. The word "bravery" also comes to mind, but it is not accurate. I'm not sure why that is. Perhaps the space simply feels more pregnant with truth than bravery. Nevertheless – there's a strange discrepancy between those who aren't actively dying and are wise enough to get their end-of-life wishes squared away and those who know that they are. They're acutely aware that they have crested the hill. The view is finite.

There are times in my life that

offer such profundity, and this is one of them. I smile, I apologize that I'm taking up their precious time because I'm fully aware that had it not been for their dying, I would not be there and any meeting would have been a pleasant accident. I'm grateful for their graciousness more often than not, because their graciousness surpasses any sense of self-pity. Indeed, there is a feeling in the air sometimes, of a generosity of spirit.

This is part of my job. A unique situation, that in all honesty, is raw and one of the greatest privileges in my world. One looks into the eyes of inevitability. One hears words of resignation and gratitude. Rarely, at this point, is anger present – and I sense the thin translucent membrane around me, as brief. Sometimes, stories flow and regrets and triumphs are unveiled. And after hundreds of these gracious encounters, I'm privileged to keep what is often hidden from oneself through our daily filters and overt denials, close at heart – the awakening truth that we are all in our own unique ways, actively dying.

These moments spent with certainty are sobering to say the least. They're gifts of a sort, and unlike many who include themselves as one of the goodly-heart-

ed throng of humanity, there are a few who include the inevitability of their mortality within the course of a working day, whether in a service profession such as I am, or not. Largely, beyond the services I provide, it is this closeness to our shared humanity that caused me, long ago, to ponder and subsequently become, a funeral director. Therefore, and perhaps as a result of this insight – the best conversations for me are not the one's concerning the weather, but the one's concerning our complexity and our "oneness." Nothing is more unifying than our shared fragility, and nothing is more interesting than the myriad views we have from the great many cultural mountains that have shaped us.

It is the recognition of that mortality that binds us at the base, holds us, dreamily, gazing up at the stars to wonder about ourselves. But in the immediacy and intimacy of the work at hand in that room – it is all about them. In all appearances, things are funneling into a conclusion, and the tendrils of what will be left behind become the dream of a lifetime, wrapped in memory for both the living and the dying, shrouded in the tangled emotions of all that is shared and must come to an end, often within those four walls.

How can one not be humbled? The simple offer of a cup of tea at these times is enough to make one feel such gratitude through their concern for my possible and petty needs. And there are encounters that remain in the psyche; that is clear, otherwise I wouldn't be writing this now – filaments of feeling with loose pictures attached, in stories that were told to me, situations that rang true to my own. More graciousness heaped upon the hour – but nothing greater than the immediate story in the here and the now. This very one ... about me being in the room with them, and them offering me a cup of tea, and me witnessing an hour or so out of their days or weeks of "goodbye" to all that they have known. That's what I will remember after my encounter with the dying – not their stories so much. I didn't live those. What I take away is the "feel" of them. A sense of how much they loved or didn't love, what the contribution was, whether gratitude exists.

And I desperately want gratitude to exist! When I go, I would like to be satisfied with myself – my behaviour, my actions, my contribution. I want to have emptied myself out so to speak. Spent myself. I'll be leaving after all, so why would I want to hold onto

anything. I want to let it all go, freely in gratitude.

That is how I wish for them to feel too. Let it go. Let it all go. Untie the mind from all things to which the ego clings. Become untethered. And that is precisely why my questions are mundane and irrelevant. The proper full name. The social insurance number. The date of birth. By the time this information is read by anyone but me, they will be free of it. And that is also why I underscore our meeting on an understanding, that they know that I know; they are so much more than the answers given.

Yes – the real job is the presence and the look into the eye of truth. And sometimes, the polite etiquette and the weightiness of the meeting is dismantled, and it too is thrown out the window for the easy gesture of fellowship when my time in their company is done – the fist pump, the peace sign, the knowing smile or the open palm into which I place my hand and I can walk out into the sunshine with a smile and a lighter heart.

Stuart is a celebrant and the manager of Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. It is his privilege to serve, dispel myths, and give information concerning his field of compassionate service.

