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Battle against homelessness depends on community cooperation

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In part two of our homelessness series, Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma weighs in on the future of the crisis and what steps the city may take next.

“It was the number one conversation, I believe, across the 444 municipalities.”

Ritsma gave that response when asked whether homelessness was a major topic at the recent Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference in Ottawa, where many cities are struggling to address growing encampments and to develop the supports needed for mental health, addiction and housing.

The city held three consultations on homelessness in August and launched an online survey to gather residents’ feedback on the issue. The outreach is part of the process involved as Stratford creates a new 10-year housing and homelessness plan.

“It provided an opportunity for people to listen and learn about what we have and share where they think we should be going. Whether it’s more co-operative housing or a shelter, we will present them to council.”

Ritsma explained the information from the in-person meetings and surveys will be compiled into a

CONTINUED TO PAGE 4



Paddlers powered their way to the finish line at the Stratford Rotary Dragon Boat Festival on Sept. 13, 2025.

(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

Grand Trunk Renewal Committee reflects on challenges, progress, and future opportunities

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The final meeting of Stratford’s Ad-Hoc Grand Trunk Renewal Committee took place Sept. 15, offering members a chance to reflect on both the challenges and the accomplishments of the group’s work over the past term.

Though the committee’s term officially ends later this month, members emphasized the importance of pausing

to celebrate what has been achieved and to recognize the foundation laid for future progress on redeveloping the historic Grand Trunk site.

Trudy Jonkman, of the Stratford Lakeside Active Adults Association and a committee member, led an exercise where participants contributed notes on the committee’s accomplishments to a visual timeline.

“We all recognize that there’s been challenges with this committee, the timeline, the amount of work we all en-

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Hallmark transforms downtown Stratford into Christmas movie set

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Downtown Stratford was a winter wonderland for a few days — or as much as it could be in September weather.

Market Square and the surrounding buildings on Wellington Street were decked out with tinsel, fake snow and other decorations from Sept. 10 to 12 for the filming of the Hallmark Christmas movie *Pining for Douglas*.

The film takes place in a small town called Douglas, where the community tries to save its beloved tree at risk of being removed. It also features the kind of Christmas love story the Hallmark channel is known for.

"It's been a real pleasure," said *Pining for Douglas* director Leif Bristow. "The city, the mayor's office, they've been great help. The merchants have been all really supportive. It's really nice and we're getting great weather for it. It's a little warm for filming Christmas in September but we're making it work."

Bristow said the textures of Wellington Street's brick-and-mortar shops and their charm made the area ideal for filming. Market Square was set up like a traditional Christmas market. The movie will also be filmed in Ancaster and Hamilton.

"We want Douglas to feel like it's a smaller community," Bristow said of filming in Stratford. "We want that strength and heart of community that you get in the smaller communities, and the downtown area of Stratford is obvi-

ously stunning."

Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the Downtown Stratford BIA, is also thrilled about the opportunity to have a movie filmed in the city's core.

"I'm happy to have the crew here and we'd love to see more of these kinds of productions in downtown," Pritchard said. "They do bring a couple hundred people here that contributes to our economy — the restaurants, the hotels. I mean, it's definitely a plus for the businesses downtown. They've used some things like local restaurants for coffees and things like that, so it's been wonderful."

The City of Stratford announced temporary road closures on Market Place from Wellington to Downie streets from Sept. 10 to 13, along with reduced availability of parking and closures of the lower southeast Erie parking lot.

Pritchard said the film crew was respectful of traffic when Wellington Street shut down.

"It was only closed when they were shooting and open the rest of the time, took up a few parking spots but their film crew has been very respectful," he said. "I've been working with them since they first came to town to take a look at the site and do a site visit. We're so happy to have them here. Something fun and new in Stratford."

A release date for *Pining for Douglas* has yet to be announced, but Bristow said it will air on the Hallmark channel either this Christmas or next.



Christmas in September? Downtown Stratford's Market Square and surrounding businesses were transformed into a Hallmark movie set for *Pining for Douglas*, filmed from Sept. 10 to 12.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

...Grand Trunk Renewal

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

deavoured to try to accomplish,” Jonkman said. “However, there are lots of positive things that happened along this journey as well. Can we say we’ve done a perfect job? Of course not. It’s a massive project. But we have accomplished something.”

Committee chair and Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson acknowledged the different opinions among members but said the group has played a vital role in shaping the project’s direction.

“Some would say it was highly successful, others might say we fell short of our mandate because we didn’t advance the development to a more definitive path forward for council,” Mathieson said. “I think we all wish we had shovels in the ground, but our role was not necessarily to do that as much as it was to help council guide where they should be looking for that next piece.”

Mathieson also noted that the language around the project has evolved, with “community hub” now being replaced with “community facility” to reflect changes brought about by provincial policy following the election of Doug Ford as Premier of Ontario in 2018.

Mayor Martin Ritsma thanked both the public and city staff for their contributions, pointing in particular to Emily Robson for

her continued work.

“I look forward to the future development of this historic site in Stratford,” Ritsma said. “I think it is going to be a major source of growth in this community for residents and for those who aren’t residents here yet.”

Working groups presented their final findings, including the Vision, Planning and Architecture subcommittee, which recommended updating the Grand Trunk Master Plan to reflect community needs and market conditions, and the Real Estate, Legal and Finance working group, which stressed the importance of fiscal responsibility and called on council to ensure the project continues.

Upcoming initiatives will keep the momentum going. The Grand Trunk building will host interim public uses such as Trophy X Dream Weavers, a storytelling event Oct. 4-5 on the west-side grounds of the property. In addition, a committee social on Oct. 20 at the Parlour Inn will celebrate the group’s work and contributions.

“This is both business and reflection,” Mathieson said during the final meeting. “It’s a chance to look back at what has been accomplished and also to draw conclusions and point forward for council’s consideration in the future.”



John Kastner, co-chair of the communications, advocacy and civic engagement working group, and youth representative Ryen Robinson add their notes to the Grand Trunk Renewal Committee’s visual timeline during the final meeting on Sept. 15. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)



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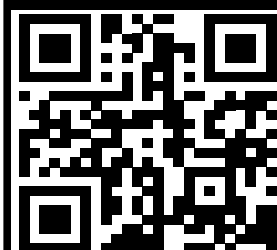
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Editorial

I got a cat! Meet Binx



AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

I wasn't sure about getting a cat. I had just moved into a new house and figured that with the chaos of moving, learning how to be on my own, and managing my busy work schedule, I didn't need the extra stress. But I'm a farm girl, and my whole life I've always had pets around me, and I was desperate for something furry to take care of.

Soon after moving in, my two daughters started gently nudging me, sending screenshots of adoptable cats and kittens online, or sharing when their friends' farm cats had kittens. I was interested, but resistant to the idea, even though I knew I'd eventually cave.

I kept an eye online and finally

came across a big guy I couldn't resist messaging about. This cat is almost three, a little bit cross-eyed (this gives him character), very friendly, and easygoing—and to me, he seemed like a perfect fit. My youngest daughter, Hailey, went to meet this massive bundle of fluff, and once we saw him, we knew he was ours.

He came with a name we didn't love, so we renamed him Binx. Yes, Binx—as in Thackery Binx from Hocus Pocus, one of my all-time favourite movies as a kid. So far, this very chill, friendly cat has been nothing but entertaining and loving. He's already claimed his spot at the bottom of my bed at night and follows me from room to room, no matter what I'm doing.

There's something about a pet that makes a house feel like home. Moving into a new space came with excitement, but also a little emptiness—quiet rooms, new routines, and the adjustment of settling in. Binx has filled that gap.

He follows me around the house as I clean, do laundry or work, curls up nearby when I'm reading, editing, or writing, and occasionally demands a good scratch on the back. He's already

knocked over cans of Diet Coke, pushed my laptop closed with his big head, and even deleted paragraphs by walking across my keyboard—but I love him all the same.

What I've realized is that pets like Binx are more than companions. They're stabilizers. On days that feel a little off, just having him nearby makes things better. When I'm busy or distracted, his quiet presence serves as a reminder to slow down and appreciate the little things.

Talking to Binx is something I didn't expect to do, but here I am, asking him if he wants more food or if he wants me to brush his fur. It might sound odd to anyone who hasn't experienced the companionship of a pet, but to me, it feels completely natural. Studies show that speaking to pets can help people process emotions, reduce stress, and ease loneliness—but I don't need a study to tell me that. I feel it every day.

Bringing Binx into my life has been one of the best decisions I've made. He's made my new place feel lived-in and loved, and he's reminded me that home isn't just about walls and furniture—it's about who (and in this case, what) shares the space with you.



Meet Binx, a very big, very fluffy, slightly cross-eyed cat who's made my life much better since he arrived. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

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Battle against homelessness depends on community cooperation

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

recommendation through the city's social services department. He added he has a pretty good idea what needs to happen next.

"In my opinion, permanent and supportive housing is where we need to go, and then it's a continuum of housing from there. People could then go from supportive care to their own apartment with the ability to access supports."

The mayor said he is committed to making any solution community-based to make a concrete difference.

"For us to deal with it properly, it needs to be an ownership from the community. I've been working for the last two years with the Council of Churches, and as a result, I was able to get some short-term funding. We need to find those partnerships, whether it's the United Way or our own social services department."

Ritsma said the last thing he wants to see is finger-pointing and accusations that homelessness is one organization's problem.

"It's our problem. I was asked a few years ago whose responsibility it was to house people. I said all of ours, and the lady just paused. She said she'd never had that response. We need to put a face and a name to the issue, not just numbers. That's where we are heading — a local solution to homelessness."

He added he's looking forward to working with any

organization looking for a seat at the table to bring the different community silos together.

"Let's hear your individual voices and then let's work together so we're not repeating the same efforts. Collectively, we can impact more lives. We're all doing it for the right reasons, but let's not duplicate. We will have more of a positive effect as a team."

Ritsma admitted sometimes groups can become protective of a service or initiative they are offering, but added he is confident there is a willingness to come up with a local strategy and solution. He also explained the city has never and would never transport a homeless person elsewhere.

"Sometimes people don't know what we are doing or perceive what we are doing as nefarious. There has not been one case where we have taken an individual and said we are going to drive them to another community for us to say they aren't our problem anymore."

He does recall a situation where a homeless man in Stratford wanted to go to Listowel, where he had an opportunity to be housed. It didn't work out, but Ritsma said he was welcomed into the Stratford system.

"We provided an opportunity for him to come back. I want to assure the public the City of Stratford is not ducking its responsibility on homelessness and not acquiescing it to another community in any way. I can say that with absolute certainty."



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Falstaff Family Centre hosting Truth and Reconciliation Week events

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Falstaff Family Centre (FFC) will host its fourth annual Truth and Reconciliation Week this September, offering exhibits, ceremonies and film screenings leading up to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on Sept. 30.

The week-long program is designed to build awareness of the impacts of colonialism and residential schools while encouraging inclusivity and understanding.

From Sept. 22 to 26, and again Sept. 29 and 30, the Legacy of Hope Foundation's exhibit *We Were So Far Away* will be on display in the FFC community room from noon to 6 p.m.

During exhibit hours, Orange shirts will be available for purchase from Winona Sands of Howling Moon Aboriginal Arts, a member of Walpole Island First Nation. Visitors will also see a Stratford Perth Museum micro-exhibit featuring more than 10,000 years of archaeological evidence of Indigenous settlement along the Avon River, along with a collection of regional artifacts. A short Parks Canada film, *The Legacy of the Residential School System: An Event of*



Photo from last year shows Patsy Day, Indigenous leader at the 2024 Sunrise Ceremony

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

National Historic Significance, will play on a continuous loop.

On Sept. 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, activities begin at 7:30 a.m. with a sunrise ceremony and Indigenous teachings led by Oneida First Nation elder Patsy Day, Turtle

Clan. In the evening, FFC owner and director Loreena McKennitt will lead a solidarity walk around the river, starting at the tipi at 6 p.m.

At 7 p.m., the centre will screen the National Film Board documentary *Birth of a Family*, which follows four siblings

separated during the Sixties Scoop as they reunite decades later. Knowledge carrier Christin Dennis Gzhiiquot (Fast Moving Cloud) of Aamjiwnaang First Nation, himself a survivor, will share his story following the film.

Private group viewings of the *Legacy of Hope* exhibit and the NFB film can be arranged by contacting the centre.

