

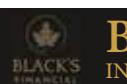
# St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1295

Thursday, January 8, 2026

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## St. Marys details response to days-long winter storm, significant weather declaration



### A SNOWY START TO THE NEW YEAR

(ALEX HAYWOOD PHOTO)

This shot of a snowy downtown St. Marys was taken on New Year's Eve, Dec. 31, during the town's significant weather event declaration, and shared to the St. Marys Life Facebook page.

## Missing for nine years: Stratford police offer \$10,000 reward for information about Derek Ritz

Rumours and hearsay plague investigators as they search for evidence

GALEN SIMMONS

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

Nine years after Derek Ritz was last seen at a home in Sebringville, in the Township of Perth South, at around 1 a.m. on Dec. 31, 2016, investigators with the Stratford Police Service are hoping to entice first-hand witnesses to come forward with new information that could close the City of Stratford's only cold case.

On Jan. 1, Stratford police announced it is of-

fering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the confirmed whereabouts of Ritz and the closure of this case, and/or the arrest and conviction of the person or people responsible. The city's police service officially took over the missing-persons investigation from Perth County OPP in April 2019, just over two years after Ritz, who was 51 at the time, was reported missing to OPP on Jan. 7, 2017.

"For me, the Stratford police and the (Strat-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

GALEN SIMMONS

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

A powerful mix of freezing rain, rain and persistent snowfall kept St. Marys road crews busy for the better part of a week beginning Dec. 26, 2025, prompting the town to declare a significant weather event on Dec. 29, 2025, as conditions worsened.

What began as heavy freezing rain early on Boxing Day quickly turned to rain as temperatures rose, loosening a layer of ice that had begun forming on local roads and sidewalks. Later that evening, the weather shifted again, with snow continuing to fall on the town and surrounding area for the next several days.

St. Marys director of public works Jed Kelly said staff were ready well before the storm's effects were fully felt.

"Patrols began at 2 a.m. to assess and address road conditions," Kelly said. "We were receiving updates from the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre warning of up to 50 millimetres of ice. Fortunately, temperatures rose through the day, helping break up much of the accumulation."

Despite the reprieve, the system that followed created ongoing challenges for winter operations staff. With snow falling steadily and drifting under strong winds, the town declared a significant weather event under Ontario's Minimum Maintenance Standards to acknowledge conditions that made it impossible to meet provincial road and sidewalk standards.

Kelly said the declaration serves two important purposes.

"First, it ensures the public and local businesses are aware when travel becomes hazardous," he said. "Even with a strong fleet and dedicated crews, weather can outpace what is safe. Second, it formally signals that due to extreme conditions, meeting the maintenance standards may not be possible."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 5



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# COMMUNITY

## Missing for nine years: Stratford police offer \$10,000 reward for information about Derek Ritz

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

ford police services) board, and the investigator with Please Bring Me Home, I don't think the case has ever really gone away," acting deputy police chief Mark Taylor said. "We've pushed and pushed and interviewed as many people as we possibly can. We've got lots of information, just not that final piece to close the case for us. I think this reward is just a reminder and maybe a little bit of an incentive for people to come forward with further information that benefits the case, benefits us and helps everyone in trying to close the case for us."

Since the Stratford police took over the search for Ritz, investigators have interviewed more than 100 potential witnesses and conducted exhaustive searches of properties in the area for evidence of what happened to Ritz on the night he disappeared.

Taylor said most of the information shared with investigators to this point has been rumours and hearsay, and investigators haven't been able to find any hard evidence that could close the case. The difficulty with the case, he said, has to do with that lack of physical evidence and first-hand accounts, with many potential witnesses providing investigators information they heard from friends or friends of friends.

"Right now, the difficulty is we don't know where he is," communications officer Const. Darren Fischer added. "I know that sounds really simple, but that's exactly what it is; being unable to find Mr. Ritz or anyone being able to confirm any possible location for him, as well, that can be corroborated."

While the investigation into Ritz's disappearance has faded from the public spotlight over the years, Shelly Smith, a friend of Ritz's, has worked diligently to keep the case front and centre with her awareness campaign and Facebook page, Justice For Ritz.

In addition to canvassing the city with flyers seeking in-



(PHOTO COURTESY OF STRATFORD POLICE SERVICE)

**Derek Ritz was 51 years old when he was reported missing on Jan. 7, 2017, seven days after he was last seen leaving a home in the area of Avonton Road in Sebringville on Dec. 31, 2016**

formation about Ritz's disappearance and speaking with media about the case and the need to solve it for nearly a decade, Smith also engaged Please Bring Me Home Canada, an organization that uses volunteers and private investigators to help police reunite missing persons with their families, to help with the Ritz case.

In 2025, Smith and Please Bring Me Home Canada pushed the Stratford police services board to offer the reward for information on Ritz's whereabouts, a notion Taylor said police and the board members agreed could be

helpful in solving the investigation.

"When the reward for Ritz finally became available – especially after nine long years – it meant far more than just money," Smith said. "For myself and Please Bring Me Home, the ones who have been fighting, searching, advocating and refusing to let that person be forgotten, it says Ritz matters and our fight matters."

"Families (of missing people) and advocates often feel like they are shouting into the void. A reward acknowledges that Ritz's case deserves attention, effort and resources – officially and publicly. Even after nearly a decade, hope doesn't disappear, but it has somewhat been buried under exhaustion and grief. A reward has relit that flame."

Smith says she and the investigator assigned to this case at Please Bring Me Home Canada refuse to let Ritz's case be forgotten. The Please Bring Me Home investigator has spoken with more than 60 people as part of their investigation, sharing all information they obtain with the Stratford Police Service.

From the perspective of the Stratford police, Taylor said investigators are appreciative of the efforts put in by the Please Bring Me Home investigator and Smith, both in keeping the case alive in the minds of area residents and in trying to find closure for Ritz and the people who care for him.

The \$10,000 reward offered by the Stratford Police Service will be available to anyone who provides information that results in the confirmed whereabouts of Ritz and the closure of this case, and/or the arrest and conviction of the person or people responsible. Anyone with information, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is urged to contact the Stratford Police Service.

All information can be directed to Det. Sgt. Mike Weyers at 519-271-4147 ext. 8184, or to Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.



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# COMMUNITY

## Stratford officers praised for life-saving actions during 2024 Bradshaw Drive shooting in Stratford

AMANDA NELSON

Independent Reporter

On Aug. 1, 2024, Stratford faced a rare and violent crisis as Stratford police received multiple 911 calls reporting gunshot victims and an active shooter on Bradshaw Drive in the city's north end.

Within minutes, six Stratford police officers arrived at the scene.

"In that moment of uncertainty and danger, six of our officers – constables Jeff Serf, Brady Simpson, Brent Poppe, Scott Parkinson, Amy Knechtel and Nick Feltz – responded without hesitation," said the Stratford Police Service's acting deputy chief, Mark Taylor.

"They rushed toward the threat knowing the risks and acted with courage and professionalism. Their decisive actions and life-saving measures that evening not only protected lives but exemplified the highest standards of policing."

Ricky Bilcke, 31, shot his neighbours, Jonathan Bennett, 36, and David Tokley, 43, with a high-powered rifle. He then shot Bennett's partner, Stephanie Irvine, with a shotgun before taking his own life.

Bilcke was pronounced dead at the scene. Bennett later died at Stratford General Hospital. Tokley and Irvine sustained serious injuries, were hospitalized and later released.

The incident marked Stratford's first homicide in nearly two decades.

"These officers demonstrated what it truly means to serve and protect," Taylor said. "They saved lives that day."

In recognition of the officers' actions, the Stratford Police Service applied for the Ontario Medal for Police Bravery, but

the application was unsuccessful.

"While we were informed in November 2025 that our application was not successful, that does not diminish the heroism displayed that night," Taylor said. "Their actions will forever stand as a testament to their commitment to this community."

Police also recognized the role of two communicators who received the initial 911 calls: Nikki Smidts and Heather Forsyth. Taylor said both quickly triaged calls to ensure officers were dispatched efficiently.

"They did an amazing job taking those 911 calls," he said. "So many calls came in, and they were able to prioritize the most critical information — where individuals were, what they were doing — and calmly dispatch officers to the scene."

Taylor noted the emotional toll the situation carried for dispatchers in a small police service.

"Our dispatchers have personal relationships with these officers. This is a small service, and this is like their second family," he said.

"These two dispatchers had to send officers into a situation where there was an active shooter, knowing they could be putting their friends at risk. That carries a huge emotional toll."

"On behalf of the Stratford Police Service and the citizens we serve, I want to express our deepest gratitude to constables Serf, Simpson, Poppe, Parkinson, Knechtel and Feltz, as well as communicators Smidts and Forsyth. Thank you for your dedication and unwavering resolve to keep our community safe."

### Bravo

We have 4 Bravos this week.

- 1) Bravo to the kind-hearted cashier at the Independent Grocery Store who gently rocked my grocery cart to soothe my newborn while I paid. That small act of care meant more than you know.
- 2) Bravo to the employee at Lyric Flowers for going above and beyond with her service for me recently. Thank you so much.
- 3) Bravo to Nancy Abra and the history keepers for advocating for the preservation of social and cultural heritage.
- 4) Bravo to the person who blew out our driveway with a four-foot blower Dec. 30 on Huron Street South. A big heartfelt thank you and for bringing in our garbage bins as well!

### Boo

We have no Boos this week.

\*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.

### Quote of the Week

**"We are going to run the country."**

**- U.S. President Donald Trump on Jan. 3, 2026 after U.S. forces removed Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro from office.**



Restoring small-town journalism, one community at a time!

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2026 is off to quite a start!

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others? Either email them to us at [info@stmarysindependent.com](mailto:info@stmarysindependent.com) with the title "Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519.284.0041 or drop by the office to let us know!



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# St. Marys details response to days-long winter storm, significant weather declaration

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The town's announcement on Dec. 29, 2025, noted that snow removal was having "little effect" as winds and ongoing accumulation continued to undo clearing efforts. Primary roads, hills and bridge decks remained the focus while residential streets and sidewalks took longer to reach.

The storm's duration over the New Year's period also brought the usual operational complications that accompany heavy snowfall. Kelly said equipment failures and stuck vehicles are unavoidable in prolonged storms.

"Transport trucks were unable to climb hills, and some sidewalk machines became immobilized or needed repairs," he said. "Our one-tonne sander truck even had a transmission failure, but we deployed an older unit to keep operations going."

Despite the timing, Kelly said the community was patient and supportive.

"We received very few complaints – in fact, more positive feedback than negative," he said. "Many of our winter operations staff had vacation days planned, and most have young families, but everyone reported for duty to complete the early morning passes. Their dedication made a tremendous difference."

Sidewalk clearing, often the final step before lifting a weather declaration, was slowed as machines had to switch from blades to blowers due to deep accumulation. Both sidewalk plows must complete their initial passes before the town can return to meeting provincial standards.

The declaration was lifted Jan. 1 after crews regained control of both roads and sidewalks.

Kelly credited not only staff but council's long-term investment in winter operations.

"We are grateful for the support and resources provided through the budget process," he said. "One cannot succeed without the other. I believe we have a very good winter service delivery model in place and are well positioned to manage future storm events."

Officers with the Stratford Police Service were also out in full force in hazardous conditions over the holidays, responding to stranded and stuck vehicles, and ensuring residents of St. Marys, Perth South and Stratford remained safe during the worst of the snow and ice.

"It's a stressful situation for everyone in the community, including the emergency services workers who are engaged in addressing those matters and attending calls

for service during that time," community resource and media relations officer Const. Darren Fischer said. "Roadways are slippery and snow-covered and icy, and it's a dangerous time to be travelling around on those roads, so I think we just have to be aware of that weather and be cautious ourselves along with passing on that message to others to be patient and careful while they're out travelling."

Fischer said public works staff in St. Marys, Perth South and Stratford worked closely with the police service, giving police an eight-to-10-hour heads up to ensure vehicles are not parked on the street where snow-clearing operations are planned to occur, making the job of keeping roadways clear easier for plow operators.

While Stratford police did not provide the number of collisions that occurred within the three municipalities during the worst of the holiday winter weather from Dec. 26, 2025, to Jan. 1 before press time on Tuesday, the local police service did say the only road closures during that time were short in duration and had to do with rescuing stuck vehicles and stranded drivers. Perth Line 26, for example, was closed for several hours Dec. 29, 2025, between Perth Road 113 Perth Road 111 as tow truck operators and emergency crews worked to remove multiple transport trucks that had become stuck and were blocking the road.

Perth County OPP, meanwhile, told the Independent there were 62 collisions across the county, excluding the Stratford Police Service's jurisdiction in Perth South, in that same time period.

OPP closed a number of roads in Perth County due to blowing and accumulating snow between Dec. 29, 2025, and Jan. 1 with all roads in the county reopened by Jan. 2. Closed roads between Dec. 30 and 31 included Highway 23 from both Highway 7 to Mitchell and Mitchell to Palmerston; Perth Line 33 from Perth Road 107 to Perth-Oxford Road; Perth Road 107 from Perth Line 56 to Perth Line 43; Perth Road 131 from Perth Line 55 to Perth Line 61; and Wilmot/Easthope Road from Highway 7/8 to Punkeydoodles Corners.

"The decision to close a road is not taken lightly," regional media relations coordinator for the OPP West Region Derek Rogers told the Independent. "Road closures may have significant impact on personal or commercial traffic. Public safety and officer safety are the main considerations when deciding to close a road."

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## STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



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### ZONING BY-LAW OPEN HOUSE

January 28 | 4 - 8 PM | MOC

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### CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH WORKER

January 17 | 10 AM - 12 PM | Snapping Turtle

Drop-in and chat with Community Outreach Worker Jade Orquin and enjoy a free hot beverage. Learn about local support services, financial aid, and how to access resources in St. Marys.

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### WARMING CENTRES

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If you or someone you know needs assistance, please reach out to the Community Outreach Worker at 226-261-0098 or email [communityoutreach@town.stmarys.on.ca](mailto:communityoutreach@town.stmarys.on.ca).



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## Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Elton Baker who just celebrated his 80th birthday. Elton was born at St. Joe's hospital in London. He grew up on his family farm on Baseline Road near concession 7 & 11. He was married to his first wife for 46 years. Elton was remarried to Sharon and the two have been happily married for over 10 years. Between them they have six children, 13 grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Over his life Elton has farmed, worked at Motor Sales, WG Young Funeral Home and with his son at Simplistic Lines.

He loves fixing up and restoring old cars.

If you would like to nominate someone for Senior of the Week, contact us at 519.284.0041 or [info@stmarysindependent.com](mailto:info@stmarysindependent.com).

## WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

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

This week's answers are found on pg. 31

# Next Generation 911 now live for St. Marys through Owen Sound emergency centre

## ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The St. Marys Fire Department has taken a major step toward modernizing emergency response with the launch of Next Generation 911 through the Owen Sound Emergency Communications Centre.

The system went live last month and marks a significant upgrade to the way 911 calls are delivered, processed and routed for residents of St. Marys.

While dialing 911 remains the same for callers, the technology behind the scenes has undergone a fundamental shift. The legacy analog network that has supported Canada's emergency calls for decades is being phased out nationwide. It is being replaced with a digital, fibre-based system designed to improve reliability, accuracy and the long-term flexibility needed to support new forms of emergency communication.