Protecting what matters: Safeguarding your energy, priorities



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

Many of us begin each day with good intentions. We plan to complete important tasks, spend time with loved ones, pursue personal interests and perhaps even carve out a few moments for rest. Yet somewhere between the ringing phone, an overflowing inbox, unexpected requests and the demands of daily life, our energy and attention become scattered. By day's end, we may wonder where our time went and why we feel so depleted.

Protecting our energy, priorities

and time has become increasingly important in today's fast-paced world. It is not selfish. Rather, it is an essential part of living intentionally and sustainably.

Energy is one of our most valuable resources. Unlike time, which moves at the same pace for everyone, our energy levels fluctuate. Factors such as stress, caregiving responsibilities, work demands, health concerns and aging can all influence how much energy we have available. When we ignore these realities and continually push ourselves beyond our limits, exhaustion often follows.

Learning to honour our energy begins with self-awareness. It involves paying attention to what replenishes us and what drains us. Some activities leave us feeling inspired and engaged. Others leave us feeling overwhelmed or resentful. Recognizing these patterns allows us to make choices that better support our well-being.

Equally important is identifying our priorities. It is easy to say yes to every invitation, volunteer opportunity, committee or request

for help. While generosity and community involvement are admirable, overcommitting can pull us away from the people and activities that matter most.

Protecting our priorities requires us to ask difficult but important questions. What truly matters to me in this season of life? Where do I want to invest my time and energy? Are my daily choices aligned with my values?

The answers may change over time. For a young parent, family responsibilities may take precedence. For someone navigating retirement, creativity, travel or volunteer work may rise to the forefront. During periods of illness or caregiving, simply maintaining one's health and emotional balance may become the highest priority of all.

Boundaries play a critical role in protecting both our energy and our time. Many people associate boundaries with conflict or rejection. In reality, boundaries are simply guidelines that help us care for ourselves while remaining connected to others.

Sometimes boundaries sound like, "I can't commit to that right now," or "I need some time to think about it before giving you an answer." They may involve limiting activities that consistently leave us depleted or scheduling periods of uninterrupted rest. Boundaries allow us to give from a place of abundance rather than exhaustion.

Protecting our time also means being intentional about how we spend it. We often underestimate the cumulative effect of small distractions. Minutes spent scrolling through social media or saying yes to obligations that do not align with our priorities can quietly erode the time available for the pursuits we value most.

Creating space in our schedules does not require perfection. Small changes can have a meaningful impact. Setting aside an hour each week for reflection, protecting family dinners, scheduling regular walks or dedicating time to hobbies can help us reconnect with what matters.

Perhaps the greatest challenge

is releasing the guilt that sometimes accompanies these choices. Many of us have been taught that productivity equals worth or that caring for ourselves somehow diminishes our care for others. Yet the opposite is often true. When we protect our energy and honour our priorities, we are more present, patient and engaged in the relationships and responsibilities that define our lives.

Ultimately, protecting our energy, priorities and time is an act of stewardship. It reflects an understanding that our resources are finite and worthy of thoughtful care. By living with greater intention, we create room not only for productivity, but also for joy, meaning, rest and connection.

In the end, a full life is not necessarily one filled with constant activity. It is one shaped by conscious choices about what deserves our attention and what can be gently set aside. When we protect what matters most, we give ourselves permission to live with greater purpose, balance and peace.

Opinions

The Annoyance Economy



BRUCE WHITAKER

Times Columnist

By now most of us have experienced the "Annoyance Economy" – a world where everyday tasks that should be simple have somehow become exhausting ordeals.

These aren't minor irritations. They're the frustrations that quietly drain our time and patience: getting a refund for a cancelled flight, disputing an unexpected credit card charge, cancelling a streaming subscription, deciphering a phone upgrade, or restoring an internet connection.

Recently, I noticed a charge on my telecom bill that I didn't recognize. The last thing I wanted to do was call customer service, but I expected the matter could

be resolved in 15 or 20 minutes. Instead, an automated voice cheerfully informed me that the estimated wait time was 115 minutes.

One hundred and fifteen minutes.

There was no option to leave a message, request a callback or use any alternative that suggested my time mattered. I could switch providers, of course, but would another company really be any better?