Daily online "Lunch and Learn" webinars will also be offered at 1 p.m. throughout the week by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. The 50-minute sessions feature panel discussions and are described as "an immersive experience to unlearn the myths of colonial history in Canada."

"The Falstaff Family Centre is grateful for the opportunity to lean into the Calls to Action set out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," McKennitt said. "As reconciliation has evolved, albeit slowly, we have been privileged to deepen our insights into our collective humanity through Indigenous world views. My hope is that Stratford-Perth citizens will join us for these events and continue this work throughout the year."

For more information, contact the Falstaff Family Centre at info@falstaff.ca or 519-273-3876.

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Stratford Writers Festival to feature “Fireside Chat” with former Beacon Herald summer intern

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Though she went on to write more than 20 books in her career, including her latest, *Walking with Beth*, author Merylin Simonds got her start as a writer working as a summer intern for the Stratford Beacon Herald newspaper.

Simonds, who will be back in Stratford for a fireside chat about *Walking with Beth* with award-winning poet and founder of the Stratford Writers Festival Heidi Sander on Sept. 27, said that while she was born in Winnipeg, she spent her formative years half an hour down the road from Stratford in Plattsville.

“I was born in Winnipeg, but my parents left when I was three months, so that doesn’t really count,” Simonds said. “And I lived in Plattsville from the age of three months to seven, when my parents moved to Brazil, and then from seven until I left for university – I guess I was 17 or 18. And I went to Waterloo-Oxford high school, which is near New Hamburg.”

Knowing she wanted to be a writer from the time she was a teenager, Simonds applied for the summer intern position at the Beacon Herald to gain some real-world experience before she headed off to university.

“I learned from (the editor) that the Stratford Beacon Herald hired a journalism intern and their policy was to hire a fourth-



Author Merylin Simonds, who got her start as a writer working for a newspaper in Stratford, will return to the Festival City on Sept. 27 for a fireside chat with poet Heidi Sander as part of the Stratford Writers Festival. (MERILYN SIMONDS PHOTO)

year journalism student from Western,” Simonds recalled. “So, I started applying in Grade 11 and every year, I sent a letter saying, ‘Ok, I am still intent on being a writer and I really, really want to come work for you.’ Finally, by first-year university, he hired me and it was just to get rid of me, really. He had to hire me to get me off his back.”

“I worked at the Beacon Her-

ald for a summer and I did ... the great, big, fat (Stratford) Festival supplement. I wrote everything in that and edited it. ... I did it all, but it was a fantastic job because I was at the Festival all the time, I interviewed all the actors and directors and people who later became famous, people who were already famous. At that time, I was trying to decide between English literature and drama – I

ended up getting a degree in both because I love theatre – but it was one of those lifechanging experiences for me.”

Simonds says she is excited to return to Stratford, where she got her start as a writer. This time, however, she will be sharing her experience and insights as a now well-established author, specifically with regard to her book, *Walking with Beth*.

The book is based on conversations Simonds, who is in her 70s, had at onset of the COVID-19 pandemic with her friend, Beth, who is now 105 years old. Her book is described as a lyrical meditation on friendship, memory and time. In her fireside chat with Sander, Simonds will explore the intertwined themes of aging, friendship and creativity through the poetic lens that runs throughout the book.

“Beth and I have been friends for years as part of the Kingston literary community,” Simonds said. “I never really cared about birthdays, but when I was about to turn 70, I thought, ‘Oh dear, this feels different somehow.’ So, I thought, I want to talk to somebody who’s older, who’s been through this, and I thought of my friend, Beth, who is exactly 30 years older than I am. She had just turned 100. So, I called her up and I said, ‘Let’s get together,’ and she, in her wisdom, said, ‘It’s COVID,

let’s go for a walk.’

“So we went for a walk and our conversation was so stimulating, we said, ‘Let’s do this again next week.’”

During the countless walks and conversations that followed, Simonds and Beth mulled over some of life’s great questions surrounding how we live, how we remember and how we make meaning from loss, all of which Simonds recorded and became the foundation for her book.

“Beth is just such a remarkable individual,” Simonds said. “She worked until she was 99. ... She strongly believes in following your passion and in having a passion. And if you have a passion that isn’t necessarily the money work that you do, when your job ends, you will have something else to carry you forward. She has tremendous curiosity in the world, she lives entirely in the present, she’s not one of these older people who lives in the past ... and I just thought I don’t want to be the only one who knows Beth. I want other people to know Beth because she is just such an amazing person.”

For more information and to purchase tickets for the Charlie Mountford Fireside Chat with Merylin Simonds, visit <https://tinyurl.com/3j28aycj>.

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Passengers on the Hankyu Line, by Hiro Arikawa

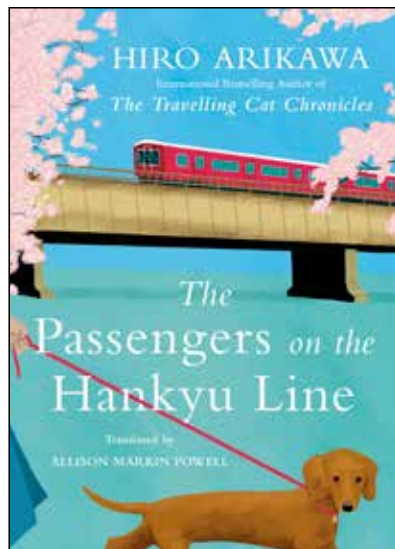
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Passengers on the Hankyu Line
By Hiro Arikawa; translated by Allison Markin Powell

The Hankyu Line train, known for its signature maroon cars and distinctive retro interiors, is a private railway line running between the towns of Takarazuka and Nishinomiya, a scenic mountainous area of Japan. Strangers’ lives collide and become momentarily intertwined as we witness the individual and ordinary struggles of a handful of passengers travelling onboard the train. On the outgoing journey, we are introduced to the emotional dilemmas of five characters - A young man who meets the woman who always happens to borrow a library book just before he can. A woman in a white bridal

dress who boards the train looking inexplicably sad. A university student leaves his hometown for the first time. A woman prepares to leave her abusive boyfriend. A grandmother discusses adopting a dog with her granddaughter. Six months later on the return journey, we watch their situations resolve.

Passengers on the Hankyu Line is a heartwarming and reflective novel of interconnected short stories that captures the small and meaningful moments of everyday travelers. Told through a series of vignettes, each chapter introduces new characters and storylines, as we move along the Hankyu Line. The chapters are short, and are filled with characters who are both insightful and endearing. With beautiful glimpses of Japanese scenery and culture, it is a quick and cozy read that can be enjoyed in one sitting or over the course of a weekend. If you are looking for quiet stories that are light on the surface but rich in depth, this one might be one you’ll want to read.



Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What famous actress married baseball player Joe DiMaggio in 1954?
2. What is the name of Roger’s dalmatian in the Disney movie ‘101 Dalmatians’?
3. Which country is Madrid the capital of?
4. What is the most expensive spice in the world?
5. Who directed the 2018 movie ‘A star is born’?
6. What is Prince William the duke of?
7. Who wrote the dystopian novel ‘1984’?
8. Roughly how long does it take for the sun’s light to reach Earth?
9. Animals that eat both vegetables and meats are called what?
10. What was the robot’s name from *Interstellar*?

This week’s answers are found on pg. 31

Stratford resident launches homeless protest at city hall

LEE GRIFFI

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Martine Lee has only lived in Stratford since March but has decided to take a stand against what she said is a lack of action by the city on homelessness.

The 37-year-old has been a self-proclaimed activist for the homeless when she lived in Toronto, Montreal and then London. She explained Stratford city council's failure to put more effort into creating a shelter in cold weather prompted her to set up a tent at the bottom of the steps at city hall.

"We are now advocating for what we call an emergency/warming centre for the homeless that will be open overnight. They don't like it being at the Rotary Complex, so where could it be? They have to figure that out."

Lee said the city would rather push the issue into the hands of the Council of Churches, which is ill-equipped to deal with the responsibilities that come with establishing a shelter. In her experience in other cities, church shelters are required to purchase insurance and even have security guards on site.

"They would need money to buy cots and blankets, and the city refuses to put any money towards it. They just want the churches to fundraise on their own and figure it out."

Lee is also bringing awareness to the Stratford Connection Centre and encouraging anyone stopping by her tent



Martine Lee sits outside Stratford city hall beside the tent she set up as part of a protest calling for more action on homelessness. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

to donate to the organization.

"I am not affiliated with them, but I am pointing people in the right direction if they want to help."

The centre is a wraparound support centre for people who are experiencing homelessness, precarious housing or other vulnerabilities. It provides both emergency and preventative services: helping with basic daily needs (food,

showers, laundry, storage), and connecting people to longer-term supports like case management, housing stability, medical, legal, mental health and addictions.

Lee, who plans to at least stage her protest at the same location every afternoon this week, explained the reaction was positive on day one.

"Lots of people who used to be homeless or who now are currently homeless came by to show their support. Quite a few people took flyers and one individu-

al said his family is at risk of becoming unhoused because of a renovation and a woman who is in geared-to-income housing who could soon be evicted."

Her hope is for all levels of government to eventually work together to come up with more tangible solutions to the problem, but she said first, the city needed to take a look at its own bylaws, which are confusing.

Mayor Martin Ritsma said recently that the best way to end homelessness is to create more housing options.

"In my opinion, permanent and supportive housing is where we need to go, and then it's a continuum of housing from there. People could then go from supportive care to their own apartment with the ability to access supports."

He also isn't ruling out some sort of shelter after the city held three consultations on homelessness in August and launched an online survey to gather residents' feedback.

"It provided an opportunity for people to listen and learn about what we have and share where they think we should be going. Whether it's more cooperative housing or a shelter, we will present them to council."

Lee said she isn't exactly sure how long her protest will last, but she does know she will never give up the fight.

"I'm going to see how it goes, but as an activist/advocate, I'm never going to stop. It depends on if nobody listens or if there's not enough momentum. I might pitch a tent potentially every other week or as long as it takes. I'm perfectly fine with continuously doing this."



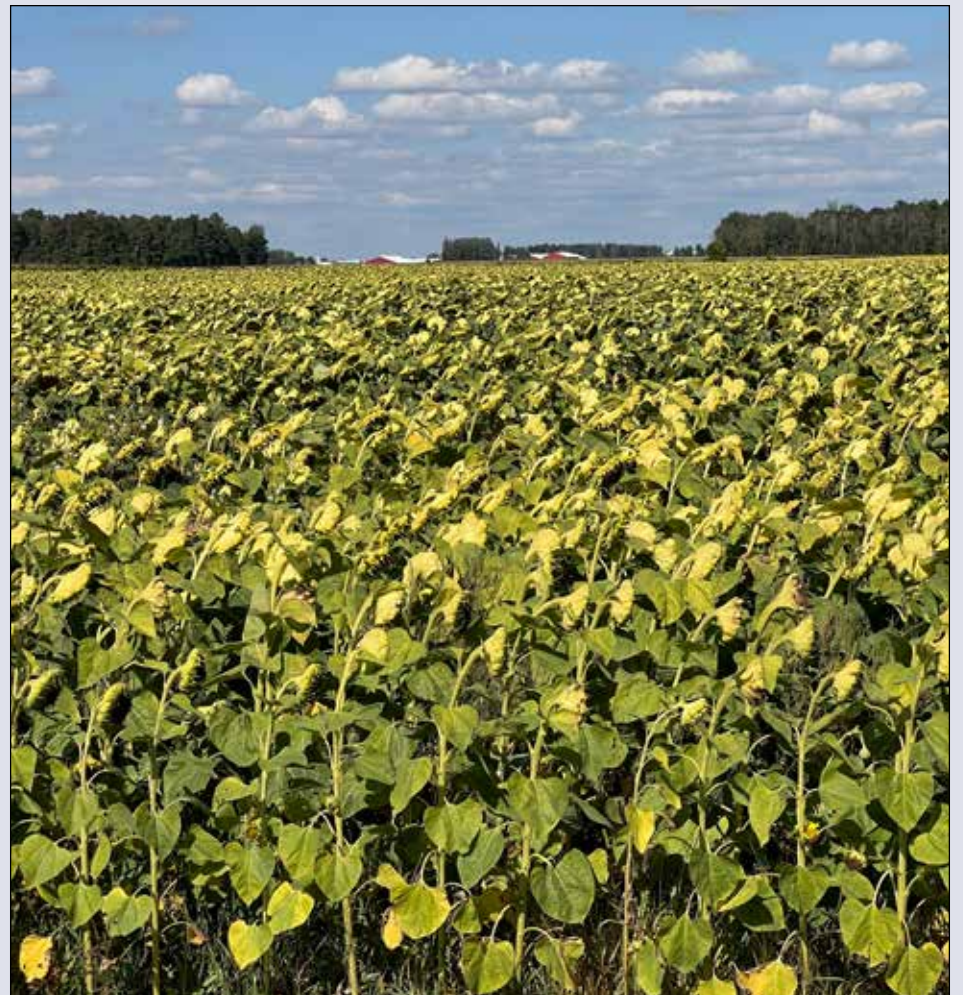
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Just north of Stratford, a 60-acre field of sunflowers in Perth County is in full bloom. The flowers will be harvested later this fall for seeds destined for the commercial market. (GARY WEST PHOTO)

