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Shaughnessy takes city to court in \$1.4M suit

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Stratford resident Barb Shaughnessy is taking the City of Stratford to court over its 2024 decision to ban her from municipal property and restrict her access to Stratford city council and municipal staff. Mayor Martin Ritsma is also added as a defendant, in that Shaughnessy is seeking damages for misfeasance in public office beyond the \$1.4 million defamation, aggravated damage and punitive damages claimed against the city.

The legal action follows a letter sent April 4, 2024 to Shaughnessy regarding her delegation at a Feb. 26, 2024 council meeting and ultimately resulted in Shaughnessy taking her complaint to the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman.

Shaughnessy was one of three Stratford residents who became subject to restrictions under the city's respectful workplace policy following appearances before council. Shaughnessy and Mike Sullivan, a former Member of Parliament, were initially issued three-month suspensions that prevented them from attending council meetings, contacting city staff or entering public municipal buildings.

The city's actions sparked a broader public debate in Stratford over the use of its respectful workplace policy, the ability of citizens to attend and participate in public meetings and the balance between protect-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Thank you Warriors! The Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors were at Community Living Stratford and Area on Sept. 26 for an afternoon of pickup hockey and autograph sessions, meeting with more than 100 local hockey enthusiasts. The organization extended their gratitude to the players and wished them luck as the Junior B season gets underway.

Ritz wants top to bottom change, if made mayor

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

If elected mayor, Robert Ritz wants top to bottom change – from how the City of Stratford communicates, the elimination of red tape and the adjustment of local services like transit.

“I’m running because I believe Stratford can do better,” Ritz said. “Stratford should be set up to work for you. I hear from residents who feel disconnected from city hall and are frustrated by the decisions they don’t fully un-

derstand or feel that they have a meaningful, meaningful voice in. I believe municipal government works best when residents are treated as partners. My priorities are straightforward: restore public trust, put residents first and respect the taxpayer. I want to bring people together, make better informed decisions and provide the practical, collaborative leadership Stratford deserves.”

Ritz, a lifelong Stratford resident, has over 40 years of professional experience as an architect and a long tenure as a local Rotarian. Residents will also recognize him as

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Ritz wants top to bottom change, if made mayor

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

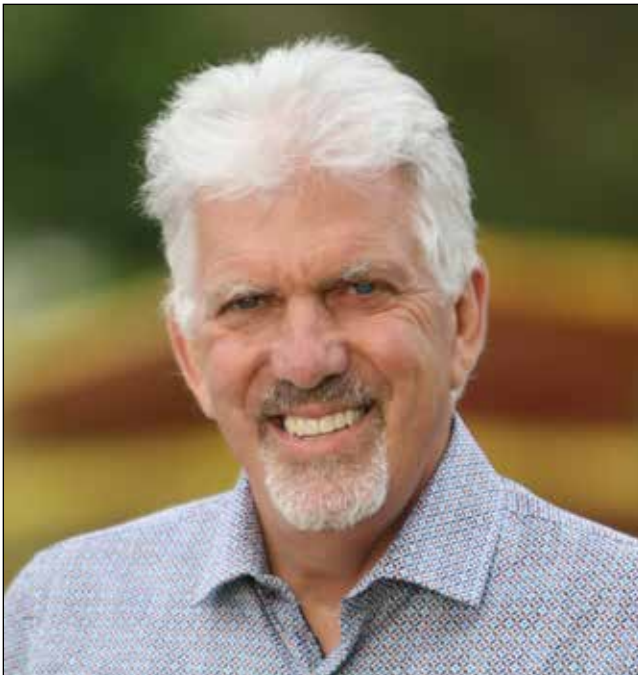
the citizen who has presented a comprehensive vision for the Grand Trunk renewal project, the city's keystone capital project set to overhaul the 18 acres of former industrial land downtown.

If elected, Ritz said he would like to see the establishment of a municipal service corporation, "a Grand Trunk Development Corporation," a la Festival Hydro, which would develop the site for the city. When asked if he would champion his own vision for the project if elected mayor, Ritz told the Times he wants to see something happening on the site "in some form."

On housing affordability, Ritz likewise advocated for another corporation, the "Stratford Housing Development Corporation," which would monitor the city's housing stock on an ongoing basis and work with developers to provide as much as needed in the free market, using city land and building when the market could not build affordably.

Ritz would like to better involve citizens in municipal decisions, or even to better inform citizens on process and what the city is doing. He would like to see the city's communication platform Engage Stratford better utilized. He would like to introduce ward representation, so each councillor will be responsible for communicating with the residents of their assigned ward.

All of that would take a change to the city's procedural bylaw – and money.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Mayoral candidate Robert Ritz is running for mayor of Stratford in the 2026 municipal election.

Ritz was in favour, especially during this first year, of keeping the tax rate increase to 3.5 per cent at the highest.

As he said, the timeline of being elected end of October and signing off on the budget in January is too short to do big cuts or institute a tax freeze, but he was in favour of keeping it "as low as possible," while maintaining service levels.

"Now I'm sure there's some fat in the system," Ritz said. "I'll be looking for that, see where I can trim it out. But there's not enough time from when you take office in November to when they want you to sign off on it in January. It's just no time, and to do the research I'd really like to do."

If elected, Ritz would lead the city's budget as mayor, thanks to the strong mayor powers endowed to Stratford last year. He did not rule out using the powers, but said he would only use them for "the people," to reverse a decision that council has made if he thought it undemocratic. For example, if a number of councillors were absent from a planning vote and a minority number of total councillors made a decision that might not have been made if all of the councillors were present.

Speaking directly to voters, Ritz said he is ultimately running for mayor to give back to the city which has given so much to him.

"I was very fortunate," Ritz said. "... It's my town, and I want to help it. I have 40 years of experience, and I think that experience can help us become a better city."

For more information, visit www.ritzfor26.ca.

Shaughnessy takes city to court in \$1.4M suit

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

ing municipal employees and elected officials while preserving public access to local government.

Shaughnessy appealed the city's decision which was

denied by the city's chief administrative officer (CAO) and subsequently brought her complaint to the Ombudsman. Following its review, the Ombudsman's office raised concerns about the breadth of the restrictions imposed on Shaughnessy. It noted that the city had not first addressed its concerns directly with her before imposing the suspension and advised that restrictions on an individual's access to municipal property should be considered a last resort and should restrict access as little as

possible in the circumstances.

"This action is about more than what happened to me," said Shaughnessy in a media release. "The ability of citizens to question their elected representatives, to access their municipal government and to expect transparency, accountability and fair treatment are fundamental to good local government. These are principles that matter to every citizen and to the health of our local democracy."



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(out of 4)

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JEFF LILLICO, 2024. PHOTO: ANN BAGGLEY

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Bookends leads new Ballinran production *In Search of Celtic Sound*

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Canadian producer Ballinran Entertainment and Ireland's Red Shoe Productions, based in County Waterford, Ireland, have announced the commencement of production on *In Search of the Celtic Sound*, an ambitious feature documentary exploring the extraordinary endurance and global influence of Celtic music.

"For generations, this music has travelled with people," said Craig Thompson, co-producer and co-director of the production, as well as the president and founder of Ballinran Entertainment. "It crossed the Atlantic with Irish immigrants, became embedded in communities

across Canada and North America, and continues to influence musicians around the world. This is a quest to discover why this sound has such extraordinary staying power becoming part of a global musical language."

Filmed in Canada and across Ireland, the documentary brings together Canadian and Irish creative teams on a musical journey in search of the roots of a sound that has travelled around the world. The Canada-Ireland treaty co-production is being produced for RTE in Ireland and Stageview TV in Canada. Buffalo Toronto Public Media and WPBS will be partnering on distribution to all Public Television Stations in the U.S.

In Search of the Celtic Sound is led by

JUNO-nominated Canadian Celtic folk group The Bookends, from Stratford, Ont., who will cross the Atlantic to undertake an extraordinary musical journey through Ireland. Travelling through the country by train, bus and boat, they will meet, play alongside and learn from generations of renowned Irish musicians, from legendary tradition bearers to some of the most exciting contemporary artists carrying the music forward.