For St. Marys, the transition means emergency calls will now be handled on infrastructure capable of providing more precise location information, enhanced cybersecurity protections and strengthened backup systems. It also lays the groundwork for future capabilities such as real-time text messaging, photo and video transmission and other digital tools currently under development.

Fire Chief Phil West said the change represents a "major advancement in how emergency services are delivered to our community."

"This modernized system strengthens reliability, improves the quality of information available to first responders and helps ensure faster, more effective responses when residents need help most," West said in a press release. "We appreciate the collaborative efforts and investments that have made this milestone possible and look forward to the enhanced level of service it brings to St. Marys and communities across Ontario."

The rollout is part of a national transition mandated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), which requires all service providers and primary public safety answering points to be fully converted to Next Generation 911 by March 2027.

The Owen Sound Police Service, which operates the communications centre serving St. Marys and several oth-

er municipalities, has spent the past five years preparing for the shift. That work has included upgrades at its primary and backup answering points, technology replacements, troubleshooting engineering challenges with networks, participation in national testing trials and the development of a host model that allows smaller agencies to connect to the system cost-effectively.

Suzanne Bell-Matheson, director of corporate services at the Owen Sound Emergency Communications Centre, said callers may not notice much difference on the surface, but the benefits are already being felt operationally.

"Most residents will not notice any major changes right now when they call 911," Bell-Matheson said. "Calling 911 still works the same way as it did yesterday; you dial the same number, speak with a call-taker, provide your location and describe your emergency. What they may notice is faster routing and fewer transfers, better location accuracy and better call stability as NG911 networks are more resilient."

The new system relies on advanced geolocation using GPS, WiFi and device-based hybrid positioning, rather than depending only on cell-tower triangulation. Calls are routed based on precise geographic coordinates, reducing delays and minimizing misrouted calls in border areas. The Ontario government has invested more than \$3.1 million since 2022 to support the transition.

Owen Sound police Chief Craig Ambrose said the launch reflects thousands of hours of work by technical staff, communicators and partner agencies.

"This transition allows us to keep evolving and improving services for our communicators, police officers and other emergency responders, and most importantly, to the people we serve in Owen Sound and in communities all across Ontario," Ambrose said.

Work continues nationally on future capabilities, including how digital files such as photos and video will be transmitted to call centres and first responders, along with privacy and data-ownership policies.

Residents are reminded that 911 is for emergencies only, including police, fire or medical assistance where immediate action is required. It is not an information line, and call-takers cannot provide weather updates, outage details or municipal contacts. *With files from Amanda Nelson*

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# Town hosting Conversations with the Community Outreach Worker event Jan. 17

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys is kicking off the new year with an event, Conversations with the Community Outreach Worker.

This event offers details and a chance for residents to ask questions about available community support resources. Taking place on Saturday, Jan. 17, attendees are welcome to drop in from 10 a.m. to noon at Snapping Turtle Coffee Roasters (145 Queen St. E). Everyone is welcome to attend and enjoy a complimentary hot beverage, courtesy of the town.

Attendees will have the chance to meet and chat with the town's community outreach worker, Jade Orquin, who earned her undergrad in sociology and political science and her master's in political science with a focus on policy development and analysis.

This event is part of the town's on-

going efforts to enhance community engagement and ensure residents are well-informed about the support systems that are available and how they can be accessed. Topics include the role of the community outreach worker, connections to life stability services, financial aid and other social services.

"This is an excellent opportunity to learn about all of the amazing support systems in place and how resources can be accessed," said Orquin in a press release. "We hope to answer questions and provide valuable information to those who need it."

For a list of social services available in St. Marys, visit the Stonetown Supports page on our website ([www.townofstmarys.com/stonetownsupports](http://www.townofstmarys.com/stonetownsupports)).

For more information on the Conversations with the Community Outreach Worker event, contact Orquin at 226-261-0098 or [communityoutreach@town.stmarys.on.ca](mailto:communityoutreach@town.stmarys.on.ca).

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# 2026 promises a new beginning for the St. Marys Farmers' Market

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

As another year came to a close, the St. Marys Farmers' Market board members shared their 2025 highlights and hopes for the new year with the St. Marys Independent.

The last day of the 2025 market was held at the Pyramid Recreation Centre on Dec. 20. Locals gathered to purchase from their regular vendors for the last time before the new year.

"We've had a lot of fun with our recent events and hope to see even more in the future," said Sean Brode, market board member. "We're also beginning to renew some of our past partnerships, including with the Lions and other local service groups."

Brode said he's had an immense love for the market since he started as a board member five years ago. He said the market had a great 2025 year, highlighting the Apple Pie Day, which saw good support from the community.

Board member and Breadtopia vendor

Simon Fraser said the stable weather brought lots of customers to Milt Dunnell Field over the spring and summer months. Fraser joined as a vendor in 2012 and specializes in making sourdough, croissants, granola and cinnamon rolls. He joined the board a year later to become directly involved with executive decision making.

"The Soup Day was a great success with our customers, and all the ingredients were sourced right here from our vendors," said Fraser. "Some of our longtime vendors are still with us, but we've also welcomed many new ones. We're always working to recruit and increase vendor variety, and that's one of our main goals for the new year."

"We had hot food available at almost every market, which was fantastic," added Melody Arnhold, market board member and Forest Hill Orchard vendor. "I'm usually up early, so it was nice to be able to grab a hot meal from our vendors. It really added to the atmosphere and made the mornings more enjoyable."

Market board member Ann Slater



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

St. Marys Farmers' Market board members Sean Brode, Simone Fraser, Ann Slater and Melody Arnhold.

hopes to bring in more young farmer vendors, noting current vendors are starting to age out of the game.

"We had some great events in 2025 that brought a lot of excitement to the market. We really appreciate our customers

who come out rain or shine to support us," said Slater. "We have a few pop-ups planned early in the new year, but we're especially looking forward to being back outside in the spring."



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# A very merry Ukrainian Christmas Banquet



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Frank St. Germain, Santa, Don Van Galen and John Stevens played the song, "Home St. Marys," and had some of our Ukrainian residents on stage to help sing along.

## NATALIYA SHYSHKIVSKA

Contributed Article

The Ukrainian Christmas Banquet and Charity concert was a marvelous feast filled with delectable Ukrainian food lovingly prepared by me, Nataliia Shyshkivska, owner of De Varenyk Fine Foods, and my family. However, this was an event with a story.

This fall, my family learned that our friends needed help. Olya and Alexey Pakhomenko live in Lublin, Poland, having moved there from Melitopol, Ukraine (now occupied territory), to help their son, Stepan, who has cerebral palsy. We studied together at university in Melitopol for five years, living in adjacent dorm rooms.

They have a beautiful family. In Lublin, Alexey works in a factory, and Olya cooks Ukrainian food to order from home while taking care of Stepan. They also have an older daughter, Yulia, who

helps her parents with Stepan and is studying at university.

Several years ago, Stepan had surgery for his cerebral palsy in Poland, but it was unsuccessful. They have now found a specialist in Athens, Greece. The surgery costs approximately \$39,000, not including the long rehabilitation that follows. This is a significant sum for this family, and when we saw sluggish fundraising, we decided to help them ourselves.

I suggested holding a Christmas party at the St. Marys United Church featuring Ukrainian food. My family immediately supported me. The children offered to perform. Alina offered a circus act and Vasilissa offered to sell her hand-drawn cards and sing a song. As we were preparing to make this idea a reality, my Ukrainian and Canadian friends joined me and offered their help, and I am very grateful to them all!

The banquet and charity concert took

place on Dec. 22. About 150 people from various towns across our region came to support us. We managed to raise \$2,500, which was sent to the mother the next day. She cried with joy, unable to believe that thousands of kilometres away in faraway Canada, in a small town, there were such kind people who had gathered to help her little son.

I would like to send a huge thank-you to everyone who was with us, and to those who couldn't come but also donated. These include the United Church administration, John Stevens, Robert and Leslie Edney, Barbara Dan-Prosser, Jan Mishkevich, Priya Pickle, Anastasia Vecherenko, Vasylisa Shyshkivska, Larry Hebbert, Alina Shyshkivska, Frank St. Germain, and the jewel of the evening, the inimitable Loreena McKennitt, providing the perfect culmination to the event.

It was an unforgettable, warm evening. The unity and love of the community in



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stepan Pakhomenko lives with Cerebral Palsy and is awaiting surgery that is to take place in Greece. The Shyshkivska family, who live in St. Marys, held a fundraising concert on Dec. 22 to help out their Ukrainian friends with the very expensive costs for Stepan's surgery.

our cozy little town was palpable in the hall. When Frank St. Germain played the song, "Home St. Marys," not just the Ukrainians but half the audience cried.

Together, we brought Stepan's cherished dream of walking and living without severe spasms and pain closer to reality.

My family and our food business, De Varenyk, wish everyone a Happy New Year, one full of peace, health and warmth in the hearts of each of you!

The fundraising is still ongoing. If anyone wants to help this child, information is available on my Shyshkivska Nataly Facebook page, on the De Varenyk Facebook page, or by emailing me at natysik\_nn@icloud.com and I'll send you a link to the official fundraising website.

The Pakhomenko family and my family thanks everyone for their tremendous help and support. We believe in miracles! You are welcome to join us.



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Organizer Nataliia Shyshkivska takes a break from her busy night to pose for a photo with Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma.



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Stratford singer-songwriter Loreena McKennitt finished the night with her incredible musical vocals that left the audience in awe.

# The Salvation Army's 2025 year comes to a close and reopens with new hopes and growth for 2026

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

The Salvation Army Stratford- St. Marys Regional Community Ministries finished off a high-demand year with learning opportunities for the next generation.

The local Girl Guides visited The St. Marys Salvation Army Foodbank on Dec. 16 to help sort food and give back to their community.

"Community service is an important part of our mandate," said Gwyneth Hall, Girl Guide leader. "This provides a great opportunity for the girls to learn about local needs and see firsthand how we work to support the community. It also gives them experiences and opportunities they might not otherwise have."

Community and family services manager Jennifer Morris said the Girl Guide visits hold a special place in her heart. She gets joy from watching young kids feel like they're making a difference in the community.

"My hope is for them to know that what they do with The Salvation Army makes a difference," said Morris. "They're building and learning skills that will serve them in the future, and I hope that this experience makes a positive impact on them as well."

Morris said the biggest accomplishment for this year was the efforts made by staff and volunteers to meet the increased demand from the community. She also made special mention of the Salvation Army's community partners, which help ensure the team did not fall behind in service delivery expectations.

The St. Marys Christmas Hamper handouts saw 121 hampers go to support community households. A total of 2,637 pounds of food were collected from food drives stationed at Your Independent Grocer, Foodland and at Milt Dunnell Park during the Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan.

The final number of donations received from community donors and the Christmas Kettle Campaign is to be announced at the end of the month. As of Dec. 20, the Kettle Campaign brought in \$47,127.65, and \$64,293.13



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Jennifer Morris, community and family services manager at The Salvation Army Food Bank.

was brought in from community donors. From Stratford, St. Marys, and Mitchell, Morris said that the goal is to raise \$385,000 collectively.

A volunteer appreciation event will be held at the end of the month to celebrate this year's success and the work of volunteers.

"Going into the new year, we're looking forward to building new community partnerships so we can expand our operations for new programs that complement the ones that we currently provide," said Morris. "We want to continue serving people to the best of our abilities."

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# Professional dance teacher to host classes at the Pyramid Recreation Centre

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Hilda Lopez, a professional dancer, choreographer and dance teacher, is offering dance classes at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC) as of Jan. 8.

Lopez, who has been dancing since she was a child, was professionally trained in Cuba in contemporary dance and Cuban folkloric dance. Her love for dance has been a passion in her life, and she is looking forward to sharing this devotion for the art of dance with the community.

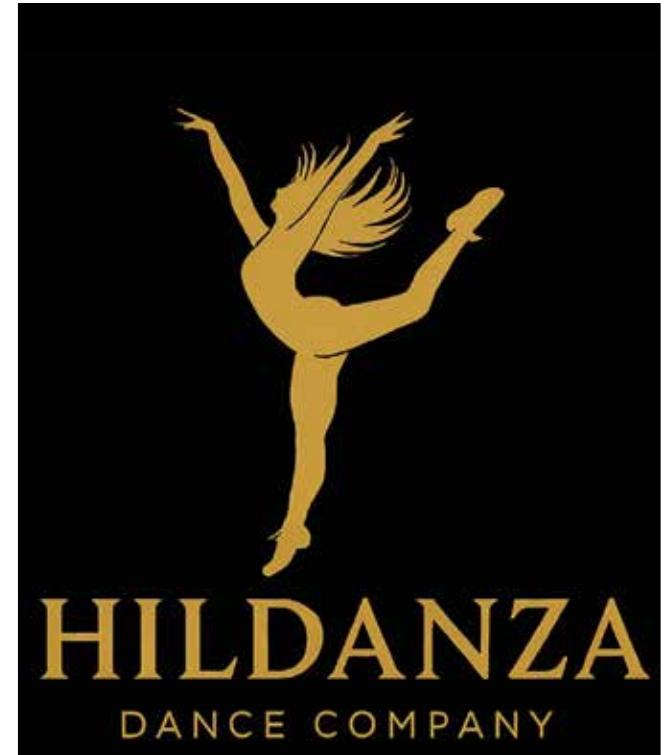
Lopez said being a mother has helped bring responsibility, patience and understanding to her classes, especially when working with children. She loves watching children grow in their confidence and discover the joy of dance.

There are classes available to both children and adults. For children, the classes include technique, rhythm, coordination, discipline and expression. Lopez teaches Latin rhythms but also modern styles like K-pop that is suitable to the children's ages and skill levels, bringing fun, confidence and development which leads to a love of dance.

Adults will learn Latin rhythms such as salsa, rumba and bachata with others being introduced combining technique, joy of movement, skill improvement all while being in a fun environment.

Lopez says her teaching philosophy is to support student growth and ensuring her students enjoy the process and feel proud of their progress. She plans to have a small show so families and participants can see results and celebrate their achievements.

Lopez hopes to share her professionalism and heart-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Hilda Lopez, certified dance instructor is offering dance classes at the Pyramid Recreation Centre on Thursdays for both children and adults.

felt joy of dance to both adults and children in the community giving them the experience of joy, creativity and discipline that dance brings.

Lopez's business is called HILDANZA Dance Company and classes will be held on Thursdays. For more

information or to register, Lopez can be contacted through WhatsApp (+1 437-329-4809), her Facebook Page, HILDANZA, or by email at [hildalopezartistry@gmail.com](mailto:hildalopezartistry@gmail.com).

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## ZONING BY-LAW OPEN HOUSE

### DATE & TIME:

Wednesday, January 28, 2026 from 4:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.

### LOCATION:

Municipal Operations Centre  
408 James Street South, St. Marys, Ontario, N4X 1B6

### PURPOSE OF THE OPEN HOUSE:

The upcoming Open House will welcome residents, business owners, and all members of the community to share their feedback and learn more about the ongoing Zoning By-law Review. This drop-in event offers a chance to discover what the zoning update means for the town. This includes information on permitted building uses, building heights, distance from property lines, parking requirements, etc. Please note, no decisions regarding the Zoning By-law Review will be made at the January Open House; it's simply an opportunity to get informed and have your say.