From These Yellowed Bricks

(on the occasion of Stratford Summer Music's 25th Silver Anniversary)

The locals here will tell you
the music was already there
the notes soaked into those
famously yellowed bricks,
the old dance hall at 42 Wellington,
staves locked inside the swirl of swans
over the rivers...gliding.
But there is sap in maples, too,
and gold sunk in the igneous,
blood and love always
in the veins of life but
too often left just boiling there,
never to see the light of day.
Most times, I'll tell you,
it takes a dream
to bring the beauty out,
the winnowing of wheat from chaff,
the melody from the robin's throat
to charm the millions.
And that's what's happened here,
I think, the music culled and twined
into a taffy pull of violins
and voice, the braided lilt
of orchestra and wine,
from concert halls and nature trails,
jazz upon the altar,
opera from a drifting barge
and choirs, always choirs,
though sometimes of just a solitary voice,
or the choir of bow upon a single string,

and the magic never changes.
Yes, I'll tell you, it may take a dream
to bring the beauty out,
but resolution, too,
and leadership and volunteers,
those tough deciding lug nuts
that pull the gossamer
down to earth and make it real.
Yeh...those notes are surely sunk forever
within our yellowed bricks,
but now, too, they jive on tongues
and thrive in hearts all beaming.
And so tonight we raise our glasses
not only to the music that was,
but also to the crystalline of that
cascade of notes unbroken
that announce our future
and the endless wonder of the music
that is yet to be.

As Stratford's Poet Laureate, David Stones creates and performs poetry to celebrate and to enhance engagement in local community events and initiatives. Today's poem is "From These Yellowed Bricks": on the occasion of Stratford Summer Music's 25th anniversary.

Join the #howucstratford initiative @ ourstor-y.com.

Chamber of Commerce business excellence awards moving to Tom Patterson Theatre

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce is shaking up its annual Business Excellence Awards this fall with a new venue, format and focus on accessibility.

The 29th annual event takes place Thursday, Nov. 6 at the Tom Patterson Theatre, replacing the traditional dinner at Arden Park. Chamber officials say the change allows more people to attend, with capacity increasing from about 200 to as many as 400 or 500 guests.

"We're sad to be shifting away from Arden Park, they're a great venue," said Chamber general manager Aaron Martin. "But this is an opportunity to streamline things and make it a bit more accessible to people. Generally, we have 200 people in attendance, and we usually have a wait list that matches that as well. So we want to make it so that more people can come, and we are able to do that this year at the Tom Patterson Theatre."

The evening will begin with a cocktail reception and networking hour at 6 p.m., followed by the awards ceremony at 7:30 p.m.. The event is expected to wrap up between 9 and 9:30 p.m.

Instead of a sit-down dinner, hors d'oeuvres will be served during the reception. Martin said the Chamber hopes the change will encourage guests to enjoy Stratford's downtown dining scene before the event.

"We want to encourage people to visit one of the many

downtown businesses and restaurants before coming to the event," he said. "We want to promote people to have a nice dinner before the show."

Ten awards will be presented, including Business of the Year and the Business Leader Award. The Chamber has confirmed that philanthropist and volunteer Marian deWever, who has made a profound impact in Stratford through her philanthropy and volunteerism, will be recognized as the Business Leader Award winner.

The Business Excellence Awards are considered the premier recognition event for the local business community. Past winners have included a range of small businesses, large employers and community organizations, with nominations reflecting the diversity of the Stratford and district economy.

Whether it is recognizing long-standing businesses, celebrating up-and-coming entrepreneurs or highlighting individuals who have made a lasting impact, Martin said the evening is meant to shine a spotlight on the people and organizations who shape the region.

"This is Stratford's business community at its best," he said. "It's about celebrating success, leadership and the entrepreneurial spirit that drives our region forward."

Ticket prices have also been reduced this year. Admission is \$100 for Chamber members and \$125 for non-members, compared to the usual \$150. Tickets are available through the Chamber's website www.stratford-chamber.com.

Stratford police seek public's help to identify suspicious man

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Stratford police are asking for the public's help to identify a man who offered a ride to a 13-year-old girl waiting at a school bus stop earlier this month.

Police said the incident happened between 8:15 and 8:30 a.m. on either Sept. 2 or Sept. 3 near the intersection of Orr Street and McCarthy Road.

The girl declined the offer, and there was no further interaction, police said.

The man is described as being of East Indian descent, middle-aged, and was driving a dark-coloured vehicle. Police believe he was alone at the time.

The Stratford Police Service was notified of the incident on Sept. 8.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Stratford

police at 519-271-4141.

Police are also reminding parents to speak with their children about the dangers of accepting rides or items from strangers. Anyone who has experienced a similar incident is encouraged to come forward.

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Sept. 08 Eleanor Kittmer, Lakeside	\$50.00
Sept. 09 Nancy Ellens, Mitchell	\$50.00
Sept. 10 Matthew Nevbrand, Dublin	\$50.00
Sept. 11 Bob Phillips, St. Marys	\$50.00
Sept. 12 Margie Taylor-O'Rourke, Stratford .	\$50.00
Sept. 13 Darlene A. Dunbar, Stratford	\$200.00
Sept. 14 Chris Rekker, Stratford	\$50.00
Sept. 15 Elaine Thomson, St. Pauls	\$50.00
Sept. 16 Deanna & Steve Dove, Beeton . . .	\$50.00
Sept. 17 Kim Boyce, Cambridge	\$50.00
Sept. 18 Victor Smith, Stratford	\$50.00
Sept. 19 Chris & Tom Ney, Sebringville	\$50.00
Sept. 20 Jeanne King, Stratford	\$200.00



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Legion to host annual honours and awards ceremony

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Royal Canadian Legion Branch 8 will hold its annual honours and awards ceremony on Sunday, Sept. 28, at 2 p.m. Veterans and their families are invited to attend, and the event is also open to the public.

The ceremony recognizes members' service to the Legion, with awards given in five-year increments starting at five years. Honours include service medals, anniversary medals, service bars, certificates of appre-

ciation, certificates of merit, as well as special recognitions such as the president's acknowledgment and life membership awards.

This year's event will also include the presentation of three certificates to mark Clarence McCallum's 100th birthday. The certificates, from His Majesty, the Governor General and the Prime Minister, will be presented along with other awards.

For more information, please email the Stratford Legion at stratfordlegion008@gmail.com or call 519-271-4540.



Thank You for a Great Season! More Recreation Programs Ahead!

Thank you for joining us in making this summer memorable, from camps and events to swimming, markets and more. The City of Stratford takes pride in providing and supporting quality recreation and social activities for all ages. We invite you to continue the fun with us this fall and winter with some exciting opportunities below:

PA DAY CAMP/WINTER BREAK:

This program is offered on school PA days for children 4 to 12 years of age. Each day features a theme with a variety of activities such as crafts, games and outdoor exploration.



NEXTSTRAT ESPORTS LOUNGE:

A safe and welcoming place to connect, play, and grow, the lounge blends gaming with real-world learning. NextStrat helps young players to sharpen not only their skills in esports, but also teamwork, communication, and problem-solving that will serve them well beyond the screen. With mentorship, accessible equipment, and resources that highlight careers in the gaming industry, NextStrat is dedicated to showing how “play” can lead to opportunity. Open Monday through Friday from 3:30–8:30 p.m., the lounge continues to build a community where passion and potential come together. Best of all, it’s completely free to access! Visit www.nextstrat.ca or attend Level Up Together: Gaming for Growth on September 24 to learn more.



BIRTHDAY PARTIES: Looking for a hassle-free place where your child can burn off energy, create or strategize with friends while having minimal clean up? Look no further as we have two exciting birthday party options with access to either the Agriplex Gymnasium or NextStrat Esports Lounge. Activity options for the gymnasium include parachutes, scooter boards, soccer, basketball, and various other activities. NextStrat offers various gaming options and challenges to keep everyone entertained. Both options provide additional party space to enjoy further activities including themed colouring pages, Giant Jenga, Giant Connect Four, Ring Toss and more.

For more information visit www.stratford.ca/birthdays

SENIORS PROGRAMMING:

Are you looking to exercise your body and mind? From art therapy and woodworking to cards and indoor pickleball, there is something for everyone. Explore a variety of health and wellness activities offered through the Senior Lakeside Active Adult Association (SLAAA). For more information visit www.stratford.ca/active55 or Stratford Active Adults on Facebook.



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28th annual Stratford Rotary Dragon Boat Festival



Paddlers, performers and community members came together at Lake Victoria on Sept. 13 for the 28th annual Stratford Rotary Dragon Boat Festival. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTOS)
The event featured Hong Kong-style races with more than 40 teams, live music, children's activities, food vendors and a vendor village. Organized by the Rotary Club of Stratford, the festival is the city's largest Rotary fundraiser, with proceeds supporting local charities and community projects.



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Illuminated and immersive storytelling at Grand Trunk site to kick off Provocation Ideas

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Stratford will be known as the City of Dreamers during the Provocation Ideas Festival this fall, beginning with an event portraying the Grand Trunk site in a new light.

The Provocation Ideas Festival's City of Dreamers will feature a variety of events in Stratford between Oct. 4 and Nov. 22, starting with the immersive storytelling experience Trophy X Dream Weavers at the Grand Trunk site on Oct. 4 and 5. The event, which also involves the City of Stratford, SpringWorks, Destination Stratford, investStratford, and the local YMCA, will feature illuminated tents with readings of true short stories from local residents, chalk art, games, and puppet making.

"The city's been in the process along with the community of thinking about redevelop-

ment and moving towards redevelopment opportunities," said Emily Robson, the City of Stratford's corporate initiatives lead. "So, with the vision for this site being really about a mixed-use vibrant space, one that can support new housing and new public spaces and new community amenities, having these types of events and these placemaking interventions really helps our community to imagine what could be different about that site in our community and get excited for what's possible."

Robson is also thrilled about the community-driven collaboration between the city, its organizations, and the Provocation Ideas Festival.

"It's really a collaborative effort and this to me is really leaning into the strengths in our community and the organizations and people that really contribute creatively and socially to our community," she said.

The Provocation Ideas Festival will also

include the following events after Trophy X Dream Weavers:

Maker Multiverse: Constructing Futures panel discussion on Oct. 16 at Copperlight/Knox Presbyterian Church, followed by workshops from Oct. 17 to 21 and a showcase of the creations from Oct. 23 to 25.

True Tapestries live storytelling event on Nov. 15 and 22 at the Stratford Perth Museum's Co-operators Performance Theatre.

Northern Wit: Comedy as the Canadian Shield hosted by CBC Ideas host Nahlah Ayed with dates and locations to be announced.

The Flavours of Home: Stories and Meal that Connects Us series featuring culinary storytelling through Stratford's newcomers, who will prepare a meal inspired by their region of origin. The series will run from October 2025 to March 2026.

The Provocation Ideas Festival partnered with the Stratford Perth Museum, CBC

Ideas and Pathways to Poetry for additional festival events.

The City of Dreamers was built upon three core questions between the years 2024 and 2026: "Why do some dreams take root here—and which unrealized dreams still matter? Who gets to dream—and who's left out? What binds us—and how do we close the divides to build our best future?" founding director Mark Rosenfeld told the Stratford Times. The Provocation Ideas Festival connects the community together and puts their various dreams on the map.

"We live here now, and Stratford's story is literally a story of dreamers—from Indigenous presence to railway and other industrial workers, artists, farmers, entrepreneurs, and new arrivals," Rosenfeld said.