Travelling through Ireland and Northern Ireland, The Bookends will play alongside traditional musicians in pubs, halls and intimate sessions; meet artists and craftspeople carrying the tradition forward; and explore the places, instruments, stories and communities from which Celtic music

emerged.

The film will bring together an exceptional collection of Irish musical talent, including some of Ireland's most revered traditional musicians, alongside emerging performers, singers, composers and cultural voices. Through intimate musical encounters, spontaneous sessions, masterclasses and performances, *In Search of the Celtic Sound* will create a rich and emotionally engaging portrait of Ireland and its music.

The documentary is being produced as Canada and Ireland approach the 180th anniversary of the Great Famine migration of 1847, providing a contemporary cultural lens through which to explore the connections between the two countries.

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Optimist Club of Downie donates Dusty plush dogs for Stratford police to give to those in distress

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Dusty, the facility dog for the Stratford Police Service, is well known for providing comfort to those in distress. Thanks to the Optimist Club of Downie, those in need of support and calm can bring home their own Dusty.

The Stratford Police Service will distribute 200 stuffed animal lookalikes of Dusty, plush yellow labrador retrievers with her signature purple harness, throughout the community. Social worker and Dusty's main handler Rachel Braden reached out to the Optimist Club of Downie, who donated the toys, to see if they'd like to get involved.

"We thought this was a great opportunity for them to be able to partner with us and give back to the community and be able to provide some support for children as well," said Const. Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer.

Children of Stratford police officers put the vests on the stuffed dogs during a pizza party with games.

Officers will give the plush Dusty toys out to those in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South, who are having a bad day, including children present during distressing situations.

"Our focus is on supporting youth in the community and that doesn't just mean sponsoring a hockey team or something like that," said Manny Puetz, incoming president of the Optimist Club of Downie. "It also means making sure the most vulnerable youth are looked after. Kids never make the choice of being in those situations. I think it's highly important that they get looked after and if there's something that can calm them down or put a smile on their face in a bad situation, let's do it."

Dusty has been part of the Stratford Police Service since January 2026. As the police service's first facility dog, she provides emotional support to those in crisis and/or recounting a distressing situation. She has also appeared at community events throughout Stratford.

"It's really great when we're able to bring Dusty to a call and have an interaction with kids and to be able to

provide them with a stuffed Dusty afterwards to continue that calming presence and just some peace to what had happened, whatever the incident was," Fischer said.

The Stratford Police Service and the Optimist Club of Downie have collaborated for years on other initiatives like the Project 529 Bike Registration program.



(STRATFORD POLICE SERVICE FACEBOOK PHOTO)

Thanks to a donation from the Optimist Club of Downie, Stratford police can distribute a lookalike plush toy of their facility dog, Dusty, to those in the community experiencing distress. Just like the beloved Dusty, the toys aim to provide a sense of calm and comfort to those who need it.



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Volunteers were out last Friday and Saturday for the Thanksgiving Food Drive to benefit the Salvation Army and Stratford House of Blessing. Pictured at Sobey's Grocery Store on Saturday are volunteers (left to right) Jayli Wiebe, Mike Tigani and Constable Hughes.

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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the traditional birthstone of October?
2. Who bet Eddie Murphy \$100,000 he couldn't make a hit song?
3. Who was selected 1st overall in the 2026 NFL draft?
4. What is the name of the famous clock tower in Ottawa?
5. In what year did ABBA win Eurovision?
6. What disease used to be called consumption?
7. What brand introduced the first-ever fully automatic drip coffee maker in the 1970?
8. What is the color of an emerald?
9. The offspring of a polar bear and a grizzly is a what?
10. Montana shares a northern border with which three Canadian provinces?

This week's answers are found on pg. 23



MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

COUNCILLOR CANDIDATES Q&A

Council candidates: Bill Boon



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I have called Stratford home my entire life. My wife and I have raised our family here, with our two daughters and four grandchildren. For the past 19 years, I have been employed at AISIN Canada Inc. serving as vice president of administration. Giving back to Stratford has always been important to me. I have been actively involved in minor sports as a player and coach and local boards of directors and currently serve as vice president and a

member of the investStratford Board. I also judge the Stratford Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards and volunteer in our community.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My campaign focuses on the issues that affect Stratford residents and the future of our city. Priorities are keeping property taxes and municipal spending manageable while protecting essential services; expanding housing options, including attainable homes, rentals, seniors' housing and workforce housing; and strengthening our downtown by supporting local businesses and reducing unnecessary barriers. I also believe in responsible investment in roads, sidewalks, bridges, water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure. I support the Grand Trunk redevelopment and back improved GO Train service and transit connections. My platform

is about responsible spending, investment, sustainable growth and protecting Stratford's quality of life.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

I would ask for a hard target of less than a two per cent increase for a tax levy before city departments are asked to submit their proposals for the upcoming year. I would ask all departments to clarify a new spending list so it can be transparent for council to view. Speak to the department heads on how we can get more revenue without raising property taxes. This would involve reviewing many areas with examples such as possible municipal properties, cash management practices, grants from provincial/federal governments and energy savings in city facilities. Stratford needs

to live within our means.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

Stratford needs more housing, but we also need to make sure we are building the right kinds of homes at prices people can afford. I would support faster approvals, sensible increases in density, more secondary suites and better use of land that has services. We should remove unnecessary barriers and encourage private, non-profit, and community partnerships to create affordable rental and ownership options. Homelessness also requires more than building homes. We need supportive and transitional housing for people who need help, while working with provincial and federal governments to

secure funding and close the gaps in our housing system.

Are you in favour of the current council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

I support continuing the Grand Trunk renewal project, residents deserve a clear, accountable path from planning to concrete results. The city has committed up to \$15 million, and I do not believe taxpayers should be responsible for the remaining estimated \$40 million required to complete the project, unless that investment is strictly limited to infrastructure that unlocks further development and private investment. I would establish a realistic goal of completing major phases of the Grand Trunk redevelopment within 10 to 15 years. My priority is turning years of planning into visible progress while protecting taxpayers and demanding responsible financial oversight.

Council candidates: Jason Davis



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I, Jason Davis, am a 36 year old father and diesel mechanic. Due to a lack of childcare I switched to working three 14 hour shifts on weekends fixing transport trucks and farm equipment so I can be home with my son during the week. I also own and operate Stratford Comic Stop, where I sell books online and at the local toy and collectibles show. For the last

several years I have also given away free comics to all kids who come by my booth, in the hopes of sharing my love of reading with future generations.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

The core issue I have tried to focus on, in and out of every election period is working class economics. Whatever level of government we are looking at the focus needs to be on affordability, helping keep more money in the pockets of our citizens so that they can use that money to stimulate our local economy. The largest hurdles to prosperity, especially for young individuals and families today are housing and childcare. I have also focused heavily on our unhoused community as a rising tide lifts all ships, and a moral society cannot leave individuals on the street.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

While the most effective long term solution to our ever increasing residential property taxes is increasing our disproportionately small industrial tax base. I believe a short term solution is implementing a zero based budget. This should be done for no more than a few years to find efficiencies. Especially within the parks and forestry budget which nearly rivals the entire social services departments municipally funded budget at 2.6 vs 3.3 million respectively. Relying on outside consultants to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year also needs to be revisited.

Housing and homelessness in

Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

In my report to council following the last election I made it clear simply building more units does not lower prices. One in five new homes in Stratford are already purchased directly by investors. We need to focus on building the right kind of housing, from revisiting current spending to create year long overnight supports, to building non-market homes for purchase. Relying on the private market which already encompasses 95 per cent of all residential units in Stratford is not a viable solution. We need to stop selling public land for private development and create an affordable housing reserve fund immediate-

ly.