The problem extends far beyond telecom companies. Over the past two decades, the time consumers spend dealing with customer service has increased dramatically. Texting, once reserved for family and friends, has become another channel for promotions, reminders and demands for action. Surprise fees appear everywhere, from concert tickets to meals ordered through apps.

It's no wonder customer satisfaction is slipping. Forrester's Customer Experience Index reported some of its lowest scores on record in 2024.

The costs aren't merely emotional. Chad Maisel of the Groundwork Collaborative recently estimated that the Annoy-

ance Economy costs Americans roughly \$165 billion annually in wasted time and money. Hidden fees, confusing claims processes and cumbersome cancellation procedures turn routine transactions into frustrating experiences. In some cases, that's not accidental.

Many companies have discovered that adding extra steps and confusing menus boosts revenue because some customers simply give up before completing the process.

I've seen a version of this thinking from the inside. In the 1990s, I served on a task force at one of Canada's largest banks when call-centre costs were rising rapidly. Management encouraged us to treat every incoming call as a sales opportunity, asking employees to upsell products while addressing customer concerns.

At the time, the strategy was considered innovative. But many organizations eventually pushed the concept too far. Long wait times, complicated phone menus, endless transfers and dropped calls became common features of customer service. Whether intentional or not, the effect was the same: some customers eventually gave up.

Governments have introduced consumer protections over the years, but enforcement is often inconsistent. When I pursued a complaint involving Air Canada, many years ago, former NHL referee Bruce Hood served as a federal arbitrator for customer disputes. I was fortunate to win my case. After Hood retired, the position was never effectively replaced. Some believe it was because Hood often favoured the consumer.

Industries have resisted stronger consumer protections. Airlines fought refund requirements for lengthy delays. Telecom companies opposed proposals that would have made cancelling a service as easy as signing up for one.

Now artificial intelligence and chatbots promise greater efficiency. Sometimes they deliver. Too often, however, they simply add another layer of frustration. Customers find themselves bounced between automated systems and scripted responses that struggle with anything outside a narrow set of predefined problems.

In theory, competition should punish companies that provide poor service. Consumers would take their business elsewhere, re-

warding organizations that make life easier. In reality, many sectors are dominated by a handful of large players. When customers feel they have few meaningful alternatives, companies can impose friction without losing significant business.

Stronger consumer protections would help, particularly if regulators recognized that wasted time has real value. Consumers also need clearer information about their rights and where to seek assistance. Responsibility is divided among federal and provincial agencies.

These organizations exist to protect consumers. They simply need the authority, resources, and public attention necessary to do the job effectively.

When ordinary tasks require endless hoops just to fix a bill, secure a refund, or cancel a service, frustration eventually turns into cynicism. If governments and regulators can remove even a few of those obstacles, it would signal that someone is paying attention. That would be a good start toward rebuilding trust – and saving all of us a great deal of time and aggravation.

From Parliament to Perth: Adjournment of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



MATTHEW RAE

MPP for Perth-Wellington

In June, when the legislature adjourns for the summer, I am asked "what do MPPs do now?"

It is a fair question. Most people see what happens inside the legislature because debates are televised; legislation is publicly available and Question Period often makes the evening news.

We learn about our parliamentary democracy in Grade 10 Civics Class, but far less attention is paid to the work that happens outside Queen's Park.

The reality is that while the legislature may not be sitting, the work certainly doesn't stop.

For me, the summer months provide an opportunity to spend even more time throughout Perth-Wellington meeting with the people and organizations I have the honour of representing. Our riding encompasses a total of nine municipalities and two counties. This includes two single-tier municipalities, the City of Stratford and the Town of St. Marys, and seven lower-tier municipalities each containing various towns, villages and hamlets. From one end of the riding to the other, it's about a 90-minute drive, and every

community has its own priorities, opportunities and challenges.

Time back in our electoral districts is one of the most important parts of serving as a MPP and an essential part of our parliamentary system. It allows me to meet directly with residents, local businesses, farm families, municipal leaders, health care providers and community organizations to hear firsthand what is working well and where we can improve.