More information about the Stratford events part of the Provocation Ideas Festival can be found at provocation.ca/2025-events-stratford

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SK8 Jam for Sam returns for fourth year, raising funds for community hospice

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

The fourth annual SK8 Jam for Sam is set to honour the life of Sam Beauchamp with skateboarding, live music, raffles and community connection, while raising funds for local hospice care.

Beauchamp died four years ago at 27 after being diagnosed with frontal lobe glioblastoma in his teens. His legacy lives on through the SK8 Jam for Sam fundraiser, an event that remembers him as someone who bridged two communities together with kindness and compassion.

“There’s a stigma with skateboarding, there can be a disconnect between skateboarding and the greater community, Sam’s legacy is bringing them together. It was just pure inspiration for his existence that brought this to fruition,” said Alex Sparling, one of the organizers.

The event will take place at All Wheels Park in Stratford on Sept. 27 at noon.

“Skateboarding is sometimes seen as a stigmatized subculture, but you don’t have to skate to connect with the community,” said Sparling. “They’re an open, positive group of people who care deeply about those around them. It just takes one person to make a difference and change the way an entire subcommunity is seen by the greater community.”

Four years ago, the event started as a



The SK8 Jam for Sam fundraiser has thrived for three years after starting as a gathering of friends and family. Each year, the event raises more money to support local hospice care.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

hangout with friends at All Wheels Park and has since evolved into a fundraiser with the blessing of Beauchamp’s mother. All proceeds are donated to Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth, where Beauchamp received end-of-life care.

Core organizers include Sparling, Darin McCulloch, Nick Dunsmoor, Matt Bell, Alex Hunt and Brendon Whetham.

Last year, the event raised more than \$3,000 for Stratford Rotary Hospice, and

Sparling hopes to break \$3,500 this year. The fundraiser has grown significantly since its debut, attracting supporters from outside the community. This year’s event will feature food by donation, live music, a raffle and T-shirts designed with Beauchamp’s artwork that he used to practice with sticker bombs.

“Sam always continued to do the things that he loved regardless of how the disease impacted him. He always

found ways to be involved in the community,” said Sparling. “When Sam was faced with losing one of these things he loved to do the most, which was skateboarding, he just became the world’s best cheerleader for his friends.”

“He exemplified perseverance and continued to stay positive during difficult times and set an example for everyone to always remain positive where everything seems negative.”

Pumpkin cannon and sunflower trails draw families to Fall Harvest Festival

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Black Creek Flower Farms welcomed hundreds of visitors for its Fall Harvest Festival last weekend, raising funds for the local food bank while offering a week-end of autumn fun.

The entry-by-donation event, now in its third year, took place on the farm grounds. Community vendors set up stations and sold their wares during the two-day festival.

The Fall Harvest Festival featured a winding sunflower trail, a bouncy castle, kids’ activities, a pumpkin cannon and the chance for visitors to pick flowers.

“The turnout was great and the weather was beautiful, entry is by donation, and the proceeds will go to the foodbank and we are hoping to raise a couple thousand dollars,” said Laura Barker, owner of Black Creek Flower Farms. “Last year we raised around \$1,200, people can put what they want, and it gives everyone a chance to explore what we have to offer at the farm.”

A pumpkin cannon was one of this year’s new attractions. It was built and operated by Barker’s husband, Adam, who used



Black Creek Flower Farms welcomed hundreds of visitors for its Fall Harvest Festival. Pictured, Adam Barker loads up the pumpkin cannon for onlookers during the event.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

spare parts he found around the farm.

“Started building it on a Monday and it was done by Friday, and we will continue on adding improvements to it,” said Adam Barker. “They do this sort of thing in the

States somewhere for Thanksgiving and I thought it would be pretty cool to do that here because there’s nothing that really has this concept in this area that I know of.”

Laura Barker said the sunflower trail

was extended this year and rock painting was added to the festival lineup. Her goal is to keep the event non-commercialized and focused on giving locals a chance to relax and enjoy the fall weather. Vendors rotated over the two days to give more people a chance to showcase their products.

“I love getting to see people, I’m doing laps and making everything run well and I get to socialize with everyone. We try to add more things everywhere and this year, we made the sunflower trail a touch longer,” said Barker. “It looks small, but it really takes you through the flowers. This is also a good educational opportunity to teach people some things about farming.”

Black Creek Flower Farm began in the 1950s as a wholesale gladiolus grower and bulb supplier. Over time, several family members began attending local farmers’ markets, gradually establishing a retail division. In the early 2000s, the farm opened its retail store alongside a new wholesale building.

In 2019, Black Creek Flower Farm expanded to include a U-Pick Garden open to the public. The business continues to grow within the community by hosting events such as weddings, gatherings and festivals.

Join Us As The Forest City Film Festival Celebrates 10 Years of Community, Creativity, and Cinema in Southwestern Ontario

BRITTANY WHELAN

Industry and Special Events Coordinator

Picture this: I was eight years old when a major movie production rolled into my small town in Southwestern Ontario. The downtown transformed into a film set, and I can remember my mother dragging me by hand to a gleaming white limousine. Security moved to stop us, but Julianne Moore said it was okay, and signed my scrap of paper. I didn't know it then, but that brief exchange was the spark that led me to study film and pursue a career in the industry—because film doesn't just entertain, it inspires, connects people, and fuels local economies. Now I work for the Forest City Film Festival, where we help champion the next generation of regional storytellers.

For the past decade, the Forest City Film Festival (FCFF) has celebrated the stories and talent of Southwestern Ontario. Uniting movie lovers, empowering creators, and contributing to a \$30 million regional film industry. And the inspiration doesn't stop with film. This year, we're honouring London native David Shore, creator

of *House M.D.* And *The Good Doctor*—whose work has influenced not only storytellers, but a generation of doctors and healthcare professionals.

That spark I felt as a kid was the same kind of magic our founder and executive director Dorothy Downs wanted to share when she launched the FCFF in 2015. A year later, her vision came to life at the Wolf Performance Hall with a three-day event showcasing 25 regionally connected films, capped by a sold-out gala featuring local screenwriter Emma Donoghue. By 2017, FCFF had nearly doubled its programming, introducing an animation category, an international screening, and extending the festival to five days.

2018 brought a dose of nostalgia with a screening of *The Breakfast Club* and a live Q&A with London-born actor John Kapealos. Plus the launch of the Short Film Pitch Competition which gave emerging creators the chance to bring their ideas to life. In 2019, the inaugural Forest City Youth Film Festival took centre stage, spotlighting the voices of high school filmmakers from across the region.

When the world went online in 2020,

FCFF adapted with a fully digital festival, introducing a Music Video category, virtual Q&As, and on-demand access that connected audiences across Canada. 2021 marked the rebrand of our industry programming into the Ontario Screen Creators Conference, complete with a national-scale Project Pitch competition offering a \$60,000 prize package. In 2022, we expanded our lens with curated Indigenous programming and "Best of the World Fest" (BOWF), bringing highlights from Cannes, TIFF, Sundance, and Berlinale to our local audiences.

By 2024, London's designation as a UNESCO City of Music inspired an electrifying opening night of live performances, music videos, and a world premiere. We also introduced our Lifetime Achievement in Entertainment Award, honouring London born Victor Garber in a star-studded celebration with surprise appearances from Jennifer Garner, Eugene Levy and Martin Short.

This year, as we mark our 10th anniversary, we invite you to be part of 10 unforgettable days with more than 100 films, 60+ events, and experiences that cele-

brate the power of storytelling. From our high-energy music video opening night to a haunting Halloween screening, and the very best in regional cinema in between, the Forest City Film Festival is where culture, creativity, and community meet on the big screen.

Audiences will enjoy stories from across Southwestern Ontario, featuring films from Stratford, Cambridge, Hamilton, and beyond, showcasing the region's richness and diversity. Hollywood comes to London with our Lifetime Achievement Award Reception, where Emmy-winning creator David Shore will be honoured in a glamorous evening of signature drinks, generous hors d'oeuvres, and an exciting silent auction. Attendees can also explore the best international films or cheer on the next generation of filmmakers. With so much to see and do, there's truly something for everyone at this year's festival.

So grab your tickets, load up on popcorn, and join us at the theater—because in every seat, there's a dream waiting to be sparked, and a story waiting to be told.

Visit fcff.ca to explore the full program and join the celebration.

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Traditional Indigenous feast brings sense of community to gathering at Falstaff Family Centre

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A traditional Indigenous feast was held on the grounds of the Falstaff Family Centre (FFC) on Saturday, Sept. 13, uniting First Nations, Inuit and Métis (FNIM) people from Perth and Huron counties.

The gathering was part of an initiative to support FNIM people and to bring together youth and elders in celebration, connection and rebuilding relationships.

Dozens gathered on the spacious grounds, where a medicine garden and traditional teepee are permanently installed. A sacred fire was lit, drum circle and music performed, and stories shared.

Piles of orange shirts were donated by Phyllis Webstad, founder and ambassador of the Orange Shirt Society, so no one would go without on Sept. 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

This was the first event connected with The Gathering Place, a space under development at the FFC.

"The mission of bringing together The Gathering Place is to have a safe place for anyone in the community who identifies as First Nations, Inuit and Métis," explained Saranne Whetung of Curve Lake First Nation, cultural and wellness manager with the Huron-Perth Children's Aid Society. "(It is) to bring our community together, to build a strong connection,

and to have a safe place to do teachings, be involved in the culture, talk about the culture and use their voice within that culture."

Whetung noted that within her culture, oral storytelling and history are central. "Those stories are passed down generationally, so this provides a safe and comfortable space for those culturally significant conversations to happen," she said.

Organizers hoped to bring together FNIM people from Stratford and Huron-Perth counties and were pleased to welcome at least six Inuit who travelled from other communities. One guest, Tawny, wore a traditional southern amauti used to carry babies on the back. She said she wore it to honour her birth mother, who never had the opportunity to use one, as Tawny was apprehended the day she was born.

"I would say we have really reached the people we were hoping to reach," Whetung said. "We have a lot of people from First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures who are joining us today, and we made sure those folks feel welcome. It's about bringing people together, having a good meal, and sharing lots of stories and teachings."

The event marked the beginning of what organizers hope will be an ongoing path to community, togetherness, authenticity and sharing of culture and history.



The traditional Indigenous Feast was laid out in preparation of first serving a dish to be offered in thanks to the spirits, followed by youth plating food to serve elders and guests. (LISA CHESTER PHOTO)



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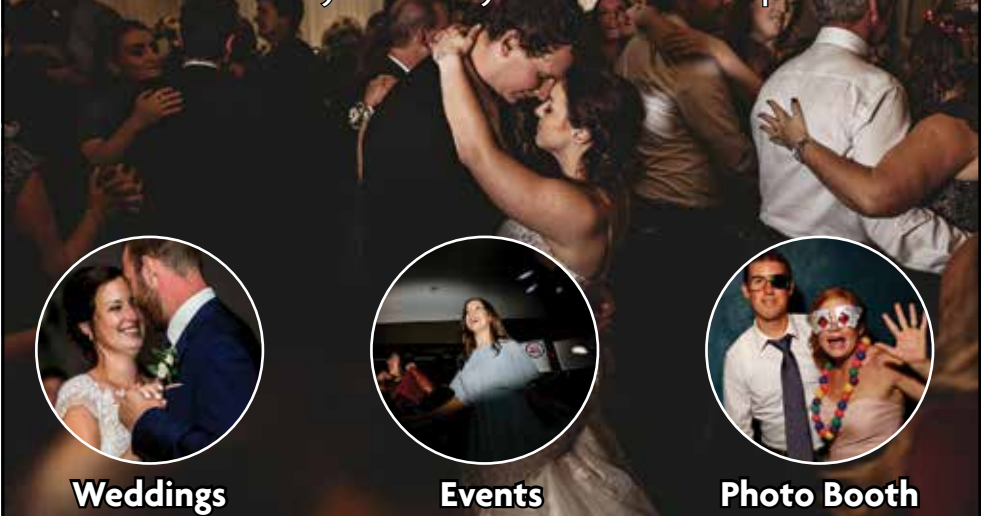
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Since 1871, The Parlour Inn has anchored Stratford's downtown. Its brick façade and period architecture are instantly recognizable, making it one of the city's true heritage landmarks. Inside, original woodwork and vintage detailing nod to its railway-era past, while careful updates keep the spaces comfortable for today's gatherings. It's this blend of authenticity and ease that draws couples in. Many venues can be dressed up for a wedding; The Parlour Inn begins with character already in place.