Are you in favour of the current council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

The GTR should focus on community spaces, affordable housing and childcare expansion. I struggle with the current plan and giving millions of dollars to a private non-profit that cannot maintain capacity for the childcare spaces they already have due to paying below living wages. A new facility will not address these issues, just like it will not address being the most expensive gym membership in the city. If we are going to invest public dollars in something the goal should be to benefit the entire community – we need assurances that any hosts receiving municipal funds will pay a living wage.

Council candidates: Cody Sebben



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

My name is Cody Sebben. After growing up in Stratford, I went to school for behavioural science, and moved back after four years. My wife and I have two young children, I am a current member of Stratford city council, and also work as a rehabilitation facilitator supporting people living with brain injuries. I have one main priority, and that is to represent you. I have worked as your city

councillor for eight years by being responsive, hosting monthly meetings and running with each of your issues as if it were my own. That's the role of a councillor.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

Representation and tax rates. I have worked hard to be accessible these past eight years by hosting monthly meetings, consistently responding to your

emails and phone calls and by being receptive to feedback for the issues that matter to you. I am a firm believer that governments should spend money as if it were their own – and Stratford is no exception. As a member of Stratford city council, I have been vocal and consistent in advocating that council needs to set reasonable targets for rate increases and draw a hard line between needs and wants while

maintaining existing services.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

For eight years I have been vocal and consistent in advocating that council needs to set reasonable targets for rate increases and draw a hard line between needs and wants. In my

Council candidates: Cody Sebben

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

opinion each of the four budgets passed this term of council (5.46 per cent, 7.73 per cent, 6.97 per cent and 3.19 per cent) were unacceptable. The very recent change by this and previous council to not set a budget target is one contributing factor and I strongly believe council needs to set a budget target. I refuse to put further financial pres-

sures on residents for any items that are not absolutely needed to maintain services.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

Though the city currently has several effective programs in

place, there is much work to be done. The challenge is where to spend the limited resources our city has in this area, and we must be sure we are spending effectively. By working and investing with community partners on housing, while also implementing minimum requirements for affordable housing ratios with new developments, we can both make an impact within our

community and leverage those relationships for more effective solutions.

Are you in favour of the current council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

This is an ongoing and complex development. I believe pieces of the current plan have value, though there is much room for improvement. I was

frustrated with council's decision to move police headquarters to the edge of the city, rather than be considered as a part of this plan. Maintaining much of the existing superstructure is important. I do remain apprehensive about the potential costs of this project, and this will very much guide my opinion of what the site should become and the timeline.

Council candidates: Lesley Biehn



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

My name is Lesley Biehn, and Stratford has been home for 40 years. I am a wife, mother, long-time community volunteer and hairstylist by trade, and for the past four years I have had the privilege of serving on Stratford city council. I bring more than two decades of volunteering, mentoring, outreach and community service, along with experience serving on boards and committees focused on housing, seniors, public health and social services. I approach council by

listening carefully, researching the facts, asking difficult questions and considering the people behind every decision ...

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My focus is keeping Stratford affordable while protecting the services residents depend on. That means responsible spending and keeping tax increases as low as possible; investing in roads, stormwater, sewers and pedestrian safety; and advancing affordable housing solutions. We need permanent supportive housing while maintaining short-term measures that keep vulnerable residents safe. I will continue advocating for partnerships with non-profits and senior governments so property taxpayers are not carrying these challenges alone. Above all, I want decisions guided by data, staff expertise and long-term value, while ensuring Stratford remains a great

place to live, work and raise a family.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

As a councillor, I would push to keep departmental increases within inflation wherever possible and require clear justification when they exceed it. I would support a thorough review of staffing and service levels to ensure we make the best use of existing staff and vacancies before adding positions. I would defer non-essential capital projects and scrutinize new or expanded programs that create ongoing costs. For housing and homelessness, we must fund necessary short-term safety measures while advancing permanent solutions that reduce long-term reliance on emergency responses. Every new expenditure should demonstrate a clear need and val-

ue for taxpayers.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving affordability?

We need to continue advancing Stratford's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, with a focus on permanent supportive and affordable housing. I initiated a housing reserve that now holds \$1 million dedicated to affordable housing, and a path to reduce the multi-residential tax ratio which helps landlords absorb rising costs without increasing rents. We must also pursue partnerships with non-profit housing providers and senior governments because property taxpayers cannot fund the solution alone. While short-term measures, including emergency accommodations and the warming centre, remain neces-

sary to keep people safe, our investment and energy must remain focused on creating permanent housing solutions.

Are you in favour of the current council's direction on the GTR? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

I support moving the Grand Trunk forward, but a project of this scale cannot be rushed. The potential is tremendous, but so is the financial risk to taxpayers. I support a walkable, mixed-use neighbourhood with housing, businesses and community facilities, developed in phases as funding permits. I am not committed to retaining the existing superstructure at any cost, given the significant expense involved, but I am open to retaining it if a sound business case supports it. We need firm partner commitments, government funding and clear spending limits before proceeding with major investments.

Council candidates: Amy Brodhagen



Introduce yourself to readers. Who are you?

I'm Amy Brodhagen (she/her), and Stratford has been my home for 30 years. I'm the youngest of four, a mother, a bereaved mother, a wife, longtime volunteer, local poet and proud ally. I am someone who cares deeply about the environment and this community. I'm eager to learn, grow and work collaboratively. I want to bring my experience, compassion, resiliency, commitment and the public's voice to Stratford city council. I'm not running because I have all the answers. I'm running because

I'm willing to listen, ask questions and speak up for the everyday person.

What are the core issues you are focused on this election?

My focus for this election is building a more connected, resilient and engaged Stratford. I want to make municipal government easier to understand so more people are informed, confident, and know their voices matter. A resilient community means strengthening local food security, by revisiting by-laws and supporting community services. Protecting our environment and Stratford's character requires thoughtful growth and clear guardrails. Responsible development includes creating dignified housing solutions that make sense for Stratford, both today and for future generations. I also want to support the arts, cultural diversity and alternative sports, by expanding accessible recreation and year-

round amenities.

Next year's budget, like last year's, will be presented and guided by the mayor. As a councillor, what will you do to keep the tax levy low?

I will scrutinize spending, highlight areas where costs can be reduced or deferred, and ask hard questions about any proposed tax increases. Stratford residents deserve transparency about how their tax dollars are being used, and confidence that they are being spent efficiently, responsibly and where they are needed most. I will make decisions based on what is in the best interests of residents, not simply follow the majority. I will listen, ask questions and be accountable for how I vote.

Housing and homelessness in Stratford continues to be a challenge. What, in your opinion, is the strategy the city should be taking in building more homes and/or improving

affordability?

Stratford needs a housing strategy focused on affordability, not just growth. I support higher-density, mixed-use developments that create complete communities while protecting green space and planning for the future. That strategy should also include policies that support renters and encourage more attainable rental housing. City funding for housing initiatives should be tied to clear goals and measurable results, while making use of existing properties and buildings wherever possible. The city should actively pursue provincial and federal funding and grants to expand housing options. Growth should improve the lives of current residents without compromising our environment, infrastructure or quality of life.

The Grand Trunk renewal project is underway, yet still far from any concrete changes

to the grounds or superstructure. Are you in favour of the current council's direction? If not, what strategy would you be in favour of?

With the Grand Trunk renewal project, I want to see action, not endless planning. I support a phased approach that delivers visible results within four years, with clear costs, funding and measurable community benefits before each phase proceeds. Taxpayers deserve transparency about where their money is going and who is influencing decisions. The site should become a multi-use, community-focused space combining social services, amenities, green space, housing, while recognizing its history. I support exploring community partnerships and grants to reduce the taxpayer burden. This project will have a lasting impact on Stratford; we all deserve that impact to be positive.

Not One More Night begins fundraising for warming centre

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Not One More Night, facilitated by the Stratford and District Council of Churches, has launched its fall fundraising campaign in support of Stratford's warming centre for the 2026-27 winter season.

