

# SIMCOE ADVOCATE

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## Norfolk looks to sell more surplus lands

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

In its efforts to save some taxpayer dollars by selling surplus land, the successes Norfolk County experienced with the “low-hanging fruit” properties has convinced councillors to support looking at options for more complicated properties.

The first phase of a county land review project could end up netting the municipality around \$1.2 million. Staff are now being tasked to look deeper into some other surplus properties and whether the effort it would take to make them saleable is worth it.

“I think we should continue to look, we should always be looking for ways to save the taxpayer money,” said Coun. Alan Duthie.

In the first phase of the county land review, councillors approved a plan to have staff look to sell 24 parcels of land. These parcels were considered relatively easy sales and included properties that could be sold to adjacent owners, and road closures and conveyances. Nine were also subject to community engagement and required zoning work.

Sales that have closed in Phase 1 amount to roughly \$480,000, the report said, with two other properties on the market for \$450,000 and \$275,000. Eight more properties could be sold once necessary zoning works, agreements and surveys are complete.

Looking ahead to the second phase, general manager of corporate services Heidi Van Dyk said sales won't be as straightforward.

“There will undoubtedly be more investment required up front in order to get the properties ready to market,” she said.

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Seven-year-old Roman Boyd features in Daryl Granger's documentary, *Young Farmer*, showing at the Strand Movie Theatre in Simcoe. (DARYL GRANGER PHOTO)

## A little farmer's adventure

IAN MILMINE

What's for Dinner Norfolk County?

Daryl Granger's 'Young Farmer' is a beautifully crafted, educational, and often humorous documentary told through the eyes of seven-year-old boy, Roman Boyd.

The film invites viewers into Ro-

man's world, where moments of inspiration, laughter, and admiration unfold as he learns to grow crops and sell them at the Simcoe Farmers' Market. It's an engaging journey that offers both insight and enjoyment. It may even inspire families to start their own gardens together.

This documentary is the latest work

from local independent filmmaker and photographer Daryl Granger, owner of RoseLe Studio in Simcoe, and creator of the award-winning documentary *Netting the Waters*.

With thoughtful storytelling and striking visuals, Granger brings to life the challenges and rewards of farming. At the heart of the film is Roman

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



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# Boyd family, Strand audience enjoy premiere

Award-winning documentary *Young Farmer* opens at The Strand Theatre in Simcoe

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

It was an emotional Monday night for the Langton-area Boyd family.

Excited, and maybe in some cases a bit nervous, Greg and Victoria and their three children watched the premiere of *Young Farmer* for the first time on the 'big screen' at The Strand in Simcoe.

The locally filmed and produced documentary by Daryl Granger, Victoria's brother, features the farming journey of Roman, Connor and Lauren in 2025, assisted by parents Greg and Victoria.

"My eyes were watering as soon as it started, as soon as Greg started talking about the history, the family, and where it all came from, and seeing those old pictures of his ancestry, his grandfather," said Victoria.

AI was used to bring old family portraits to life for the introduction.

"An example of technology being used the right way," said Greg.

Victoria played a supporting role in the documentary, which has already won, placed, or advanced in 14 international film festivals.

"I'm behind the scenes and I support, and I make sure everybody's fed and clothed and healthy and well and where they need to be."

And she made sure seven-year-old Roman Boyd's single pair of overalls, which he wore pretty much every scene, were washed.

"Just the one pair, so had to make sure they were washed," she laughed, "a lot... because he was rolling around. That's what he does, he likes to roll around in the dirt."

In the documentary, Victoria said, "Where do you find Roman? He's out on the farm. That's where you're going to find him."



From left, Greg and Lauren Boyd, Daryl Granger, and Roman, Connor and Victoria Boyd answer questions after the premiere of *Young Farmer* Monday at The Strand.

"Not going to lie, it was a lot of work," Greg smiled. "Not only growing the garden, but working with Roman to teach him and get him to be friendly in front of the camera."

"Tonight, very proud, very proud. Proud of all of them, they did a great job. And I'm just continually impressed by Daryl's talent and what he is capable of doing, and I'm looking forward to seeing what he will be doing in the future."

Greg, who operated Heritage Lane Produce for 14 years, had the knowledge and expertise to create and 'build' the garden. Their children had varying levels of experience assisting in the garden.

"Connor... vegetables weren't his thing. Cows, cows and more cows for him."

The family's beef cows, and the dairy farm where Connor works, were also fea-

ured in the documentary.

Lauren grew sunflowers to compete in the Langton Fair (where she won two first-place ribbons, and defended her 'tallest' championship) and sell at the Simcoe Farmers Market, along with Roman's vegetables.

"Roman, he was always interested in watermelons - he loves watermelons. That always his thing. 2025 was kind of his first real introduction to 'This is how we start' and 'This is how we prepare' and 'This is how we grow it' and sell it. It was his first go-around, really, and I think it's been a positive experience for him, for sure."

The documentary was not the Boyd fam-

ily's idea, Greg noted.

"It was Daryl's idea, Daryl approached us. Originally it was just going to be like a 15-minute YouTube thing. That's what we all thought we were getting into."

"Then, about halfway through the season he breaks the news, 'No, this is going to be a full-length documentary.' So my anxiety kind of went up a little bit at that point," Greg laughed.

Pleased with the finished product, Greg said "We couldn't be more happy."

*Young Farmer* will continue playing at The Strand - on scheduled dates - until the end of March.

## Staff asked to look into other surplus properties

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The review also included looking at lands that could potentially be sites for affordable housing projects. Staff have identified some opportunities but the report said some updates on affordable definitions as well as options for incentive programs need to be developed. Staff would also like to look at provincial and federal funding options as well as mechanisms that could be put in place to ensure the units remain affordable in the long term.

Duthie encouraged staff to "take the blinders off" as they consider these options.

"Let's be creative, let's be somewhat innovative," he said.



Alan Duthie, Norfolk County Ward 5 Councillor.

## Two charged after drug trafficking investigation

Two individuals have been charged as a result of a drug trafficking investigation led by the Haldimand/Norfolk Ontario Provincial Police Community Street Crime Unit.

On Sunday, Jan. 11 at approximately 11:09 a.m., members of the Haldimand/Norfolk OPP CSCU, with assistance from Norfolk County OPP officers, conducted a traffic stop on Ireland Road in Simcoe as part of an ongoing drug trafficking investigation. The passenger was taken into custody without incident.

As a result of a search of the individual and vehicle, officers seized a quantity of suspected cocaine, fentanyl, methamphetamine,

Canadian currency, and drug-related paraphernalia. The driver was also taken into custody without incident. A subsequent search led to the seizure of suspected MDMA (ecstasy).

A 36-year-old resident of Norfolk County was charged with; Possession of a Schedule I substance for the purpose of trafficking - cocaine; Possession of a Schedule I substance for the purpose of trafficking - opioid (other than heroin); Possession of a Schedule I substance for the purpose of trafficking - methylenedioxyamphetamine (ecstasy); and Possession of proceeds of property obtained by crime under \$5,000 - in Canada; and Fail to comply with Probation Order.

The accused was sched-

uled to appear for a bail hearing at the Ontario Court of Justice in Simcoe on Monday, Jan. 12.

Also charged was a 68-year-old from Norfolk County, with the following alleged offences: Possession of a Schedule I substance for the purpose of trafficking - cocaine; Possession of a Schedule I substance for the purpose of trafficking - opioid (other than heroin); Possession of a Schedule I substance - methylenedioxyamphetamine (ecstasy); and Possession of proceeds of property obtained by crime under \$5,000 - in Canada.

The accused is scheduled to appear at the Ontario Court of Justice in Simcoe on Feb. 10.

# Young Farmer features ‘small hands, big dreams’

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and Greg Boyd. Greg takes on the meaningful task of teaching his youngest son the realities of farm life. Roman gains a hands-on understanding of what it truly means to be a farmer, while audiences are guided through the entire agricultural process - from selecting seeds and preparing soil to planting, nurturing crops, harvesting, and post-season soil care.

The film thoughtfully highlights the daily dedication and hard work required in farming.

Young Farmer begins with a brief history of the Boyd family, tracing their immigration from Ireland to North Walsingham in 1862. For more than six generations - 163 years - the Boyd family has been feeding their community.

Viewers are introduced to both the sixth and seventh-generation farmers, who warmly welcome audiences into their home and into Roman’s farming journey. Much of the film takes place at Heritage Lane Produce, with appearances from several recognizable local establishments.

Granger’s visual storytelling is both striking and heartfelt. He captures vegetables in a way that is vibrant and visually compelling. His cinematography and narrative approach first showcased in *Netting the Waters*, once again leaves a lasting impression. Filmed without scripts or reshoots, *Young Farmer* relies on raw, authentic footage paired with a thoughtful musical score. The result is an engaging and genuine documentary that stands as another must-see achievement from Granger.

As a self-proclaimed foodie, I am sure you will love *Young Farmer* because it brings food back to its very beginning. The film doesn’t just show vegetables, it celebrates them. From the careful selection of seeds to the rich colours of freshly harvested produce, the cinematography makes food feel alive, intentional, and beautiful. You gain a deeper appreciation for the work, patience, and passion behind every ingredient that ends up on your plate.

*Young Farmer* also highlights the connection between farming, family, and community - especially through scenes at the

Simcoe Farmers’ Market - reminding food lovers why local, seasonal produce matters. Watching a child experience the entire farm-to-market process reinforces the value of knowing where your food comes from and the people who grow it.

For anyone who loves food not just for its taste, but for its story, craftsmanship, and origins, *Young Farmer* is a heartfelt and visually satisfying experience that deepens your respect for every meal.

\*\*\*

*Young Farmer* is currently playing at The Strand Movie Theatre in Simcoe, 55 Robinson Street.

Online tickets are available at <https://simpli.events/u/strand-theatre-simcoe>. There are 200 online tickets available for each screening. Online sales close three days prior to the screening.

There are also 100 in-person tickets available for each screening, which can be purchased at the Strand Theatre Tuesdays-Thursdays 6:15-7:15 p.m. or Saturdays and Sundays 1:15-2:15 and 6:15-7:15 p.m.

Total capacity is 300. Any unsold tickets will be available in-person on the day of the screening (the box office opens 45-60 minutes before the screening).

For more information call the Strand at 226-534-1532, or email [office@strandtheatre.ca](mailto:office@strandtheatre.ca).

*Young Farmer*’s premiere was Monday, Jan. 12.

**Upcoming January shows include:**

- Thursday, Jan. 15, 2 p.m.
- Saturday, Jan. 17, 4:15 p.m.
- Monday Jan. 19, 2 & 7 p.m.
- Thursday, Jan. 22, 2 p.m.
- Saturday, Jan. 24, 4:15 p.m.
- Monday, Jan. 26, 7 p.m.
- Thursday, Jan. 29, 2 p.m.
- Saturday, Jan. 31, 4:15 p.m.
- *Young Farmer* will also show on Feb. 7, Feb. 9, Feb. 14, Feb. 16, Feb. 19, Feb. 21, March 5, March 7, March 16, March 21, March 26, and March 30.



Small hands, big dreams.

(DARYL GRANGER PHOTOS)



The Boyd family in Norfolk County.



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# EDITORIAL

## What are your bold predictions for 2026?

### FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

By Stewart Grant



A New Year's Day poll on Smerconish.com asked people, "Will the world be in a better place at the end of 2026 than it is today?" Of the 25,000 responses, just over 60% replied "No" while the remainder replied "Yes." What do you think?

It's a subjective question that's hard to measure, but I had cast my Jan. 1 vote in the "Yes" column. Maybe that's just wishful thinking. The year is certainly off to quite an interesting start.

As I finish up this predictions article on Jan. 3, one of 2026's big questions had already been answered with the news that Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has been removed from power by American forces. While Maduro was an illegitimate leader who had stolen the 2024 Venezuelan election, the brazen manner whereby he was tak-

en out is very concerning, as are the unknown worldwide consequences that may follow.

Here's my crack at how the rest of the year will play out...