Stratford itself adds to the romance. Couples step into familiar backdrops—portraits along the Avon, moments in the Shakespearean Gardens, guests wandering between boutiques or taking in a performance before rejoining the celebration. For many, the wedding naturally expands beyond the Inn, becoming part of the Stratford experience itself.

Intimate Spaces, Infinite Meaning

What sets The Parlour Inn apart is its intimacy. Unlike larger venues that cycle through multiple events, the Inn hosts only a limited number of weddings each season. That focus allows each celebration to feel distinct and closely tied to the couple's vision.

The Churchill Room is the largest, often chosen by couples who want the energy of



dining and dancing with up to 120 guests. For those drawn to smaller weddings, the Windsor and St. Patrick's Rooms hold around 20 guests each. These gatherings often unfold more like elegant dinner parties, where every toast carries across the room and every guest feels part of the same conversation.

It's this flexibility that appeals to couples who want a wedding that feels personal rather than produced.

Planning That Lets Couples Stay Present

Couples often describe weddings at The Parlour Inn as seamless. Much of that comes down to the planning support built into the experience. Staff guide couples through the decisions that can otherwise

feel daunting, from room layouts to menu choices, so the process feels manageable.

On the day, the rhythm of the celebration feels natural. Speeches, dinner, and dancing flow easily, with the coordination handled quietly in the background.

Where Every Plate Tells Your Story

Dining is often what guests talk about long after the wedding, and here it's treated as more than a formality. Menus are developed in conversation with each couple, shaped around their tastes and the tone they want for the day. Some lean toward multi-course plated dinners, others toward abundant buffets designed for mingling. In every case, the food carries the creativity and attention to detail that Stratford's dining scene is known for.

As Shakespeare put it, *"What is love? 'Tis not hereafter: present mirth hath present laughter."* The joy of the day is often found in those shared moments around the table.

From Getting Ready to Good Morning

One of the Inn's advantages is how easily the wedding carries from morning to morning under one roof. The hotel's 28 guestrooms and suites give wedding parties space to spread out while getting ready. Suites with sitting areas become gathering points, and adjoining rooms keep families close.

When the reception winds down, couples and their guests simply head upstairs, retreating to comfortable rooms that feel private yet still connected to the occasion. By morning, many gather again over breakfast in the dining room. The wedding becomes a shared stay, where the celebration stretches naturally into the next day.

A Singular Celebration

In a city with no shortage of wedding venues, The Parlour Inn offers something rare: a celebration rooted in Stratford's history yet shaped entirely by the couple at its centre. Some weddings here fill a ballroom with dancing; others bring together just a handful of guests around a single table. What connects them is the same impression: that the day belonged entirely to them.

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PHOTO: This photo courtesy of Best Western Plus, Arden Park Hotel

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Meet Pastor Kelli Berkner, Knox Presbyterian Church's new minister

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Knox Presbyterian Church's new minister is eager to get to know the community of Stratford and learn how the church can best serve it.

Pastor Kelli Berkner has been the Knox Presbyterian minister since Dec. 1, 2024, and said she's been enjoying getting to know the congregation and community.

"The congregation has been so welcoming, and they have such a deep heart for the community and that's just really exciting as a pastor to come in and be a part of and just want to join them in all of the ways that they are helping and loving the people of Stratford," she said.

Berkner and the rest of the congregation are looking to update the church's website and social media pages to let Stratford residents know about its programming and that there is a new minister at Knox. Knox is also partnering with BMI, the property owner, to start a community dinner on the third Wednesday of the month beginning in October.

"We're really excited to be able to host the community for a free meal," Berkner said.

The congregation is also starting small groups for people to examine how faith plays a role in their day-to-day lives and looking into strategies to entice people to come to church.

"We know that people are busy and that church isn't always at the top of the list, so we just want to see what are



Pastor Kelli Berkner, minister of Knox Presbyterian Church, wants to continue to meet members of the Stratford community

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

the needs of our community and how can we adapt to meet them," Berkner said.

More information can be found at pccweb.ca/knox-stratford, by calling 519-271-0373, or by emailing pastorkelli.knoxstratford@gmail.com. Berkner also invites Stratford residents to stop by the church office at 142 Ontario St. on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a chat.

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STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Firebirds top Otters 3-1 in Stratford exhibition

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Led by a 34-save performance from Mason Courville, the Flint Firebirds came from behind to beat local star Jake Murray and the Erie Otters 3-1 in front of an energized crowd at the William All-

man Memorial Arena on Sept. 12.

Murray loved coming back to the town where he played for his minor hockey career, where he captained the Huron-Perth Lakers U16 triple-A last season before being drafted to the Otters this past spring.

"I have played for Huron-Perth (Lak-

ers) for four years. So coming back here was pretty special. The town is pretty special," Murray said.

Selected by Erie in the first round of the 2025 OHL Priority Selection, Murray embraces the opportunity to play with the Otters and looks forward to playing in the National Hockey League someday.

"It's great. I mean, when I heard my name with Erie is obviously something special. First couple of weeks here has been unreal with me," said Murray.

"I think the NHL is everyone's dream, so it's just one step at a time, and we'll see how it goes out."

Otters broadcaster Trevor Kubeja says the overall experience of the exhibition game in the Allman Arena was very positive.

"It was pretty awesome. We were just doing stats tonight, but the view from the booth was terrific and really awesome rink," Kubeja said. "I was telling Tim (Quinn), my broadcast partner, we had never really been in a rink anywhere close to like this, right? So really awesome barn and really pleasure to be here tonight."

Flint's Courville and Erie's starting

netminder, Noah Erliden, put on a goal-tending duel in the first period and kept the game scoreless. After a lengthy delay that lasted over an hour, the second period got underway, and the Otters found paydirt first by a goal from Tyler Cooper 2:30 into the period.

But Flint responded with a goal from Xavier Tessier at 7:29 and the eventual game-winner from Josh Bonnyman with 2:40 left in the period. Christopher Thibodeau added insurance midway through the final period, and the Firebirds' defense held off two consecutive five-on-three Erie power plays and preserved the win.

Courville got the win for the Firebirds while Charlie Burns, who relieved Erliden midway in the second period, took the loss for the Otters.

Kubeja believes Stratford can host another Otters exhibition game at the Allman again in the future.

"Who knows? I think the door is always open, and that was something that was talked about a lot earlier on today, so we'll see. It'd be a pretty cool opportunity to certainly come back," Kubeja said.

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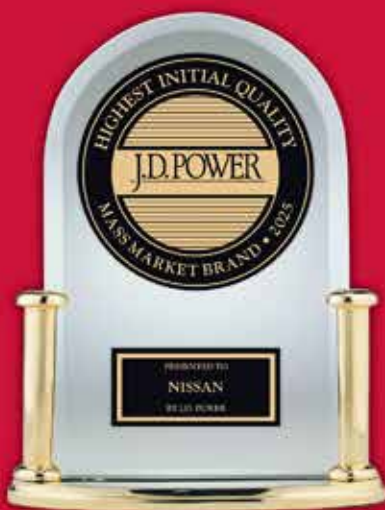
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STRATFORD NISSAN



Warriors set sights on strong season with mix of youth, veterans

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors underwent their final preparations for the opening week of the regular season at the William Allman Memorial Arena. Like in training camp and pre-season, there is great buzz surrounding the team with a blend of young and veteran players.

Head coach Dave Williams says the team has had excellent practices, and the game plan for the opener against the London Nationals is to provide simplicity and discipline established during the long-standing training camp.

"We just keep working on the things we've been working on here for the last three or four weeks," Williams said. "We've had a long camp. So the benefit of that is it gives you a little longer runway to try and implement some of the systems and ideas that you want to play."

"I think we've been practicing really well," Williams continued. "I thought tonight was a really good skate. I think it's just to try and keep doing what we're doing, maybe just try and be a little cau-

tious about getting too fancy, and just try and play a really simple game. It's a big ice surface, so it was minimizing puck turnovers and things like that."

Williams says the team is part of a conference that has no clear favourite and understands that any season prediction is bound to be inaccurate when made before puck drop on opening night.

"I think as you go through the first time through the league, you get a chance to see what everybody else looks like," he said. "Everybody wants to guess how everybody's finished before the season even begins. There are a lot of good teams in our league. If we learned anything last year going from three divisions to two, it's that there's lots of parity."

Jack McGurn, entering his second season with the Warriors, says the expectation is to aim for the top prize in the GOJHL.

"I think the expectation is to have a deep playoff run, and maybe going to the Sutherland Cup final, and beat some top teams that we battled with last year," he said.

Entering his second full season with the Warriors, Colin Slattery echoes his

fellow teammate's championship ambitions.

"I think nothing short of a championship would be considered a failure at this point," said Slattery. "We had a deep run last year, one win away from moving to the finals, and it came up short. So we're looking to build on that one and win it all this year."

Recently named to the leadership group for this season, Joe Curtain says he is focusing on improving his skill set and wants fans to know the team will be competitive.

"My expectations are to get up on the scoreboard a lot more than last year, very solid defensively," Curtain said. "This year, I'm going to try to step it up inside of the game as well as keeping a strong defence."

"Be excited. We're a young team. We have a lot of our returners and young guys are picking up quick, so we're going to be a very tough team," continued Curtain.

As of press time, the team has nine rookies on

its main roster. Williams says he is glad the young talent played a game to get accustomed to their home soil as the home opener on Sept. 19 comes closer.

"There's a little bit of nerves for our first-year guys," Williams said. "I think it was good that we played St. Andrews here a week or so ago for the guys to get a chance to play here."

"I think it's an exciting time, right? That's how they have to look at it," he continued. "It's really exciting to get to play that home game. And there's no better spot to play your first home game this season than at the Allman Arena."

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Stratford can't get enough of grassroots documentary *We Lend A Hand*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

After two sold-out screenings with Stratford Film Festival (SFF), and a successful run at the Stratford Cinema, the community came out and packed the barn for the screening of *We Lend A Hand, The Forgotten Story of Ontario Farmerettes*.

On Sept. 13 at Ritsma's Barn, producer/director Colin Field greeted guests eager to see the documentary so many people have been talking about. There were 40,000 Ontario Farmerettes who volunteered during the war to work on the farms while the men who typically would labour were away fighting for the country.

The audience was enthralled, and while the cause for these young girls to have left their home and family was serious, there was a great deal of humour found by the audience in the telling of their stories, which was touching to Bill Harris, general manager of SFF and co-sponsor of the evening.

"It has a lot of dimensions to it, it has stories and history, I've seen it at least a dozen times but



The Q-and-A panel of (from left) Filipe Gaj-Levra, Colin Field and Bonnie Sitter was moderated by Bill Harris, general manager of SFF. (LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

I've seen it only three times with an audience and it's really funny, I kind of forgot that, and the girls were wild, they were out there on their own doing things and it really brought a lot of heart to the story," said Harris.

In fact, there was an audience member who knew that his mother worked on a farm during the war, but didn't know she was a Farmerette until that night, after seeing her signature on a slide shown.

The film covers the time from the call to service to leaving friends and family behind to the arduous work on the farms, which proved to be the best summers of their lives. Twenty Farmerettes, who are now in their 90s, were interviewed and shared photos and stories with Field and Bonnie Sitter, historical producer and co-author of the book *Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz, Memories of Ontario Farmerettes*, written with Shirley English.

The Q-and-A that followed the film featured Field, Sitter and executive producer Filipe Gaj-Levra exploring the making of the film. Field is a newer filmmaker who went back to school to study filmmaking. He met Sitter at the Goderich fair and within no time, they were into all things Farmerette.

"I was invited to Goderich festival, where, by chance, I met Bonnie, and it takes about thirty seconds after you meet Bonnie to start speaking about the Farmerettes, and so we started talking," said Field. "Fast forward to the pandemic, and I had finished my (film) program... Bonnie showed

me the book, and that's how it all started. I thought, 'Why hasn't this been made into a film?'"

They wanted to capture the story of how the Farmerettes helped win the Second World War by volunteering to aid farmers with food production. Inspired by the research Sitter had done and the desire to bring the forgotten Canadian story to life, the two came together to fundraise and produce the film.

"It has been a privilege to travel through the province and hear the stories of these surviving Farmerettes," Field said. "If it wasn't for these girls, the soldiers wouldn't have had food to eat and the economy would have ground to a halt."