Not One More Night began with an idea brought forward by Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma and took shape a summer ago, when public debate on homelessness escalated and crystallized. Although the city did not have the financial means to establish a full shelter – nor did leaders believe that would have been a viable long-term solution – the warming centre was put forward as a “stop-gap measure,” and supported by a number of stakeholder groups who wished to help, like the council of churches.

“It was never the intention to replace any infrastructure that's already existing, it's only here to serve and fill in the gaps of existing infrastructures and to come along and to enhance,” said Trevor Biehn, pastor at Jubilee Stratford and

spokesperson of the council of churches. “And I think that was achieved in our first year.”

Last season, the warming centre operated 134 days, including 19 days of extreme cold. It also successfully reduced pressure on emergency response systems. Emergency accommodations paid for and organized by the City of Stratford's social services department decreased by 50 per cent. The Stratford Police Service reported a reduction of 16 per cent in its contact with unhoused individuals this winter compared to last. Representatives with Stratford General Hospital anecdotally described a decrease in cold weather-related injuries, though formal reporting is not yet finalized.

As of press time, Not One More Night has raised \$46,000 for next season, which is about the cost of one month's operation, as Ritsma said, meaning it will take many groups together to lessen the burden of operation for the city.

“A huge thank you to those that have been so generous to date. Every dollar makes a difference in a resident's life,”

said Ritsma.

As he has said before, Ritsma is in favour of supportive housing (housing that has social services support wrapped around, so those transitioning from being unhoused are supported), though the city is still a ways away from that being a reality.

“We have committed \$5 million to (a build),” Ritsma said. “That piece is ready to go. What we're waiting on, and it's out on RFP, where contractors will bid on the job. But we have made two delegations to the province, and I have a follow up conversation with Minister (Sylvia) Jones, Minister of Health ... We've requested \$1.3 million in both delegations to have the ministry support us in the operational costs. The huge part of going down this road is having the skilled women and men to bring those supports there 24/7 that are on site.”

Biehn and Ritsma were also excited to announce that Simple Dreams Ministries will match all donations made to the campaign, dollar for dollar, up to a total of \$10,000. This means a \$50 dona-

tion becomes \$100, and a \$500 donation becomes \$1,000 toward supporting Stratford's warming centre this season.

“If we all give a little, we can do a lot,” Biehn said, quoting Simple Dreams co-founder Richard Kneider. “And I think this is a good example of when we invite everyone to the table to give a little, we can do great impact to our city.”

Donations will be received and administered by Bethel Church in Stratford. Bethel will retain none of the money raised. One hundred per cent of the campaign funds received, will be directed to the City of Stratford to fund the warming centre during the 2026-27 winter season. It will operate Nov. 1 through April 30 for an expected total of \$327,031 (with \$88,560 being the city's portion).

Donations can be made through Bethel Church (Stratford). Those interested can donate in person at Bethel Church during regular hours, through Interac e-transfer, or through a portal on Not One More Night's website.

For more information on the campaign or to donate, visit notonemorenight.com.

Y Day a celebration of Stratford YMCA's impact on community

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Whether or not you're a member, you'll have a chance to learn about all the local YMCA has to offer.

The Stratford YMCA will have a free open house as part of Y Day at its site on 204 Downie St. from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Oct. 3. There will be activities like a bouncy castle and EarlyON's Run, Jump, and Play program in the gym, face painting, a photobooth, open swim and group fitness classes. Representatives from Employment and Immigration Services will also be there to promote the services and programs that are offered.

“Y Day is really an opportunity for the Stratford community to come in, have some fun and experience the YMCA in a different way,” Keristen May, general

manager said to the Times.

The Stratford YMCA is part of the YMCA of the Three Rivers, which also includes the locations St. Marys, Guelph, Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. All six locations will celebrate Y Day as part of the six-year unification anniversary, but May said the team at Stratford's YMCA wants to showcase its local impact.

“The biggest reason to come is to see that the YMCA is so much more than a gym and a pool. Those are certainly a big part of what we do, but there are so many other programs, services and opportunities happening here that people in our community may not even realize are available to them,” she said.

To learn more about the programs and services offered by the YMCA Three Rivers online, visit www.ymcathreerivers.ca.



(KERISTEN MAY PHOTO)

Y Day at the Stratford YMCA on Oct. 3 will have lots of activities during the free event including open swims, group fitness, bouncy castles and face painting.



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SDSS senior boys volleyball win London tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) earned the top prize at a tournament held Sept. 25 at John Paul II Catholic Secondary School in London.

After splitting their first match of the day against London Christian 1-1, SDSS rattled off eight straight-set wins to take home the championship, with coach Bear Gough recalling a moment from one of the earlier games in the tournament as highlighting the spirit of the squad.

“During pool play, rookie Nate Meadows ran and dove headfirst to try and save a ball in a set where we were up 23-6,” Gough explained. “It was emblematic of the hard-nosed mentality this team has been building. They play hard and battle for every point, no matter what. I think it shows how much respect they have for the game, and for each other. One thing I love about this team is that all 14 guys are fully invested in every game, and our bench and their energy have been a big reason we’ve been so successful thus far.”



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) won gold at a tournament at John Paul II Catholic Secondary School in London Sept. 25. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Yug Patel, Jack de Graaf, Nate Meadows, Cohen Bernard, MJ White and Jordan Diep. In the back row, from left, are coach Bear Gough, Chahil Patel, Brody Sinclair, Davis Longston, Zack Davidson, Ashton Van Kooten, Evan Abercrombie, Evan Ehnes, Ryan Cassone and coach Mark Cassone.

Their hot run culminated with a semi-final victory over London Banting before defeating London Christian High in the finals by scores of 25-23 and 25-21.

Gough explained how the Golden Bears overcame a tough opponent from London Banting in the semis.

“London Banting had been playing well all day,” said Gough. “We had a few players go on really strong serving runs that really limited our opponent’s ability to run their offence. Yug (Patel) had two big runs in the playoff rounds that either pulled us level or put us ahead for good. I thought our setter, Davis (Longston), had a really good day for us. He’s one of the smartest players you’ll ever see, and he just kept finding ways to put our hitters in positions to kill the ball. We’re a very dangerous team offensively, and he sets the table really well.”

Captain and left side Ryan Cassone, along with

setter Davis Longston, led the charge with strong leadership and inspired play on the court. Pinch-servers Yug Patel and Evan Ehnes went on several long serving runs in key moments to take momentum and seal wins for SDSS.

According to Gough, the Golden Bears were lifted to the tournament gold by their veteran leaders in the finals.

“In the final, we played a London Christian high team that has already given us four very tight matches so far this season. We won in straight sets, but they were close, and we had to battle back from an early deficit in the second set,” Gough began.

“Our veteran outside hitters were really smart and creative with the ball, and the team played a really mature game. We weren’t firing on all cylinders, but we’re an experienced team, and these guys just keep proving they can win games in a lot of different ways. Our captain Ryan Cassone was a great leader for us. He’s been around the program for three seasons now, and he’s a guy who leads by example in big moments.”

From a players’ perspective, Cassone summarized SDSS’s gritty effort.

“The boys battled today, and that was the story of how our tournament went. The start of our tournament wasn’t the way we wanted it to go, but that didn’t stop us from doing what we needed to do. Every-

one had their roles today, and we showed up in a great way. A huge part of our success today was the positivity on and off the court, with a calm and collected coach helping us take our first tournament win of the season.

“I believe the whole team just keeps getting better and better as every day goes by, as we all have that same goal of making it to OFSSA,” Cassone continued. “As a team, we understand that we need to work and keep improving to prepare for the strong competition we will be playing. Lastly, the effort, the energy and enthusiasm were there, and that’s what we build on at SDSS athletics.”

Both SDSS and St. Michael Catholic Secondary School open their Huron-Perth league campaigns this week, and Gough said he was thrilled with the work ethic and resilience of his team as the season is about to get underway.