### TOWN OF ST. MARYS ZONING BY-LAW REVIEW

The Town of St. Marys retained NPG Planning Solutions Inc. (NPG) to undertake a Zoning By-law Review. Under the Planning Act (R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13), local councils are required to amend their Zoning By-law to align with a new or updated Official Plan. St. Marys' updated Official Plan was approved by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) in October 2024.

The Town of St. Marys current Comprehensive Zoning By-law No. Z1-1997 was adopted by Council on March 11, 1997. Since the Official Plan has been approved, the Zoning By-law will need to be brought into conformity with the approved Official Plan.

### WHAT IS A ZONING BY-LAW

A Zoning By-law is a legal document outlining the set of regulations that determine how a piece of land can be used and developed. The Zoning By-law regulates the use of land and buildings; the located and setbacks of buildings and structures; the types of buildings permitted; lot sizes; heights; parking requirements; and performance standards such as landscaping requirements.

The Zoning By-law Review is a collaborative and coordinated process which will involve the preparation of a Technical Memorandum on By-law Issues, Technical Briefs, and the updated Zoning By-law and associated mapping, as well as the necessary public and stakeholder engagement. The project is intended to be completed by October 2026.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you'd like to learn more about the event or project, stay updated, request additional information, or be added to the project contact list, please reach out to the individual listed below:

Grant Brouwer  
Director of Building & Development  
Town of St. Marys  
408 James Street South, St. Marys, Ontario, N4X 1B6  
Phone: 519-284-2340 ext. 215  
Email: [gbrouwer@town.stmarys.on.ca](mailto:gbrouwer@town.stmarys.on.ca)

# Predictions for 2026

## STEWART GRANT

Independent Publisher

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

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

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

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

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

1. Despite Trump's comments to the contrary at his Jan. 3 press conference, public pressure within Venezuela will sway the American president to eventually support Maria Corina Machado as the rightful leader of Venezuela.

2. A Democratic politician will call for the impeachment of Donald Trump for failing to gain necessary approvals for invading Venezuela, but this goes nowhere.

3. In Canada, the Liberal government will hold throughout 2026.

4. Pierre Poilievre will remain as Conservative leader following that party's leadership review in January.

5. Although there will be much speculation, China will not invade Taiwan in 2026.

6. A ceasefire will be negotiated in the Russia-Ukraine war.

7. Drone warfare, one of the staples of the Russia-Ukraine war, will sadly make its first high-profile appearance on this side of the ocean, with a notable strike sparking heavy interest in counter-drone defense systems.

8. American tariffs on Canadian-made products will decrease during the year.

9. Despite worries about an AI bubble, the stock markets will record another positive year.

10. More information will be released from the Epstein files, but no arrests of high-profile personalities will occur.

11. In sports, the Stanley Cup will stay south of the border, with the Colorado Avalanche earning the NHL's top prize.

12. Fans of the Toronto Maple Leafs will be spared the agony of losing in the first round when the team fails to make

the playoffs.

13. The Buffalo Bills make it to the Super Bowl but lose to the Seattle Seahawks.

14. Team Canada will edge Team USA in the Men's Olympic Hockey Finals.

15. France will win the 2026 World Cup.

16. Speculation will grow regarding Trump's physical and mental health as he turns 80 years old this year. He will survive the year, but with increased public focus on JD Vance as potentially needing to take over as U.S. president in 2027.

17. Late addition to the prediction list - Despite all his talk, surely Trump will not invade Greenland, Colombia, or Cuba in 2026, right??

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

# Looking back on 2025 with the St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxiliary

## JANIS FREAD

St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxiliary

St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxiliary members gathered at Hillstone Bar and Grill to celebrate the end of 2025 with a luncheon.

It was a busy year for the group, which organized bake sales, trunk shows at

Kingsway Lodge, a Heritage Festival booth, attendance at the farmers market and a Bingo. The crocheters among us made poppies to support the Legion's amazing poppy installation and also crocheted festive pumpkins to sell in the Boutique.

We had a spring raffle offering a beautiful handstitched quilt and tried two

new fundraisers – the wildly successful Stitch Market and a gift-wrapping service during the Downtown Merchants' Open House. Plus, we were able to extend the hours of the hospital Boutique from noon to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Thank you to everyone who has generously supported our fundraising events, with special thanks to Troyer's Spices,

Jackson's Guardian Pharmacy, the Ball family and St. Marys Independent for partnering with us in various ways in 2025.

For updates on fundraising events or to become a volunteer, follow the Auxiliary on Facebook at "The Boutique at St. Marys Memorial Hospital" or email [smmhauxiliary@gmail.com](mailto:smmhauxiliary@gmail.com).



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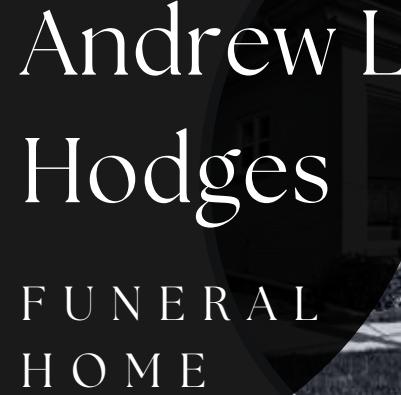
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# Station Gallery hosts year-end event celebrating art, music and poetry

ALEX HUNT

*Independent Reporter*

St. Marys Station Gallery held a Gallery Soirée on Dec. 19 to close out the year and celebrate all things art, music and poetry.

The evening featured an exhibit that included artwork by Paul Nicholson, music by classical guitarist Rob MacDonald and poetry readings by the St. Marys Poetry Circle.

“The soirée went really well,” said Duncan MacDonald. “Despite the less-than-ideal weather, it gave people a chance to come together and enjoy a warm, creative evening to close out the year.”

During the evening, Poetry Circle member Sharon Sinclair read her poem, “Sunrise Reflections.” Sinclair said the poem was inspired by her practice of watching the sunrise every morning during the winter of 2012. She describes her mornings as a spiritual experience, something she will remember for the rest of her life.

“I spent a few winters as a snowbird in Fairhope, Ala., where I had the privilege of standing on the pier each morning, overlooking Mobile Bay,” said Sinclair. “I would watch the sunrise every day and it always felt like a deeply spiritual experience.

“No two mornings were ever the same, and over time, I began to see those changing skies as a metaphor for our emotions, constantly shifting, never stagnant. Nature inspires me deeply, and the sunrise has come to symbolize new beginnings and the promise of a fresh start each day.”

Alizon Sharun, who took over leadership of the St. Marys Poetry Circle in 2019, said anyone interested in joining the group can be a member and welcomes individuals of all experience levels.

“It’s a supportive group for people who love poetry and love to write it. We explore different forms, and we do all kinds of things around the community,” said Sharun.

During the soirée, Poetry Circle member Mary Maika presented her poem,



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

**Sharon Sinclair reading “Sunrise Reflections” at the St. Marys Station Gallery Soirée on Dec. 19.**

“Like Dust.” Maika said as a poet, she aims to provide readers with something that invites them to create their own meaning.

“I don’t want people to hear my poem and think, that’s exactly how it is. Life, after all, is like dust, always shifting, always changing,” said Maika. “This is

the longest poem I’ve ever written, and I feel like I’ve lived enough life now to say that, in most poetry, some part of it always circles back to who we are.”

MacDonald said the evening was a great opportunity for new people to visit the gallery and bring everyone together for a year-end celebration.

**Scott didn't receive an organ transplant, but an organ transplant saved his life**

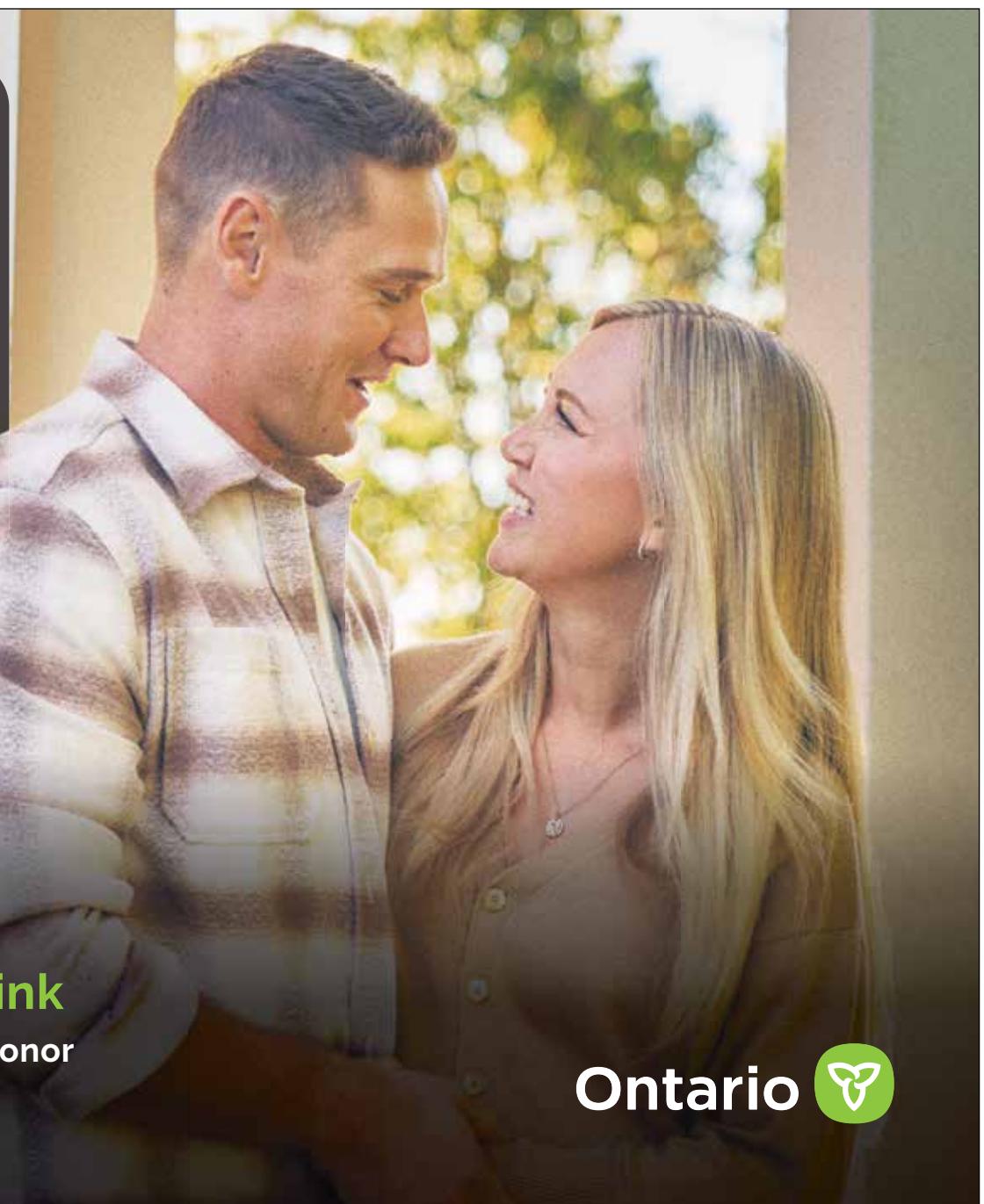
Because thanks to an organ donor, his wife Katie received a lifesaving transplant.

**Organ and tissue donation saves more lives than you think**

Register to be a donor at [ontario.ca/BeADonor](http://ontario.ca/BeADonor)

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January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month

## No one should face dementia alone.

Join us this January to end stigma and support families.



Alzheimer Society  
HURON PERTH  
#ForgetNoOne

Each January for Alzheimer's Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society highlights an important conversation: dementia is a health crisis too many people avoid. This year's theme, *Forget No One*, calls on all of us to break the silence and reduce the stigma that keeps people from seeking help.

New polling shows that one in four Canadians would rather not know if they had dementia, and nearly half wouldn't know where to turn for support. Stigma delays diagnosis and leaves people facing symptoms alone, but it doesn't have to be this way. The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth is here to help, offering information, guidance, and community programs so no one has to face dementia alone.

This January, learn how you can be part of the movement to *Forget No One*.

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth accepts and welcomes new clients and volunteers. Registration is required for all programs, education, and support services. Programs may be offered in-person or virtually. If you are in need of support or have questions about programs and services, please call one of the offices.

**Huron 519-482-1482 | Perth 519-271-1910**

### First Link Memory Loss SUPPORT

#### One on One Support

Free, confidential support services to individuals, families, and friends affected by Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

#### Support Groups

Groups provide an opportunity to discuss topics related to dementia with others who can relate to similar situations and behaviours.

### EDUCATION

Education is an important part of understanding and learning to live well with dementia. Education is provided to people whose personal or professional lives are impacted by dementia, including registered clients, healthcare professionals, and anyone with questions about brain health.

#### Education Hour

Free online webinars available through [www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth](http://www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth)

#### Memory and Aging Program™

Developed for those who are experiencing normal age-related changes in memory or who are interested in learning more about this topic.

#### First Link Learning Series

The First Link Learning Series offers a comprehensive overview of dementia, coping strategies, planning, resources, and supports.

#### Taking Control of Our Lives

A self-management program for people living with dementia and their care partners.

#### Learning the Ropes for Living with MCI®

A program aimed at community dwelling older adults experiencing Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and their close family member/friend.

### SOCIAL RECREATION

#### In-Home Recreation

Offers individualized activities that promote cognitive stimulation for people living with dementia through ongoing weekly visits from staff or volunteers.

#### Minds in Motion®

An 8 week community based social program incorporates physical activity and mental stimulation for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and their care partners.

#### Social Recreation

Provides opportunities for individuals living with dementia and their care partners to socialize while benefitting from activities that improve well-being.

## What Dementia Stigma Really Looks Like

Let's break it down, and break it, together.

#### Stigma shows up when:

- Harmful reactions or "jokes" come from misinformation
- People make negative assumptions or stereotypes
- Those living with dementia are treated as less capable or less worthy

#### Stigma isn't harmless, it hurts. It can:

- Lower quality of life and self worth
- Delay diagnosis and support
- Push people into silence instead of connection

#### Why it matters:

- When stigma keeps people from seeking help, families lose moments, support, and tools that could make life easier and more meaningful
- No one should face dementia alone

#### How you can fight stigma. Your everyday actions make the biggest difference:

- Learn and share accurate info
- Stay connected with people living with dementia
- Speak up when you hear stigma
- Reach out to the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth for support

Let's rewrite the story, together.

#ForgetNoOne

Alzheimer Society  
HURON PERTH



Silence around dementia keeps people from getting help.

With presence in nearly 100 communities across Canada, the Alzheimer Society is your first link to information and support.

Alzheimer Society  
HURON PERTH

### Talk with the Doc!

Dr. Alexandria Peel, Geriatrician

### TOP FIVE GERIATRIC RESEARCH PAPERS

JOIN US ON ZOOM!

1:30 PM

WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY 28

Register at <https://bit.ly/Doc-Talk2026>

For more information, contact  
Alzheimer Society Huron Perth  
[info@alzhp.ca](mailto:info@alzhp.ca) | 1-800-561-5012



Make the call. You can cut your fear and anxiety in half by connecting to the Alzheimer Society. The person at the other end of the phone has answered similar calls hundreds of times.

They know what they're doing – they can help you.

— Fred K.