As a grassroots film, it has been travelling throughout southwestern Ontario and has had about 30 screenings to date, with about 40 more planned this fall. Saturday's screening was generously sponsored by Mayor Martin Ritsma and family, Armor Pro Audio Visual, Stratford Film Festival, Stratford Perth Museum and Central Sanitation.

To learn more, visit welendahand.ca

Spruce Lodge car show draws record crowd and 177 vehicles

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

One of the biggest car and truck shows Stratford and Perth County has ever seen was held recently at the Spruce Lodge Home for Seniors in Stratford.

A total of 177 vehicles were on display, including classic cars, trucks and even an antique tractor. The crowd was estimated in the thousands.

Vehicles came from across the region, including Kitchener, St. Catharines, New Hamburg, Wellesley, Mitchell, St. Marys, Woodstock and many places in between.

"The Spruce Lodge Car Show began as a Father's Day event in 2015, and it has grown into an annual event with an amazing turnout from the community of car enthusiasts," said activity co-ordinator and organizer Kim Luckhardt.

In the early days of the show, Luckhardt connected with Laverne Gould and Percy Davidson, Hamlet Estates residents, to get their input on how to run a successful car show.

Each year, she said, the event has been supported by generous local businesses that donate sponsorships for the car show cruiser raffle.

"It's amazing to see how many donations we receive each year, and it is so greatly appreciated," Luckhardt said.

She added the event now involves many volunteers and staff, who serve food, help with registration and parking, and assist residents with transportation to and from the show.

"All donations received are put towards enhancing residents' activity experiences," she said. "It's an incredible night filled with great tunes, delicious food, and beautiful cars and trucks."



A look from inside the parking lot at Spruce Lodge during the recent car and truck show (GARY WEST PHOTO)



From left, Jamie Fitzgerald, Brad Woodcock, Jim Player and Mike Brubacher chat beside Player's 1971 black Chevy Cheyenne during last week's classic car and truck show at Spruce Lodge in Stratford. All four have played important roles in the Perth County business community.

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'Roots Ramble' concert series to bring top Canadian singer-songwriters to Stratford

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Barry James Payne and String Bone Presents!, in collaboration with Tim Harrison and Onrush Music Festival, have launched a new concert series to be held in Stratford this fall.

The Roots Ramble Fall Concert Series runs from Oct. 11 to Dec. 5 at Revival House and The Bunker Performance Lounge and Café. The series will feature five premiere concerts showcasing Canadian musicians of stellar pedigree.

The name Roots Ramble is partly inspired by hometown legend Richard Manuel, who embodied roots music with his soulful voice and musicianship with The Band, often credited with pioneering folk-rock Americana. The "ramble" portion nods to Manuel's bandmate Levon Helm, who hosted the barn series The Midnight Ramble in Woodstock, N.Y., which continues to this day.

Payne said The Band was a heavy influence on his career, beginning when he received his first cassette player and two of the group's albums as a child.

"They've been a passion of mine that started my music career in roots music. They were essentially the forerunners of Americana/Canadiana roots music," Payne said. "Over the years I've read Levon Helm's book and Robbie Robertson's book, which was interesting because they talk a lot about London, Ontario, which is my old stomping grounds, so there's a connection there. Roots music covers a wide swath, a huge umbrella from folk to bluegrass to jazz. I wanted a title that really spoke about the music which is roots. So, Roots, Ramble, seemed like a really good combination."



Barry James Payne (left) and Tim Harrison have united to present the 'Roots Ramble'. Fall Concert Series to be held in Stratford. Five concerts featuring premiere Canadian singer/songwriters are planned. (HAZE NI CHEALLAIGH PHOTO)

Genres featured in the series include folk, blues, country, R&B, soul, rock and jazz.

"Blues, folk and country are the pillars on which rock and roll is based. There's a huge, shared lineage in all that," said Harrison. "Stratford has a long history of that; The Revols, Perth County Conspiracy, and those that went on to be part of The Band. There's a significant history and development of that music within this community. So, it's wonderful to bring that to the forefront, and have people recognize not only these independent artists, or artists that are of that genre, and of the area, and to support it here in Stratford is fantastic."

Several musicians in the lineup have performed in Stratford before, including

Zachary Lucky and three artists who appeared in the acclaimed Songs of Nick Drake concert last year. Payne said after that show he encouraged fellow performers to reach out if they ever wanted to put together another concert in Stratford.

"I got contacted by Kevin (Kane) from Grapes of Wrath, Suzie (Ungerleider) and Michelle Willis and everything just landed in my lap. We were able to make all the dates work with the venues and I thought then, let's make this something special," Payne said. "I've had this idea, this roots series, and I've had the Roots Ramble in my sights for about three years, so I thought this was a great opportunity to kick it off. I got a hold of Tim and so we are doing this together."

The intended audience is as varied as the lineup, Payne said, from youth through to seniors — anyone who loves music and stories about it.

The first concert, Oct. 11 at Revival House, is a triple bill featuring The Stevie T Band, Barry James Payne & String Bone, and Ginger St. James.

"The one I'm really looking forward to is Michelle Willis, who comes to Stratford after working with David Crosby (formerly of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) for 10 years. She was David Crosby's right-hand person musically; she was his musical director, his bandmate and his co-writer. We're talking about someone who is working at the top of the food chain musically. And she's coming here to play her music and tell her stories," Payne said.

The second concert, Oct. 17 at Revival House, features The Grapes of Wrath acoustic duo with original members Kevin Kane and Tom Hooper. On Oct. 24, Suzie Ungerleider (formerly Oh Susanna) will perform an intimate evening at The Bunker Performance Lounge and Café for a record release and birthday concert. On Nov. 21, Michelle Willis and Lori Cullen will take the stage at Revival House. The final concert is Dec. 5 at The Bunker, featuring Zachary Lucky with Barry James Payne.

"We were super fortunate to have had the Songs of Nick Drake experience here," said Harrison. "There's a lot of people who brought incredible talent. The quality and presentation that they had was a wonderful preview of the kind of talent that wants to come to Stratford and believes in Stratford and what it has to offer for music and musicians. So, I'm thrilled that they are coming."

For showtimes and tickets, visit onrushfestival.ca or stringbone.ca

STRATFORD TIMES

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Strickland's Toyota
Fix Auto
Stratford KIA
Expressway Ford
McDonald's - Erie St
Tim Hortons - Erie St
Stratford Mazda
7-Eleven - Erie St
Joe's Diner
The Urban Barber
Erie Convenience
Mr. Sub
Balzacs Coffee
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario
New Orleans Pizza

Zehrs
Food Basics
Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier
Festival Marketplace
Stratford Nissan
Stratford Subaru
Stratford Honda
Quality Festival Inn
McDonald's - Ontario St.
Papa John's
Fore Everyone Golf
WalMart
Stratford Motor Products
A&W
Toner & Ink Shop
Rutherford Funeral Home

Athens Greek Restaurant
Stratford Legion
Gino's Pizza
Rosso's
Buzz Stop
Union Barber
Mornington Variety
Split Rail
Stratford Rotary Complex
Agriplex
No Frills
Cozyn's
Sebringville Esso
Dave's Diner - Sebringville
Stratford-Perth Museum
Sobey's

Pick Up Locations

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron
Circle K - Huron
West End Pharmacy
Tim Hortons - Huron
Stratford Hospital
Video 99 - Erie St
Jenny Trout
Stratford Medical Pharmacy
Stratford Chamber of Commerce
A.N.A.F.
Stratford Hyundai
Daisy Mart
Foodland
Stratford Variety
Brch & Wyn
Stratford Place

Stratford Chefs School
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Creative arts take flight at Falstaff Family Centre

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Flight Studio is now offering creative arts classes for children of all ages from its new year-round home in Room 1D at the Falstaff Family Centre.

The studio aims to bring extracurricular programming to Stratford and surrounding communities, with classes in visual art, music, voice and drama.

Founder and director Michelle Giroux said the idea took shape when her daughter began showing signs of creativity at home.

"My husband and I are both actors with the festival, and we've always had this deep appreciation for the town and everything it has to offer," she said. "As [my daughter] started to get older, and I watched her begin to express herself at home through visual art, I thought, okay, we need to support her in these efforts and curiosity."

"Our lives have felt so rich culturally here in Stratford, and there was this kind of transfer, I think, with our daughter, where I assumed or felt that the same was true for her," she said. "But surprisingly, in our town, we have some great offerings, but not a lot. And so this idea began to ruminate in my head."

Through community connections, Giroux assembled a team of Stratford-based professionals to teach and guide children

on their creative journeys.

Programs currently run throughout the week, including Art Mondays with multidisciplinary artist Kellen Hatanaka, Flight Choir on Tuesdays with Brooke Dufton, music classes on Wednesdays with musician Eric Lundgren, and drama on Thursdays with educator Jane Czarny.

Each day, the classroom is reconfigured to meet the needs of each one of the programs offered.

"We really transform the space every day and facilitate this instruction almost like a stage," said Giroux. "It's cool that each day the room has a very different feel—for visual art, the chairs are cleared, the kids are on the floor, and we're going to get messy, whereas choir is very structured."

Flight Studio also offers Pre-school-Kinder Saturdays, creative arts classes designed for children aged two to six. These sessions encourage self-expression through art, music, movement and storytelling while helping young children build confidence and social skills.

While the current focus is on grade school-aged children, Giroux hopes to expand programming to reach teens and adults in the future.

"We aim to grow slowly and with intention," she said.

Registration forms are available at www.flightstudio.ca



Flight Studio owner and director, Michelle Giroux offering artistic classes for kids in Stratford

(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

Stratford artists mix poetry, rap and dance in *Spoken Groove*, part of Stratford Writers' Festival

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A one-of-kind performance created by three talented Stratford artists will hit the stage at Here For Now Theatre Sept. 26 and 27, blending poetry, rap and dance as part of the Stratford Writers Festival.

Spoken Groove is described as a powerful, genre-blurring performance that weaves spoken word, dance and rap into one unified artistic experience. The performances flow between spoken-word poet Heidi Sander and dancer Deltin Sejour. Whether passed gesture by gesture at the poem's close, or exchanged mid-verse in a fluid back-and-forth, the story moves between voice and form, as if the two are speaking in a shared, unspoken language. Finally, clean rapper Karim Rushdy reshapes the poem through flow, lyric and rhythm.

"I love collaborating with other artists and just having an intersection with the arts, so I wanted to do something unique and different this time," Sander said. "I feel that there's such a connection between poetry and spoken-word rap, so I reached out to Karim to see if he was interested; I love the fact that he does clean rap, so it's very much community focused, which is



Stratford rapper Karim Rushdy, poet Heidi Sander and dancer Deltin Sejour will perform in *Spoken Groove* at the Here For Now Theatre Sept. 26 and 27, blending poetry, rap and dance as part of the Stratford Writers Festival. (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

what his work is all about, and mine is as well.

"... He was interested and then I wanted to incorporate dance because I love dance. Karim put me in touch with Deltin and it's been incredible."

While Sander had a collection of poems and ideas she had been considering for this show already in mind, the process of developing *Spoken Groove* was very much a collaborative one, as each artist reframed those ideas and concepts from their own personal and artistic perspectives.

"At first, I was kind of shocked. I'm not going to rewrite somebody else's work. It

kind of felt maybe wrong," Rushdy said. "But then Heidi was so open and welcoming and kept saying, 'No, no, let's do it. Make it yours.' So, I felt really invited to bring what I do, and I said let's have a session together in my studio, so that's what we did. We did a few of those where we actually created pieces of music together because that's my creative process — I write to music — and so we created something together. It was super fun and she was there guiding it, saying, 'Yeah, I feel like that reflects the spirit of what my original poem is about.'"

Meanwhile, Sejour immersed himself in the words, lyrics and music being created

to develop his own interpretation through movement. Ultimately, the show the trio developed is themed around the oneness of humanity, how we're all connected and how each individual plays a part in that.

"The process that's underneath all of this is that all three of us who are working on this interdisciplinary work are really interested in and really curious about community and how art has a relationship with community," Sejour said. "That's sort of underneath a lot of the work and it's also part of why we can be so collaborative as a team because it's sort of something that binds us together."

"... I think it's also really beautiful that the work is a very diverse work in the sense that it combines all of these different art forms, but also the people presenting are diverse. We have a woman, we have a Black person, we have an Egyptian, and I think to underly the overarching idea of unity, we're all different just in the way that we look, and I think that would be very inspiring for an audience."