“What was most impressive to me was the fact that we really didn’t have our A-plus game all day, but the players put on their hard hats and worked hard to make adjustments and play winning volleyball. The boys were battling a bit, but they were consistent in their effort and commitment to each other and to getting better. They refused to get frustrated and used each point as an opportunity to learn and improve. You can’t ask for anything more than that as a coach.”

On October 26th, 2026.

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Warriors outlast Nationals and Maroons for weekend sweep

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

Looking for their first win of the season, the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors faced the London Nationals at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Sept. 25 and travelled to Chatham to face the Chatham Maroons on Sept. 27.

Warriors head coach Dave Williams says the team needs to build a proper mindset.

“We just need to find confidence,” Williams said. “... I don't think we've played poor hockey. I think we've had some stretches in really good hockey. It's just a little bit more challenging. I think psychologically, mentally, when you don't get the result that maybe you feel you deserve.

“So, I think it's just trying to stay positive and keep trying to build habits and details that are going to have positive outcomes or positively influence hockey games. The guys are practicing hard. I thought last week, last Wednesday, that was maybe one of our better practices. So I think we just got ... to have a short memory and keep plugging away.”

Netminder Gage Hurst says despite the 0-3 start, the team's current morale remains positive, and shared his thoughts on the two games ahead.

“I think in the room it's great still with the boys. You know, obviously not ideal to start off 0-3, but the boys still have confidence. I think it's just a lot of

small details we've got to fix up. We're a very tight group, so I feel like we can get that fixed up pretty quick. But all around, pretty positive vibes,” Hurst said.

“I think it's small details, penalty kill, power play, stuff like that. You know, just small things like passing as well. Just got to tighten everything up, and we'll get the win.”

On Sept. 25, the Warriors started strong with a 2-0 lead in the first period. Francesco Sanita scored at 7:32, assisted by Jaxon Broda and Grady Murphy, followed by McQuen Haylock's first goal of the season from Sanita and Dominic Marshall with 8:53 remaining. London scored once with 2:41 remaining, narrowing the Stratford lead to 2-1 after 20 minutes. Throughout the period, Stratford outshot London 17-7.

The score remained 2-1 until Haylock notched his second of the game from Ethan Bridges and Will Coward with under two minutes remaining in the second period, thus giving the Warriors their two-goal lead back. London closed the gap once again less than a minute later.

On the power play around the midway point of the third period, Colin

Slattery scored his first of the season to put the Warriors up 4-2. Just over 90 seconds later, London scored to close the Stratford lead to one, and tied the game with 4:51 remaining.

After being rewarded with a power play in the last second of regulation, the Warriors capitalized on the opportunity in overtime, as Marshall scored the game-winner, securing the Warriors' first win in the 2026-27 season. Netminder Noah Bender overcame a shaky third period for his first win of the season, stopping 29 of 33 Nationals shots.

Following the game, a very elated Marshall and Haylock shared their thoughts on the team's big overtime win over the Nationals on home ice.

“It feels amazing. I mean, it took us a while. Obviously, three games in, it's not ideal, but getting the first win at home will hopefully set us up for a big weekend and carry the momentum there. So, I think it's a really big thing. Feels good,” Haylock said.

“Feels good, you know. Team effort definitely came in and wanted that win. So, I think everybody played a good part, and glad we got that last goal in

the end,” Marshall said.

Williams was very pleased with the team's strong showing after a productive week of practice paid dividends.

“They're really happy. They've been working hard ... We've been going down here six, seven weeks from the start of camp. They've been working incredibly hard in practice, so I think it was a big one to get that first win and get that monkey off our back a little bit, and yeah, it's a happy room right now,” Williams said.

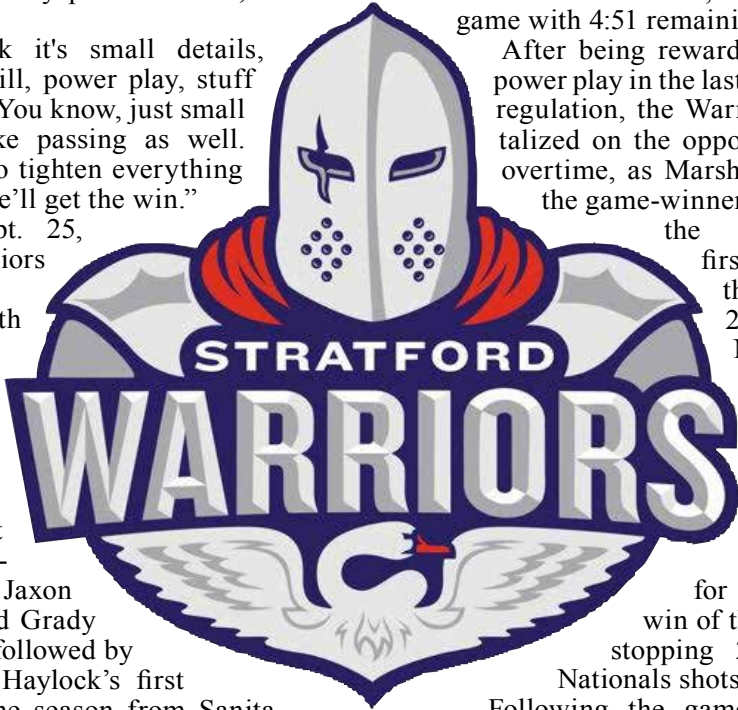
Haylock's comment about momentum came to fruition when the team went to the Chatham Memorial Arena on Sept. 27 to face the Maroons.

After surrendering the opening goal early in the first period, the Warriors put on their best offensive display of the season to date as Mateo Craievich, Max Wildfong and Aaron Green all scored their first of the year in a 7:30 span to put the Warriors ahead 3-1.

After Drew Hodge's second of the year with 4:40 remaining put the Warriors in a commanding 4-1 lead, the Maroons scored a late goal in the opening frame to cut the Warriors' lead in half before the period ended.

Chatham clawed back to tie the game with goals in early second and third periods, but Wildfong replied for the Warriors on the power play at the 5:41 mark of the period, and held on to a 5-4 statement win on the road. Bender stopped 36 out of 40 shots for his second straight win since returning to the team earlier this month.

The Warriors will have the forthcoming weekend off before returning to action on Oct. 9 at the Allman Arena against the Sarnia Legionnaires.



Stratford Warriors 2026-27 Stats (as of September 28, 2026)					
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Dominic Marshall	F	5	1	4	5
Will Coward	D	5	0	5	5
Ethan Bridges	F	5	2	2	4
Francesco Sanita	F	5	2	2	4
Grady Murphy	F	5	1	3	4
Jaxon Broda	D	5	0	4	4
Colin Slattery	F	4	3	0	3
Max Wildfong	F	3	2	1	3
McQuen Haylock	F	5	2	0	2
Drew Hodge	D	5	2	0	2
Chase Martin	F	4	1	1	2
Aaron Green	D	5	1	1	2
Coen Galbraith	F	5	0	2	2
Gibson Grendel	D	5	0	2	2
Mateo Craievich	D	5	1	0	1
Ethan McPhee	F	4	0	1	1
Declan McCotter	F	5	0	1	1
Carter Brownlee	D	3	0	0	0
Lucas Minard	F	3	0	0	0
Colten Brenzil	F	4	0	0	0
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	2-0-0	3.94	0.890		
Gage Hurst	0-2-0	3.57	0.865		
Travis Vanderzwaag	0-1-0	4.12	0.778		

U18 Warriors compete at the St. Marys Rock Tournament

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY
Times Correspondent

The Stratford U18 AA Warriors performed well this week, securing a preseason win against the South Oxford Storm last week and participating in the St. Marys Rock 'A' Preseason Showdown at the Pyramid Recreation Centre last weekend.

On Sept. 22 at the Stratford Rotary Complex, the Warriors beat the Storm 6-5. Liam Micks scored twice to lead the team, with Ethan Eros, Jake Schultz, Reid Morris and Ryan Watling also contributing goals for Stratford.