# Local Awareness Month Events and Education

During Alzheimer's Awareness Month, Alzheimer Societies across Canada unite to challenge dementia stigma and create a community where everyone feels more comfortable talking about dementia and sharing their own experience.

The Alzheimer Society Huron Perth has a variety of education events coming up. Talk with the Doc! Top Five Geriatric Research Papers with Dr. Alexandria Peel will take place on ZOOM on Wednesday, January 28 from 1:30 – 3:00 pm.

Every year brings new research regarding aging, dementia, and more. Dr. Peel, a local geriatrician well-versed in dementia care is going to comb through the news and focus on five studies that we should be paying attention to now.

Talk with the Doc, also includes a lively Q&A session with Dr. Peel after the presentation. This is a FREE event. Self-register at <https://bit.ly/DocTalk2026>.

You can register for one session and have access to all four. There is no cost to join and the sessions are all held on Zoom so you can join from anywhere.

The Alzheimer Society provides many educational opportunities for everyone. From online webinars to in-person speakers and classes, there are opportunities for you to learn more about brain health and dementia.

Contact the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth for more about these and other upcoming programs, support services, and education.



#ForgetNoOne

**Living with dementia is about more than challenges. It's about resilience, creativity, and hope. By seeing strengths and expanding possibilities, we can change the way the world views dementia.**

Life after a diagnosis can still be meaningful and full of purpose. 

— Mario G.



## EDUCATION HOUR

One hour - one topic, No cost, hosted virtually over ZOOM. Presentations on brain health, cognitive changes and dementia.

Dementia Overview  
Monday, January 19  
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Care Partners:  
Dealing with the Feelings  
Tuesdays, January 20, 27  
February 3, 10  
1:30 PM

What is Mild Cognitive Impairment?  
Monday, January 26  
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

10 Common Warning Signs  
Monday, February 2  
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Types of Dementia  
Monday, February 9  
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Self-Register: [bit.ly/ASHPEducationHour](https://bit.ly/ASHPEducationHour)  
[www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth](http://www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth)  
Questions: 519-482-1482 or 519-271-1910



Your Journey of Support  
Starts Here  
Wednesday, February 4 & March 4  
10:00 AM

Understanding Brain Changes  
Monday, March 2  
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Communication Tips  
Monday, March 9  
1:30 PM & 7:00 PM

Brain Health  
Thursday, March 12  
1:30 PM

Demystifying Memory Clinics  
Thursday, March 19  
1:30 PM

Becoming a care partner is a significant change, leaving little time to process. Care Partners: Dealing with the Feelings is a four week program supporting care partners in managing the emotional aspects of their new role. The weekly sessions will focus on what a care partner is, care partner stress, grief and loss, and guilt and other tough emotions.



Public  
Education  
for persons  
55+

## Memory aging<sup>TM</sup> PROGRAM

Healthy  
Brain  
Workshop

What is her name? What did I come down here for? Where did I put....? The Virtual Memory and Aging Program, reviews age-related memory changes, how to optimize your brain health, and helpful memory strategies.

It is designed for anyone experiencing normal age-related changes in memory or anyone interested in learning more about this topic.

The Memory and Aging Program describes what memory is, how it changes with age, and when to be concerned.

The Memory and Aging Program consists of three weekly ZOOM sessions, 1:30 – 3:30 pm on Wednesdays: February 4, 11, 18.

There is a fee of \$25, which covers the cost of the program workbook and materials. Financial assistance is available.

Register online at <https://bit.ly/MAP-Winter26>

Wednesday, February 4 1:30 - 3:30 pm  
Wednesday, February 11 1:30 - 3:30 pm  
Wednesday, February 18 1:30 - 3:30 pm

**\$25 Workbook Fee. Registration required. Group size limited.**  
Self register at <https://bit.ly/MAPWinter26>

Over half of Canadians worry about dementia. Stigma keeps people from getting help.

The Alzheimer Society is here to help, because no one should face dementia alone.

Alzheimer Society  #ForgetNoOne

HURON PERTH



[www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth](http://www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth)

## What is a Dementia Friendly Community?

A Dementia Friendly Community is a place where people living with dementia are understood, respected, and supported. It's an environment where they will feel more confident in their abilities to contribute to community life, will be included in conversations, and

have a choice and control over their day-to-day lives.

People with dementia and their care partners have the right to live well in the community, together. As more people are diagnosed with dementia every year and choose to live

## Help Make Your Community Dementia Friendly

Dementia Friendly Communities™ training will help you better understand the everyday experiences of people living with dementia.

The course has 4 modules approximately 15 minutes each:

What is a dementia-friendly community?: An introduction to the concept and dementia-friendly efforts at the community level.

Dementia-friendly interactions: Social environment considerations, such as ways you can communicate effectively with someone living

with dementia. Dementia-friendly spaces: Physical environment considerations, such as ways you can optimize your space to be dementia-friendly. Dementia-friendly policies, practices and services for organizations: Provides specific scenarios and recommendations.

The information is practical and is helpful for all community members. Reach out to the Alzheimer Society to learn more.

Dementia-Friendly Canada™ is a partnership between Alzheimer Societies across the country. The goal is to train Canada's workforce to be dementia-friendly. Free tools and resources give Canadians knowledge and confidence to support and include people affected by

# St. Marys Independent SPORTS

## U18 B Boys' persistence leads to Parry Sound tourney gold

SPENCER SEYMOUR

*Independent Sports Reporter*

The St. Marys Royal Canadian Legion U18 B Boys St. Marys Rock battled adversity to come out of the Bobby Orr Hall of Fame tournament in Parry Sound Dec. 12-14 as gold medalists.

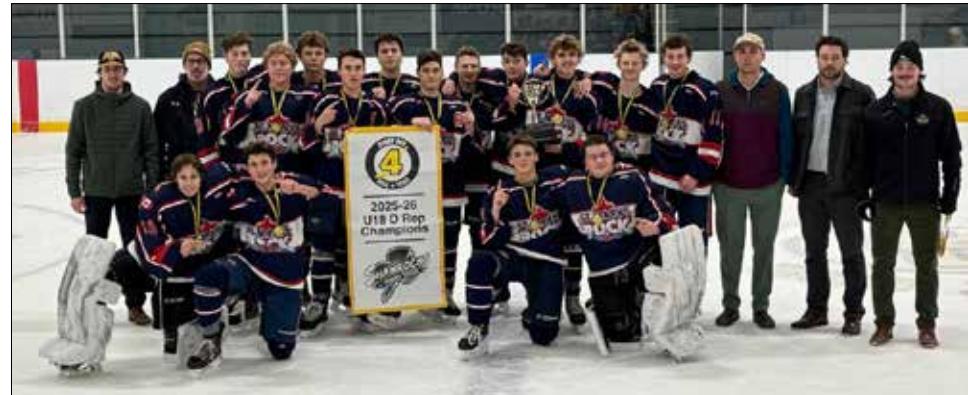
The Rock had a lacklustre start to the tournament, dropping their first two round-robin contests, first in a 4-2 loss to the Muskrat Voyageurs, and then losing to the Newcastle Stars 3-1. However, according to head coach Sam Bolton, the team refocused in a big way the next day when they won both of their final round-robin games.

"Overall, I thought we progressed very well as the tournament went along," said Bolton. "We started off Friday not playing our best games. We stayed disciplined in our games on Saturday, which was an issue on Friday, and the mentality in the room on Saturday was much better. They never took a shift off and made a statement to the rest of the teams that we deserved to play on Sunday."

St. Marys first got into the win column on the second day of the tournament with a 5-0 victory over the host Parry Sound Shamrocks. They followed that up with another shutout, winning 4-0 over the South Muskoka Bears later that day.

Bolton explained the significance of the team's last two round-robin games to ultimately capturing the tournament's top prize.

"I would say both our games on Saturday were the reason we ended up winning the tournament. It helped their confidence and got their swagger back. The Saturday morning game was huge for us in turning a corner. Most teams would go into that game down on themselves, thinking they had no chance to get to Sunday. Instead, our boys took those



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The St. Marys Royal Canadian Legion U18 B Boys St. Marys Rock won the gold medal at the Bobby Orr Hall of Fame tournament on Dec. 12-14 in Parry Sound. Pictured on the ice in front, from left to right, are Harper Murrell, Zach Matheson, Jaxon Brown, and Isaac Cousineau. In the back row, from left, are assistant coach Ian Bolton, assistant coach John Bolton, Hunter Pickel, Cainan O'Doherty, Cohen Ahrens, Simon Greig, Owen Dittmer, Brody Higham, Luke Richardson, Brody Cox, Andrew Davis, Ethan St. Clair, Owen Maxwell, head coach Sam Bolton, assistant trainer Owen Hartman, and trainer Sam Watt. Not pictured was Grayson Gerber.

Friday games out of their minds and just focused on the games at hand.

"Performance-wise, our goalies were our backbone," added Bolton. "Isaac (Cousineau) and Harper (Murrell) kept us in games we should have never been in on Friday. On Saturday, they stood on their heads with both of them posting a shutout. On Sunday, I'd say it was a full team effort. Every single player played their roles and played their hearts out."

This set St. Marys up for a final day against the two teams that beat them on the first day of the tournament, which Bolton noted intensified the Rock's desire.

"To me, the storyline of the semis and the finals was about getting revenge," Bolton said. "The two teams we played on Sunday were the teams we lost to on Friday, so the boys had more of a chip on their shoulders, which ultimately helped us win those games."

The Rock jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the first period of the semi-final against

Newcastle, with goals just 26 seconds apart. Zachary Matheson scored first, assisted by Hunter Pickel and Ethan St. Clair, followed by a goal by Andrew Davis, with the assists going to Brody Higham and Owen Dittmer.

Higham found the back of the net with five-and-a-half minutes left in the second frame before Newcastle finally got on the board with a pair of goals before the end of the period. Simon Greig and Brody Cox picked up the helpers. The Stars tied the game early in the third, but St. Marys found more quick-strike offence with two goals just a minute and 22 seconds apart to take a 5-3 win. Cohen Ahrens potted the eventual game-winning goal, with assists going to Dittmer and Jaxon Brown before Dittmer added an insurance marker assisted by Matheson.

The win over Newcastle put the Rock in the finals against Muskrat, and once again, St. Marys opened the scoring, this time with a goal by Greig, assisted by

Davis and Cox. The Voyageurs answered back a minute later to tie the game at one apiece, but the Rock retook the one-goal lead just 33 seconds later when St. Clair found the back of the net, with assists going to Dittmer and Brown. Higham added a pair of goals in the third, both of which were assisted by Ahrens and one of which was also assisted by Greig.

Bolton cited an improved resiliency by the Rock as a key to winning in both the semis and the finals.

"Another big part that led to us winning these games was we never let up and never gave up. In the past, once we got a lead early in games, we would almost shut down and let the other team back in the game. This would lead to us shutting down mentally. This was not the case on Sunday."

"We got up 2-0 early (in the semi-final), but Newcastle tied it up in the second," Bolton continued. "Instead of shutting down, the boys kept their composure and grinded through to squeak out a 5-3 win. The final game went into the third tied 1-1. Our boys never took a period off, and they ultimately scored three goals in the third."

When looking forward to the remainder of the season, Bolton said he wants the tournament win to be a catalyst for a strong second half for the Rock.

"This win gave us a sense of hope moving forward," said Bolton. "Before this, we struggled to win games, play together and have confidence in our game. As coaches, we know that we can play with any team in the league. I think winning this tournament and how we won it proves that we can beat anyone. It all comes down to playing a full game and staying focused, and I believe it helped us greatly moving forward. It was the start of a new team and a new season."

## St. Marys Bowling Lanes hosts Family Twosome Roll-off



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

The St. Marys Bowling Lanes hosted the Family Twosome Roll-off tournament on Jan. 4. The tournament was a handicapped four-game scotch doubles format, where the adult and child alternate bowling each frame. There were two classes of bowlers, including bowlers with a bowling adult and bowlers with a non-bowling adult, and 19 teams participated in the tournament. There were also three divisions, including bantam, junior, and senior. Pictured on the left, from left to right, are Ivy and Melissa Kittmer, Myla and Shane King, Felix and Scott Louwagie, and Amanda Kittmer and Jeanne Lyons. Ivy and Melissa scored 734 points to win the bantam non-bowler category, while Amanda and Lyons won the bantam bowler class by scoring 1,150, the highest score of the day in any class. In the bantam class, Felix and Scott took second, while Myla and Shane came in third place. Pictured in the middle, from left, are Robin and James Van De Gevel and Natalie and Matt McKeen. Robin and James recorded a score of 1,086 to win the junior bowler class, while Natalie and Matt won the junior non-bowler division, scoring 824. Pictured on the right, from left, are Landon Ball and Nathan McKeen. McKeen, who scored 997 with Gerry Brockman, finished first in the senior bowler division. Along with Jason Ball, Landon won the senior non-bowler category with a score of 831. The six first-place teams will go on to the zone competition on Feb. 22 at Sunset Lanes in Port Elgin.

# U12 Snipers win tournament gold on home ice

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Hubbard's Pharmacy-Frayne's Custom Cabinets U12 St. Marys Snipers captured the gold medal at the Snipers' Ringette Tournament Dec. 12-14 in St. Marys.

Head coach Courtney Beech was ecstatic with the way her team competed throughout the tournament.

"The kids played with heart all weekend," Beech told the Independent. "They were excited to be on home ice and really tried to skate hard, take hard shots and stay out of the penalty box. To get the win at home with all of the parents and grandparents around to see was very special."

The Snipers won two of their three round-robin games with their only loss coming at the hands of the Tillsonburg Twisters, the same team St. Marys would go on to meet in the gold-medal game. However, the Snipers' first win against Tillsonburg came when it mattered most.

Harper Buck tied the game at one apiece with one second left in the first period. The Twisters retook a one-goal lead just over four minutes into the second, but less than two minutes later, Izzy Feltz evened things up at 2-2. With just over four minutes left on the clock, Tillsonburg once again went up by a goal. However, as the clock ticked down, the Snipers came up clutch. Peyton Fo-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Hubbard's Pharmacy-Frayne's Custom Cabinets U12 St. Marys Snipers won the gold medal at the Snipers' Ringette Tournament in St. Marys Dec. 12-14. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Suzie McCutcheon and Evelyn Parsons. In the middle row, from left, are Jordyn Rasenberg, Natalia Mattucci, Briella Graham, Harper Buck and Peyton Foley. In the back row, from left, are coach Brent Foley, coach Courtney Beech, Hannah Pickel, Brooklyn Meta, Aubrey Feltz, Ellie Beech, Natalie McCorquodale, Chelsea Hughes, Isabella Feltz, junior coach Kirsten McKichan and coach Kelsey Pickel.

ley buried a powerplay goal with just 38 seconds left on the clock, and then, with just 11 seconds remaining, Aubrey Feltz fired the ring home to give the Snipers their first lead of the game and the eventual game-winning goal.

Beech called the championship contest

an "exciting nail-biter" that carried a lot of significance for the Snipers, even beyond the gold medal.

"The final game was so much fun to watch. It meant a lot to us because we had played Tillsonburg three times this year and lost all three. We finally won

this time because we believed we could. There were many chants of, 'I believe that we can win,' In the dressing room before the game.