Though *Spoken Groove* is already sold out for its Sept. 26 performance, tickets are still available for the Sept. 27 show. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit stratfordwritersfestival.com/event/spoken-groove/.

Chinese art exhibition opens at Stratford Public Library

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Stratford Public Library is hosting a Chinese art exhibition featuring the work of artist Yanni Chen from Sept. 12 to Oct. 25.

Chen, who moved to Canada from China in 2017, has worked as an art educator for more than 30 years and has held numerous exhibitions in China. This marks her first exhibition in Canada.

In addition to Chen's own pieces, the show includes two works by her late mother, a respected Chinese artist. The paintings, completed in 1979 and 1994, reflect the depth and tradition of Chinese painting and highlight the artistic legacy passed down through generations.

Chen studied art at the University of Toronto after moving to Canada and said the transition allowed her to devote more time to her own creative work.

"My mother would come and look at my art and explain how to improve," Chen said through her translator, Louise Liu. "I would learn to be better by watching her and by her telling me what to focus on."

She paints in a variety of mediums including traditional Chinese, gouache, coloured lead, acrylic and a style known as zentangle art — a blend of structures and patterns created with curves and lines.

"Through painting in different mediums and traditions, I've tried to capture the flowers' brilliance and elegance on canvas," Chen said. "This exhibition features a rich and diverse collection of

works with fresh and distinctive themes."

Chen said she is now exploring ways to merge Eastern traditions with modern Western styles in her art.

Liu praised Chen's dedication to her craft during the opening reception last Friday.

"Despite language barriers and the challenges of presenting her work in this

community, she has shown incredible courage and determination," Liu said. "Her paintings speak a universal language, one that transcends words and touches the heart."

Chen thanked the Stratford Public Library for hosting the exhibition.

The public is invited to view the display in the upstairs auditorium until Oct. 25.



Left: Artist Yanni Chen speaks with attendees about her work during the opening reception of her Chinese art exhibition at the Stratford Public Library on Sept. 12. (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Above: Yanni Chen stands beside her artwork, which depicts various locations across Stratford, as part of her exhibition running at the Stratford Public Library until Oct. 25.

Perth-Waterloo annual Holstein show draws thousands to Stratford's Rotary Complex

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

"One of the best-quality Holstein shows that Stratford has hosted for years."

Those were the comments circulating around the RBC Arena at the Friday night Holstein show, hosted by the Perth-Waterloo Holstein Breeders along with the Stratford and District Agricultural Society.

The number of cattle shown was well up over last year. More than 180 head were shown in front of judge Brian Carscadden (Blondin Sires) from Guelph, Ont.

Up until three years ago, the show was closed to Holstein breeders in Perth and Waterloo counties, but since then, organizers opened the show to other counties. It has now become one of the highest-quality county Holstein shows in the province.

With a very large heifer show, Canhope Holsteins from Palmerston were named the owners of the junior champion, Canhope Major Blissful, with reserve going to Parallel Genetics of Mildmay with Fraeland Alpha Precious.

By the end of the show, Oxford County's Charlie and Joanne Lupton family, on the Embro Road from the southern edge of Fairview, south of Stratford, claimed

both the grand and reserve grand championship banners with their four-year-old Upridge Alleyoop Freezie and their reserve champion red aged cow, Sweetview Avalanche Mitsou.

Honourable mention champion was the spring two-year-old, Carldot Delta Lambda Lilah, from the Perth County farm of Carldot Holsteins for Larry Krantz in South Easthope Township.



With the Champion and Reserve Grand Champion are from L- associate judge, Jenn Carlton, Tyler Canning with reserve grand champion Sweetview Avalanche Mitsou, and Michael Lupton with the Grand Champion, Up Ridge Alleyoop Freezie, alongside judge Brian Carscadden.



From Right- are the working udders of the Grand, Reserve and Honourable Mention Champions of this year's invitational Perth-Waterloo Holstein Show in Stratford. (GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Opinions

Web-crawling in the meadow



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

What picture does the word GARDEN bring to mind? Some gardens are planted for beauty, some for pollinators, some for food, some for cut flowers, and some for ease of care.

My garden is a meadow. It's planted for habitat. Habitats are the home and survival range of life forms. Just as a fox needs not only a den, but also hunting, mating, and travel range to survive. The plants in my garden don't need a hunting range, but they do provide habitat.

For whom? Ah, this is the foundation of my meadow. My garden

is designed to provide habitat for creatures of all kinds whose lives are so important to our own. A healthy environment with strong biodiversity is one of our best protections against climate change. How many different life forms are there? We can only estimate, based on the best science we have available. In 2023, J. Wiens estimated 8.75 million life forms. Of that, we have only described 1.2 million of those life forms.

Those numbers tell us how many forms of biodiversity share the planet with us. (The World Health Organization defines biodiversity as the variability among living organisms from all sources, which underpins all life on Earth [2025]).

My meadow celebrates habitat to support biodiversity! How did that happen? Slowly, as I learned more and more. I arrived in Stratford 26 years ago, fresh from a farm, where our organic vegetable garden was huge. I didn't know the first thing about flowers. I didn't know about sun/shade, about different times of blooming, or about soil (turns out Stratford soil is notoriously

alkaline). I learned in a hurry, with the help of so many wonderful people! And I learned by watching. I watched the insects that came to my garden, and I watched the birds, the toads, the squirrels, the rabbits, the raccoons that stopped by, the skunks that passed through, and I read—tons!

Gradually my garden became a meadow. I learned that there are millions of insects, some needing plants, some needing to break down dead animals and plants, and some needing other insects as prey (needing aphids, e.g.). I learned the wisdom of the plants, how to plant them in batches (if I could afford to), and I learned to make sure that new plants are watered. I only planted native plants that would be useful to some other species, as a host plant for butterflies and moths, or a food source for pollinators, or a seed source for birds. And once I planted them, I retreated. They would find the best spot in my garden for themselves. Beautiful plants (wild bergamot, e.g.) have found homes far from where I initially planted them. We're happy

right here, thank you. :)

Do I weed? Yes. The weeds I remove are invasive or exotic plants—plants that might look pretty, but are of no use to other species, and will compete with native plants. The plants I keep are almost all native—even a gem called "clearweed." It turns out clearweed is a host plant for four butterflies, and a wonderful ground cover—shelter for toads and soil. I also occasionally thin out the goldenrod—which we know is NOT an allergen—but RAGWEED ABSOLUTELY IS—and blooms at the same time! Goldenrod is a hugely important habitat plant for pollinators.

To support biodiversity, I plant as many different kinds of native plants as I can find and/or afford. After all—it's a meadow—and meadows are rich in biodiversity. That meadow absorbs carbon, and the biodiversity it supports helps all life survive—including us.

A statement in the Wiens paper: Global biodiversity is now facing numerous threats. The most important ones may be habitat destruction and overexploita-

tion, and climate change can threaten even protected species in well-preserved habitats. Soon, we may not be estimating how many species there are on Earth. We will be estimating how many there were.

Help that. Nurture a meadow.

UPDATES:

1. **Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere** as of 15 September, 2025: 426.33 ppm. Safe level, 350 ppm passed in 1990.

2. Autumn is a fantastic time to plant native plants, shrubs and trees! Don't miss the MASTER GARDENERS PLANT SALE ON SATURDAY, September 27th, 9-11AM, at Avondale Church.

3. Good read: Serviceberry, by Robin Wall Kimmerer - an alternative in nature to a society based on constant consumption in a world that has limits.

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

Opinions

Forget lifespan — It's time to focus on joyspan



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

We humans are obsessed with longevity. Headlines scream about “adding years to our lives” through diets, exercise routines, supplements and cutting-edge medical research.

We also hear a lot about healthspan, which are the years we live in relatively good health before illness or decline sets in. But maybe it's time we shift our focus to something even more radical: joyspan.

Joyspan is not about how long we live, or even how long we stay healthy. It's about how many years, or even moments, we spend truly feeling joy. After all,

what good is living to 90 if most of our days are dull, stressful or joyless?

The concept of joyspan asks us to measure our lives not just by the calendar but by the quality of our inner experience. It's a way of asking: How often do I feel wonder, connection, gratitude, laughter or purpose? And how can I increase those moments, even if I can't control everything else?

Imagine if, along with taking our blood pressure, our doctor asked us how much joy we experienced last week. Joy may seem subjective, but research in positive psychology shows that cultivating positive emotions has measurable effects on health, relationships and resilience. People who report frequent feelings of joy or awe have lower levels of stress hormones, better immune function and even faster recovery from illness.

In other words, joy isn't just a nice-to-have feeling. It's a powerful tool for extending the quality of life, regardless of its length.

One of the most liberating things about focusing on joyspan is that joy does not require dra-

matic life changes or large amounts of time. Psychologist Barbara Fredrickson, a leading researcher in positive emotions, has shown that tiny bursts of joy, like a genuine smile from a stranger, savouring a cup of coffee or stepping outside to feel the sun, can build up over time to create profound effects on mental well-being.

We don't need a perfect life to expand our joyspan. We just need to notice and nurture these moments. That might mean keeping a daily gratitude journal, intentionally slowing down to enjoy music or a walk, or reconnecting with hobbies that light us up.

Focusing on joyspan can also guide decision-making. When faced with big life choices — career changes, relationships, where to live — we often focus on money, status or security. But what if we asked instead, “Which choice will likely lead to more moments of joy?”

This question can clarify our priorities. Choosing the path of greater joy does not necessarily mean choosing the easiest or most comfortable option. Sometimes the work that brings us the

most joy is challenging and uncomfortable at first. But over the long run, it contributes to a richer, more meaningful life.

Another benefit of joyspan is its ripple effect. When we experience joy, we're more likely to spread it. Joyful people tend to smile more, listen better and engage more fully with those around them. Our joyspan becomes part of our community's joyspan.

This is particularly important in today's world, where stress, division and anxiety are rampant. By prioritizing joy, we're not just improving our own life, we're making our family, workplace and neighbourhood a little brighter.

Here are a few practices to increase our joyspan:

Joy Tracking – Spend one week noticing every moment of joy, no matter how small. Write them down before bed. This trains our brains to notice and appreciate joyful moments more easily.

Joyful Movement – Find a form of physical activity that feels playful instead of punishing. Dancing in our kitchen counts. So do walking with a friend and

throwing a ball with our dog.

Micro-Adventures – We should try to break up our routine with small, novel experiences. Visit a new park, cook a recipe we've never tried or take a different route to work. Joy often hides in the unexpected.

At the end of our lives, we rarely measure our worth in years lived. We measure it in moments that took our breath away, in laughter shared, in connections that mattered. By focusing on joyspan, we give ourselves permission to prioritize those moments now — not later, not when life is easier, not when we retire.

We may not be able to control how long we live or how healthy we stay, but we can choose to nurture joy. And that, perhaps, is the most meaningful way to extend life: not by adding more days, but by filling more days with delight.

So the next time we read an article promising to add 10 years to our life, take it with a grain of salt. Instead, we should ask ourselves: What can I do today to expand my joyspan? We might just find that those joyful moments, no matter how brief, are the ones that truly make life worth living.

Being Good Neighbours



BRUCE WHITAKER

Times Columnist

Since the onset of the Me Too movement, many of us have turned inward, safeguarding our loved ones and retreating into ourselves. It's a natural response—when faced with threats like pandemics, political conflicts, wars, or natural disasters, survival instincts often take over. But is this the best approach?

Recently, my partner and I welcomed two new neighbours into our community. We decided to greet them with a gift of cookies from the Outpost. The first neighbour opened the door with a puzzled expression, and since then, their curtains have remained drawn. The second neighbour didn't respond at all when we left cookies at their doorstep. Both encounters left us feeling chilly—were we wrong to reach out?

These experiences made me think about the true role of neighbours. Aren't we meant to be kind, compassionate, and welcoming? There is a delicate balance between fostering closeness and respecting personal space. We certainly didn't want to come across as intrusive, quite the opposite.

Even in places perceived as somewhat “cavalier,” like Paris, efforts are underway to cultivate

a greater sense of neighbourliness. The Paris Project aims to increase interactions from five to fifty daily, part of a broader movement to reclaim urban spaces by fostering close-knit communities based on mutual support and connection.