1. Despite Trump's comments to the contrary at his Jan. 3 press conference, public pressure within Venezuela will sway the American President to eventually support Maria Corina Machado as the rightful leader of Venezuela.
2. A Democratic politician will call for the impeachment of Donald Trump for failing to gain necessary approvals for invading Venezuela, but this goes nowhere.
3. In Canada, the Liberal government's government will hold throughout 2026.
4. Pierre Poilievre will remain as Conservative leader following that party's leadership review in January.
5. Although there will be much speculation, China will not invade Taiwan in 2026.
6. A ceasefire will be negotiated in the Russia-Ukraine war.
7. Drone warfare, one of the staples of the Russia-Ukraine war, will sadly make its first high-profile appearance on this side of the ocean, with a notable strike sparking heavy interest in counter-drone defense systems.
8. American tariffs on Canadian-made products will decrease during the year.
9. Despite worries about an AI bubble, the stock markets will record another positive year.
10. More information will be released from the Epstein files, but no arrests of high-profile personalities will occur.
11. In sports, the Stanley Cup will stay south of the border, with the Colorado Avalanche earning the NHL's top prize.
12. Fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs will be spared the agony of losing in the first round when the team fails to make the playoffs.
13. The Buffalo Bills make it to the Super Bowl but lose to the Seattle Seahawks.
14. Team Canada will edge Team USA in the Men's Olympic Hockey Finals.
15. France will win the 2026 World Cup.
16. Speculation will grow regarding Trump's physical and mental health as he turns 80 years old this year. He will survive the year, but with increased public focus on J.D. Vance as potentially needing to take over as U.S. President in 2027.
17. A late addition to the prediction list... despite all his talk, surely Trump will not invade Greenland, Colombia, or Cuba in 2026, right??

Do you have any bold predictions for 2026? Feel free to email me at [stew@granthaven.com](mailto:stew@granthaven.com) to have your say.

## Relationships are an investment, not a luxury

Haldimand-Norfolk

MPP  
Bobbi Ann  
Brady



Over the past month, I had the opportunity to attend two conventions in the United States. On the surface, these conferences were about policy discussions, keynote speeches, and the usual choreography of political life. But beneath the agendas and policy take-aways was a quieter, more enduring lesson - one that too often gets lost in daily headlines.

Leaders come and go. Administrations change and political winds shift. What endures, however, are the relationships we choose to build and, just as importantly, the ones we take the time to nurture. Sitting across tables with elected officials, business leaders, and community advocates from across the border, I was reminded that progress rarely hinges on a single individual. It is sustained by trust, familiarity, and the willingness to engage even when times

are tough.

In mid-December, I was in Chicago attending the Council of State Governments National Convention. I was one of only a handful of delegates from Ontario, joining colleagues from across North America to discuss issues ranging from trade and tariffs to housing, political violence, social media, and the broader challenge of restoring civility in politics.

During the convention, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Dallas Trade and Investment Office (TIO), which facilitates trade and investment between Ontario and several U.S. states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Our discussions focused on Ontario's future energy needs, particularly how the industrial park in Nanticoke could be leveraged to help meet the province's electricity demands through to 2050.

While in Chicago, our Ontario delegation also met with officials from the Office of the Consulate General of Canada. These conversations reinforced the importance of maintaining strong cross-border relationships and ensuring Ontario's interests are well represented in the United States, regardless of political or economic shifts.

I knew once I posted about my work in Chicago that I'd be asked why I was attending, and to my surprise, the only question came through a private message asking how such a convention benefits Ontario. If the examples above weren't enough to make the case, I explained that Ontario

and Illinois share a strong economic bond: Illinois is our fourth-largest U.S. export market, and in 2024 a memorandum of understanding was signed to further boost trade, and Chicago serves as a vital logistics hub connecting Ontario industries across the border.

As space is limited, I'll share reflections on the second convention in next week's column. Before I sign off, however, I want to highlight the importance of the Council of State Governments and its commitment to connecting, informing, inspiring, and empowering public servants as a non-partisan organization. One initiative launched at the convention, the Service with Civility Project, encourages leaders to act with integrity, compassion, and honesty. I proudly took the pledge to lead with civility, serve with intention, and recognize others who do the same.

One of the finest examples of such leadership is former Ontario Speaker Ted Arnott, who was honored at the convention for his exceptional work in fostering productive cross-border relationships. His recognition is a reminder that civility and collaboration remain at the heart of effective public service.

In an era when politics is increasingly transactional and short-term, the conversations I am blessed to be a part of serve as a reminder that strong relationships are not a luxury - they are an investment. When leadership changes, relationships become the bridge that carries cooperation forward, because what unites us is greater than what divides us.

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# Lighthouse Festival appoints interim artistic producer

Lighthouse Festival announced the appointment of David Leyshon as Interim Artistic Producer for the 2026 season.

A respected theatre artist, educator, and director, Leyshon brings decades of experience in live performance and storytelling, making him a natural fit for Lighthouse Festival's mission to deliver outstanding, laughter-filled Canadian theatre.

Leyshon joins Lighthouse Festival at an exciting time, as the theatre prepares for a season focused on joy, connection, and the uniquely Canadian sense of humour audiences have come to know and love. His role as Interim Artistic Producer will see him working closely with the Lighthouse artistic team to support artistic planning, creative leadership, and the continued excellence of productions on stage in both Port Dover and Port Colborne. Leyshon has also been announced as the director of Lighthouse Festival's 2026 community production, deepening his connection to the Festival and its community.

"I'm absolutely thrilled to be joining Lighthouse Festival," said Leyshon in a media release. "Lighthouse has built an incredible reputation for making excellent, entertaining theatre and creating unforgettable experiences for audiences over several decades. To be a part of that legacy, shaping a season that is warm, funny, and deeply engaging, is something I'm truly excited about."

Leyshon emphasized the importance of comedy and shared experiences during challenging times.

"Laughter matters. Now more than ever, people need opportunities to come together, escape for a couple of hours, and laugh. The 2026 season is going to be an amazing and

entertaining one for each patron that walks through our doors, and I can't wait to help bring those stories to life on stage."

"David brings a depth of experience in live theatre that is both practical and inspiring," said Lighthouse Executive Director Nicole Campbell. "He has worked extensively as a director and actor, and his background as a theatre educator brings a thoughtful, collaborative approach to both artists and process. His skill set and passion for storytelling align closely with Lighthouse Festival's commitment to accessible, audience-first Canadian theatre."

"We are pleased to welcome David to Lighthouse Festival during this important season," said Campbell. "His insight, and love of comedic theatre will be an important asset as we plan and deliver the 2026 season for our audiences and artists."

Lighthouse Festival looks forward to an inspiring and laughter-filled 2026 season under Leyshon's artistic guidance, continuing its tradition of bringing exceptional Canadian theatre to our lakeside communities.

During the interim period, the Board of Directors will be overseeing a full search for a permanent Artistic Director soon, ensuring continuity and long-term artistic leadership for the Festival.

For more information about Lighthouse Festival Theatre and the upcoming 2026 season, visit [lighthouse theatre.com](http://lighthouse theatre.com) online.

About Lighthouse Festival

Lighthouse Festival is a charitable organization devoted to the development and production of new and existing Canadian plays. Lighthouse Festival theatres operate on a



(SUBMITTED PHOTO)

David Leyshon is Lighthouse Festival's Interim Artistic Producer for the 2026 season.

central policy of hospitality, inclusivity, accessibility, and affordability for all.

## SUV, dirt bike stolen in Norfolk

Police are requesting the public's assistance in locating a stolen sport utility vehicle (SUV) and a dirt bike, as well as in identifying those responsible.

On Saturday, Jan. 10, at approximately 5:12 p.m., members of the Norfolk County Ontario Provincial Police responded to a report of a stolen vehicle from a property on Erie Boulevard in Long Point.

The investigation determined that one or more unidentified individuals

stole a white 2018 Jeep Grand Cherokee SUV bearing Ontario licence plates CAXR130.

On Monday, Jan. 12, at approximately 9:11 a.m., Norfolk County OPP officers responded to a reported break-and-enter at a property on Windham Road 12 in Simcoe.

Sometime overnight, one or more individuals unlawfully entered a shop on the property and stole a blue, black, and white Yamaha 65cc dirt bike with a #91 decal on the side.

Police are actively conducting ongoing investigations and are appealing to the public for assistance. Anyone with relevant information is urged to contact the Norfolk County OPP at 1-888-310-1122.

Should you wish to remain anonymous, you may call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or leave an anonymous online tip at [www.helpsolvecrime.com](http://www.helpsolvecrime.com) where you may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2,000.

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# Norfolk County honours police education team

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

As a son of two educators, the school system has always had special importance for Const. Andrew Gamble. But his own life journey took him in a different path as he entered the world of law enforcement.

However, as fate would have it, that career has brought him back into the classroom, and ultimately led him and his PROSE writing team to win provincial recognition as the most recent recipients of the Ontario Justice Education Network's Chief Justice Award. The team was honoured

by Norfolk County council at its Dec. 16 meeting.

"This recognition carries special significance," Gamble said at the meeting, referring to his two educator parents.

The constable said he still has people who share fond memories of their times under the tutelage of his parents.

A collaboration of the Grand Erie District School Board, Brantford Police Service and OPP detachments in Brant County, Norfolk and Haldimand, the Police Resource Outreach Supporting Education team developed modules for eight courses for kids in Grade 9 through 12. It covers

topics like consent, Internet safety, technology, exploitation, restorative justice and the role of police in the justice system.

Mayor Amy Martin credited Gamble with being a driving force behind the project.

"His leadership in promoting justice education and fostering dialogue in the schools reflects the strengths and collaboration between policing and education," she said.

Gamble called being part of the program "one of the most rewarding experiences of my career."

Established by the three chief justices of the Court of Appeal, Superior Court of Jus-

stice and the Ontario Court of Justice, the award is meant to honour those who make "an exceptional contribution in promoting public understanding, education and dialogue in support of a responsive and inclusive justice system," according to the OJEN website.

JoAnna Roberto, director of education at the GEDSB, said the positive results of the program are largely a result of its collaborative nature. "The expertise is very rich in the classroom, and it's an ability to establish a really strong relationship, not only in school, in the hallways, but also in the community," she said.



The PROSE writing team won this year's OJEN Chief Justice Award. From left: Const. Kelsie Annaert, Const. Abigail Whitenect, Const. Andrew Gamble, Geoffrey B. Morawetz, Michael H. Tulloch, Jeremy Morton, Sharon M. Nicklas, Inspector Andy Tait, Meghan Cameron, Karen Edgar, Staff Sergeant Tom Hutton, Jason Hall, Chief Jason Saunders, JoAnna Roberto, and Lisa Munro.

## County signs off on Dunnville affordable housing project

LUKE EDWARDS

Grant Haven Media

Norfolk councillors have given their blessing for the Haldimand Norfolk Housing Corporation to take on some debt for its Dunnville affordable housing project.

As one of the shareholders of HNHC, the county was required to give consent for the organization to enter into a financing agreement with the Canadian Municipal and Housing Corporation to fund some of the 56-unit mixed-housing development being built on Ramsay Drive.

Providing consent puts no direct financial obligations on the municipality.

Haldimand County supported the recommendation at an earlier council meeting. They're also providing a few financial supports to get the project off the ground. Provincial and federal funding is also being used in the project.

The development, located at 311 Ramsay Dr., will be a five-storey building with a mix of market, affordable and rent-geared-to-income units. It'll feature 29 per cent accessible units, and be built with lower greenhouse gas emissions and energy use in mind.

It's being supported by outside organizations like the YWCA of Hamilton, Community Living Haldimand, and Haldimand-Norfolk Women's Services.

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# Pair accused in Norfolk arson spree head back to court

J.P. ANTONACCI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

It has been nearly a year since a pair of Norfolk County men were charged with setting 11 fires during a months-long arson spree that rattled the rural community.

Chad Reimer, 43, and Matthew Smith, 30, were arrested the night of Jan. 26, 2025.

They were pulled over because their pickup truck matched the description of a vehicle seen leaving the scene of a barn fire on Lynn Valley Road, east of Port Dover, earlier that evening.

The pair were charged with 11 counts of arson.

Four of their alleged crimes — burning down a greenhouse north of Delhi, a vacant house north of Waterford, a barn on Teeterville Road and the barn on Lynn Valley Road — happened in January, continuing a string of dangerous fires that started in November 2024, and taxed the county's volunteer fire department.

Reimer was released on bail in February, while Smith was granted bail in April.

Both accused were ordered to wear GPS monitors and live under strict bail conditions at the home of a relative — Reimer in Port Rowan and Smith near Fort Erie.

Reimer and Smith had pretrial hearings scheduled for Jan. 12 in Simcoe.

No civilians, firefighters or livestock were injured during the alleged arson spree. Police have not publicly shared how the two men knew each other or commented on their alleged motive.

Norfolk's fire department dealt with six cases of arson to start 2025.