Placed in Group A, the Warriors played their first round robin game against the Lake Erie North Stars on Sept. 25. After a scoreless first period, the Warriors scored the first goal on a short-handed play with 6:27 remaining in the second. They then added three more goals in less than four minutes during the third period, leading to a 4-1 victory.

On Sept. 26, the Warriors faced the Guelph Jr. Gryphons in a noon game. Both teams scored in the first two periods, but the Warriors scored twice late in the third to secure a 3-1 victory, improving to 2-0 in the round robin.

In the evening contest, the Warriors competed against the Talbot Trail Blazers in the final round-robin game, with both teams

remaining undefeated in their groups. Talbot led 2-0 after two periods before the Warriors responded with two early third-period goals to tie the game. However, just 69 seconds after Stratford's tying goal, Talbot regained the lead for good with three consecutive goals, resulting in the Warriors' only loss in the preliminary round with a final score of 5-2.

Despite the defeat, the Warriors topped Group A with a 2-1 record, earning a semifinal match against Lake Erie on the tournament's final day, Sept. 27. Stratford scored first in the opening period and maintained their lead into the third. Early in the third, the Warriors widened their margin before Lake Erie responded with two quick goals to equalize. Stratford then executed a rapid two-goal surge within three seconds, securing a 4-2 victory and advancing to the final.

In the final against Talbot, the Trail Blazers took an early 2-0 lead in the first period. However, the Warriors answered back with two goals early in the second period. Talbot scored a goal with 41 seconds remaining in the second period and maintained their lead by defending successfully in the third period, ultimately winning the tournament.

The U18 Warriors begin their ALLIANCE regular season at home on Oct. 3, facing the St. Thomas Jr. Stars at 11:30 a.m. at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

VOTE 2026



STRATFORD

2026 STRATFORD MUNICIPAL AND SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION

Less than two weeks until voting opens for the 2026 Stratford Municipal and School Board Elections!

As we approach the Voting Period (10:00 a.m. on Friday, October 16 to 8:00 p.m. on Monday, October 26), it's important for electors in Stratford to know their rights as they relate to voter privacy and secrecy. There is an onus on each and every Stratford voter to help protect the principles of voter secrecy and privacy under the Municipal Elections Act.

For example, the law provides that:

- When you are voting, no one may attempt to influence your voting choices, or interfere with your marking of the ballot;
- No one may attempt to obtain information about how you intend to vote, or how you did vote.

What can you do to help uphold the principles of voter privacy and secrecy, and undue interference while voting? Here are some tips!

1. Cast your Ballot Privately. Although internet and telephone voting options will allow voters to cast a ballot from virtually anywhere, casting a ballot should still be a private exercise. Find a quiet, private place to cast your ballot, free from interference or close observation by others.

2. Protect your PIN. Your secret Voting PIN will arrive in the mail, or may have already arrived. Although a PIN thief would need to know other personal information about you in order to steal and vote using your PIN, it's still important for you to keep your PIN private.

3. Don't Donate your Vote! If you choose not to vote, destroy your PIN. It is illegal to give your PIN and your vote to another person.

4. Say NO to political interference while casting a ballot. While candidates and their teams are welcome to solicit your support throughout the campaign period, they must not interfere with a voter who is casting a ballot. Ensure that candidates and scrutineers respect your privacy and do not pressure you while you are voting.

5. Keep your choices private. Remember that you are not obliged to share your voting choices with anyone, either before or after casting a ballot.

For more information and to stay up to date on the 2026 Stratford Municipal and School Board Election, please visit www.stratford.ca/elections. Questions can be directed to the City Clerk's Office at elections@stratford.ca or 519-271-0250 Extension 5237.

Boyles-Keating, Sheridan earn Rising Star awards



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured is Dominic Boyles-Keating, who bowls at Mike's Lanes in Stratford, who, alongside Shelby Sheridan, were recipients of the 2026 Grand River Hall of Fame Rising Star Awards. Sheridan and Boyles-Keating were recognized for their dedication, passion, and accomplishments in Canadian 5-pin bowling. As part of this honour, both will receive a set of Softroll bowling balls and free entry into the Open Championships during their first year of eligibility.

Mike's Lanes bowlers earn city recognition for provincial, national success

NICHELE BUTCHER-BONTRUP

Guest Contributor

Stratford's five-pin bowling community has plenty to celebrate as several bowlers from Mike's Bowling Lanes are being recognized by the City of Stratford for outstanding achievements at the provincial and national levels.

The City of Stratford has invited the successful bowlers and their families to attend the Stratford City Council Community Recognition Awards, taking place Tuesday, Oct. 20 at 7 p.m. at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

Among those being recognized are five Mike's Bowling Lanes youth bowlers who captured provincial and national gold in the Ontario Youth Challenge Mixed Team competition:

- Claire Turner
- Jocelyn Gethke
- Owen Martin

- Wyatt Robinson
- Dominic Boyles-Keating

Mike's Bowling Lanes will also be represented by three bowlers who earned a gold medal in the Open Mixed Team Division at the Ontario Open Provincials:

- Brooke Louwiagie
- Christine Mair
- Kevin McKenna

These accomplishments highlight the strength and dedication of bowlers competing out of Stratford and showcase the continued success of five-pin bowling in the community.

The city's Community Recognition Awards provide an opportunity for Stratford city council to congratulate and recognize local individuals who have won provincial or national competitions or have excelled in their sport. The approximately one-hour ceremony will be followed by a reception.

M5PBA Weekly report

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Stratford

Bottle drive raising funds for swimmer Amiera Black as she heads to World Down Syndrome Swimming and Artistic Championship

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Stratford swimmer Amiera Black just earned five medals from the Special Olympics Canada National competition in swimming, and now she's looking towards participating in the World Down Syndrome Swimming and Artistic Championship in the fall.

The 20-year-old athlete and her family are seeking support from the community to cover the cost of the trip to the world championship tournament in Portugal, hoping to raise \$15,000 through fundraising such as a bottle drive and GoFundMe.

Amiera will join 12 other swimmers part of the Canadian Down Syndrome Swimming Association. The team does not have any government funding nor sponsorship, so each family has to cover the cost of accommodations and travel.

"Just for her to go on deck and swim is \$1,000 Canadian, which is just crazy. Then, you add on accommodations, you add on food, travel. It's a lot," said Jennifer Black, Amiera's mother.

At first, Amiera wasn't participating in the World Down Syndrome Swimming and Artistic competition in the fall for a few reasons including the cost, the uncertainty of jet fuel, the focus on Special Olympic Canada Nationals in August, and



(JENNIFER BLACK PHOTO)

Swimmer Amiera Black loves collecting medals, and won five medals total from the Special Olympics Canada National Games in swimming this past August in Medicine Hat, Alta.

not enough time to fundraise – compared to six months of fundraising when Amiera competed in Worlds in 2022.

"When people found out that we weren't going to do it, that we're going to take that opportunity away from her, I guess, they're like 'No, absolutely not. We have

to find a way. Let's do this," Jennifer said. "It's a lot of work, so the more we can expand that village of people spreading the word. The more grateful we are, right?"

The bottle drive began on Labour Day Weekend and is still accepting donations of beer cans, liquor bottles, wine bottles,

and other empties that can be returned to the Beer Store for refunds. Empties can be dropped off at either 78 Fraser Dr., Stratford or 4780 Line 42, Warburg.

"If we can take it back and get 10 or 20 cents for it, it adds up and we appreciate it and that's something that everybody can help with if they have a few cans in their garage," Jennifer said.

Although a lot of pop cans have been dropped off for the drive, they do not generate revenue.

"We just end up recycling those," Jennifer said.

Local restaurants including Rene's Bistro, the Common, and the Braai House will also be donating their empties towards the fundraiser.