Some of the most valuable conversations I have do not happen in the legislature. They happen at kitchen tables, in municipal council chambers, at community events or in barns across Perth-Wellington. Those conversations provide insight that simply cannot be gained from only reading reports or

attending meetings at Queen's Park.

Listening matters because good public policy starts with understanding the people it affects. Whether it's advocating for infrastructure investments, supporting local economic development, improving health care or reducing unnecessary barriers for businesses, the ideas that shape provincial decisions often begin with conversations here at home.

Many initiatives brought forward at Queen's Park are influenced by what MPPs hear in their communities. Sometimes that means recognizing local achievements through a member's statement. Other times it leads to changes in legislation, government policy or regulations. My own Private Members Bill, the Growing Agritourism

Act, came about because of conversations with local farm families and small business owners.

Being in the community is not separate from my work at Queen's Park. It is an essential part of it. Elected representatives use these interactions in the communities we represent to remain informed about the issues on the ground. These interactions improve my ability to advocate on your behalf at Queen's Park.

Serving as your MPP means being present, not only when legislation is debated in Toronto, but in our communities. The conversations we have across Perth-Wellington help shape the work I do at Queen's Park, and they ensure that our rural communities continue to have a strong voice in provincial government.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US

CALL 519.622.2341 OR EMAIL STRATFORDTIMES@GMAIL.COM

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford
Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, August 10; 4:30-7:30 p.m.
Grace United Church Tavistock
Born2Eat, Fo'Cheezy, Beavertails
Donations to Grace United Church

STRATFORD LEGION YARD & BAKE SALE

Saturday, August 15; 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

Stop in at the and check out all our yard sale items, enjoy a back bacon on a bun and our many bake sale goodies

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, August 17; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

Siggi's, Pablas Street of India, SWAT

Donations to Tavistock Agricultural Society

JOIN US FOR SUMMER AT KNOX

Knox Presbyterian Church

142 Ontario St., Stratford

August events include Book Club on Tuesdays, drop in watercolour painting on Wednesdays, Stained Glass Tours on Thursday - all starting at 10:30AM. Free community dinner on August 19 at 5 p.m! Visit <https://pccweb.ca/knoxstratford/> or call 519-271-0373 for more details! Everyone welcome!

BLACKSMITH DEMONSTRATION

On Saturday, August 29, starting at 10 a.m., come to the Brocksden Country School Museum for an incredible demonstration of how a blacksmith used his forge!

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, August 24; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

Berlin 95, Ish n Chips, El Milagro

Donations to Camp Bimini

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Monday, August 31; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

Born2Eat, Los Rolling Tacos, Fo'Cheezy

Donations to Tavistock Agricultural Society

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRES

Friday, September 11; 6 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

Sign up your team of 2 for \$20 by calling the Legion at 519-271-4540, Dave at 519-703-6544 or Anne at 519-301-0914. Doors open at 6 p.m., games start at 6:30 p.m.

EDMONTON ELKS VS TORONTO ARGONAUTS

Saturday, September 19

The Stratford Legion is hosting a bus trip to see the Edmonton Elks vs Toronto Argonauts football game. It is a 3 p.m. game and the Badder bus leaves from the Cooper Lot at 12 noon. The cost is \$105 p.p. Contact Dean at 273-4463 to reserve and pay for your spot. Tickets are selling fast!

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRES

Friday, November 13; 6 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

November 13 – The next Stratford Legion Friday Night Euchre is Friday Nov. 13th. Sign up your team of 2 for \$20 by calling the Legion at 519-271-4540, Dave at 519-703-6544 or Anne at 519-301-0914. Doors open at 6 p.m., games start at 6:30 p.m.

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

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

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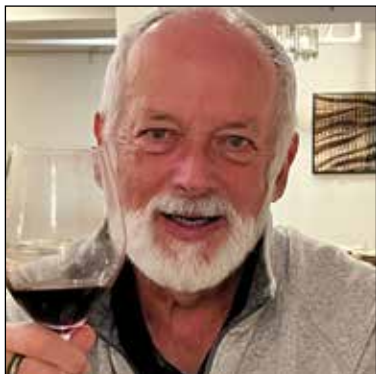


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pizza to your child's
soccer team when they
won the championship?