Along with the four aforementioned incidents, an abandoned house west of Port Rowan was torched on Jan. 19 and a gas station at Highway 24 and Forestry Farm Road was set on fire just after midnight on Jan. 22, forcing residents of an attached home to flee the flames.

No charges have been laid in connection with those two fires.

### Many fires preventable: fire department

Norfolk's fire department responded to approximately 1,100 calls in 2025, and fire officials said "roughly half" could have been prevented.

The department posted end-of-year statistics on social media, saying the 22 structure fires Norfolk firefighters doused in 2025 — including one in the early hours of New Year's Eve — were mainly caused by faulty electrical devices, unsafe welding operations, and open-air burning.

"Misuse of electrical in homes, shops and outbuildings continues to be the leading cause of structure fires in Norfolk," fire officials said. "If it's not working right, stop using it."

The department dealt with 11 "contents fires," which are

fires that are extinguished before they can spread to the surrounding structure.

"Contents fires decreased this year, but the leading causes are still the same — unattended cooking and device malfunction," fire officials said.

More fields and grassland in Norfolk burned up in 2025 compared to the previous year, with 20 open-air fires resulting in the preventable loss of crops and woodlots, the fire department reported.

"Tossing a (cigarette) butt out the window can have devastating results," fire officials said.

Uncontrolled open-air burning also sparked grass fires in 2025, as did letting machinery idle in tall grasses, as the exhaust from the vehicles heated the dry grass. The past year saw 29 fires classified as "other," a category that includes car fires, fires in garbage bins and collection trucks caused by discarded lithium-ion batteries, unattended barbecues going up in flames, and embers from carelessly tossed cigarettes that set fences and even lawn mowers on fire.

Norfolk's fire department also responds to vehicle accidents, medical distress calls, and fire and carbon monoxide detector calls, many of which end up being false alarms.

### Norfolk fire calls by the numbers

- **Total calls in 2025:** approximately 1,100
- **Structure fires:** 22
- **Contents fires:** 11
- **Field/grass fires:** 20
- **"Other" fires:** 29

Leading fire causes: malfunctioning electronics and appliances, discarded lithium-ion batteries, careless smoking, unattended cooking and barbecues, and open-air burning.

- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the Hamilton Spectator. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

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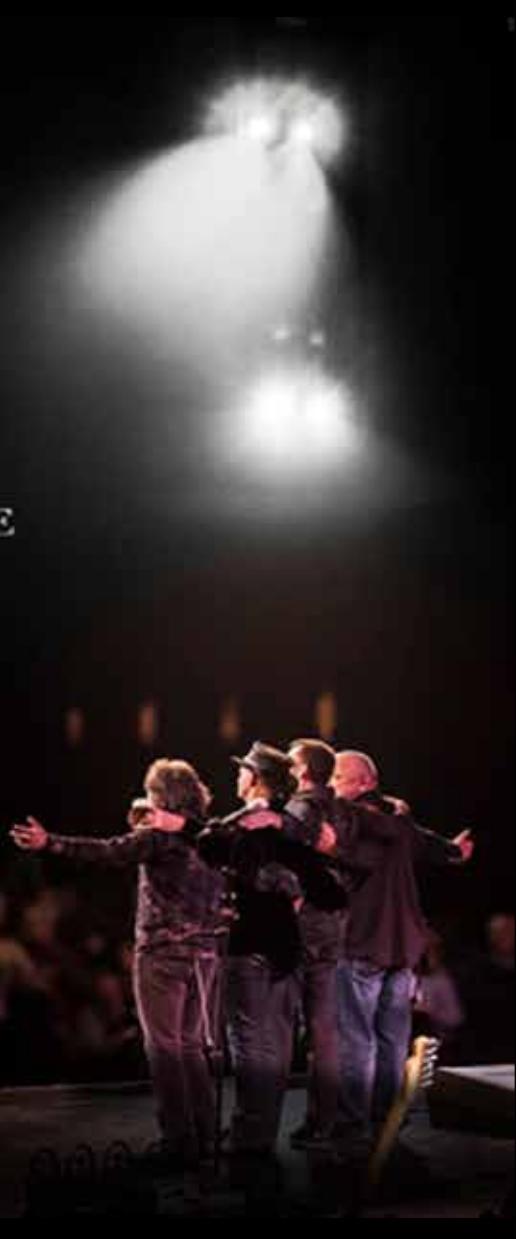

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# Amendment for proposed townhouse build

LUKE EDWARDS

*Grant Haven Media*

Despite some ongoing concerns by nearby residents, Norfolk councillors have been satisfied enough with changes to a Scott Drive development proposal, and protections in place.

Council supported a staff recommendation to approve zoning bylaw amendments for 9 Scott Dr. at the Dec. 16 council meeting. The amendments pave the way for an eight-unit stacked townhouse build on the property.

The road to approval was a rocky one. After a public meeting held earlier this

fall, the proponents agreed to reduce the unit count from 10 to eight. However, staff still had issues, namely with the parking arrangements, and recommended denying the application at the Oct. 28 council meeting.

At the time, councillors opted not to decide one way or the other, and asked staff to have further discussions with developers.

Those discussions appeared to bear fruit, at least from the point of view of planning staff. Additional changes that included re-orienting the building to be perpendicular to Scott Street reduced streetscape concerns and altered site design means they won't be seeking relief from parking requirements.

The changes also provide an area for earth bin garbage receptacles and a place for snow to be piled in the wintertime.

"Overall, planning staff is satisfied that the concerns raised previously have been addressed through the revised proposal," said planner Josh Mueller.

However, neighbours still had concerns about tight spaces making it difficult for emergency crews should a fire or other incident happen. Parking issues were not, in their minds, adequately addressed and they fear visitors to the complex will park on Scott Street, which is too narrow to accommodate parked vehicles.

And drainage concerns had them unsure

about the use of earth bins.

A holding provision on the development will be put in place to ensure some of those concerns are addressed. Holding provisions require developers to do certain things to the satisfaction of municipal staff before building can go ahead.

In this case the holding provision covers water modelling or fire hydrant testing to confirm fire flows, geotechnical and hydrogeological reports that relate to the groundwater concerns, and a suitable grading plan. Since it's also an area regulated by the Ministry of Transportation, the applicants will also have to get appropriate permits from the MTO.

# Teens weigh in on new youth drug strategy

J.P. ANTONACCI

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

To find out how to curb drug use among local youth, Grand Erie Public Health went right to the source.

Grade 10 students in Haldimand and Norfolk were invited to complete in-class surveys in December to give the health unit a baseline on which to build a strategy to address substance abuse.

The anonymous surveys asked teens about their lives at home, school and in the community. The logic, explained medical officer of health Dr. Jason Malenfant, is that by understanding how teens spend their free time, the health unit can better understand what interventions are needed to curb rising rates of drinking, vaping and other drug use.

"With strong partnerships and solid, local data, we can build supports that genuinely reflect what youth need to feel safe, empowered and able to thrive," Malenfant said in a news release.

The surveys were the first step toward Grand Erie implementing Planet Youth, an Icelandic public health model that has been shown to steer youth away from abusing substances by focusing on "protective factors" like recreational opportunities with friends and family.

Instead of one-off campaigns about the dangers of drug use, the Icelandic model seeks to "address the complex societal factors that contribute to youth substance use," the health unit said.

The aim is to delay when kids first try drugs, which in turn delays — and ideally sidesteps — the potential negative outcomes of substance abuse.

Iceland introduced Planet Youth in 1998 and saw rates of youth drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and using cannabis drop by up to 85 per cent over 20 years.

"The Icelandic Prevention Model has shown incredible success in countries around the world, and we are excited to bring this approach to Haldimand and Norfolk," said Norfolk Mayor Amy Martin, who chairs the board of health.

"By working together as a community, we can create a supportive environment that helps our young people thrive, offering healthy alternatives and reducing the risks associated with substance use, which we know is important, particularly to youth living in rural areas."

The effort is backed by public funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to the tune of \$704,886 over three years.

"This investment gives our community a powerful opportunity to better understand the realities young people are navigating today," Malenfant said.

The survey results will be analyzed by the Iceland-based consultants and form the basis for what the health unit describes as "a long-term, community-driven prevention plan," with input from school boards, social-service agencies, governments and community members.

To learn more about the local rollout of the Icelandic pre-

vention model, visit [planetyouthhaldimandnorfolk.ca](http://planetyouthhaldimandnorfolk.ca).

- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the *Hamilton Spectator*. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

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# Tax sale nets \$387,000 for Norfolk County

J.P. ANTONACCI

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

A tax sale in November netted nearly \$387,000 for Norfolk County after four property owners coughed up years of unpaid taxes and three high bidders walked away from their purchases.

Only one of the 11 properties initially put on the auction block in the fall actually sold at the Nov. 5 auction. But tax collector Rob Fleming explained the point of the exercise was not to sell the properties but to compel their owners to settle their property tax bills.

The owners of four properties did just that, with a Turkey Point cottage, Port Dover house, and two properties connected to the Dover Coast development in Port Dover — including a 154-acre golf course

along Highway 6 — being pulled from the sale because the outstanding taxes were paid.

Three other properties received bids but the successful bidders walked away from their offers, forfeiting their deposits.

In those cases, the bids came in well above the minimum bid required to cover the tax arrears. All three properties have restrictions that prevent building permits from being issued.

The sole property to be sold was a 39-acre parcel of farmland on the border of Six Nations of the Grand River. The land was owned by the Haudenosaunee Development Institute, the development arm of the traditional government of Six Nations. HDI representatives have stated they will not willingly give up the property, which they consider unceded Haudenosaunee

territory and thus exempt from municipal taxation.

The highest of eight bids for that property came in at \$410,800. But Norfolk only keeps the taxes owed, which were \$73,657, plus any fees associated with the transfer of ownership. The rest of the money is held by the courts in case of future legal action.

All told, the municipality collected \$408,625 through the tax sale process, not far from the \$466,254.41 owed in taxes on the original 11 properties.

"The tax sale process was successful in that it recovered a significant portion of property taxes outstanding," collections supervisor Erika Robinson said in a report to council on Tuesday.

Three slivers of land on Windham Street in Simcoe received no bids, and council voted to have the municipality assume

ownership to allow unimpeded access to stormwater infrastructure on the three sites.

"These parcels are not eligible for building permits due to their inclusion within existing stormwater and sewer easements," Robinson explained.

"Vesting these parcels would allow the municipality to have control over infrastructure involved with the stormwater system, which would facilitate any maintenance."

Buying the three parcels meant writing off \$21,783 in unpaid property taxes, which cut into the county's take from the tax sale.

- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the *Hamilton Spectator*. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

# Got fitness resolutions? Here are some tips

LISA TIMPF

Advocate Contributor

A quick internet search on the topic of New Year's resolutions suggests, depending on the source, that only nine to 30 per cent of people manage to stick with their plans. Often, resolutions are abandoned less than one month into the new year.

Fitness is an important activity for health promotion, so it's unfortunate that the good intentions so many people start the year with fizzle out. But it doesn't have to be that way. Local fitness instructors have some tips for how to be among those who keep, rather than break, their resolutions.

Susan Cuming, who instructs Qigong classes at the Simcoe Seniors' Centre, noted that getting to a fitness class can be the hardest part. Having a workout buddy who also attends the class can provide the boost some people need to get out the door.

Qigong, says Cuming, is similar to Tai Chi, focusing on breathing, stretching, and meditative movement. It can be helpful with relaxation, and is meant to be done slowly. Still, when asked at the end of a period of a few weeks for examples of how the sessions have helped them, participants often fill a white board with a list of positives, whether it's less joint pain, greater flexibility, or other factors.

Qigong offers proof that fitness-improvement activities don't have to be high-intensity and high-impact to have a positive impact. Cuming notes that it's important not to focus on what you can't do, but rather to "do what you can." Qigong exercises can be adapted to people with varying levels of ability, and can even be done from a chair.

\*\*\*

Helen Lapointe, convener of one of the Simcoe Seniors' Cen-

tre walkabout sessions, notes that when starting something new it's important to begin slowly, and to recognize when you've had enough. Attendees at the Senior's Centre walkabouts who don't feel like they can walk the entire session are welcome to leave at any time.

"If you go too hard," Lapointe says, "you won't come back."

She notes that forcing yourself to do exercise can be a recipe for failure. Having fun and enjoying what you're doing is key. She suggests that people "try different things and find the thing that works."

Like Cuming, Lapointe recognizes the value of having workout companions. Many of the walkabout participants enjoy the activity's social aspect, and that's one of the factors that brings them back.