In addition to the bottle drive, monetary donations can either be sent via e-transfer to amierablack@icloud.com, through shopping on the FlipGive app with the code 3HNR4X, or online via GoFundMe: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-send-amiera-to-the-world-down-syndrome-championships>. Anyone looking for more information can send an email to jennilee-black@icloud.com

The 12th annual World Down Syndrome Swimming and Artistic Championship tournament will run from Oct. 30 to Nov. 6 in Albufeira, Algarve, Portugal.

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U18 and U16 Lakers searching for an identity as season draws near

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

With the 2026-2027 season on the horizon, the U18 and U16 Huron-Perth Lakers are still looking to forge an identity and the right chemistry.

U18 head coach Chad Smalley and U16 head coach Greg Swan discussed their teams' morale and the process of establishing their respective identities.

"We're gelling pretty good. We've had a lot of time to practice and get on the ice. We have four practices left, and we've got one exhibition game with Kitchener coming up on the weekend. There were a few little things to iron out, but we're close. The team's gelling really nicely, and the kids are excited and, you know, getting to know each other," Smalley said.

"The preseason is like the main thing

because we got kids coming from everywhere. We want them to gel quickly, and it's coming that way, which is good. We're just trying to find chemistry with the guys and who can play with who and etc. So as long as we're working hard and buying into the system that we're selling, everything's going to be fine," Swan said. "I think we're really impressed with just how they're coming together as a group and their work ethic and attention to detail in practice and just the willingness to get better. I think we're trending in the right direction for the start of the season."

"With so many new bodies that we brought in, and you know the guys getting used to the new coaching staff and just gelling together as a team, and as coaches getting to know the kids and coming together as a family more or less and having that translate into success."

U18 netminder Ty Wilkinson attended the Stratford Warriors training camp and started the preseason opener against the Woodstock Navy Vets. Wilkinson says the experience with the Warriors was beneficial and explained to the Times what it meant to play in front of his family.

"It was absolutely great. The way their management, their team, their coaches, everything they do is awesome over there. It's all super professional. Just had a blast there. Was able to show my skills off," Wilkinson said. "It absolutely was a blast. I had some family out, had a couple uncles and aunts. It was a great time. So blessed that Stratford gave me the opportunity."

U16 forwards Will Molenhuis and Dexter Powell kept busy during the offseason, mainly competing with the 15U Stratford Nationals this past summer. Both players

aim to transfer key aspects of their baseball skills to the rink and tailor their performance for the upcoming season.

"I'm a catcher in baseball. So I kind of view the field as a leadership role, and I can see the whole field, just like bringing my eyes to the ice and seeing the whole ice. So yeah, just a bunch of leadership roles on the ball team," Molenhuis said.

"In comparison with baseball, I think it mainly correlates with short bursts of speed in hockey and with hand-eye coordination. Those things go hand in hand along with stick handling and shooting," Powell said.

Both the U18 and U16 Lakers start their regular season with tournament games at the Toronto Titans Tournament in Toronto from Oct. 1 to 4. The results will be published in next week's edition of the Times.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



An invitation to education about teacher Rose McQueen

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

An afternoon celebration of the legacy of teacher Rose McQueen is planned for Oct. 4. There is so much to learn about this greatly admired woman who taught in Stratford from 1912 to 1946 at what was then Stratford Central Secondary School.

She is most famously credited for inspiring Tom Patterson, through an essay assignment, to develop the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. As Judy Maddren explained it to the Times, Patterson came to McQueen some time after graduating when he was feeling at loose ends with what to do with his life. His former teacher recalled the essay and suggested, "What about that essay you wrote?"

The essay dealt with a reimagined town, an economic catalyst to replace the furniture business lost and the collapse of the train industry. Patterson pondered the many connections to Shakespeare already in Stratford and thought, why not



(STRATFORD & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTO)
Come out October 4th to learn more about this Stratford Teacher, Rose McQueen, whose love of Shakespeare inspired a young Tom Patterson.

create a festival of Shakespeare plays that he had come to love in McQueen's English class?

"Rose McQueen is one of those unsung heroes. We can all think of someone who has encouraged us, teachers, and that was her role with Tom Patterson, for sure. She mentored a lot of students, and, in fact, she paid for some of their education," explained Maddren.

A group of modern-day citizens, lead by Laura Pogson, began about a year ago to plan how to celebrate Rose McQueen and the event of Oct. 4 is the first event to be held. Beginning at 2 p.m. at Stratford Intermediate School, 60 St. Andrew St. (formerly Central Secondary School where Rose taught) there will be a short presentation by Lauri Leduc of Stratford Walking Tours. After that, take a short walk to Here For Now Theatre, 24 St. Andrew St., where a performance at the Rose McQueen Stage by Scott Beaudin will take place.

"That group of people thought it would

be nice to honour her with a bursary, funding for students from kindergarten to post-secondary levels, to take theatre courses. The Rose McQueen Legacy Fund goes to the festival's educational department and is administered by Stratford Perth Community Foundation," said Maddren.

The fund helps students access Shakespeare Workshops, post show chats with students, tours of festival assets, busing to plays, overnight theatre arts summer camps for Grades 7-12, multi-day courses for secondary students, partnership courses with Ontario universities and RISE UP youth mentorship ensemble for IBPOC (Indigenous, Black, person of colour) students.

This fundraising event is free to attend with the hopes that donations would be made to the Rose McQueen Legacy Fund. Seating is limited; registration can be emailed to friendsofrosemcqueen@gmail.com to confirm attendance.

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COMING EVENTS

Wed., Oct. 14	Ladies' Sweet 'n Sour Chicken Luncheon, \$18 per person. Call Mary Helen 519-273-3789 for tickets.
Fri., Oct. 16	100th Anniversary Weekend Open House 3-10 p.m. Tombola (Casino Night) doors open at 6 p.m., play starts at 7 p.m., entrance by donation, MUST be 19 years of age
Sat., Oct. 17	Laying of the Wreaths, 9:30 a.m. at the Cenotaph Dedication of the Centennial Bench 9:45 a.m. at the Cenotaph Family Barbeque at the Legion, 12-2 p.m.; kids corner with a magician, animal balloon making and face painting, entrance by donation 100th Anniversary Cake Cutting, 2:00 p.m. Meat Draw, Legion Hall 4:00 p.m. Dance to the sounds of Strings 'n Traps; doors open at 6:00 p.m., music is from 7:00- 10:00 p.m. entrance by donation
Sun., Nov. 8	"Lest We Forget" Roast Beef Dinner, \$30 (tax included). Call Frank 519-271-9669, Pearl 519-305-2757 or the Legion 519-271-4540
Wed., Nov. 18	Ladies' Luncheon, \$18 per person. Call Mary Helen 519-273-3789 for tickets.
Thurs., Nov. 19	Burger Night and Fries
Sun., Nov. 29	Christmas Gala, Oven Roasted Turkey and Glazed Ham with a salad bar, dessert bar, \$30 per plate. DINE IN ONLY.

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Experience Bob Wiseman's solo music at Grayson Mills

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Bob Wiseman may be a founding member of Blue Rodeo known for his eccentric keyboard playing, but it is his solo career that has defined the man and his music. Coming to Stratford Oct. 7 to the historic Grayson Mills is Wiseman and his piano, with special guest Brent Jones opening.

This isn't the first time he has performed in town and hopefully won't be the last. Fans may have caught him when he played at the Stratford Perth Museum or for the celebration of Richard Manuel when author Stephen Lewis brought his biography on Manuel to town.

Could you imagine a world where there is no Bob Wiseman music? It could have happened as in his youth, while he knew he was a musician, he couldn't figure out how to be a musician and so resigned himself to make peace with that fact that it just wouldn't happen for him. That is, until one day, he played a folk festival in his native Winnipeg.

"I ended up playing the Winnipeg Folk Festival and there were some people that were international performing artists on the bill with me at this workshop. They were older than me and they thought I was talented, and they were like, 'What are you doing here, kid?' and I asked, 'Do you think I could do what you're doing?' and they said, 'Oh yes.' That became the gunpowder that made me move to Toronto and try my luck going to music school,"



(LISA KANNAKKO PHOTO)

Bob Wiseman is set to appear at Grayson Mills on Oct. 7. Doors open at 6 p.m. for this 7 p.m. concert featuring special guest Brent Jones.

explained Wiseman.