In Manhattan, a friend of mine hosts a monthly pizza party on his street—an old tradition started by a few senior residents who've lived there since the days of raising children. The rule is simple: serve basic pizzas, along with cookies or brownies. The goal is to keep it affordable and inclusive so everyone can join.

I'm not alone in grappling with what it means to be a good neighbour. A recent study shows that over the decades, fewer people are forming meaningful relationships with those nearby. In the 1970s, nearly one-third of citizens spent time with

their neighbours at least twice a week. Today, about the same proportion say they've had no interactions at all.

With that in mind, here are some researched tips for being a better neighbour:

Don't rush them

Give new neighbours time to settle in instead of overwhelming them immediately. (We admit, we might have failed this one.)

Be respectful

Keep your property tidy and avoid eye-sores. Respect boundaries. And avoid unannounced visits. (Again, lesson learned!)

Use notes

Notes are a neighbour's preferred language of love. Whether it's a concern, request, or invitation, write a note and place it on their door—never in their mailbox or on their car. It's almost certain to be read.

Not all neighbours need to

be friends

Identify a few key neighbours who can be your trusted allies—those who should know when you're away, can lend items, or check in on you.

Be proactive

If you're hosting a loud event, give neighbours a heads-up and invite them to contact you if they're bothered.

It's really about breaking down the barriers that prevent us from knowing one another. No matter where you live, or what your circumstances, there's really only one rule for being a good neighbour: be kind.

In the end, the Rolling Stones' song “Neighbours” offers timeless wisdom:

But neighbours

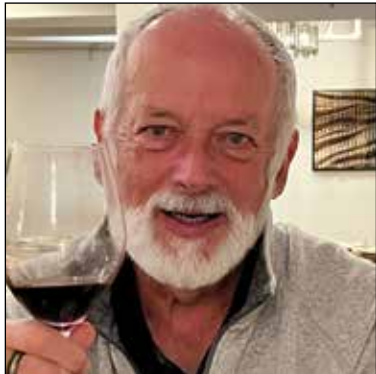
Do unto strangers

Do unto neighbours

What you do to yourself, yourself, yourself, yourself, yourself

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Unexpected delights in a "drive-through province"



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

The exact numbers are tough to authenticate, but the trend is very clear; a lot of Canadians are opting not to visit the United States and are choosing, instead, to travel within Canada.

For example, some statistics suggest that up to 30 per cent fewer Canadians visited the U.S. in the first months of 2025, while at least 10 per cent more are vacationing here at home.

If you are among those planning in-Canada vacations in the next year, you will not be disappointed. I've had the opportunity to travel in eight provinces in the last year and a bit, and I enjoyed every visit. And I especially appreciated my time spent in three of Canada's less-visited provinces.

It's probably no surprise to know that the most popular provinces for visitors are Ontario, Newfoundland, Québec, British Columbia and Nova Scotia, but there are three provinces that are seen as "drive-through destinations" – places to pass through on your way to something more interesting. I am referring to New Brunswick, Manitoba and Saskatch-



The unique "prairie links" topography at Dakota Dunes.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

ewan. Well, I have to say that if you are not stopping to explore these destinations, you're making a big mistake. Each of them holds amazing surprises for travellers, and each is worth a lengthy stay.

This week, I want to focus on something that was a complete revelation to me during my visit to Saskatchewan a couple of months ago because, as an avid if generally inconsistent golfer, taking a golf holiday in Saskatchewan would never have occurred to me.

Wrong.

I got the chance to play in three unique settings north of Saskatoon, and each offered a terrific golfing experience. With a small group of travel/golf writers, I played Dakota Dunes Golf Links on the Whitecap Unceded Dakota Territory; Cooke Municipal in Prince Albert; and the three nine-hole courses at Elk Ridge, described as "Saskatchewan's premier destination resort."

I also stayed at Dakota Dunes and Elk Ridge.

And I have to say, for any golfer planning a golfers' group getaway, an itinerary including these three courses would be a guaranteed hit with your golfing companions.

What makes this special is the three golf courses are entirely different, one from the other.

We started at Dakota Dunes. Its full name is "Dakota Dunes Golf Links," which may seem odd, since "links" courses are supposed to be beside the ocean and Saskatchewan is a fair distance from any salt water! But I think the name is appropriate – this is a "prairie links" course, with lots of sand, high-grass rough and plenty of challenges. It's also beautiful, presenting amazing scenes unlike anything you would find in Ontario, and I guarantee golfers will be pleasantly distracted by the prairie dogs, striped squirrels and unique flowering plants that are

some of the delights of the course.

And speaking of delights, our dinner at Dakota Dunes' Moose Woods Home Fire Grill was over-the-top amazing. The restaurant has a farm-to-table menu that features local ingredients; this being Saskatchewan, local ingredients include bison, elk, Bannock and more amazing tastes. We were presented with planks of roasted meats and vegetable, and I thought I had died and been transported to foodie heaven.

Our next golfing stop was Cooke Municipal. It's a lovely course, but for an Ontario golfer looking for something different, it was the least interesting of our choices simply because it is a beautifully care-for parkland style course that you might find at one of the finer courses in Ontario. That being said, it's in remarkable condition for a municipal course and I would recommend including it in your itinerary.

Last stop was Elk Ridge, where

we had the chance to play all three nines – and repeat one, if we chose. The Elk Ridge courses are in the heart of Saskatchewan's northern boreal forest and the course designers have taken full advantage of the breath-taking opportunities that landscape offered them. That landscape is home to lots of wildlife; we saw deer during our rounds and it's not rare to spot the elk for which the course is named.

Personally, I loved it. So much so that on day two, when it started to rain as we finished the first nine of the day, I opted to replay nine I had already played the day before while the others hustled off to have a beverage in a warm and dry restaurant. I got soaked, but then the sun came out and by the end of the game, I was as warm and dry as my better-refreshed friends.

In addition to the golf, a highlight of our visit to Elk Ridge was a seminar on creating and preparing cocktails – an opportunity offered (for a fee) to visitors to Elk Ridge. By the time we finished mixing, sampling and resampling our cocktails, it was probably a good thing I had skipped the earlier drinks.

So, if you love food, drink, scenery, wildlife and even golf, don't just drive through Saskatchewan. Stay and discover one of the best destinations our country has to offer.

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.



Dakota Dunes offers a unique experience for Ontario golfers.



The incredible selection of "local ingredients" at Dakota Dunes.



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BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Thursday Sept. 25 and Thursday Oct. 23

Legion 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford

Bring your friends out for a fun and tasty evening, supporting your local legion. No tickets needed, just show up! The cost is \$13 each or 2 for \$25. Take-out is available if preordered from Dave Hartney at 519-703-6544.

ROAST BEEF DINNER

Orange Lodge Harmony

Tuesday September 30th

3178 Perth Line 26, Perth East

\$30 roast beef dinner 5-7 p.m.

Call for tickets 519-274-0216

TROPHY X DREAM WEAVERS: STORYTELLING THAT TRANSFORMS US

Saturday, October 4; 3:00 - 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 5; 1- 2:30 p.m.

290 Downie St, Stratford Grand Trunk site — green space across from the bus station

Step into a circle of light and story. Trophy X Dream Weavers transforms Stratford's historic Grand Trunk site into a glowing village of ten intimate tents, each one home to a powerful tale of transformation, hope, and the dreams that shape who we are. This is a free, all-ages event.

Email: contact@provocation.ca

Website: www.provocation.ca/2025-events--stratford

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday, Oct. 6; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "Secrets of Successful Garden Design", Elizabeth Spedaliere, Owner of Blue Beech Design and Tri-County Master Gardener
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission

PROBUS CLUB OF STRATFORD WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

October 8, 2025 at 10:00 to noon

The Army, Navy, Air Force facility
151 Lorne Ave. E in Stratford

Hear guest speakers, explore new interests, take tours
Fun and Fellowship in Retirement

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY CIRCUIT BOOK FAIR

Saturday, Oct. 25; 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

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

Free Admission & Parking

Stop in and buy some stamps and meet fellow stamp collectors. About 8 participating stamp clubs.

Contact: Don Eaton dhfe@silomail.com

Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRE

Friday Oct. 17 and Friday Nov. 21.

Legion 804 Ontario St B1, Stratford

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

EARLY FALL SAVINGS WITH STRATFORD KIA'S PRE-OWNED DEALS

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\$17,995 OR **\$65/wk** + HST & lic
MILEAGE - 67,645 KM STOCK #: S26085A

2022 Hyundai Venue Trend



\$20,495 OR **\$74/wk** + HST & lic
MILEAGE - 82,570 KM STOCK #: P22516

2019 Mazda CX-5



\$20,995 OR **\$75/wk** + HST & lic
MILEAGE - 113,900 KM STOCK #: S26073AA

2020 Toyota Corolla LE



\$20,995 OR **\$75/wk** + HST & lic
MILEAGE - 96,164 KM STOCK #: S26046A

2021 Kia Seltos EX



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MILEAGE - 83,588 KM STOCK #: P22556

2022 Toyota Corolla LE



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LOW KMS - 67,200 KM STOCK #: P22488

2020 Honda Civic EX



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LOW KMS - 27,000 KM STOCK #: P22515

2022 Hyundai Elantra Preferred



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2022 Kia Soul GT-Line



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MILEAGE - 80,909 KM STOCK #: S26083A

2024 Kia Seltos EX



\$30,495 OR **\$109/wk** + HST & lic
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LOW KMS - 33,945 KM STOCK #: P22502

2023 Kia Telluride SX



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NAT-WK38

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Riddles

Why do trees hate going back to school in autumn?
Because they're easily stumped.

What did one autumn leaf say to the other?
"I'm falling for you!"

Why was the scarecrow promoted?
Because he was outstanding in his field.

What do you get when you drop a pumpkin?
Squash!

Why don't autumn leaves ever get in trouble?
They always fall in line.

What's a tree's least favorite month?
Sep-timber!

Why are pumpkins so good at sports?
Because they have a lot of squash.

What's the ratio of a pumpkin's circumference to its diameter?
Pumpkin π .

Why did the apple stop rolling down the hill?
Because it ran out of juice.

What's a scarecrow's favorite fruit?
Straw-berries.

Why did the leaf go to the doctor?
Because it was feeling a little green.

Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 31

Pet of the week



MAXIME

Maxime is a friendly and adorable girl looking for her fur-ever home. When she isn't curled up in the windowsill watching birds fly by, or taking a nap on the sunny carpet, Maxime enjoys hanging around with her humans and participating in playtime shenanigans. Maxime has tested positive for FIV, but that won't stop her from enjoying life just like any other cat. Because of this diagnosis, she will need to find a home where she is the only cat, or with another cat who is FIV+.

If you think Maxime could be your next kitty-companion, apply at kwsphumane.ca today!



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FALL DAYS

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

- ACORN
- APPLE
- AUTUMN
- BONFIRE
- CIDER
- CINNAMON
- CRISP
- FALL
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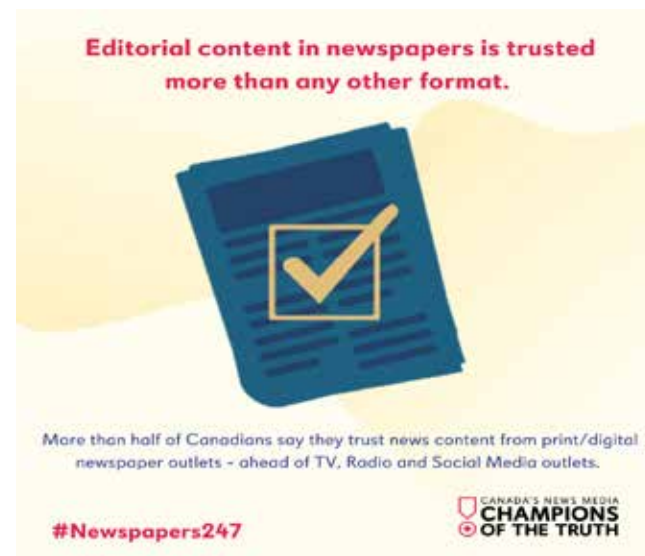
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- The Community Calendar is for non-profit organizations to promote their free admission events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as a phone number, email address or website.
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
 - Coming Events Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
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5	9	8	3	1	7	4	6	2
3	6	7	5	4	2	8	9	1
4	1	2	6	8	9	7	5	3

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7. George Orwell
8. 8min, 20sec
9. Omnivores
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