"The final game brought a lot of nerves, but the kids really kept their cool, especially in the last few minutes," Beech continued. "They never gave up and played hard right to the end. Our goalie, Suzie (McCutcheon), was very nervous going into the second half, but she used the nerves to keep herself focused. She played amazing."

Along with McCutcheon, Beech noted all of the team's players delivered key performances throughout the tournament.

"Our centres deserve credit for their solid skating and energy across our four games. Briella (Graham) switched to defence and held it down very well. And overall, the entire team really played as a cohesive unit, and every single player contributed to the win."

According to Beech, the team is optimistic the tournament win can help the team as they prepare for some of their most important games of the season.

"This win meant a lot to the team," said Beech. "We felt like we won the Stanley Cup. The kids have more confidence heading into the back half of the year, and it really helped the kids bond as a group. The kids felt a lot of pride to win the home tournament, and we will keep the feeling when we head to provincials later this year."

## Lincs ring in new year with win over first-placed Maroons

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

If the St. Marys Lincolns felt rusty from the holiday break in their return to action on Jan. 3 against the Chatham Maroons, fans wouldn't have known it by watching the game.

With the 3-2 win, the Lincolns have not only defeated the Western Conference's first-placed Maroons three straight times but have thoroughly outplayed Chatham in three straight outings. If not for a stellar showing by Maroons goaltender Samuel DiBlasi, the Lincolns' win on Jan. 3 likely would have been by a larger margin.

Head coach Jeff Bradley told the Independent the Lincolns did precisely what they needed to make their return from the break as smooth as possible.

"We talked pre-game about how rust was definitely going to be a factor for both teams, and we had some things we had to focus on to overcome that, and I thought we did a good job," said Bradley. "We worked hard, we competed, we were hard to play against and we did a great job back-checking and staying on the right side of our guys, and I think that leads to low support and easier passes to make."

Bradley added he was most impressed with the team's desire to come away

with the victory.

"Our will to win was very impressive. Our players know how good Chatham is. They're the reigning Sutherland Cup champions, so we want to make sure we're giving them our best game every time because they're the standard in the league right now, and we want to make sure we're including ourselves in that conversation."

As he reflected on the win, Bradley noted a big reason for the team's strong performance was getting off on the right foot, for which credit was assigned by the bench boss to the five skaters who started the game.

"A lot of guys had a really good night, but the first shift of the game was important for us, and I thought the five who started the game for us were really, really important. We tried to establish getting pucks low, making Chatham work, making Chatham uncomfortable, and I thought Blake (Elzinga), Ryan (Hodkinson), Declan (Ready), Owen (Kalp) and James (MacGregor) were really important because it filtered through line to line to line from there."

Just moments after killing off a penalty, the Maroons opened the scoring when Aydan Doyle ripped a shot by goaltender Brogan Colquhoun to give Chatham a 1-0 lead just over 12 minutes into the first. With just 16.8 seconds left

in the opening frame, a shot by Callum McAuley was tipped by DiBlasi off the stick of the net-driving Ethan Weir to tie the game going into the second.

It appeared the game would go into the third still deadlocked 1-1, but with just four seconds left on the clock, Weir dashed down the wing and fired home his second of the night, this one on a powerplay, putting the Lincolns up 2-1 entering the final period.

A turnover early in the third led Max Skinner to get a clear path to the net and score to tie the game at two apiece just two minutes and four seconds into the third. However, the Lincolns responded less than two minutes later with a powerplay goal by McAuley. The goal was the fifth goal in as many games for the 19-year-old Timmins native.

The Lincolns went two-for-three on the powerplay and successfully killed off all three Chatham man advantages in the game. According to Bradley, the team's adaptability was key to their success on both the powerplay and the penalty kill.

"Chatham definitely did a bit of homework, and they threw a couple of different powerplay looks at us," Bradley said. "I thought Mike (Herman) and the guys who were killing penalties did a good job adjusting to what they were doing. Then, on the powerplay, we've been

working on a couple of little things, and you can see the guys trying to execute it. We talked about how aggressive they are in-zone, and we had to make sure we had outs and support. I thought they did a great job of that, too."

McAuley's goal held up as the game-winner, and Colquhoun finished the game with 26 saves in the win.

Bradley described the team's focal points entering the 2026 portion of the season, noting the team is trying to refine their version of playoff-style hockey.

"It's just a continuation of what we've been doing prior to the Christmas break. Now that we've got 20 games left, there's going to be a lot of review, trying to get ramped up for the playoffs and making sure we're dialled in everywhere, we're hard to play against and our systems are well-rounded."

"Today, for example, we're putting some time in on the back-check," Bradley added ahead of the team's Sunday practice. "I think our effort on the back-check is great, but we just want to sort out everyone's responsibilities and the structure of our back-check. But other than that, we're not allowing a lot. We're starting to score more goals. Our special teams are good. There is a lot of good, we just can't take our foot off any pedal."

# Open A Snipers strike gold at Snipers tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The 18+ Open A St. Marys Snipers earned the top prize at the Snipers' Ringette Tournament hosted in St. Marys Dec. 12-14.

Player-coach Allison Sage told the Independent the team began clicking as a unit in a stronger way during the tournament.

"I think that, overall, we had a great performance throughout the weekend," said Sage. "We were really starting to gel as a team and get used to playing with each other. We have a core group that's been together for a couple of years now, but we also have new girls joining and some that have left this year, so our first couple months have really been getting used to each other's play styles. It looked like it's all really come together as of this weekend. We played to our strengths all weekend, which was likely a big reason why we came out successful."

After winning their first three round-robin games, the Snipers met the Waterloo Wildfire on the second day of the tournament in a game that ended in a 5-5 tie and proved to be a preview of the finals, as St. Marys met the Wildfire the next day for the gold medal. The Snipers came away with a convincing 5-1 victory to win the gold, and Sage noted the round-robin game allowed the Snipers



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The 18+ Open A St. Marys Snipers won the gold medal at the Snipers' Ringette Tournament Dec. 12-14. Pictured in front is goaltender Rachel VanBakel. Pictured in the back row, from left to right, are Laynee Partridge, Nicki VanBakel, Rachel Mann, Natalie Reay, Rachelle Keys, Rylee Harrison, Josie Butler-Watson, Allison Sage, Avery Wedow and Kaylee Tobias.

to find ways to pick apart Waterloo.

"We had played Waterloo the day before, so we recognized their weaknesses and capitalized on them," Sage said. "We never slowed down throughout that final game, and I think we just

really wore them down throughout the game. We were all really pleased with the game once it was over, and obviously happy with our showing."

Josie Butler-Watson opened the scoring for St. Marys less than two minutes

into the gold-medal game before Breanna Athill extended the lead to two goals at the 9:24 mark of the first period. Exactly five minutes later, Natalie Reay put the Snipers ahead 3-0. Waterloo's lone goal of the contest came less than a minute later, but Tess Erb responded just 21 seconds later to restore the Snipers' three-goal advantage. Avery Wedow scored the only goal of the second period to seal the 5-1 win for St. Marys.

Sage also cited the team's familiarity with the tighter confines of their home rink as well as the team's focus on enjoying their time on the ice as key reasons for their success.

"As we know, St. Marys has a really small centre-ice zone, which can be tricky for a lot of teams if you're not used to it. Us playing our home exhibition games there definitely gives us an upper hand in breaking out of the zone and making smart plays without always having two-line passes."

"We had a really solid, consistent weekend in my opinion," Sage continued. "Everyone carried their weight, from goaltending to defence to the forwards. Everyone was willing to step up and help out where needed. Our team is really focused on having fun. Obviously, we are competitive and want to win, but our main goal is to enjoy our time out there. I think putting that at the forefront of our game is really what leads us to being successful."



## PERTH COUNTY OPP



**Over half of stolen vehicles had the keys left inside.  
Know the risks. Don't be an easy target.**

### CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design)

Proactive approach to reduce crime by designing and organizing spaces so homes and businesses are safer and harder for criminals to target.

Good news! Perth County residents can request a FREE Assessment to identify vulnerabilities in their homes and receive advice on safeguarding their property. Contact Perth County OPP to learn more! (519) 393-6123

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PERTH COUNTY OPP



# FUN3 Snipers (Hibbert) take silver at St. Marys tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Cherry Hill Carpentry-McKinley Hatchery FUN3 St. Marys Snipers (Hibbert) earned the silver medal at the Snipers Ringette Tournament Dec. 12-14 in St. Marys.

Head coach Jamie Hibbert called the tournament a "great weekend" for her squad.

"They were very consistent throughout the weekend," Hibbert told the Independent. "Sometimes at this age, they can be a little unpredictable, but they all played really well for every game. They've been doing a great job of things that really started clicking around our last tournament; things like creating open space on the ice and applying lots of pressure when back-checking."

The Snipers put up two wins in their three round-robin games, including a 9-2 win over Mitchell and an 8-1 victory over London. St. Marys' only loss in the round-robin came at the hands of Tillsonburg, who St. Marys faced in a rematch in the gold-medal game.

Blake Munro, Adelia Verbaan and Natalie Hibbert scored in the final for the Snipers, but

Tillsonburg came away with the 5-3 win to take the top prize.

Despite not winning the gold, Jamie Hibbert was thrilled with the team's results, and the fact they played stiffer competition in the tournament final.

"This tournament was great for us, not only because we placed second, but also because we played a much harder team than we had up until this point," said Jamie Hibbert. "Tillsonburg was a really big challenge for us. They are a very strong team and it was great to see the potential our team has and what we need to work on moving forward. The second half of the season will bring a lot more of these challenging teams for us."

Jamie Hibbert also noted the special nature of playing the tournament on home ice.

"Playing on home ice is always amazing. The amount of fans we had in the crowd cheering our team on was phenomenal. It means so much more for the girls knowing their aunts, uncles, or grandparents are out there watching too. Winning a silver medal with the extra support out there makes a big difference for them."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Cherry Hill Carpentry-McKinley Hatchery FUN3 St. Marys Snipers took the silver medal at the Snipers' Ringette Tournament in St. Marys Dec. 12-14. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Adriana Marcaccio, Mila Vanderpol, Lauren Garniss, Charlotte Holliday and Lacey Terpstra. In the back row, from left, are coach Kaisu Vanderpol, Adelia Verbaan, Blake Munro, Avynne Blight, Noelle McKay, Sophia Adcock, Natalie Hibbert, head coach Jamie Hibbert, coach Carly Dundas and Addie Dundas.

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# COLUMNS

## UKRAINIAN CORNER: The January “emotional hangover”

ALONA VASYLIEVA

*Independent Columnist*

January has arrived in Canada, and with it, the great emotional deflation. If December is a glittering, high-energy party, January is the morning after – where the only thing left of the holiday spirit is a few stray pine needles.

Coming from Ukraine, I’ve realized that while Christmas is a beloved tradition back home, in Canada, it is an event. It’s a month-long crescendo of lights and shopping that leaves you with a literal emotional hangover. By the time the decorations come down, the thought of entering another mall makes me want to hibernate until May.

Spring is a distant myth, and Easter is so far away it feels like a fairy tale told to keep our spirits up. However, I’ve noticed that Canadians have a secret survival mechanism for this emptiness: Extreme Scheduling.

While Ukrainians are traditionally found in the kitchen during winter and trying new diets to prepare for “beach season,” Canadians are busy booking it. In January, the real “Hunger Games” begin.

If you want a camping spot in a provincial park or a summer camp for your kids, you have to book it now. If you want your child to learn how to swim, you cannot simply “register.” You must be a digital ninja. You need a high-speed internet connection, three browser tabs open and a finger hovering over the mouse like a professional e-sports player.

I managed to do it this year. I had my phone notifications set, my heart rate was at 140 bpm, and I clicked “Submit” with the precision of a diamond cutter.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

**Survival gear: A mobile sauna barrel provides the heat, while a fresh Canadian snowbank provides the “luxury” rinse cycle.**

I’ve never felt more Canadian – or more like I deserved a gold medal.

While the “admin wars” happen at home, the kids have been thriving. The free skating sessions at the PRC were a lifesaver. Watching Alex transform from a wobbly penguin into a confident skater was a major winter accomplishment. It’s these small wins that keep the January blues at bay.

While the kids master the ice, the Ukrainian men in our community have been on a different mission. They were hunting for a Laznya. For our Canadian friends, the difference between a Canadian Sauna and a Ukrainian Laznya is the difference between a “gentle spa day” and “glorious physical combat.”

In a Canadian sauna, if you splash a tiny drop of water on the rocks, people apologize for the humidity. In a Ukrainian Laznya, if you can still see your own feet through the steam, the host will apologize that the stove is “broken.”

We finally discovered the secret to happiness: The Mobile Sauna Barrel. You can actually have one delivered to your backyard! It turns out, you haven’t truly lived until you’ve been “tenderized” by a birch branch in your own driveway while the neighbors wonder if they should call a park ranger or a psychiatrist. You aren’t officially in a Laznya until a 250-pound man named Vasyl is hitting you with a wet tree until you resemble a steamed lobster.

In Canada: After the sauna, you take a lukewarm shower and put on your leggings.

In Ukraine: You are expected to run outside – ideally naked – and throw yourself into a pile of snow or a frozen lake. If no lake is available, a wooden bucket of ice water will do.

In Canada: The golden rule of the sauna is silence. You don’t make eye contact. You definitely don’t talk about your divorce or your taxes.

In Ukraine: The Laznya is the ultimate “no-filter” zone. It is a boardroom, a therapy office and a pub rolled into one. You will learn more about your neighbour’s life in 20 minutes of sweating than you would in 10 years living next door in a Toronto condo.

A Canadian goes home, drinks an electrolyte beverage and is in bed by 10 p.m. feeling “cleansed.” A Ukrainian realizes the Laznya was just the warm-up. Afterward, you sit in a wood-paneled room for three hours discussing philosophy. You aren’t allowed to leave until you’ve solved at least two major world political problems.

Ukrainians have realized that complaining about snowstorms is a waste of a good winter. Ukrainians are determined to take everything Canada has to offer. Whether it’s building igloos, engaging in epic snowball battles, or finding that perfect -20°C day to run out of a steaming Laznya into a snowdrift, we are finding our rhythm.

January might be long and the holiday lights are dimming, but as long as we have high-speed internet for swim registrations and a hot barrel of steam in the backyard, we are winning at winter.

## Finding wellness through the winter

JACLYN TURPIN

*Independent Columnist*

The days are slowly getting longer, but oh so slowly. The snow falls, the wind is cold and we look forward to brighter times. As a counsellor and social worker, I see that support services are often busy during this time of year with people reaching out. Our days that were once brightened by Christmas lights are now dimmed as the holidays are behind us and we face the next leg of winter. For some, losses are highlighted by loneliness and stressors are piled high.

Finding wellness can feel like another thing to add to your to-do list, or a trendy resolution for the New Year, but it can be much simpler (though it is not often advertised that way). Being “well” does not mean that you always have to be happy or energetic. Part of being well includes simply noticing

your emotions and being in tune with how you feel as seasons change and responding when necessary. Chances are you rarely take a moment to slow down and tune into how you’re feeling.

Sit. Listen. Notice. I know it sounds simple, but it can be hard if you aren’t one to turn inward. You aren’t alone. We rarely do! Let’s try it together. Take a minute right now. Sit. Pause. Reflect. Are you well?

Here are a few simple ways to wallow in wellness this winter.