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: 'Foodie' quality at sensible prices – amazing dining at Punch Ltd.



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

If you have eaten in hotel dining rooms, you will probably agree that some can be really good; many can be ridiculously pricey; some are just run-of-the-mill or worse, although still often overly expensive.

So, when Germain Hotels' France Savard invited us to dine at Punch Ltd., the new restaurant in Le Germain Hotel Toronto on Mercer Street, I did not know what to expect.

What I did not expect was one of the finest meals I have ever enjoyed, but that is exactly what we got. Amazing, unique food in a very elegant setting with superb service. A perfect experience.

Am I exaggerating? Well, at one point during the meal, my partner simply said, "This food is absolutely full of flavour!"

That's the work of executive chef Mandar Kulkarni and his eight-person kitchen crew. Mandar, who is from Mumbai, India, chatted with us and explained that the culinary model at Punch Ltd. is "modern London ... British food with softer Indian touches." This is not, in any way, stereotypical Indian cuisine; it's in a category all its own.

Punch Ltd. opened its doors last October in the hotel that opened



The bar at Punch Ltd. with a very enthusiastic bartender.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

in 2003. Le Germain Hotel Toronto was the first Germain establishment outside the province of Québec, though most certainly not the last. Germain hotels now exist all across Canada, still independently owned and operated by the Germain family based in Montréal.

Back to the dining table; while you can certainly order individual meals off the menu at Punch Ltd., there are a couple of more interesting ways to dine here. The dinner menu lists the options as "Small Shares," "Large Shares" and "Sides." So sharing is a great way to go.

But the advice at the top of the menu is, "Let our chefs take the lead. ... Enjoy a personally curated tasting journey."

Now, I have been in restaurants where a "personally curated tasting journey" costs hundreds of dollars. Not here. That option comes with a very reasonable

price tag of \$95. In fact, in the holiday months, there is also a "Summerlicious" option – your choice of small share, main dish, dies and dessert, for \$65. That is definitely not a "foodie restaurant" price, but the food will delight the most demanding foodie.

One other difference; some tasting menus involve minute portions of a variety of food. The portions at Punch Ltd. are very satisfactory.

Our meal? We wisely decided to trust the chef, as well as Lauren Hall, the warm and welcoming director of food and beverage and Punch Ltd.'s sommelier. She matched our courses with truly excellent wines.

Mandar started us with a unique amuse bouche – a vegetarian version of steak tartare, with beetroot substituting for the steak. Delicious.

We were then served Mumbai Chat-Slaw mixed at the table, an

amazing mélange of radishes, beets, green apple, pomegranate, boondi (deep-fried chickpea flour), potato straw, crispy leeks and tamarind yogurt.

Next came duck sausage with raisins in puff pastry topped with a unique, dark, spicy house brown sauce.

Then came what may have been our favourite taste of the meal (except, perhaps, the desserts), Agnolotti, a stuffed pasta with morels, English peas, snap peas, porcini mushroom broth and maggie butter.

This was followed by exceptional Beef Wellington, one of the many house specialties. The menu lists "tenderloin, prosciutto, wild mushroom duxelles, Swiss chard, sunchoke purée and rogan josh jus." The jus brings that soft, Indian spin to the very British Beef Wellington – again, a perfect culinary marriage.

And then came desserts – yes,

plural because there were, after all, two of us. One was a Punch Ltd. standard – absolutely luscious sticky toffee pudding. The other involved a surprise. Our server brought a white chocolate mousse with a red fruit sauce, and at the table, poured extra virgin olive oil on the mousse and added cracked black pepper. I was dubious until my first taste.

That dessert included both saffron – the most expensive spice in the world – and cardamom, third most pricey. Mandar explained both are essential to his recipes, so he insists on them, regardless of cost.

Lauren matched our courses with terrific wines from around the world: a Gruner Veltliner from Austria, Cerisier en Fleur from Alsace, a terrific Bordeaux and a couple more. The wine list at Punch Ltd. covers 10 pages; there are three more for spirits and that doesn't include their wide selection of unique cocktails and beer.