\*\*\*

Marilyn Guindon leads line dancing sessions at the Simcoe Seniors' Centre. Like Lapointe, she encourages beginners to start slowly and try not to get overwhelmed. Line dancing, Guindon notes, can be challenging.

"You're listening to music, you're tempted to watch your feet, there's a lot going on."

But if you stick with it, it will come together in time.

"Try to have some laughs and not be too serious with it," she advises. While some people get self-conscious while exercising, "nobody's looking at you," Guindon notes. "Don't be shy, and don't be afraid to ask questions."

\*\*\*

Fitness instructor, personal trainer, and nutrition coach Wanda Rowe leads strength training sessions at the Simcoe Seniors' Centre. Her advice is to start with small goals.

"Commit to doing one thing, whether it's drinking more water, or moving for 10 minutes after

you eat. It doesn't have to be a big change."

Focusing on sustainable action, she says, is more important than coming up with a grandiose goal that you can't meet.

Rowe says we need to realize our limitations. "I do a lot of work with people 40 and over. I remind them they need to work with where they are. You need to let your ego go. Leave the 30-year-old activities and intensity for the 30-year-olds." She stresses the importance of acknowledging and working with your "now" body.

When making a new habit, Rowe advises writing it down. "If you don't have a plan written down, it's still at the hopes-and-dreams level. Writing it down helps."

Failing to meet your goals initially doesn't mean you should give up, Rowe says.

"You can start again at any time. The next moment, the next hour, the next day - there's always a reset button."

Giving yourself grace, she adds, is key.

\*\*\*

Kim Dale, owner of Superior Workout Training Centre, located on Kent Street in Simcoe, also serves as a personal trainer. She echoes Rowe's comments about the need to start small. A lot of people start the year and "go right at it five days a week, thinking they have to lift really heavy. Then they miss a few days and feel like, what's the point?"

A better approach, says Dale, is to "get a foot in the door, create a nice simple routine, and start slowly."

People don't fail to keep their resolutions because they're lazy, she says, but because they are unrealistic in their goals. January "puts a lot of pressure on people," but real change "doesn't have a deadline."

"As a personal trainer, I don't

expect perfection. I'd rather have the person be honest with me if they're feeling like they can't do the full workout that day. We can adapt the workout." Dale adds, "fitness shouldn't be a punishment. You should feel like it's there to support your life."

\*\*\*

Tammy Holliday, who instructs yoga classes at the Simcoe Seniors' Centre, notes the importance of setting achievable goals.

"Set a realistic intention," Holliday advises, and know what you want to get out of the activity, whether it's better fitness, more flexibility, or something else.

Holliday notes that it's important to give a new activity at least six weeks before giving up on it.

"It takes your body time to adjust. Don't get frustrated if, after that time period, it's not attainable for you." At the same time, "even if you have to walk away, lean into something else that is good for your health, something that meets your intention."

\*\*\*

Samantha Miller serves as a Sit To Be Fit instructor. Sit To Be Fit, a low impact workout for seniors, is a free program offered at various locations through the Alzheimer Society of Brant, Haldimand Norfolk, Hamilton Halton.

Like some of the other instructors, Miller believes that doing group activities is a good way to maintain commitment. She says doing something you find fun creates greater motivation to keep going. "Choose something that feels like a good fit, and that you enjoy," she suggests.

So those who have set fitness goals for 2026 can take heart. By following a few tips, there's hope you can be among that small percentage of people who keep their resolutions.

And if you do happen to miss the target, remember that it's never too late to reset.

## Ten tips for keeping fitness resolutions

LISA TIMPF

Advocate Contributor

Though they may put different twists on their advice, many local fitness instructors I spoke with shared similar tips for sticking to fitness resolutions.

**1. Find something you enjoy.** Forcing yourself to exercise may work short term, but it's hard to maintain. Look for things you enjoy—socializing, music, or the fun of dancing—so fitness doesn't feel like a punishment.

**2. Work at your own level.** Many classes offer different intensity options. Sit To Be Fit, for example, includes exercises done standing or sitting, with added "challenge" versions. Yoga and line dancing also offer variations, so don't be afraid to adapt.

**3. Be realistic.** Setting goals that are too big can lead to frustration, while even small changes can add up over time.

**4. Write it down.** Writing goals and tracking progress helps make them more concrete and builds commitment.

**5. Start slowly.** Pushing too hard too fast can lead to discouragement.

**6. Find fitness friends.** Having someone to go with, or a support system like family or a trainer, can make it easier to stay motivated.

**8. Try different activities.** From seniors' centres to community programs, there are many options. If one activity doesn't work, try something else.

**9. Give it time.** Your body needs time to adjust to new activity, so don't give up too quickly.

**10. Check your ego.** Just because you can't do what you did when you were younger doesn't mean you should stop being active.

Susan Cuming



(GINETTE PIEPER PHOTO)

Susan Cuming, who instructs Qigong classes at the Simcoe Seniors' Centre, says getting to a class can be the hardest thing about keeping fitness resolutions. Having a workout buddy can help you maintain your motivation.

Helen Lapointe



(GINETTE PIEPER PHOTO)

Helen Lapointe, who convenes a walkabout session at the Simcoe Seniors' Centre, encourages people to take it slow when starting with a new activity.

Marilyn Guindon



(GINETTE PIEPER PHOTO)

Line dancing instructor Marilyn Guindon says one of the best ways to follow through on fitness resolutions is to find an activity that you enjoy.

Wanda Rowe



(GINETTE PIEPER PHOTO)

Fitness instructor Wanda Rowe says writing goals down is one way to turn them from hopes and dreams into concrete actions.

Samantha Miller



(GINETTE PIEPER PHOTO)

Sit To Be Fit instructor Samantha Miller encourages people to try different activities to find one that fits, and that they enjoy.

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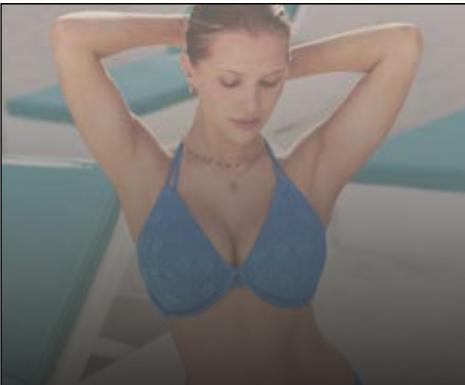
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# Kindness Kounts in Norfolk County

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

Some people in Norfolk County know him as Don. Dondie Deming is the administrator for Kindness Kounts Norfolk County, with nearly 5,000 Facebook members. “Dondie... nobody’s heard of the name,” said Deming, who was named after an Italian orphan from the 1961 movie Dondi, although Dondie has Scottish origins. “It was an orphanage boy in a movie on television in the 70s. And go figure, I grew up in Children’s Aid. “I spent a lot of my life in Hamilton and I went by Don. But Dondie, it’s like giving my fingerprint because nobody’s got that name. Here in Norfolk County, everybody calls me Dondie.”

Now living in Delhi, Deming is proud of the Kindness Kounts Norfolk County page. “What it is... it’s people helping people. Because I was homeless. I am an ex-addict. Kindness Kounts, it’s just people giving stuff... people asking for help. Every winter I ask for clothing and I give it to the homeless.”

Deming admits he has had a turbulent life – and feels he’s turned it around.

“I wanted to change my story. And that (Kindness Kounts) changed my story... it helped change my story. I’ll put it in different terms. When I was living in Hamilton, if I was to die, in three months nobody would even know I died. If I died tomorrow, a lot of people would miss me,” said Deming as carollers sang Deck the Hall in the background during Church Out Serving’s Community Christmas Day Dinner at Riversyde 83 in Simcoe. “I am not a nobody and I’ve got a heart of gold. I love helping people.

“I wasn’t always like that. I used to own a business in Hamilton, I had money. All that stuff, I lost it, it killed me and life was hard. I became an addict because I hated my life. But once I realized, that ‘stuff’ I can’t take with me when I die. That ‘stuff’ doesn’t make me who I am. What I do to help people... people love me. People like me, people respect me. That is what I am going to leave behind when I leave this world. And that is worth so much more than anything I’ve ever owned.”

“Tis the season to be jolly,” they continued to sing. “I am a different person, I no longer live for ‘me.’ I am on this earth for other people. I am not on earth for me. As soon as I got that in my head, I became content. And I love it. I love helping people.”

Deming, who admits “it’s an every-day battle,” is now in his third year as Kindness Kounts Norfolk County FB



Dondie Deming is the Facebook administrator for Kindness Kounts Norfolk County.

(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTO)

administrator. “It keeps me very busy and a lot of people know me. I live in Delhi, but I am in Simcoe every day. I love Simcoe. There’s a lot of love in Norfolk County.” “Fast away the old year passes,” they sang. “The Church Out Serving group, Eric (Haverkamp), Virginia (Lucas), it’s extremely important,” said Deming. “This, what they are doing today, on Christmas Day. Today I am happy. Christmas is a very difficult time for me, as it is for a lot of people. For about the last five years, I’ve spent Christmas alone. Because of this, here, I’m not alone. I am with a lot of amazing people. And this wouldn’t happen if it wasn’t for Eric and Virginia. They have touched a lot of people’s lives. “This is very important, and not just this,” said Deming, noting the importance of the Pay as You Can program at Riversyde 83. “It is unreal how good it is. So it’s not just Christmas. (Church Out Serving) does so much.” Going forward, the 53-year-old Deming desperately

wants a part-time job. And he would love to get into Indwell - a supportive housing project in Simcoe. “Yes, that would be huge! I would love that. Living in Delhi, it’s very difficult to do my Kindness Kounts. I need to get into Simcoe... so I would love to get into Indwell. I have a great support group and I have an amazing doctor... “I want my Kindness Kounts to flourish. I want it to do something like this,” he said, looking around the festive and joyful Riversyde 83 rooms. “In the summer, I would like to start handing out lunch bags with food to the homeless. I want Kindness Kounts Norfolk County to be something more... that’s kind of my future goal.”

## Radium Girls presented by DDSS Drama opens Friday

Delhi District Secondary School Drama is back again with its main-stage production of Radium Girls by D.W. Gregory at DDSS on Jan. 16-17. Radium girls is a gripping drama

based on a true story. Three shows will be open to the community, presented on Friday, Jan. 16th at 7 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 17th at 1 p.m. and Jan. 17th at 7 p.m.

Doors open for the 7 p.m. shows at 6:30 in the gymnasium, and 12:30 for the Saturday matinee. Adults \$10, students \$5. Tickets can be purchased at the door.



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# Christmas Day Dinner brings people together

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

On Christmas Day, everyone should enjoy being seated around a table with family, or friends, or just a friendly community, having a festive meal together.

That's what drives the annual Community Christmas Day Dinner in Simcoe, hosted by Church Out Serving at Riversyde 83. On Dec. 25, more than 200 people experienced that joy.

Participants enjoyed a full-on traditional Christmas Dinner, complete with turkey, ham and all the trimmings. Food was prepared by volunteers - either cooking, serving food and beverages, or clearing and cleaning tables. It was the first Church Out Serving free Christmas Day luncheon for volunteers Chantal Matheson and her son Connor Matheson.

"I started (volunteering with Church Out Serving) in the summer," said Chantal. "I just wanted to help the community, give back."

"It's been fun," said Connor, a Toronto Maple Leafs fan wearing a Chicago Black-

hawks 'Griswold' jersey.

"He works at the Beach House in Port Dover, so he's already a server," Chantal smiled. "It's been nice, we get to spend time together today."

Trish Shaw and James Bertling, who were attending their third Christmas Day luncheon at Riversyde 83, enjoyed the meal and the fellowship.

"The friendship," said Shaw. "Getting to see people I haven't seen in a long time, that's nice. And the food is the best."

"It really is the best," Bertling nodded. "Always have real good meals here. We love coming here."

Riley Heward was attending her first Christmas Day luncheon.

"We just wanted to see other people, get out, not be alone," said Heward. "It was amazing."

"It's a great dinner," said Church Out Serving's Eric Haverkamp. "We try to make it a festive atmosphere... and the jolly old soul from the North Pole pops in. I think it's a very festive event that brings lots of cheer and laughter into peoples' day."



A delicious Christmas dinner with 'all the trimmings.'

(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTOS)



Jennifer Burne-House, with Bruce Van Der Molen, provided live music at the annual Community Christmas Day Dinner, hosted by Church Out Serving at Riversyde 83.



Steven and Maryn Voortman volunteered at the annual Community Christmas Day Dinner, hosted by Church Out Serving.