Get outside. Yes, outside, in the winter, in the cold, and ideally in the daylight. Bundle up and walk outside. Maybe you start with a walk to your mailbox or just park a little further away from where you’re headed. Even 15-20 minutes outside will make a difference. If getting outside feels like too much for today, sit by a window, stretch your body, feel the light and hopefully catch some sunshine.

Stay hydrated. Don’t give up on me now. You know this is true! It has been cold and so reaching for a drink of (likely cold) water does not seem appealing; not nearly as appealing as it did in the summer heat, anyways. Maybe today just starts with one more cup of water. Try getting water from the tap instead of the fridge so it’s room temperature instead. Or try a new type of tea. It doesn’t have to be boring!

Reach out. You don’t have to do wellness alone. We can all benefit from being well. And hey, group projects always felt less daunting anyways! It can be as simple as meeting up for a tea at your favourite local spot, walking around downtown, sending a text message, leaving a porch drop off, or writing a card to someone who might not expect it. I promise your day will be brightened, too, when you brighten someone else’s!

Be supported. Your source of support

could be a trusted friend, or maybe it’s a counsellor. Just know you don’t have to wait until you are “unwell” to reach out. Anyone can benefit from having routine support. In my practice, I have clients who schedule in once a month, once a week, or just every so often. There are times in our lives when wellness feels like a far reach and having professional support can be just the ticket.

So here, start small. Turn down the noise of New Year’s resolutions. You don’t have to go out and get a gym membership or stay outside for hours in the snow, but maybe, just maybe, you will be willing to include something small in your day to maintain wellness this winter. Small differences make big impacts. You’ll see!

*Jaclyn Turpin is a registered social worker and owner at Rural Refresh, a counselling agency serving St. Marys and area.*

# HISTORIC ST. MARYS: Catapulting politics into the collegiate

MARY SMITH

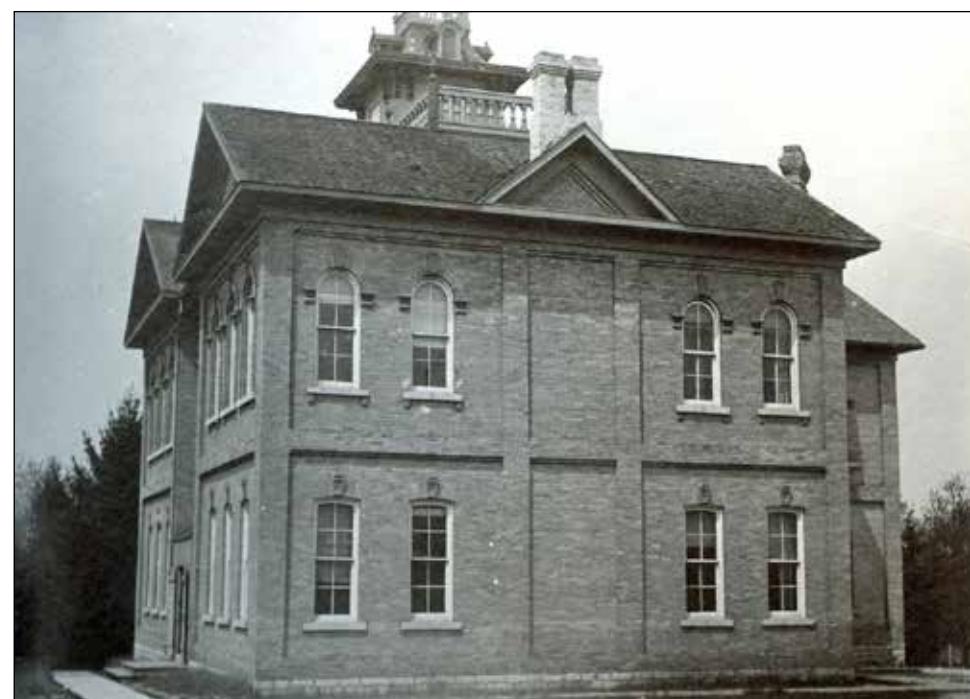
Independent Columnist

As 2025 ended, the southeast corner of Wellington and Station Streets was getting a great deal of attention. The familiar Home Hardware has closed in that location and is moving to other premises on Queen Street East. When a new tenant takes over the Wellington Street building, many shoppers are concerned that there will be problems with parking. Whether these concerns are justified remains to be seen but this popular part of town (the Royal Canadian Legion is just next door) has a long history of dealing with crowds. The old arena, originally on that very site, was the venue for a visit by Arthur Meighen in October 1925 while he was campaigning. The organizers claimed that Meighen's speech filled the building with thousands of his supporters. Many of them would have driven into St. Marys from the surrounding countryside. If they had any anxiety about finding places to park, that has not been recorded.

The old arena was built in 1884 as a covered curling facility and was strictly utilitarian in appearance, a large barn-like building. It was designed with the ice surface below grade so that it could be flooded with water pumped from Trout Creek to a reservoir just to the east of the building. The curlers stepped down onto the ice surface from the entrance door at the west end. There were few windows – before electricity, it was lit by kerosene. At first, the building was used almost exclusively for curling and the curlers – many of them men with significant influence in the community – guarded their ice jealously. Children and other pleasure skaters were allowed in once a week on Saturday evenings, after the week's curling was over. Local interest in curling declined in the early decades of the 20th century and the old rink was modified as a hockey venue with two dressing rooms and benches for spectators. It was still natural ice, dependant on cold temperatures, inside and out. That meant that late winter play-off games frequently took place on soft, soggy ice. When Meighen visited in October, it was still weeks before ice for a rink could be made.

Regardless of political affiliation, the people of St. Marys were proud when the town's former resident, Arthur Meighen, was chosen as Robert Borden's successor to lead the Conservative/Unionist Party. Meighen served as prime minister of Canada for 18 months from July 1920 until December 1921. The Liberals, under Mackenzie King, won the 1922 election, although with a minority government. As leader of the opposition, Meighen, a strong parliamentarian, was a worthy opponent. By the time the next federal election was called for October 29, 1925, he had done much to rebuild the Conservative Party and mounted a vigorous campaign.

Unfortunately, in southwestern Ontario, the autumn of 1925 featured miserable weather with heavy rains that limited outdoor campaign events. When the South Perth Riding Conservatives



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ST. MARYS MUSEUM'S DIGITAL COLLECTION, R. LORNE EEDY ARCHIVES)

In 1925, the students from this school, the St. Marys Collegiate Institute, had classes suspended for an afternoon so that they could hear Arthur Meighen speak during a campaign visit.

learned that Arthur Meighen was coming to St. Marys on October 22 to support the local candidate, Robert S. Graham, they knew they couldn't trust the weather conditions for an outdoor rally. They had to find some venue under cover that would accommodate a large crowd. The town hall auditorium was not big enough and although the United Church had good seating, political meetings could not be held in a church. That left the curling rink and a committee set to work to turn it into an appropriate place for a former prime minister of Canada to speak.

The event was a great success. The dignitaries, including Meighen, sat on a large stage erected at the east end of the building. Members of the audience were packed in, seated on tiers of seats placed on the arena floor. The crowd, estimated at about 2,000 people, included some 250 or so students from the St. Marys Collegiate Institute. They were escorted down the Wellington Street hill by their teachers to hear Meighen, the school's most famous graduate, speak.

The weather cleared up for the actual election day, Thursday, October 29, but although the sun was shining as voters made their way to the polls, it was not a happy day for the Conservatives of South Perth. Their candidate, R. S. Graham, lost to the Liberal candidate, Fred Sanderson, by 414 votes. The sun didn't shine brightly enough on the Conservative Party in Ottawa either. Although Meighen's party won the most seats, they were short of a majority. Mackenzie King refused to relinquish his position as prime minister. With just enough support from a new party, the Progressives, he was able to hold onto power. The Conservatives were back on the Opposition benches.

R. S. Graham had received more votes in St. Marys, Downie and Blanshard Townships than his Liberal opponent. But Sanderson had outpolled him in the other South Perth townships where Graham was less well-known. On top of their disappointment, the organizers for the

appreciation of their duties to the public." Couldn't they see that "to catapult politics into the Collegiate is very wrong!" The Journal Argus also published the Department of Education's dismissal of Dr. Smith's complaint: "The Department decided that no action was necessary on their part as it was held that the matter was a local one, entirely within the jurisdiction of the St. Marys authorities." Dr. Smith continued to be outraged.

Although he didn't make any headway with the Department, the doctor did create a local controversy. Letters to the Journal Argus strongly disagreed with his position. For example, Mr. W. H. Taylor wrote in defense of the St. Marys Collegiate Board, offering a non-partisan view of the issue: "Most Liberals will agree that Mr. Meighen's meeting was an intellectual treat as most Conservatives would concede the same for Mr. King, and both sides would agree that to listen to either of these distinguished men is a pleasing way of exercising one's intellectual faculties. In the event of Mr. King ever coming to St. Marys, it would be a grave oversight indeed if the School Board failed to give these Collegiate students an opportunity to hear him." Mr. Taylor considered that a speech by Arthur Meighen, "a St. Marys Old Boy and the leader of a great historical party," was an occasion that would be "both a lesson and an inspiration to every boy and girl in St. Marys" and placed this event above any political considerations. He went on to argue that Dr. Smith himself had catapulted politics into the issue by implying, "You must not hear this naughty man; he is a Tory!"

Other letter writers reminisced about their early acquaintance with the former prime minister when he was a boy in St. Marys. An old neighbour recalled that young Arthur had driven a milk delivery wagon for his father's dairy. A former teacher, T. T. Follick, remembered Meighen taking a prominent part in "many an able debate" as a member of the collegiate's literary society. Although his party was rejected in 1925 by South Perth Riding voters, Arthur Meighen continued to be affectionately remembered in his former hometown.

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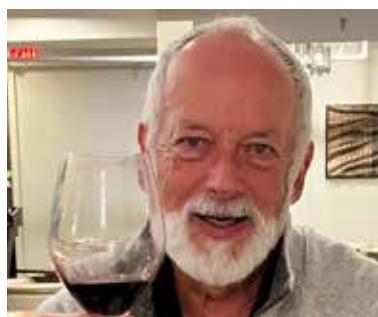
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# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Paris - a splendidly walkable city



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

If I were forced to choose among places to visit, I would always pick Ottawa over Toronto, Québec City over Montréal, or Amsterdam, Netherlands over London, England. And my reason is simple; those chosen destinations are all eminently walkable.

I really enjoy visiting a city where many of the places I want to see are within walking distance of each other, and that is one of the reasons that we enjoyed our stay in Paris so much.

We are in the capital of France because we opted for an add-on stay before our Viking River Cruise on the Rhone River. Now, the full story is we made that decision fairly late in the game, so the more basic hotel included in the package was already fully booked. That being the case, did we want to splurge on the upgraded hotel at additional cost?

Well, heck, how often are we going to spend three days in

Paris? We agreed to splurge.

That put us in the Sofitel Le Scribe Paris Opéra. It was a perfect location, and we liked our accommodation very much, but after ordering a coffee and tea upon arrival, and being billed something like \$35 Canadian, we quickly understood that we would seek food and drink elsewhere, which was never actually a problem in this city of cafés.

But the best part was everything we wanted to see could be reached comfortably on foot.

As soon as we had checked in and I had emptied my bank account to pay for a coffee and a tea, I tucked a map into my pocket and we set out to explore. The reason for the hotel's name became quickly obvious – we were only a few steps away from the Paris Opera House, an imposing example of baroque revival architecture completed in 1875. We learned that almost all of the impressive buildings in Paris are from the 1800s because Napoleon and his successors were all about urban renewal – or perhaps, all about knocking down everything in sight to build monuments to themselves, which sounds distressingly familiar. But I digress.

Right across the street from the Opera House is a high-end department store called the Galeries Lafayette. What's special here is the rooftop terrace, open

free of charge, which provides a spectacular view of the city.

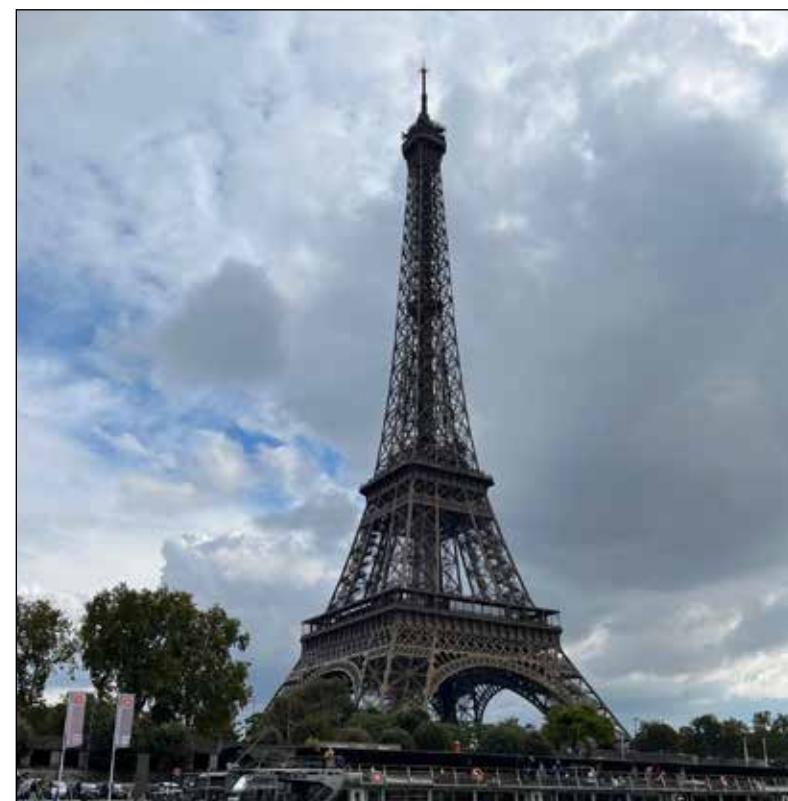
A couple of blocks into our

wandering we discovered the Church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, an imposing structure built in the style of a Roman temple. It has an intriguing history – it was begun in 1763 during the reign of King Louis XV. Construction stopped completely when the French Revolution abolished the monarchy quite dramatically by beheading Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in 1793. Enter Napoleon, who became Emperor in 1804, and decided in this time of anti-church sentiment that the building be re-purposed as "A Temple to the Glory of the Grand Army." An army which was, not coincidentally, headed by Napoleon.

Napoleon died and the monarchy was reinstated. The "Temple" reverted to its original intention, as a church, but progress on completing the structure was still slow – it was not officially inaugurated as a church until 1842, almost eight decades after construction was begun. Today, it is still a church, but perhaps even better known as one of the finest concert halls in Paris.

We left the church and strolled toward the Seine River, accidentally arriving at one of the best-known features of Paris, the Place de la Concorde. This 20-acre square, situated between the Avenue de Champs-Élysées and the Jardin des Tuileries, is one of the most beautiful parts of the city. However, it has a history that is considerably less appealing.

While today it is dubbed "Concorde" (which means harmony or friendship), in the late 1700s, this was the site of the beheadings of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and thousands of others who climbed the steps to lose their heads on the guillotine. At that time, the square



The Eiffel Tower, seen from the Seine River.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

was known as the Place de la Revolution.

There is no evidence of the bloodshed today. When we visited, the permanent monuments like the Luxor Obelisk (a 3,000-year-old monolith that was given by Egypt to France in 1829), and the spectacular fountains, were sharing space with an outdoor, nature photography exhibition.