The restaurant features low light, pleasant background music and wait staff in black suits and white shirts – it all speaks of elegance. But the diners' clothing tended toward smart casual – no formality, here.

I don't write a lot of articles about any specific restaurant, but Punch Ltd. clearly earned the attention it's getting this week.

You don't have to be a foodie to love Punch Ltd. Sure, foodies will love it, but Punch Ltd. is perfect for anyone who enjoys a dining adventure. You will not be disappointed!

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and past-president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



The dining room at Punch Ltd.



Lauren Hall is director of food and beverage, and also the very knowledgeable sommelier at Punch Ltd.



Beef Wellington with all the fixings – superb!

(GERMAIN HOTELS PHOTO)

Crossword

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62					63					64		

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Egyptian bull god
- 5. Romanian monetary unit
- 8. Santa's helper
- 11. Fictional Pink Floyd corporal
- 13. Sea eagle genus
- 14. Broad volcanic crater
- 15. Minneapolis suburb
- 16. Actual commercial worth (abbr.)
- 17. Exchange rate
- 18. Ethnic peoples in Guinea
- 20. Men's fashion accessory
- 21. Craft material
- 22. Offerings
- 25. Early
- 30. Large room
- 31. Soviet Socialist Republic
- 32. One who hauls
- 33. Shorthand for accepting
- 38. Promotional materials
- 41. Loss of memory
- 43. One who beheads
- 45. Photographers
- 48. Small, rich sponge cake
- 49. White clerical vestment
- 50. Partner to "oohed"
- 55. Abba __, Israeli politician
- 56. Zero
- 57. Owl monkey genus
- 59. Lace bug genus
- 60. Mild expression of surprise
- 61. Storage devices
- 62. Keyboard key
- 63. Make a mistake
- 64. One-time Korean president

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Bridge building degree
- 2. Expression of sorrow or pity
- 3. Large, stocky, lizard
- 4. Rumanian river
- 5. Missive
- 6. Stout-bodied moths
- 7. Brings out
- 8. Bird of prey
- 9. King of Thebes
- 10. Cleaving tool
- 12. African antelope
- 14. Three are particularly famous
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. C. European river
- 24. Dictator
- 25. Portion of (abbr.)
- 26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
- 27. Consume food
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Scrape or wear away by friction
- 34. Popular vegetable
- 35. Pacific Standard Time
- 36. Brazilian state capital
- 37. Paddle
- 39. Cause to become insane
- 40. Drier and flakier
- 41. Mimic
- 42. ESPN host Kimes
- 44. One who moseys
- 45. Secret political clique
- 46. Behind the stern of a ship
- 47. Supernatural force
- 48. Sanctuary in Orthodox churches
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Grayish white
- 53. Engrave
- 54. UNC's chief rival
- 58. Midway between south and southeast

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Pet of the week



LOTTIE

Meet Lottie! This beautiful girl has a heart as big as her personality. Sweet, affectionate, and full of life, she brings joy wherever she goes. And people are Lottie's favourite thing! Her enthusiasm for life is contagious, and she's always ready for the next adventure.

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If you're searching for a loyal companion who will fill your home with laughter, love, and endless tail wags, Lottie is ready to meet you. Meet Lottie in-person at our Stratford Centre or online at [kwsphumane.ca/adopt/dogs!](#)

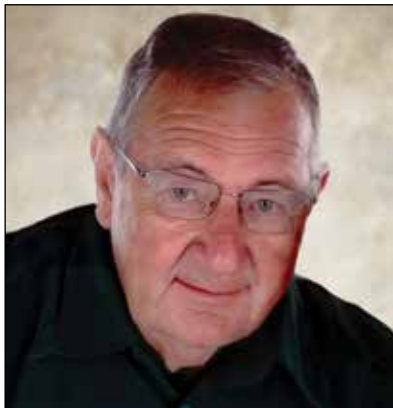


Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

OBITUARY

**BARRY SCHMIDT****June 16, 1946 – July 23, 2026**

It is with profound sadness that the family announces the peaceful passing of Barry Schmidt of Stratford, Ontario, on July 23, 2026, at the age of 80.