Volunteers at the annual Community Christmas Day Dinner, hosted by Church Out Serving in Simcoe, included from left Jake Heinrichs, Debbie Heinrichs, Kelly Heinrichs, Connor Matheson, Leigh Nagy and Roy Haviland.



Enjoying fellowship at the Church Out Serving Christmas Day Luncheon at Riversyde 83 in Simcoe are from left, Trish Shaw, Hannah Fuchs, Katherine Clayton-Fuchs, Blake Perras, Riley Heward and James Bertling.



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Church Out Serving's Eric Haverkamp was happy to see Santa Claus, who visited the annual Community Christmas Day Dinner at Riversyde 83 in Simcoe.



Community Christmas Day Dinner volunteer Chantal Matheson serves Christmas dinners at Riversyde 83.

## Seedy Saturday in Waterford 'grows big'

CHRIS ABBOTT

Editor

Is spring in the air?

For gardeners, all it takes is a little planning, and spending an afternoon at the 2026 Seedy Saturday in Waterford will help.

"It's Saturday, Feb. 7th," said Jen Thompson, coordinator of Waterford's third annual Seedy Saturday at the high school.

Vendor market hours have been extended to 12-5 p.m. this year. About 55 vendors have been confirmed, an expanded group from last year's show, and vastly expanded from the inaugural show two years ago. Both gymnasiums will be used.

"An additional hour this year because it was very, very busy last year."

There will be a mix of seed vendors, specialized equipment (like rain storage containers), artists, guest speakers, homestead farmers, and much more, including an expanded children's zone, and "interesting and fun" door prizes.

Updated posts will be made on Facebook (including Waterford Seedy Saturday), she said, and in the community, highlighting individual vendors.

"We've got a good group of people coming. We had our base group, which people really enjoyed, and we're building on it."

Admission is a canned food donation or monetary donation to the Waterford and District Food Cupboard, the local food bank. Last year, more than \$900 was donated along with several hundred pounds of food.

"The Waterford Food Cupboard, in turn, was able to be generous with other food banks in the area... and push that into Simcoe and surrounding areas. This is something I am very proud of. It's just so nice to be able to say 'This is our community.'"

If you have garden questions, Grand Erie Master Gardeners will be on site, and multiple horticultural societies.

"Frey's Hatchery will be there, the major distributor for (poultry) chicks in the spring. So if you're buying backyard chickens, this is the major distributor that you would

go through. You often see them advertising through Minor Bros. They will be there to answer the good questions like 'what is a good backyard chicken?' They'll talk about what they have and answer your questions.

"With Minor Bros. being there, too, you could put in your chick order after you've had the conversation about the birds."

Solar power and small windmill options can be explored at the show.

"We've also got people coming who advocate for native seeds and pollinator projects. Small-scale flower projects. Seeds of Diversity will be here, and a couple greenhouse companies are coming. People from the mushroom community will be coming to talk about artisanal mushrooms. I've also got a couple of apiaries – beekeepers - coming as well. I'm trying to get some maple syrup producers, but they are hard to reach at this time of year.

"Ultimately, I'd like to be able to say 'What do you want to do on your property?' 'How do you get what you can out of the land that you have?' That's my goal. I am inviting people in to do the things that they are good at, to connect with people in their own expertise. People who garden tend to have that additional 'next-step' and I want to make sure somebody is there to answer those questions.

"It's a good mix of specific and curated vendors that will appeal to people who enjoy gardening, people who want to homestead, and people who are centred on 'how do I make this sustainable?' It's amazing, I am very pleased with how things are shaping up for this event."

Feedback from the 2025 Seedy Saturday 'we need more food!' was heard, and organizers, led by Thompson at WDHS, and Heidi Mungal at Generations Marketplace, will be ready on Feb. 7 with 'hot food' available. They also heard about the need for more homesteading services.

"That's quite important," Thompson noted. Feedback also suggested a 'staggered' seed exchange.

"Instead of putting all the exchange seeds out at once, which meant people had to be there at 12 p.m. so they did not miss it, we're going to be rolling it out. 'Rounds' of seeds – we'll refresh the tables (every hour) if you want to trade for seeds. My goal is to make Seedy Saturday more

and more user friendly.

"We are greatly supported by the students and staff at the school, so I think this has become something Waterford District High School is very proud of. It gives our green industry kids a chance to see what green industry can be in the community and it gives kids who are looking for volunteer hours a chance to experience volunteering in a comfortable, familiar environment."

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# Woodhouse, Long Point Christmas Bird Count results

LISA TIMPF

Advocate Contributor

While many people were busy with holiday season activities, the period between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5 marked an important time for birding enthusiasts.

During that time frame each year, volunteers participate in annual Christmas Bird Counts, working within set 24-kilometre circles to tally as many different species and individual birds as possible over the course of a designated day.

The information helps researchers and conservation groups study long-term trends in bird populations across North America. Here in Norfolk County, there are two annual counts, the Woodhouse Christmas Bird Count and the Long Point Christmas Bird Count.

The Woodhouse Christmas Bird Count, which takes place on the first Sunday of the count period each year, fell on Dec. 14. The Woodhouse Count covers an area from Port Ryerse and Port Dover to Waterford, and from west of Simcoe to east of Jarvis. This year, 34 birders were out in the field, while 12 feeder watchers reported their results.

Count organizer Adam Timpf noted that conditions were “bitterly cold” at the start of the day, and the cold temperatures prior to the count led to many frozen bodies of water. As a result, waterfowl were seen in lower-than-usual numbers.

In total, 89 species of birds were counted, two more than the average for the last 10 years. A new species, the Lincoln’s Sparrow, was added to the count list, bringing the Woodhouse Count’s all-time species list to 157.

A total of 15,346 birds were tallied, with the top three species being Canada Goose, Slate-coloured Junco, and European Starling. The total number of birds recorded was lower than the 39-year average of 24,448.

On the positive side, the count either matched the record, or set a new record, for the number of birds of particular species spotted. Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker, Common Raven, Hermit Thrush, and White-throated Sparrow set new highs, while Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Peregrine Falcon matched previous records.

Several species that have been seen on past counts were not spotted on count day, including Horned Grebe, Cack-



(KEN BURRELL PHOTO)

**Yellow-bellied sapsuckers, like the one pictured here, were seen in record numbers during both the Long Point Christmas Bird Count and the Woodhouse Christmas Bird Count.**

ling Goose, Gadwall, and Mockingbird. The numbers of Greater Scaup, American Kestrel, and Herring Gull either matched or fell below the previous low numbers.

The Long Point Count occurs on the first Saturday of the count period, which turned out, for the 2025 count, to be Dec. 20. The designated count area covers a 24-kilometre diameter circle centred on the lighthouse south of St. Williams.

This year’s numbers included both the Long Point Family Winter Bird Count and the traditional Long Point Christmas Bird Count. Over 100 participants surveyed the area, sighting 27,710 birds from 108 species.

The 2025 Long Point Count results were average to slightly below average by recent standards. The number of species seen was higher than the long-term average of 102 species, while the total number of birds was well short of

the 10-year average of around 42,000, noted count organizer Stu Mackenzie.

On the other hand, Dec. 20 is the latest date on which the Long Point count is typically held, and as noted in the count report, low temperatures and the fact that most waterways were frozen solid influenced the results. In particular, the 4,977 Sandhill Cranes tallied represents roughly half the number seen in recent years.

As was the case with the Woodhouse Count, Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers were seen in record numbers. White-Crowned Sparrows also recorded a new high, while Eastern Phoebes tied the highest previous count record. Northern Flickers, Carolina Wrens, and Lapland Longspurs logged their second-highest totals.

Other noteworthy finds included an Orange-Crowned Warbler, only the second seen on the count since the first was spotted in 2014. An American Woodcock, sighted for the fourth time on the count, a Brown Thrasher, noted for the second year in a row, and an Evening Grosbeak were among the other interesting sightings.

As data from other counts rolled in, some trends have become evident, Woodhouse Count organizer Timpf noted. For example, throughout southern Ontario “a lot of counts had low waterfowl numbers due to the cold start to winter and water freezing up.” He said the low numbers of ducks is the result of weather patterns this year, and not an indication of any population changes, which are “better assessed by looking at the long-term data sets over all the years.”

Timpf also observed “other counts are also reporting abnormally high numbers of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers,” citing Long Point’s record as well as that on the Woodhouse Count.

“Our high forest cover and more southerly location probably explains why these two counts had the most sapsuckers in Ontario, but why the sudden spike this year is still a mystery. I expect on future counts the number will be more modest, although the trend line is probably creeping upwards with our warming climate.” The Christmas Bird Count has been running for 126 years, and is North America’s longest-standing wildlife census. The 2025 counts represent the 39th Woodhouse Christmas Bird Count, while the Long Point Christmas Bird Count marked its 65th year.



(STU MACKENZIE PHOTO)

An orange-crowned warbler was spotted for the second time in the history of the Long Point Christmas Bird Count.

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**PROFESSIONAL INSTALLATION**

# Simcoe Legion reflects on 2025 and the new year

ALEX HUNT

Advocate Correspondent

The Royal Canadian Legion Simcoe Branch 79 is planning year-round festivities in 2026 to celebrate a century of supporting veterans.

“Our Legion is older than 100, but a combination of other veteran organizations was established right after the First World War in 1919,” said James Christison, president of the Simcoe Legion Branch 79.

“They came together under one umbrella in 1926, and that’s when the Canadian Legion was established in Manitoba and spread across Canada. The Simcoe Legion is the 79th Legion to be established in Ontario.”

Christison said the Legion is planning special events throughout the year to celebrate the milestone.

After re-establishing its trivia night and bringing in special band sessions, Legion executives are also focusing on developing unannounced legacy projects.

“The role of the Legion has changed over the years; it’s not just about veterans anymore, it’s about supporting other non-profits in the area,” said Christison. “Our Legion provides a fantastic hall space for all

kinds of groups to come in and use.

“We really want the legion to be a community centre, which has been a focus in recent years, and we’re growing the membership.”

Christison said community support for last year’s Poppy Campaign was a success.

“We were able to donate significant funds to various charities in support of veterans.”

Christison explained that Second World War Veteran members have passed away, but the organization has still sustained a membership of retired Canadian Armed Forces personnel and locals without military backgrounds. He added that it is the Legion’s priority to keep the memories alive for Second World War Veterans who have passed.

“It’s been a big topic of conversation on how we retain membership, especially since a large demographic that was once heavily involved with the Legion is no longer with us,” said Christison.

“Moving forward, we want to make changes that attract more potential members while keeping the legacy of the Legion alive,” said Christison. “It’s a challenge because there’s still a lot of stigma that the Legion is just a place for veterans to grab



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Legions countrywide honour a century of remembrance in 2026.

a drink, but it’s so much more than that.”

The Legion held its annual New Year’s Day Levee to celebrate the 2025 year and plan what’s to come.

“The Levee was great,” said Christison. “I’m very fortunate that the Simcoe

Legion has a fabulous executive, and everything runs smoothly. It’s a wonderful group of people to work with, and we all have the same goal of supporting our veterans, families, and the community and remembrance.”

## Norfolk County Agriculture Society seeks board members

### Norfolk County Agriculture Society seeks board members

Are you passionate about promoting agriculture, community engagement, and the long-standing traditions of Norfolk County?

Do you want to play a vital role in shaping the future of the Norfolk County Agricultural Society and its beloved events like Eat & Drink Norfolk and the Norfolk County Fair & Horse Show?

The Norfolk County Agricultural Society (NCAS) is looking for enthusiastic and dedicated individuals to join its volunteer Board of Directors. This is your chance to contribute your skills, experience, and vision to help grow and strengthen the organization.

### Board Member Responsibilities

Upon election, each NCAS Board Member commits to a three-year term, during which they will:

- Participate actively in regular board meetings (10 per year) and any special meetings as required.
- Provide strategic direction and oversight to the organization.
- Support and advocate the Society’s events and initiatives.
- Collaborate with fellow board members to achieve their mission.
- Be open to chairing or participating in a committee/committees pertaining to your areas of interest/expertise.

### How to Nominate

Nominations from individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences who share our passion for agriculture and community development are welcome.

To nominate yourself or someone else, you can submit the following:

- A completed nomination form.
- A brief bio or resume highlighting relevant experience and skills.
- A short statement of interest explaining why you, or your nominee would be an asset to the board.

You will be asked to attend the Annual General Meeting (Saturday, Jan. 31, Juniors Farmers Building 1 at 11 a.m.) and present a statement of interest to the vot-

ing membership regarding your suitability for the Board of Directors, ahead of the election.