Our wandering continued. We explored the aforementioned Tuileries Garden and found ourselves surrounded by Parisiens at their contented leisure. On the far side of the gardens, we were suddenly on the grounds of the Louvre.

And nearby were two destinations I have always wanted to visit – the Musée D'Orsay and the Musée de l'Orangerie. The former holds perhaps the world's best collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces, while the latter is best-known for two rooms where the walls are covered with Water Lily murals of Claude Monet.

The two are on opposite sides of the Seine River, about a 10-minute walk apart.

And no, we didn't actually accomplish all of this in one walk. We saved the Orangerie and additional exploration of the Louvre for the following day, when we also made the longer trek along the Seine to the Eiffel Tower.

So, if you are a walker, you simply have to love Paris.

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

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Solutions on pg. 31



Paris, including the Eiffel Tower and many other famous landmarks, as seen from the rooftop terrace of the Galeries Lafayette.

# FROM THE GARDEN: From global concern to our backyards



NANCY ABRA

Independent Columnist

The United Nations (UN) began designating specific annual themes of focus in 1959, with the goal aimed to draw global attention to major issues and to encourage international action to address concerns of worldwide importance. The UN theme for 2026 is the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026). The theme focuses on the ecosystem that covers half the world's land and supports biodiversity, grazing animals and traditional land stewardship.

The term 'rangelands' is a vast category encompassing grasslands, savannas, shrublands, deserts, tundra and wetlands globally. It highlights the shared importance in biodiversity, water climate and pastoral livelihoods but in varying

scales and context. The native grassland of Southern Ontario is referred to as 'tallgrass prairie' and represents a special type of temperate grassland or rangeland ecosystem that provides crucial habitat and ecosystem services facing threats, making them central to the IYRP 2026 goals, in recognizing these undervalued lands and supporting pastoralists.

Both tallgrass prairies and global rangelands have shared functions in providing forage for livestock and wildlife. Their deep roots capture and release water, and are important for carbon storage and climate mitigation and provide valuable habitat for flora and fauna.

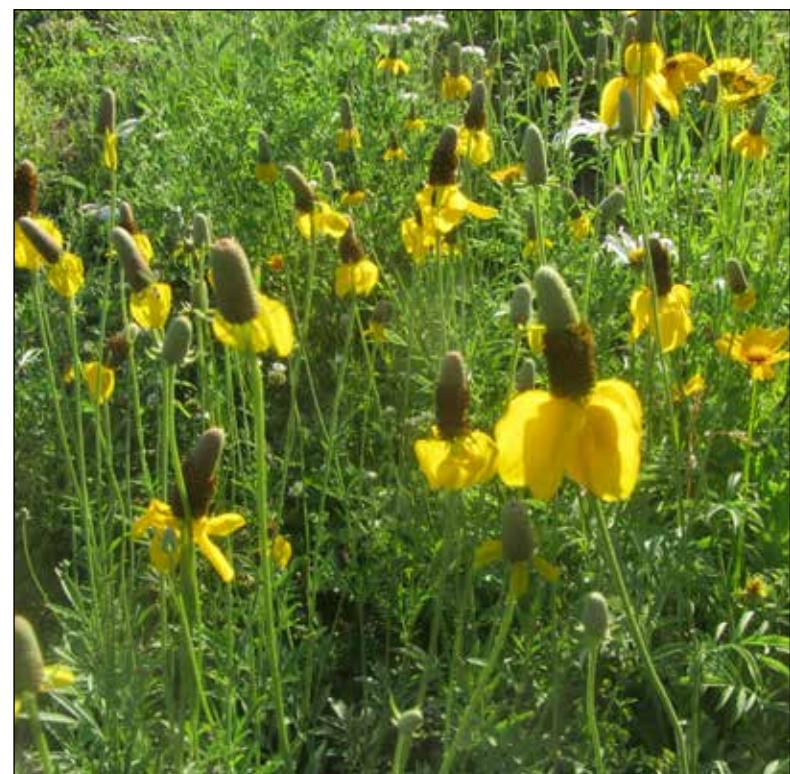
In this region, Komoka Provincial Park and the Pinery Provincial Park contain significant tallgrass prairie remnants, with the Pinery known for its oak savanna ecosystem, while Komoka has prairie species in old fields and areas to manage restoration in smaller fragmented pockets.

How does the home gardener associate with the UN 2026 IYRP theme? Simple. Tallgrass prairie plant species are very important in the biodiversity of our gardens. We can recreate micro-prairies in our home

landscapes.

January is perfect for doing a little research on native plants and tallgrass prairie, as well as planning this year's garden. You want to choose a location that gets full sun. In the spring, after removing existing grass and weeds, dig in some compost. Your micro-prairie garden doesn't have to be large, start out small. Plant in clumps, usually five of the same plant species, mimicking a natural pattern. Water until the plants are established. If you have a larger area, broadcast seeds of native plant species for a wild, meadow look. There are packages with mixed native plant seeds you can purchase but be mindful if it contains grass seed as some seed companies use it as filler.

In your micro-prairie garden design include woodchip paths or stepping stones for access, a birdbath or shallow water feature and leave some bare ground for ground nesting native bees. As for some suggestion of native plants: *Schizachyrium scoparium* which is commonly known as 'little bluestem' grass. Its round-shaped foliage has a blue tinge in summer and turns an attractive brown-red in the fall. *Ratibida columnifera* has a cen-



tral elongated disk surrounded by bright yellow drooping petals and is commonly known as upright prairie coneflower or Mexican hat flower. *Liatris spicata* or 'blazing star' boasts tall showy pink/purple flowers on a long stem which lasts most of the summer. This native flower is a favourite with butterflies and bees. And every micro-prairie garden should have

milkweed. *Asclepias tuberosa* or butterfly weed is a species of milkweed native to this region and has attractive orange cluster of flowers and is essential for the Monarch butterfly.

By creating a micro-prairie it will boost the biodiversity and ecosystem health, as well as bring more nature to your garden landscape.



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LAURA MCASH

*St. Marys Public Library*

Attend Adult Learning's upcoming resume workshop on January 15 from 5-7 p.m. and build a resume that will get you noticed by employers! This session will review GoogleDocs and Microsoft Word, show you how to format a professional resume, and give you tips on what to add/avoid in your resume. There will also be time to start building your resume during the workshop.

To register for the FREE "Creating a Resume Workshop", please call Adult Learning at 519-284-3932 or email [alearning@town.stmarys.on.ca](mailto:alearning@town.stmarys.on.ca).

### Up This Week and Next

Fri., Jan. 9: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sat., Jan. 10: Dungeons & Dragons (10 a.m.)

Mon., Jan. 12: Learn to Play Bridge (1-3 p.m.)

Tues., Jan. 13: Write of Way (6:30-7:30 p.m.)

Wed., Jan. 14: EarlyON Play & Read (9:30-10:30 a.m.), Mahjong (1-4 p.m.), Books & Brews\*^ (7 p.m.)

Thurs., Jan. 15: Adult Learning – Resume Workshop\* (5-7 p.m.)

\*Registration Required

^Broken Rail Brewery (480 Glass St.)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [WWW.GRANTHAVEN.COM](http://WWW.GRANTHAVEN.COM)

# Riddles

What animal can you always find at a baseball game?  
A bat!

What do you call a sleeping bull?  
A bulldozer!

Why are fish so smart?  
Because they live in schools!

What do you get when you cross a snake and a pie?  
A python à la mode!

What do cats eat for breakfast?  
Mice Krispies!

Why did the duck get a time-out?  
Because he was being a wise-quacker!

What do you call a pig that knows karate?  
A pork chop!

Why did the orange stop rolling?  
Because it ran out of juice!

What did one slice of bread say to the other before the race?  
You're toast!

What kind of beans never grow in a garden?  
Jelly beans!

Why don't eggs tell jokes?  
Because they might crack up!



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## NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

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

- Better habits
- New skills
- Exercise more
- Lose weight
- Save money
- Less screen time
- Eat healthier
- Read more
- Family time
- Sleep better
- Meditate
- Improve mental health
- Start a hobby



The **Riddle Kid**  
OF THE WEEK



**Liam & Marshal Darling (5)**

Hey Kids... Every Riddle Kid that appears in the paper gets a FREE MILKSHAKE at the Sunset Diner!

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic is pleased to be the sponsor of the

## PET OF THE WEEK



We hope you and your pets had a wonderful Holiday season filled with love and joy.

As we step into the new year, our team at St. Marys Vet Clinic are here to help keep your pets healthy, happy, and full of life. Schedule your pet's New Year health check today — start 2026 with pawsitive care!



### MURPHY & MILLIE

Our Pets of the Week are a pair of golden retrievers, Murphy and Millie. They are shown here celebrating Murphy's fourth birthday last July. Murphy and Millie are housemates and best friends. Their owners, Jessica and Jason, are the new proprietors of the Hillstone Bar & Grill.



# Thorndale News

**A section within the  
St. Marys Independent**

## Winter storms trigger stories of the past from Thorndale

**NANCY ABRA**

*Independent Reporter*

When it comes to weather, Canadians love to reminisce of storms of the past and share stories.

The winter of 2024-25 was a mixed bag of heavy snowfalls, winds, thaws and frigid temperatures. This winter began in November with a few heavy snowfalls in this region, then it warmed up near Christmas followed by rain, freezing rain and ending 2025 with snow and blizzard-like conditions. It makes one wonder what the rest of our winter will be like.

With an obsession for our weather, winter storms usually trigger people to share stories and experiences of the past. The 1970s is in our history books for some of our worst winter storms on record.

The major storm of January 1971 basically shut down the region, with children stuck at school and closed roads. A Thorndale area woman said her children were stuck at Plover Mills Public School and she and her husband went to get them.

“The storm was so fierce we couldn’t see the road and ended up in the ditch. We were all safe, but our truck was buried for a week,” she said.

Another local resident recalled that if



(JAMES IGLESIAS PHOTO)

**Blizzard conditions in Thorndale on Dec. 29, 2025.**

you didn’t have electricity, you went to a neighbour’s who had a wood stove.

“And we listened to Bill Brady on our transistor radio for weather updates and road closures.”

There were no cell phones or social media back then so “people relied on

friends and neighbours, phoning to check on each other.”

The winters of 1977 and 1978 also made an impact for more memorable stories. The winter blizzard of January 1977 hit with heavy snowfalls and high winds that paralyzed this region. The

following winter, in late January 1978, a storm hit which started with freezing rain, changing to heavy amounts of snow and high winds causing blizzard conditions – another blast of winter that shut down the area for a few days.

Personally, I recall my husband snowmobiling up the road to our neighbours who had a dairy farm to get some milk for our small children and our next-door neighbours. Then there was the winter storm known as “Snowmageddon” in December 2010 with record-setting lake-effect snow and blizzard conditions with roads and major highway closures in this region.

According to the local meteorological sources and the Farmer’s Almanac for this region’s winter, they are forecasting January temperatures to be near normal or slightly below normal and we should expect a return to more traditional winter patterns, including snow events and occasional thaws. As for February, the prediction is widespread snowstorms and deep freezes. Precipitation is forecast to be above normal, experiencing messy storms with the snowiest of them projected early in the month and a mix of ice and rain for the latter half of February.

So, hang on to your hats and have your shovel ready, as it could be another winter for the records.

## Municipality of Thames Centre turns 25 this year

**NANCY ABRA**

*Independent Reporter*

On Jan. 1, 2001, West Nissouri Township and North Dorchester Township merged to form the Municipality of Thames Centre, making 2026 its 25th anniversary.

This amalgamation was part of an Ontario-wide municipal restructuring plan under Mike Harris’ Progressive Conservative government. The claim was small, rural municipalities were too administratively expensive, duplicated services, lacked tax base for infrastructure and were inefficient compared to larger municipalities. The province’s

restructuring, which took place from 1998-2001, affected hundreds of municipalities across Ontario, reducing the number from 850 to 445. Middlesex County went from 21 municipalities to seven during that time.

There was significant pushback in many Middlesex municipalities with some councils arguing they were already efficient, amalgamation would not save money, their rural identity would be lost and local representation would shrink. The province’s key point in their restructuring plan was amalgamation was not primarily about local efficiency. It was about enabling the province to offload responsibilities without raising

taxes and it had the authority to override any objections.

The townships of West Nissouri and North Dorchester were geographically adjacent and shared similar rural character, similar service levels and they had similar populations. The province viewed them as a “natural pairing.”

West Nissouri and North Dorchester began their joint reorganization in earnest. They met in alternate townships with meetings chaired by Reeves Crisp in Colvin (West Nissouri) and Al Marr (North Dorchester). When deciding on a name for the new municipality, there were many suggestions, but the final unanimous decision was that since the

Thames River runs through both municipalities, we would be known as Thames Centre. There was very little backlash about the new municipality’s name.

“One of the largest concerns,” Al Marr recalled, “was the manageability of a municipality reaching from St. Marys to Elgin County especially over roads with concern for the more rural areas of both municipalities and historical snow amounts. With the rich history of West Nissouri and North Dorchester, there will always be areas of concern, but given the way this has worked out, I believe Thames Centre will meet all future challenges.”

## What’s on at Thorndale Library in January

**NANCY ABRA**

*Independent Reporter*

### For young families:

- Thorndale Storytime (Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m.): Join us for stories, songs, rhymes and fun!
- Early ON Play & Learn (Fridays,

9-11 a.m.): A free drop-in program designed for families with children aged zero to six.

### For school-aged (seven to 11 years old):

- Afterschool Hangout (Wednesdays, Jan. 7 to March 24, 4:30-5:30 p.m.): Join us for cool crafts, fun games and have a

blast with your friends.

- PA Day Easy Photo Stand (Friday, Jan. 30, 12-1 p.m.): Create a simple picture holder that can sit on your shelf. Registration required.

### For adults and seniors:

- Chunky Hand Knit Snowman (Wednesday, Jan. 14, 6-7:30 p.m.): This

holly jolly snowman is a great beginner project to learn a new skill. Registration required.

For more information or to register, call 519-461-1150 or email [thorndale\\_staff@middlesex.ca](mailto:thorndale_staff@middlesex.ca).

## OBITUARY

*Cookson*

It is with deep heartbreak that we announce the sudden passing of Lesley Anne Cookson (nee Jenner) at St. Marys Memorial Hospital on December 16, 2025 at the age of 57.

Lesley will be greatly missed by husband of 35 years, Gordon Cookson and children Caroline (Shawn Moore) and Gordy (Nicole). Loving sister to Alison Jenner and Andrew (Leanne) Jenner. Brothers and sister-in-law Tom (Kathy) Cookson, Vicki (Terry) Barber, Barry (Sherry) Cookson. Aunt to Scott (Allisha), Melissa, TJ (Leigh), Amanda, Matt, Jon, Jaden (Marisa) and many great nieces and nephews and extended family. Lesley will also be greatly missed by fur baby Lucy and her grand fur babies Leo and Cooper. Lesley is predeceased by parents Frank and Jean Jenner of Scotland, Gordon and Joyce Cookson of St. Marys and siblings Paul Jenner and Stephen Cookson.

Lesley loved the outdoors and her animals, with many fond memories being by the fire, very competitive games night or camping with her family in Algonquin park. Lesley's smile could light up a room and her contagious laugh will be truly missed at all gatherings. Lesley cherished her time at St. Andrews Church in Stratford, very rarely she would miss a service or any opportunity to volunteer.