Barry was the beloved husband and best friend of Nancy (Fehrman) Schmidt, whom he married on July 1, 1967. Together they shared nearly six decades of marriage, building a life rooted in faith, family, love, and hard work.

Barry was the proud father of Sherri Beatty (Brad) and Scott Schmidt (Hayley Flanagan). He was a devoted grandfather to Brock and Brayden Beatty and warmly welcomed Reese and Henry Flanagan into the family he loved so dearly.

He will be lovingly remembered by his sisters, Joyce Gingerich (Ray) of Alberta, and Linda Battler (Keith) of Kincardine, Ontario. Barry was predeceased by his parents, Lorne and Florence Schmidt; his parents-in-law, Clifford and Vera Fehrman; his sister, Janice Junker (Bruce) of Grand Bend; his brother, Ron Schmidt; and his sister-in-law, Sharyn Schmidt. He will also be fondly remembered by his sisters-in-law, Dianne Schulz (Tom) and Janice Horan, whose husband Denis predeceased her, along with many nieces, nephews, extended family members, and dear friends.

For more than fifty years, Barry was the owner and operator of Barry Schmidt Contracting. Through hard work, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to quality workmanship, he built a respected business and earned a reputation for honesty, reliability, and craftsmanship throughout Stratford and the surrounding area.

A faithful member of Zion Lutheran Church in Stratford, Barry quietly lived his faith through service, generosity, and devotion to his family and community.

Barry and Nancy shared a love of travel, especially cruising, but his true happy place was the family cottage in Grand Bend. Whether working on a project, lending a helping hand to a neighbour, or enjoying a cold beer with family and friends while overlooking Lake Huron, Barry found happiness in life's simple pleasures and in the people he loved most.

Barry never sat still for long. He was happiest with a project to tackle, someone to help, or time spent with family and friends. His quiet generosity, unwavering work ethic, and willingness to lend a hand left a lasting impression on everyone who knew him. His legacy lives on through the family he cherished, the business he built, and the countless lives he touched.

Cremation has taken place, with interment in a family niche at a later date. A celebration of Barry's life will be held at the Army, Navy and Air Force Veterans Hall, 151 Lorne Avenue East, Stratford on Friday, August 7, 2026 from 3-6 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in Barry's memory may be made to the Alzheimer Society or the Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth and would be appreciated by the family. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

CLASSIFIEDS

OBITUARY

**BILLING, LINDA**

Linda Louise Ellen Billing, age 78, of Stratford passed away at the Stratford General Hospital on Monday, July 27, 2026. Born in Toronto, daughter of the late Samuel and Eileen Billing.

Linda is pre-deceased by the love of her life, Gary Kingsley and by her sister, Brenda Henhoeffter.

She will be missed by her two nieces, Virginia Cochrane (Alex), and Andrea Cochrane. Also by her great nieces and nephews, Gregory Cochrane, Derek Cochrane (Aimee), Samantha Schneider, Cody Kalbflesch and Brayden Kalbflesch (Sarah). Great, great nieces and nephews, Sienna, Sophia, Quintin, Noah, Kennedy, Miles, Axle, Hailey, Daxston, Jace, and Jaxson.

Linda loved life. Being around people that could be silly and laugh with her was her joy. Her family and friends knew the laugh that sounded like she was never going to catch her breath ever again. It was no wonder that her most favourite people were the little people in her life. A child's smile and laughter was the most beautiful thing to her. She could make any child laugh with their whole body and smile ear to ear.

She will be missed by her friends that also new that laughter was who she was. She would always be there for support and a shoulder to cry on when needed.

Friends may gather at the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street, Stratford on Tuesday, August 4, 2026 from 10 am until the time of the memorial service at 11 am. As expressions of sympathy, memorial donations to the Heart and Stroke Foundation may be made through the funeral home. 519.271.7411 www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

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

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B	A	B	A		A	L	B		A	A	H
E	B	A	N		N	I	L		A	O	T
M	A	F	A		G	E	E		R	A	C
A	L	T			E	R	R		R	H	E

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Tin
2. Two
3. Philippe Petit
4. The lion
5. Nike
6. Venus
7. Boston Americans
8. Chickpeas
9. Lent
10. Papal Conclave

SUDOKU

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

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