For questions or more information contact gm@norfolkcountyfair.com .

All are invited and welcome to attend the Norfolk County Agricultural Society Annual General Meeting on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026 at 11 a.m. The meeting

will be held in the Junior Farmers Building #1, Norfolk County Fairgrounds, 172 South Drive, Simcoe.

The Norfolk County Agricultural Society will review audited financial statements for the society, present service awards and elect Directors to its board.

You can confirm your attendance by email to richard@nor-

folkcountyfair.com or by call 519-426-7280 (extension 227).

To vote, members must hold both a 2025 and a 2026 Norfolk County Agricultural Society membership. 2026 memberships are on sale at the fair office or online at norfolkagsociety.com and will be available prior to the meeting. The membership fee for 2026 is \$20.



Angela Hogeveen, General Manager, Norfolk County Agricultural Society.

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# Community comes together on New Year's Eve

ALEX HUNT

Advocate Correspondent

Locals came together at the Talbot Gardens in Simcoe and celebrated the New Year with food, chocolate beverages and games.

"Norfolk County Recreation has been hosting this family-friendly New Year's Eve event for more than 10 years," said Katelyn Bowen, Recreation Services Supervisor. "The original inspiration was to provide a low-cost, welcoming option for families to celebrate close to home.

"The event was designed to offer something for everyone, whether families wanted to be active on the ice, enjoy a snack and socialize, get creative with a craft, set an intention for the year ahead, or simply stop by for popcorn and fun."

Facilitated by Norfolk County Recreation staff, attendees had the opportunity to enjoy a variety of activities in the Talbot Gardens multipurpose room. Activities ranged from a New Year's Eve noisemaker craft, giant Jenga, temporary tattoo station, hot chocolate station, resolution wall, fresh

popcorn, and a photo booth.

Staff hosted a mimic traditional New Year's countdown starting at 5:45 p.m., followed by a public skate from 6-7 p.m.

"The balloon drop was a favourite part of the evening for many children, and it always gets great feedback," said Bowen. "Event staff gathered all the children beneath a large net filled with balloons. Together, everyone counted down to celebrate the 'New Year,' and the balloons dropped to mark the end of 2025 in a fun and memorable way."

Bowen said that life can be busy and expensive, and that it's important to provide an inclusive, local celebration that families can enjoy without added financial stress. She mentioned the event offered a relaxed and affordable way for residents of all ages to come together and celebrate as a community. Bowen said that Norfolk County Recreation hosted a variety of family holiday events, including a two-day Holly Jolly Camp, holiday-themed swims, Holiday Hangout, and Parents' Night Out, along with other swimming and skating programs that locals could enjoy over the break.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Norfolk County Recreation staff during the New Year's Eve Celebration in Simcoe.

## Grand Erie Public Health managed one of Ontario's biggest measles outbreaks. Here's how.

J.P. ANTONACCI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Grand Erie Public Health was born on the first day of 2025, the result of months of merger talks between the health units that had overseen Haldimand-Norfolk and Brantford-Brant.

A week later, as staff were still setting up their new email accounts, the measles virus appeared in the largely rural community southwest of Hamilton.

That first case of the highly contagious respiratory disease once considered eradicated in Canada led to many more, with Dr. Malcolm Lock formally declaring a measles outbreak in Grand Erie before the end of January.

Lock, who died the following month, had only recently replaced Dr. Rebecca Comley after Brantford-Brant's former medical officer of health went on leave. The health unit would introduce four different top doctors before the measles outbreak began to wane in July.

It was during this time that health officials grappled with an outbreak that eventually infected 300 residents, mostly in Norfolk County, and sent 18 people to hospital.

Among the hospitalized were an unspecified number of unvaccinated children, the demographic most affected by the potentially life-threatening disease that is almost completely preventable thanks to a safe and freely available vaccine with a decades-long track record.

Low vaccination rates saw Grand Erie account for 12.5 per cent of the 2,376 total measles cases reported in Ontario during the outbreak, which was declared over in October.

Grand Erie was second only to neighbouring Southwestern Public Health as the region with Ontario's largest measles caseload.

"I think the teams did a great job of coming together quicker than anticipated and working together, and prioritizing the response at a time that was already very busy for everyone," said Dr. Jason Malenfant, Grand Erie's current medical officer of health.

Managing one of Canada's largest measles outbreaks in

decades took technological innovation, hours of community outreach and creative approaches to overcome vaccine hesitancy in at-risk populations. Health officials spoke about how the health unit's infectious disease experts used new methods to battle an old enemy.

### The need for speed

The health unit's emergency preparedness group responded to the measles outbreak by deploying "online systems and tools" put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, said Filip Pajtondziew, Grand Erie's manager of infectious disease.

"We were able to contact cases right away (and) effectively and efficiently call contacts," said Pajtondziew, describing how robocalls helped to alert "well over 1,000 residents" of potential measles exposures.

Staff followed up with each of the 150-plus residents who filled out the health unit's online self-screening portal. Any resident unable to travel to get tested had a test kit delivered to their home, while the health unit also arranged for mobile immunization or post-exposure prophylactic treatment.

"We met people where they're at and we really tried to remove those barriers," Pajtondziew said.

To spread the word about measles, the health unit paid for ads on social media, issued news releases, convened press briefings and launched an online dashboard with updates on case counts and exposure notifications.

Those notifications named businesses, hockey arenas, places of worship, youth clubs, schools, doctor's offices and more, giving the date and time range when people with measles had visited.

"I think it was really important to be transparent with those settings and just let them know the importance of the health risks that we're trying to communicate to the community," Pajtondziew said of the delicate task of publicly naming private businesses in connection with the outbreak.

"We had positive feedback from the community to be able to utilize those (notifications) and call in to complete an exposure form."

### Removing barriers to vaccination



(J.P. ANTONACCI PHOTO)

Signage in English and Low German asked visitors to Norfolk General Hospital's emergency department to wait outside if they had symptoms of measles.

The health unit focused on convincing parents and guardians to get their children immunized, stressing that receiving two shots of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine gives the recipient near-total protection for life.

Grand Erie staff delivered more than 750 doses of MMR vaccine at community clinics amid the outbreak, a figure that does not take into account shots given at doctor's offices and walk-in clinics.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

# Grand Erie Public Health managed measles outbreaks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

“Certainly we used that as a metric (of success) — our ability to reach communities, speak with them one-on-one, increase vaccination, address head-on any hesitancy or disinformation or misinformation that we’ve been faced with,” Malenfant said.

The health unit does not usually offer routine immunizations to the general public outside of school settings, but officials did so amid the outbreak to reach rural residents who do not have a family doctor or lack access to transportation.

“And that’s not unique to our region. That’s province-wide and countrywide,” Malenfant said.

“Trying to remove those barriers is certainly one of the goals in trying to prevent future outbreaks.”

## Where religion and public health meet

Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario’s chief medical officer of health, said in March 2025 that the measles outbreak was traced to “an exposure at a large gathering with guests from Mennonite communities in New Brunswick.”

Guests at that October 2024 gathering unwittingly brought the virus to southwestern Ontario, namely the region bordering Norfolk, Oxford and Elgin counties, which has a sizeable conservative Mennonite population.

Grand Erie and Southwestern public health officials faced a challenge shared by their counterparts in rural Texas — the epicentre of a simultaneous measles outbreak in the United States — as well as in Mexico and five South American countries where the same measles strain infected members of local Mennonite communities.

Experts who study the intersection of religion and public health say some conservative religious communities with a historic mistrust of governments are reluctant to get vaccinated, leaving members more susceptible to vaccine-preventable diseases like measles.

In response, the health unit met with faith and community leaders in Norfolk to open a dialogue.

“Just meeting people where they’re at and having open conversations and listening to those concerns,” Pajtondziew said. “We look at ways we can support people, whatever the need may be.”

The health unit also got creative to educate Mennonite communities about the risks posed by measles, translating signage and handouts into Low German — or Plautdietsch — and co-producing a Plautdietsch-language video to educate residents on treatment options and ways to limit transmission.

## Reading, writing and rolling up sleeves

Knowing children are most at risk of serious complications from measles, Pajtondziew said the health unit prioritized getting educational material disseminated through schools and child-care centres, arranging for on-site vaccination clinics when needed.

Churches and private religious schools in Norfolk run by Old Colony or Old Order Mennonites, as well as other Anabaptist sects, made repeat appearances on the measles exposure list.

By law, students in all Ontario schools — including private religious schools — must be immunized against childhood diseases such as measles unless granted a medical or philosophical exemption.

The health unit uses an online records system to get timely lists of which students are immunized to help determine who needs to be kept home after a measles exposure in a classroom or on a bus.

The information is available for public schools and “at least some private schools,” Malenfant said.

But Lock, the former medical officer of health, told reporters some private school administrators are “reluctant” to release students’ names and vaccination status due to privacy concerns.

The health unit can suspend students whose parents do not submit proof of vaccination as required by provincial law. This past March, 461 Grand Erie students were ordered out of class due to incomplete immunization records. Most returned to school within a few weeks.

But health officials depend on family doctors to offer eligible vaccines to their young patients “and make sure that those children are on schedule for their routine immunizations,” Malenfant said.

## Long-term fallout unknown

Along with sending 18 people to hospital and causing hundreds more to seek medical treatment, the Grand Erie outbreak had broader implications.

Dr. Ninh Tran, Southwestern’s medical officer of health, told reporters the outbreaks in the neighbouring health units were “directly connected” to measles cases in other regions, including Hamilton, Windsor-Essex and Niagara.

“The transmission is quite complex and doesn’t follow geographical borders,” Pajtondziew added.

Grand Erie, which has 0.6 per cent of the country’s population, accounted for 5.8 per cent of Canada’s 5,138 total measles cases.

Lock told reporters the health unit’s case count was likely an underestimate, since contact tracing was limited and some residents were reluctant to report symptoms and get tested. Beyond the numbers, the long-term fallout of the outbreak remains to be seen. While most people who catch the measles will recover at home, the virus can destroy the patient’s immune system, leaving them susceptible to all manner of infections for up to five years.

## ‘Really unfortunate milestone’

Canada declared the end of the measles outbreak on Oct. 6. Just over a month later, on Nov. 10, Canada lost its measles elimination status due to the same measles strain having circulated for more than a year.

“This is a really unfortunate milestone for Canada,” Malenfant said, calling the loss “a huge wake-up call and a reminder to all of us in public health and health care that we need to remain vigilant.”

Canada had officially eliminated measles in 1998 following sustained efforts to reach herd immunity, meaning at least 95 per cent vaccine coverage.

The latest survey from the Public Health Agency of Canada, conducted in 2023, estimated 87.4 per cent of Canadian adults had received at least one dose of the MMR vaccine, with two doses needed for full protection.

The survey found the percentage of two-year-olds to have received at least one dose dropped from around 90 per cent in 2019 to about 82 per cent in 2023.

Regaining measles elimination status will involve addressing COVID-inspired vaccine hesitancy and mistrust in public health, Malenfant said.

“Certainly, I’m using (the loss of status) as motivation to regain the public’s trust,” he said.

Malenfant called for “a really collaborative response” and “sustained investment” in public health from all levels of government to remove barriers to vaccination and “combat misinformation and disinformation.”

“We need to provide credible, scientifically driven information to the general public in a manner that is digestible and trustworthy,” he said.

## ‘Thankful for the team’

The measles outbreak was an immediate test for the new health unit, and Malenfant and Pajtondziew said Grand Erie Public Health was not caught off guard.

“We’re equipped for unexpected scenarios and emergency response,” said Malenfant, explaining the cost of responding to the outbreak — including overtime pay for staff running evening and weekend vaccine clinics — was absorbed by the health unit’s budget.

The outbreak could have been worse if not for the health unit’s speedy and “proactive response,” he added.

“It could have reached a greater severity, as many other outbreaks have,” Malenfant said. “And so our co-ordinated response is hopefully contributory to that.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many regular health unit programs were forced to the back burner while staff focused on the emerging threat. This time, business continued as usual.

“We were able to plan ahead and make sure none of our other programming was impacted,” Pajtondziew said.

“Everyone is quite passionate about what we do. They’re the experts that really help control our outbreak. So I’m very thankful for the team.”

- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the Hamilton Spectator. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.