The Cookson family would like to extend their deepest gratitude to all the first responders and staff at St. Marys Memorial Hospital for their service and support offered. And to Mark Wolfe of St. Andrews Church for ensuring Lesley rest in peace.

As per Lesley's wishes, cremation has already taken place and a Memorial Service will be held at ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 25 St. Andrew St., Stratford, on January 10, 2026 at 1pm. The service will be streamed live on the church's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/StAndrewsStratfordChurchOffice](https://www.facebook.com/StAndrewsStratfordChurchOffice). Reception to follow. Any memorial donations can be made to the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth.

Online tributes at [www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca](http://www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca).

## OBITUARY

*Vankeirsbilck*

Raphael passed away on December 24, 2025 in St. Marys Memorial Hospital with his wife by his side. He is survived by his wife of almost 72 years, Jeannette. He is also survived by his daughter, Nadia Bowman, his granddaughters Denise (Pete) and Kate (Eric) and his three great grandchildren, Zoe, Alice and Louka, his final joys. He came to Canada from Belgium in 1957 with his family along with a brother and his family. He basically came with nothing, knowing no one and not speaking English. He was able to build a good life in Toronto with help from Jeannette. They moved to St. Marys in 1997 to be close to their daughter and granddaughters. As per his wishes cremation has taken place and there will be no visitation or funeral.

Online tributes at [www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca](http://www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca).

## OBITUARY

*Doupe*

Junior Doupe, 93, of Kirkton passed away peacefully surrounded by his family at Kingsway Lodge, St. Marys on Friday, December 19, 2025. Beloved husband of the late Leona Doupe. Dear father of Kevin W. Doupe, Kim Massey (Garry Brunsdon), Vivian Rosseel (Dave), Vern Doupe (Anne), Sharon Wiles (Jim) and David Swan (Brenda). Loving grandfather of Sandra (Steve), Tricia (Pete), Jacquelyn (Zack); Brittany (Jordan), Sabrina (Felix); Sharlyn (Randy), Adam (Jamie), Dylan (Stephanie), Madeline, Andrea (Cameron); Logan and Jacob. Cherished great-grandfather of 17 great-grandchildren. Special uncle of Nancy (Bob) and great uncle of Jason (Michelle), Jeremy (Jody), Lesley and families. Dear brother-in-law of Maureen Swan. Also surviving are his many nieces and nephews.

Predeceased by his parents Wesley and Myrtle Doupe, son-in-law Jack Massey, grandchildren Kurtis, Wesley, and Zachery Wiles, great-great nephew Will Swan, sisters Ella Switzer (Max) and Leona Yake (Wilfred), brothers Ivan (Lois), Harry, Melvin (Eunice).

Junior was a longtime farmer on the Doupe homestead at Kirkton. He was deeply involved in his community, serving on various committees over the years. He was a Past President of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 236 in St. Marys.

The family would like to thank Dr. Rachael Berta and the staff at Kingsway Lodge, St. Marys for their loving care and support.

Friends were received at the Lockhart Funeral Home, 109 Montreal St., Mitchell on Sunday, December 21 from 2-4 p.m. and on Monday, December 22 from 10:00 - 10:45 a.m. followed by the funeral service at 11:00 a.m. A reception followed at the Lockhart Reception Centre. Spring interment in Kirkton Union Cemetery. Memorial donations to the Parkinson Society or charity of one's choice would be appreciated and may be made at [LockhartFuneralHome.com](http://LockhartFuneralHome.com).

## OBITUARY

*Norton*

It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Joan Norton (née Godden) on December 28, 2025, at the age of 70.

Born January 22, 1955, in Stratford, Ontario, Joan grew up in St. Pauls and later returned to Stratford. She built a beautiful life with her devoted husband, Paul Norton, sharing 52 wonderful years of marriage. Together, they created a home filled with love, laughter, and simple joys on their cherished little hobby farm in Glanworth, Ontario.

Joan was predeceased by her beloved son Mike Norton; her parents Mervin Jack Godden and Margaret Ann Godden; her brothers Robert Godden, Gerald Godden, and Donald Godden.

She will be lovingly remembered by her husband Paul; her son Shawn Norton (Leanne); her daughter Shelly Benjamin (Kevin); her sisters Florence Craig (Floyd) and Carol Walker (Greg). Joan is also fondly remembered by her sisters-in-law Tress, Joanne, and Linda, and by her extended family and friends.

Joan was a proud and loving grandmother to Brittany Norton, Cameron and Luke Norton, and Logan, Madeline, and Ella Benjamin—and to them she was simply "Nanny." She adored her grandchildren and spent countless hours with them, often found at the rink or the field cheering them on.

Known for her quick wit and her endless collection of quirky sayings, Joan could make people laugh without even trying. She was also a talented seamstress and the undisputed queen of blanket-making, always busy with crafts—often alongside her grandchildren. She loved birdwatching, gardening, and being surrounded by family.

Joan will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved her.

Heaven has gained one sassy lady.

A celebration of Joan's life will be announced at a later date.

## OBITUARY

*Vankeirsbilck*

Alice and Louka, his final joys. He came to Canada from Belgium in 1957 with his family along with a brother and his family. He basically came with nothing, knowing no one and not speaking English. He was able to build a good life in Toronto with help from Jeannette. They moved to St. Marys in 1997 to be close to their daughter and granddaughters. As per his wishes cremation has taken place and there will be no visitation or funeral.

Online tributes at [www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca](http://www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca).

## THANK YOU

*Bradley*

The family of Howard Bradley would like to extend a thank you to the doctors, nurses, and the ambulance medical team, for their care and compassion during a difficult time. Also, thank you to everyone who helped with the funeral service. Your prayers, support and expressions of sympathy have been a great comfort to us. Thank you!

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## THANK YOU

*Martin*

The family of the late Emerson Martin wish to thank all who sent flowers, food and words of condolences at the recent bereavement. The many prayers and caring have given great comfort.

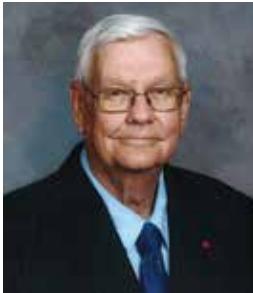
Also, thanks to Andrew L. Hodges Funeral Home, Pastor Jim Williams, and Dave MacPherson for comfort received at the memorial service.

Remembered with thanks, also, staff of St. Marys Memorial Hospital, and Jessica's House Hospice, for excellent care given to Emerson, and Nurses of Caring Partners, also PSW's of One Care. Special mention to Dr. Sarah Donaldson, and to St. Marys Cement Company staff in lowering their flags to half mast in honouring their former employee on December 16, 2025.

Nora Martin and Family

## OBITUARY

## Tipping



Bill Tipping passed away suddenly at home in his 74th year. Loving husband of Christal Tipping for 50 years. Cherished father of Amy & husband Rick King and Paul & wife Courtney Tipping, and grandfather of Rick King & Katy King. Special "Billiam" to Sam Julich and "Grandpa T" to Kristine King. Predeceased by his parents Ed & Irene, brother John & his wife Grace, sister Fran & her husband Joe Buck, and nephew Jim and niece Deb. Survived by many nieces, nephews, their spouses and their families. Missed by beloved cats Tubby and Fred. Bill was a proud member of the Thorndale Optimist Club & Mount Olivet Masonic Lodge.

When his kids were young, he was a volunteer firefighter with the West Nissouri Fire Department and coached youth baseball. He enjoyed spending time with family and friends, playing a good game of euchre or cribbage, as well as attending summer theatre. He loved to travel throughout Canada, go on cruises, and most recently took bus trips to Ireland and Newfoundland. He could often be found sitting, napping, or having a beverage on his front porch from spring until fall, chatting to those going by and anyone who would sit awhile.

Bill worked in road maintenance as a grader operator for West Nissouri Township / Thames Centre for 40 years before retiring at 60. Since retiring, he would often smile and laugh during a snowstorm, knowing that he didn't have to plow it. He was a friend to many and would strike up a conversation with anyone he met, wherever he happened to be. He was always there to lend a willing hand whenever needed and will be missed by many.

The family wishes to thank the Thames Centre Fire Department for their quick response. On Jan. 23, 2026, at the Andrew L. Hodges Funeral Home, 47 Wellington St. S. St. Marys, there will be a Masonic Service at 5:30, followed by public visitation from 6 - 8 pm. The Memorial Service will be conducted at the THORNDALE UNITED CHURCH, 245 King St., Thorndale, on Jan 24, 2026 at 11 am with Pastor Pam Wilcox officiating. Spring interment in Vinings Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations to Diabetes, Heart & Stroke, and Cancer would be appreciated. Bill often said "Always remember the good times" and at family gatherings, as he tucked his fork in his shirt pocket "Keep your fork, the best is yet to come."

Online tributes at [www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca](http://www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca).

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## OBITUARY

## Palfery



Edwin Gerald Palfery passed away peacefully on December 31st at the age of 99 at Spruce Lodge, Stratford.

Ed leaves behind his wife Jean Palfery (Irwin) his daughter Robin (David J Mountain) and grandsons Joseph and William Mountain. He is also survived by his sister Evelyn McMurray, 6 nieces, 7 nephews and their families. Ed was predeceased by his parents Victor and Mabel Palfery, siblings Florence Mordhorst, Ken Palfery and niece Lori McMurray.

Born in 1926, Ed's early years were spent camping in Mimico in the summers and living in Brooklyn, New York over the winters depending on available work for his father. When the US joined WWII, Ed worked as an Engineer's Assistant installing and repairing marine boilers on the ships preparing for convoy to Europe. After the war, he returned to Mimico and high school to attain a Canadian diploma.

He attended University of Toronto while teaching science at Meisterschaft College and playing the organ at Christ Church Mimico. He went on to become head of Science at Mimico C.I. and his 40+ year career culminated as Vice Principal of West Humber C.I.

His favourite place was his lab at Mimico, standing eating his lunch in his lab coat with the odd mouse or rat poking his head up from his breast pocket looking for treats, surrounded by students, plants and small animals. Ed's joy spending time with his grandsons knew no bounds including catching their childhood colds while playing Thomas the Tank Engine on the floor. He never appeared at our door without a small toy or candy in his pocket earmarked for the boys "just because."

A heartfelt thank you to the many PSWs, nurses and doctors who have looked after my dad at Chartwell Anne Hathaway, Stratford General Hospital and Spruce Lodge with such time and care. In lieu of flowers, donations to The Spruce Lodge Foundation or Avonbank Community Church are appreciated. Arrangements for a family service and burial at Avonbank Cemetery will take place in the spring.

Online tributes at [www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca](http://www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca).

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# Looking Back

AMY CUBBERLEY

Independent Columnist



## Duck duck goose crime

25 years ago (2000)

St. Marys OPP Sgt. Bob Jackson was busy last week dealing with a steady stream of firearms being dropped off at the local police station. Under new federal regulations, gun owners were required to have applied for a possession permit prior to January 1, 2001. Many people don't want to go through this registration process, so a lot of people are going through their closets and bringing in old firearms to be disposed of.

The Ontario Farm Woman's Network launched a toll-free telephone helpline for Ontario farmers and their families. This confidential helpline provides personal, career, and financial support and access to professionals.

50 years ago (1975)

The fire siren atop the Town Hall Tower called it quits recently. The siren will be replaced by a model similar to that now used at the James Street South fire hall. It was considered less expensive to install a new siren than to carry out repairs on the old screamer that howled under the concealed hood on the north ledge of the tower near the bell for many years.

Between flooding the Kinsmen sponsored rink on the north end of the Flats and collecting Christmas trees, Kin Club members had a busy weekend. The skating rink is in good shape, thanks largely to recent cold weather. A parking lot has been cleared so here we have the best of two deals, free parking and free skating.

75 years ago (1950)

Sam Swan found a dead grey owl on the centre road north of town this morning that had apparently been struck and killed by a car during the night. The bird had a five-foot wingspan and is in good shape if wanted by any local taxidermist fans.

Registered births in the City of Stratford declined by 152 in 1950 as compared to 1949. Some of this decrease is due to the fact that some of the births from St. Marys district have been taking place in St. Marys Memorial Hospital since that institution opened its doors some weeks ago.

100 years ago (1925)

Chief Erie Young and Nightwatchman Wm. Hanna were responsible for landing three culprits by the heels last weekend. Two young men were given three months in the common jail by Magistrate Butcher, and a third young man was allowed to go with a warning. The boys admitted the theft of two ducks and three geese from the farm of Alex Walz, River Road, and also to being in possession of bootleg liquor.

The grocers of the town will meet for the purpose of organization on Friday night to inaugurate a system of community buying as is in vogue in many towns, by which a reduction in wholesale costs will permit a corresponding reduction in retail prices to patrons.

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

## HELP WANTED



## WE'RE HIRING!

## Dairy Nutrition/Seed Sales Advisor

## POSITION OVERVIEW

We are seeking a highly motivated, dedicated and proactive Dairy Nutrition/Seed Sales Advisor to join our team.

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VISIT OUR FACEBOOK PAGE FOR FULL JOB DESCRIPTION & QUALIFICATIONS

APPLICATION DEADLINE:  
JANUARY 31<sup>ST</sup>, 2026

For more information or questions please contact Mark [mark.ross@thehitchingpost.ca](mailto:mark.ross@thehitchingpost.ca)



## HELP WANTED

## Administrative Assistant / Receptionist

Echo-Tech Machine & Tool Ltd. is a precision manufacturing company located in St. Marys. We are seeking a reliable and organized Administrative Assistant/Receptionist to support our office operations in a fast-paced manufacturing environment.

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Answer and direct incoming phone calls
- Perform general office and administrative duties
- Data entry and document management
- Support day-to-day office operations

## QUALIFICATIONS:

- Strong computer skills required
- Proficient in Microsoft Word and Excel
- Experience with JobBoss systems is an asset
- Ability to multitask and work in a fast-paced environment
- Post-secondary education in Office Administration or Business is an asset.

## HOW TO APPLY:

Please submit your resume via email to:

**Echo-Tech Machine & Tool Ltd.**  
2253 Rd 120, RR#2, St. Marys, Ontario N4X 1C5  
[cass@echo-tech.ca](mailto:cass@echo-tech.ca)

## THE WEEK AHEAD



SPONSORED BY: McDonald's St. Marys  
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PRC & Friendship Centre events - See the Stonetown Crier on Page 5

St. Marys Public Library events - see Page 25

Thorndale Library events - see Page 27

## FRIDAY, JAN 9

- Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon
- A.N.A.F. meat draw - 6 p.m.
- Mudmen concert at St. Marys Town Hall - doors open 7 p.m., show at 8 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs Sarnia Legionnaires at the PRC - 7:30 p.m.

## SATURDAY, JAN 10

- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw - 5 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs Listowel Cyclones at the PRC - 7:30 p.m.

## MONDAY, JAN 12

- Community dinner at St. Marys United Church - 5 p.m., Sponsored by Cascades Containerboard

## TUESDAY, JAN 13

- Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee - 10 a.m. to Noon
- St. Marys Legion cribbage - Starts 7 p.m. sharp

## WEDNESDAY, JAN 14

- Friends of the Library social at the Library - 6:30-8 p.m.

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