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## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

- When was the last time Canada won the IIHF World Juniors?
- Which Canadian province is known as ‘The Land of 10,000 Lakes’?
- What country has the most oil reserves?
- What does TNT stand for?
- What is the national bird of New Zealand?
- What Disney princess has the longest hair?
- In what year did Adolf Hitler become Chancellor of Germany?
- What kind of animal is a platypus?
- What is the square root of 64?
- What is larger, A US gallon or a UK gallon?

This week’s answers are found on pg. 19

# SIMCOE ADVOCATE SPORTS

## Team King curlers advance to 2026 Canadian Brier

JEFF TRIBE

*Advocate Contributor*

Courtland's Jayden King is not only brushing up on his curling skills for the Montana's Brier Feb. 27 to March 8 in St. John's Newfoundland, but also his ability to kiss a cod and ingest dark rum.

"We'll do the whole screech situation," laughed the 23-year skip of the Farm & Food Care Ontario Men's Curling Championship winning rink. "Whatever comes along, we are excited to go along for the whole ride."

King, vice Dylan Niepage, second Owen Henry, lead Victor Pietrangelo and alternate Cory Heggstad booked their ticket to Canadian men's curling ultimate ride with a 9-6 win over Sam Mooibroeck's Whitby foursome Sunday, Jan. 11 in the Woolwich Memorial Centre.

The teams have met six times this season said King, Mooibroeck prevailing 7-5 earlier in the provincial draw and opening with the hammer during the final as a result. The Whitby rink counted one in the first end, King answering with a draw for two, Mooibroeck answering back with a great third-end shot of his own, to score two and take a 3-2 lead.

"We were back and forth again," said King, who counted two in the fifth and seventh ends, adding two in the ninth to lead 8-6 heading home.

The tenth end played out 'scary' for its majority King admitted.

"We made a pair of doubles," he continued, which put the pressure on Mooibroeck to attempt an extremely tough and ultimately unsuccessful shot. "And then we stole one."

Experience gained through a final appearance two years earlier helped this year said King, believing his team entered the match looser and more focused.

"But it's hard to ignore what's at stake in these big games."

King's rink qualified for a first-round bye based on a strong seasonal performance. They opened Jan. 5 with a 6-4 win over Jordan McNamara's Rideau foursome, locking down a three-point sixth end and steal in the seventh with solid defence through the final three ends.

"They were pretty steady," King credited.

He prevailed 6-5 over Scott Howard in the team's second outing January 6, drawing twice to the circle in the tenth end to finally decide a tightly-contested affair. The victory marked a measure of revenge against an opponent who had defeated King and company in the 2024 Ontario final.

Daniel Hocevar's Dundas Valley Golf and Curling Club rink came into their Jan. 8 encounter with the momentum of two large victories behind them. An 'up-and-coming team' took a 2-1 lead into the fourth end, where the game turned as King

scored three and added a steal in the fifth for a 5-2 advantage.

"That was kind of our 'MO' this week. Three in one end and steal in the next."

Hocevar responded with two in the sixth to close within one, but King executed an 'in off' (playing off his own rock to take out an opposing stone) to count two in the ninth, running his opponent out of rocks through the tenth.

King's 3-0 record qualified his foursome for the page 1 versus 2 match January 10th at 2 p.m.

"We did not play our best," he admitted.

King scored two in each the second and third ends, giving up one in the fifth and a pivotal steal of three in the sixth to trail 6-4.

"We were scratching and clawing but just couldn't quite pull it together," he said of an eventual 7-5 loss. "Sam played better than we did and deserved the win."

Rather than qualifying for the final, King's rink had to face Woodstock's Mark Kean in a semi-final matchup that evening.

"We're good friends and we seem to meet each other every year," said King.

A see-saw battle was finally decided as trailing by one, he blanked the ninth end to take the hammer into the tenth.

"And we scored two in order to win."

To say the King rink is thrilled with the Ontario title and resultant national championship berth would be an understatement.

"Going to the brier is every curler's dream. Over the moon happy - happy is not a big enough word to describe this."

He began curling at the age of 12, taken to the local club by neighbours Les and Nora Peters after having his interest piqued by watching the sport on TV. King fell in love immediately, eventually advancing to a competitive junior team in London and winning the U21 provincial championship in 2023.

"You are fierce competitors on the ice and friends off it," he explained of a sport requiring both athleticism and strategy, one which has 'taken him many interesting places and introduced him to many great people.'

Niepage, who hails from Oro-Medonte, and King played together at the junior level, meeting up with Henry (from Ilderton). Pietrangelo is from Niagara Falls, curling previously in the world university games, while Heggstad is also a well-known member of the curling community.

King sees his role as both shot-maker and leader, understanding and managing his team's strengths in order to put the rink in a position to be successful. It takes all four curlers playing well together to win says King, working as a team.

"We all pitched in and couldn't be happier with the result."

Each is 'super excited' to represent their home club, King proud to compete under the Tillsonburg Curling Club banner.

"Having a trophy to come home with is



even better."

Their team is young, averaging 23 years of age, but he feels they can be competitive at the Brier.

"Make the playoffs and anything is possible from there," King said of their shared goal.

While making the Brier is an accom-

plishment for most curlers, doing so at this point of their careers is also cause for excitement, King pointing out most competitive curlers fall between the ages of 20 and 35.

"There's a lot of years left in our curling careers if we choose to take them. This is just the beginning."

## Volleyball Champs



(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTO)

Walsh Public School Whirlwinds won the Grade 4-6 South West Junior Co-Ed Volleyball A Division Championship at Waterford District High School on Dec. 3, defeating Lynndale. Both schools qualified to play at the Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk championship tournament in Dunnville. Front row from left are Whirlwinds' Claire, Odette, Aleda, and back row, Mme. Grozelle, Rosalind, Vivian, Mallory, Carter, Jase, Beau, George, Elise and Mme. Schott.

# 'Quirky' SpongeBob musical opens Jan. 15

J.P. ANTONACCI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?

The teenage cast of "The SpongeBob Musical," a Young Theatre Players production on stage in Simcoe this month.

SpongeBob and his friends band together to save their undersea home of Bikini Bottom from an imminent volcanic eruption.

Their quest is set to original songs written for the show by artists as diverse as Lady A, Cyndi Lauper, Panic at the Disco, John Legend and Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Joe Perry.

"The music is incredible. Every song is its own genre. It's so mixed," said co-director JP Cullen, who described the show as "lighthearted fun."

Along with "very upbeat" song-and-dance numbers, co-director Lilly Shearer said the musical offers a message of togetherness in divided times.

"It's a story about community and caring for each other and not excluding each other," she said. "And it's heartwarming."

Young Theatre Players (YTP) teaches performance and theatre production skills to students from ages eight to 18.

"The SpongeBob Musical," which runs Jan. 15 to 25 at Simcoe Little Theatre, features a cast of 24 young actors from YTP's senior company. Their longest-tenured student, 16-year-old Katie Gorzo, plays the title role.

"I'm absolutely loving it," said Gorzo, who debuted in the cottontail chorus of "Velveteen Rabbit" when she was eight years old and has mostly performed in supporting roles since.

"But I started to like that," she said. "I liked not being in the spotlight and being able to back up the bigger characters in the show and kind of being my own little star in the corner."

Now in her eighth season with YTP, Gorzo admitted to being "a little scared" of how audiences will rate her performance as SpongeBob in a show she called "cute and quirky."

"I'm trying to put my own spin on it," she said of a character she described as a perpetually positive people-pleaser "who's just really happy to be a fry cook."

But any jitters she may have are overshadowed by eagerness for the curtain to go up on opening night.

"I honestly feel more excited than pressure," Gorzo said. "I know all my songs, I'm the star of the show and I feel so awesome."

Cullen, who is also YTP's artistic director, has watched Gorzo grow into a confident performer and a "reliable" and "accountable" offstage leader.

"Katie has always been a very dependable student. She will jump in when we need her," Cullen said.

"It was her time to hit that stage to be that star. She de-



(J.P. ANTONACCI PHOTO)

Katie Gorzo, right, stars as SpongeBob opposite Lilly Deming as Squidward in Young Theatre Players' production of "The SpongeBob Musical," on stage Jan. 15 to 25 at Simcoe Little Theatre.

served it. She has earned it for the amount of time that she's been here and the amount of work she's put in."

Young Theatre Players is in its 41st season and Cullen has been there for most of them. She started with the company 32 years ago as a child actor and has stuck around ever since.

Today she devotes at least 20 hours per week to YTP and splits her time between acting as business manager and artistic director. The director role sees her do everything from choose shows to lead rambunctious eight-year-olds in drama games designed to foster teamwork and communication skills.

"A lot of it has to do with them feeling supported — knowing that my heart is in it as much as theirs is," Cullen said. "I'm here to help them shine and help them grow."

To Gorzo, being on stage is "a way to let out the inner me."

"I love that I can come here and just relax and have fun," she said.

"Any time I'm here, I always feel like I'm super loved. Everybody's always so kind and it's just such a welcoming, warm space that I can be myself in."

- J.P. Antonacci is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter based at the Hamilton Spectator. The initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

## The SpongeBob Musical

Presented by Young Theatre Players

**When:** Jan. 15 to 25 - Thursdays and Fridays, 7 p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays, 2 p.m.

**Where:** Simcoe Little Theatre, 33 Talbot St. N., Simcoe

**Tickets:** \$17.50 each, available at [youngtheatre-players.ca](http://youngtheatre-players.ca)

**Run time:** About 90 minutes with intermission

**Production team:** Directed by JP Cullen and Lilly Shearer, music direction by Shauna Barrow, choreography by Marley Kirk.

## Police issue 'shelter-in-place' on Saturday

Officers from the Norfolk Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police responded to an incident involving potentially armed individuals — and suspected discharge of a firearm — around Kent Street and Union Street in Simcoe on Saturday about 1 p.m.

As a result, Colborne Street North, Union Street, Young Street and Kent Street were closed until about 8 p.m. when

the shelter-in-place was lifted. The OPP Tactics and Rescue Unit, along with the Emergency Response Team, OPP Canine Services and Crisis Negotiators assisted with the investigation. There were no reports of any injuries.

Members of the public in this area were urged to shelter-in-place. People outside were asked to seek shelter immediately in a secure location, and for those inside, they were

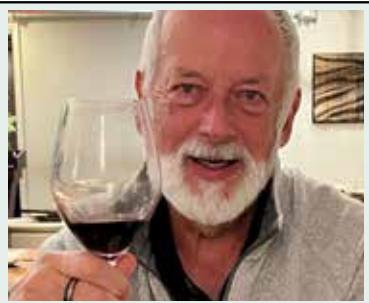
asked to remain there and lock all doors and windows... and close curtains or blinds to avoid drawing attention.

"We recognize the significant emotional impact that receiving a shelter in place can cause," an OPP release stated. "We thank the community for their cooperation and understanding. No further information will be released at this time, as the investigation continues."

# SIMCOE ADVOCATE

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# Is travel safe, any more? Where should we go?



## OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO

By Paul Knowles

It's not too surprising that, from time to time, I get asked questions about travel, in emails or in person. Once upon a time, they were either, "What are your favourite destinations?" or "We're going to a specific destination; can you give us advice about that place?"

But lately, there has been an increasing number of questions on a third theme: "Is it safe to travel?"

Good question. I know, personally, there are places on my once-upon-a-time bucket list that are now moved to a "probably never" file. The world is changing, rapidly, and for travellers, not necessarily in a good way.

But the increasing number of people wondering about safe places to travel prompted me to do some research. The results were intriguing. One much-cited, reliable study is the Berkshire Hathaway Travel Protection annual survey that polls thousands of American travellers who have actually visited the countries they comment on, and adds data from other sources like the Global Peace Index.

So... according to this survey, here are the 15 safest countries for visitors, in order: The Netherlands, Australia, Austria, Iceland, Canada, New Zealand, United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Japan, Ireland, Belgium, Portugal, France, United Kingdom and Denmark.

I find several things quite interesting here. The majority of these are in Europe. Canada is rated highly – number 5 among a total of 195 recognized countries world-wide.

And you may notice who is missing – the United States. In fact, this survey, which reflects the view of Americans, mind you – rates the U.S. as only the 26th safest country, with respondents citing challenges including violent crime, health access and risk of terrorism.

Another report, published by World Population Review, ranks the safest countries in North America (which includes about half of the Caribbean Islands). Here, Canada is ranked best among 14 countries, immediately followed by Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. The U.S. is near the bottom, its safety ranking only better than Mexico and Haiti.

We need to acknowledge that while these reports are quite current, nothing can keep up with the challenges presented by our ever-changing global reality.

The BHTP report points out that "safety" is an evolving term. Where once it might simply have reflected the potential for being a victim of crime or terrorism, in today's world it also includes how safe women, LGBTQIA+ travellers and people of colour feel. And those factors were key components in identifying The Netherlands the safest destination.

There are sub-sections in the survey, and Canada comes off very well in almost all of them: second in safety from violent crime (after Japan); second in transportation safety; fifth in "health measures"; second, after The Netherlands, in how safe women, LGBTQIA+ travellers and people of colour feel.

Make me again proud to be a Canadian, and glad that at least half of my travel plans take me to wonderful destinations inside our own borders.

The BHTP report also has a "Safe Travel Hall of Fame" – countries that have averaged a top-ten position since 2018. Eight countries are on the list and yes, Canada is one of them, along with Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland, Norway, Ireland and Japan.

These surveys – and there are many more just like them – and the worrisome headlines of the day all do suggest that travellers need to keep themselves informed before they make plans.

I am not suggesting that you should make your travelling decisions based entirely on safety recommendations, although it would seem wise to be as aware as possible. I do still plan to travel, a lot – this page doesn't fill itself, you know – and in the next weeks and months I will be visiting the Dominican Republic, Italy, British Columbia and Newfoundland.

But quite honestly, I am also turning down opportunities to travel. To the Middle East, for example and – full disclosure – to the United States. I have written dozens and dozens of articles about U.S. destinations over the years. Some of my closest friends

and colleagues in the travel industry represent U.S. destinations, and my heart aches for the professional challenges they are currently facing. But just now – no, I can't go. For all the reasons you know about, including the fact that the country simply doesn't feel safe for visitors – and the statistics back this up.

However, many of you will disagree with this, and I have lots of friends who have made their annual trek to Florida, Arizona, the Carolinas or some other warmer U.S. destination. I wish them to be safe and well. But I won't be dropping in.

And since I have become so darned serious in this week's feature, let me dive even a little deeper. As an old white guy, I feel the need to ask myself if I am comfortable travelling to destinations where I would probably be okay, but where my friends of colour, or my gay friends, or my single female friends, would be in danger. Should I go where they cannot go? I think not.

All of these present-day realities have made my bucket list bucket pretty darned leaky. But it ain't empty, and hopefully, some of the holes will get patched up, maybe soon.

*Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and Past-President of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email [pknowles@golden.net](mailto:pknowles@golden.net).*



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

Travel by Canadians within Canada increased by as much as 10% in 2025, a trend welcomed in every province, including Saskatchewan (shown).



Canada is rated fifth safest country (of 195 nations in the world); shown are Newfoundland lobster fishers.



Austria moved way up on this year's Safe Countries list, to be rated as the third safest country for travellers. Shown, the main square in the city of Linz.

# Riddles

I can be cracked, made, told, and played—yet never eaten. What am I?

*A joke*

I shave every day, but my beard stays the same. Who am I?

*A barber*

I have branches, but no fruit, trunk, or leaves. What am I?

*A bank*

I'm lighter than air, but a million people can't lift me. What am I?

*A bubble*

I go through cities and fields, but never move. What am I?

*A road*

# PET OF THE WEEK

Nominate your Pet of the Week by emailing [info@simcoeadvocate.com](mailto:info@simcoeadvocate.com)



## QUARRYDOTTY

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QuarryDotty is a smart, energetic young dog who needs space, structure, and an active home. She was adopted as a puppy, but her owner's health made it difficult to keep up with her needs. Dotty loves to work, learns quickly, and will thrive with continued training, exercise, and an engaged family. With the right home, she'll be a wonderful companion.

[www.simcoedhumane.ca](http://www.simcoedhumane.ca)



# Word Search

## WINTER WELLNESS

V K Y Y M E N D C F R E S H S T A R T H  
 F T M Y A J B T O D E C Z Y F R W K S W  
 V W A G P G O P M Y C O Q R E L A X U X  
 K E A R Q E B D F O N R U T A K H Z C R  
 Z L N E U V D P O S A W G Z I C A J O O  
 B L B N F I A V R S L E E P F X C F F U  
 M N N E F L V K T P A N O U R I S H H T  
 S E L F C A R E P O B M U D T B G R E I  
 O S J G U M P O J H Y D R A T I O N A N  
 C S V U A L V J C C H I I V B Q D W L E  
 M I N D F U L N E S S N N T V K Z B T S  
 Z Y N Z Z V B U U J E N Z N W R Z W H F  
 A R R E S T S S S D H E A E V W H F Y L  
 I F H I M P C S M C T R D M I A Y D E N  
 W C Q O Y K L B U Y A P G E T R R M X F  
 S W F W W B Q P I Z E E W V A M A J V X  
 I N I O Q N I K W G R A D O M T E Q A V  
 X C M L A P R I F X B C Q M I H E X W O  
 G Z C X T D Q J G I S E H H N X J J U I  
 Y G I I P H U F C S A V B N S C E M I X

- Balance
- Mindfulness
- Hydration
- Rest
- Movement
- Breathe
- Nourish
- Vitamins
- Sleep
- Warmth
- Relax
- Energy
- Focus
- Healthy
- Comfort
- FreshStart
- Wellness
- InnerPeace
- Routine
- Selfcare

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# Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 23

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Email to inquire: [info@simcoeadvocate.com](mailto:info@simcoeadvocate.com)

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 16

### FRIDAY FUN NIGHT - EUCHRE 7:00 p.m

Come out and play regular euchre and/or learn how to play bid euchre! NEWCOMERS WELCOME! FREE EVENT.

Riversyde 83 Foodhub - 83 Sydenham St., Simcoe

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

### GAME NIGHT AT ST. PETER'S! 4:00 p.m - 7:00 p.m

Looking for a fun and relaxing evening with friends, family, and neighbours? Join us for a cozy Game Night filled with board games, pizza, and great company on January 25 from 4:00-7:00 pm. Enjoy a slice of pizza for just \$5 (kids 6 and under eat free!), plus free coffee to keep the games going. A variety of games will be provided, or feel free to bring your own favourite to share. For more information, email [stpetersnorfolk@gmail.com](mailto:stpetersnorfolk@gmail.com).

St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 155 Colborne St N, Simcoe

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

### FRIDAY NIGHTS AT THE CAFE 7:00 p.m

Riversyde 83 presents - Sue Rivard, the Owner

of Reveal Coaching Ontario. Speaking on The Architect of 2026: Intentional Living Put Into Action. FREE EVENT

Riversyde 83 Foodhub - 83 Sydenham St., Simcoe

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2

### BINGO NIGHT 7 p.m

Doors open 5:30 p.m - Early Bird 6:30 p.m Presented by ABEL Enterprises. Concession stand run by Simcoe & District Humane Society.

Simcoe Legion, West Street, Simcoe

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

### BINGO NIGHT 7 p.m

Doors open 5:30 p.m - Early Bird 6:30 p.m Presented by ABEL Enterprises. Concession stand run by Simcoe & District Humane Society.

Simcoe Legion, West Street, Simcoe

## MARCH 2-6, 2026

### 40TH ANNUAL NORFOLK MUSICAL ARTS FESTIVAL

VISIT [WWW.NMAF.CA](http://WWW.NMAF.CA)

all individuals, musicians and theatre artists, schools, churches, community groups and theatre

groups. the festival is open to anyone who would like to participate. bands | choirs | guitar | english & french speech arts | piano instruments | strings | classical voice & musical theatre

## EVERY OTHER FRIDAY

### INGERSOLL COUNTRY MUSIC JAMBOREE 1:00 p.m - 4:00 p.m

In 2026 it's your fix! Ingersoll Country Music Jamboree meeting every other Friday 1-4 p.m. at Masonic Hall, 190 Thames St. S. Ingersoll. Join us, walk ins welcome. Qualifications - love 50-70's country music. Perform, listen, dance & enjoy! January 16 & 30, February 13 & 27, March 6 & 20, April 10 & 17, May 1, 15 & 29, June 5 & 19.

## EVERY FRIDAY EVENING

### CATCH THE ACE

4:30 a.m- 7:30 p.m (Draw at 7:45 pm) Win over \$10,000.00 (LIC #RAF 14505443)! Tickets are available for \$5 each, 3 for \$10, or 6 for \$20. Proceeds support the Norfolk Haldimand Hospice, Norfolk General Hospital Foundation, and Rotary Norfolk Youth Scholarships.

Simcoe Legion, West Street, Simcoe

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH

**COURTLAND COUNTRY OPEN MIC JAM**  
Music starts at 1:00 p.m | Dinner at 5:00 p.m  
All welcome!

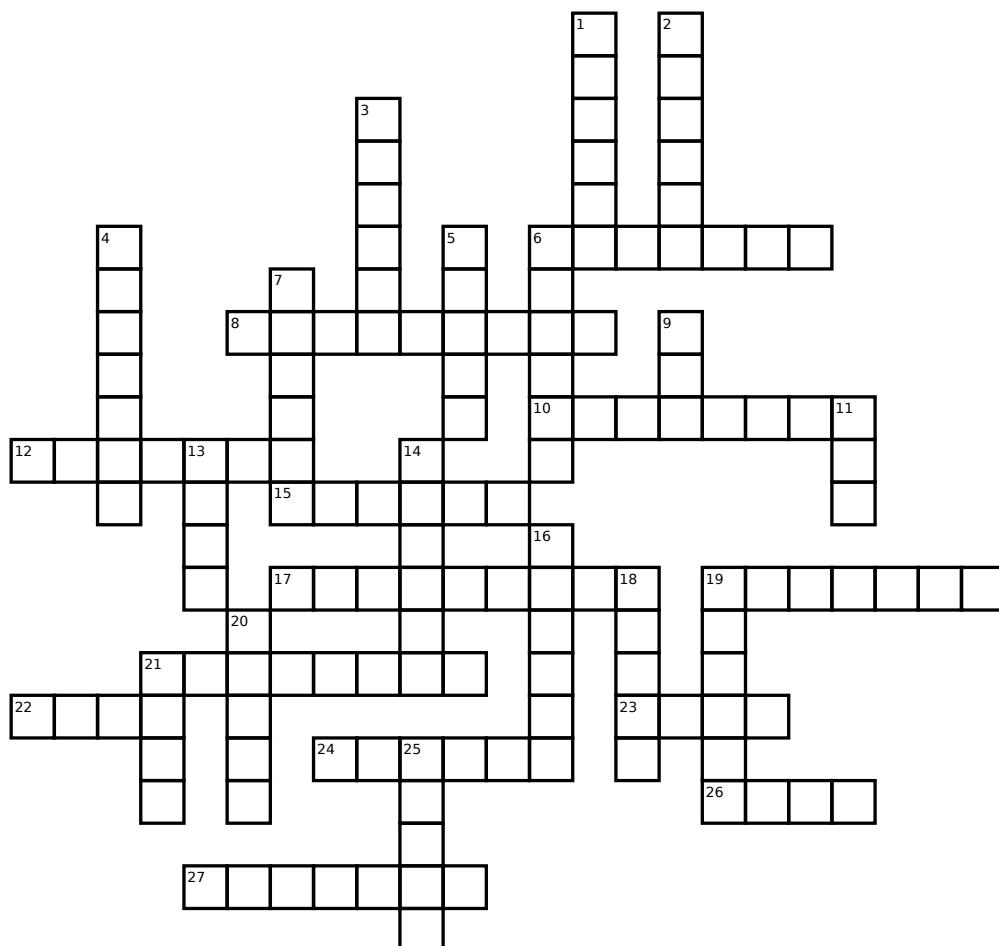
# Weekly Crossword

## THE PRODUCE PUZZLE - STOCK THE FRIDGE

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



227 MAIN STREET IN DELHI, ON



## Clues

### DOWN

1. Creamy spread for toast
2. Small chilled fruit
3. Orange root veggie
4. Burger topping
5. Cold fruit drink
6. Dairy topping for sandwiches
7. Creamy dairy snack
9. Seals a container
11. Popular deli meat
13. White drink for cereal
14. Holds a dozen eggs
16. Crunchy green veggie
18. Spicy taco topping
19. Appliance that keeps food cold
20. Basil-based sauce
21. Where milk is often stored

### ACROSS

6. Produce drawer
8. Holds leftovers
10. Lunch on bread
12. Coffee lightener
15. Red salad vegetable
17. Saved meal for later
19. Stores frozen food
21. Salad topping
22. Egg-based spread
23. Fizzy cold drink
24. Sliced sandwich meat
26. Breakfast protein
27. Leafy salad base

Answers found on page 23





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