Toronto can be overwhelming and there were so many talented musicians that again he began to think to himself just how impossible success seemed, so instead he tried social services as he had done some work along those lines as a teenager.

But then one day, his older brother who had been living in New York, called and said his friend Greg was going to come stay on Wiseman's couch, "like older sib-

lings just have the right to tell you how life is going to be." This is how Wiseman met Greg Keeler, who heard him play the piano and determined to himself he was going to hire Wiseman for this new band Keeler and buddy Jim Cuddy were starting.

For six years Wiseman played with Blue Rodeo before embarking on his remarkable career as a musician, a writer, a composer and a teacher who has recently received a PhD. His approach to performing

was nurtured through performing on open stages where he found "his people."

"When I found the open stage, it was like a community vibe where anybody could play. There was no music business there, there was no judgement and I made friends right away. It was a licence to experiment with being a performer," said Wiseman.

This experimental approach became his hallmark playing keyboards with exuberance and enthusiasm for the music. He improvises with heart.

"Part of the draw of being an artist is that you can resolve emotional problems through art, so that's what happens for me. I think that's what a lot of people go through with whatever art they are drawn to. Especially what's going on emotionally, they can have fixed in the universe of the heart itself. In a song, I can fix a certain problem that's not necessarily fixable," said Wiseman.

The concert at Grayson Mills will feature songs he has written about a wide spectrum of subjects, from love to pain, from Jian Ghomeshi and improvisational music, improvisational piano music. He will also include live readings of excerpts from his two books.

The opening artist is Brent Jones whose music blends elements of soul, folk, roots and jazz in his songwriting. This concert is a production of Barry James Payne and Stringbone. Tickets are \$37.50 (including HST) and can be purchased at stringbone.ca/shows.

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Stratford's 185th fall fair



The 185th Stratford Fall Fair officially opens! Paige Fawcett, Paige Wilhelm, Chloe Bell, Lydia Parr and Faith Knechtel pose during the crowning of the 2026 Fall Fair Ambassador, which Bell won.



Judge Morgan McMillan looks over the final lineup of 4-H members in the finals of the Western Ontario Showmanship Competition at the Stratford Rotary Complex during the Stratford Fall Fair. The eastern Ontario judge from Northumberland County commented on how he was extremely proud of the way the over 130 members of 4-H dairy clubs in the area came and showed their unlimited expertise.



Two winning showmanship 4-H members included #117-Jackson Kaufman from Perth County, named reserve champion showperson, while #110 Emma Lewis from Middlesex County took home the Grand Champion Showmanship Banner from the Western Ontario Championship Show.



Campbell Amusements manager Aaron Hickerson, Martin Ritsma, Danny Campbell and Elaine Standeaven stand in front of the Ferris wheel at the Stratford Fall Fair on Sept. 26. After half a decade of partnership, past presidents of the Stratford and District Agricultural Society accepted a plaque of gratitude and appreciation from the company.

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Downie Central's first Grade 8 class reunites, honours classmate Sgt. Margaret Eve

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The original class of Downie Central Elementary School held a reunion this month for the first graduating class of those born in 1962. These students were the first to attend kindergarten through Grade 8. They graduated from Grade 8 at Downie Central 50 years ago.

"It was wonderful to see everyone; the energy in the room was electric," said Elaine Strawbridge, organizer. "Everyone was hugging and introducing themselves because, you know, we don't look the same as we did when we were 14. People were thrilled to attend."

The school was built during a period when Ontario was increasingly consolidating rural school sections into larger central schools. Instead of maintaining numerous small one-room schools, school boards began bringing students together in larger buildings, often with several classrooms, specialized facilities and eventually school-bus transportation, which came with its ups and downs, said Strawbridge.

"We had quite an adventure on Jan. 26, 1971," said Strawbridge. "There was a massive snowstorm. Our bus and one oth-

er bus got as far as Aventon, about three kilometres from the school, but couldn't make it any farther. The only reason we got as far as we did was that one of the Grade 8 boys ran in front of the bus to show the bus driver where the road was. Three buses were stuck at the school for three days with the teachers that week, too."

Downie Central is part of the Avon Maitland District School Board and is located in the Downie Ward of the Township of Perth South. The school is located at 4384 Perth Line 20, Saint Pauls Station, between Stratford and St. Marys.

One person who attended the school and graduated with the first class was Sgt. Margaret Eve, a sergeant who was killed at a roadside stop during her time working with the Chatham-Kent Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).

On the afternoon of June 7, 2000, on a deadly stretch of Highway 401 (known as "Carnage Alley"), Sgt. Eve, along with Constables Brad Sakalo and Patti Pask, checked a vehicle that was suspected to have been involved in an armed robbery in Windsor.

While talking with the occupants of the

car, the driver of a transport truck drove directly into the three police cruisers, the suspect vehicle and all five people standing on the shoulder of the highway. All were rushed to the hospital with serious injuries. Sgt. Eve was airlifted to the Trauma Unit at the London Health Sciences Centre but later died on June 9, 2000.

Approximately 4,500 police officers and civilians attended the funeral service that day.

She was the first female police officer killed in the line of duty in Ontario, as per the OPP website.

Sgt. Eve was known as an incredible person and a true leader. She lived by two mottos: Lead by Example and Do It Right, or not at all.

Although Sgt. Eve's tragic death was felt by communities across the province, her death was one of the tragedies that helped lead to Ontario's Move Over law, which requires drivers to slow down and, when it is safe, move over when passing certain stopped emergency vehicles.

The legislation was introduced in 2002 and, since then, has been said to have saved countless police officers' lives.

Sgt. Eve's daughter, Colleen Eve, at-

tended the reunion on her mother's behalf and said she was grateful for the opportunity to connect with those who knew her mother as a young child and teenager.

"It was such an honour for our family to be invited to the Downie Central Elementary School class of 1976 50th reunion," said Eve. "To have the opportunity to speak with her classmates and hear their stories was particularly special for our family. Margaret valued friendship and community, and we know that this class reunion would have been something she would have loved to attend herself."

The graduating class has now started a scholarship in Sgt. Eve's name. This fund will support a student graduating from Downie Central School and aims to recognize a student who exemplifies kindness, as Eve did.

"We are equally honoured that the class members had the idea to establish a scholarship in Margaret's name with kindness at its heart," said Eve. "It feels like a particularly fitting way to carry her legacy forward in her own community."

Anyone interested in more information about the scholarship can contact Strawbridge at strawbridge.elainef@gmail.com.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Members of Downie Central School's first Grade 8 graduating class reunite 50 years after graduating from the school. Back row, from left: Jane Bickell Otto, Mr. Graham (spouse), Jayne Shackleton Dill, Colleen Eve (Margaret Eve's daughter), Brenda Vink (Margaret's sister), Sherry Forster Moraca, Pierre Chateaufort, Dave Gorvett (spouse), Peter Bisset, Daryl Stacey, Ken Brooks, Steve Otto, Andy Graham, Dan Jackson, Joan Tettman, Bob Galloway, Elaine Strawbridge and Reid Dundas. Front row, from left: Barb Costick Gorvett, Lois Worden Gascho, Catherine Gibb, Liz Hislop Clarke, Jane Humphrys, Susan Hewitt Graham, Sherrie Wickenheiser Roulston and Kathryn Mallon (daughter of Bessie Blair, a kindergarten/Grade 1 teacher).



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The first graduating cohort from Downie Central School of those born in 1962.

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Editorial

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Church Yard

(on walking among the flat markers, Holy Trinity Anglican Church, formerly St. James, Stratford, Ontario)

These are the half names,
the half people, the quarter lives
of rain-smoothed hieroglyphs,
details smudged like that goodbye
lipstick kiss that wounds the motel mirror.

The markers magnetize the dead,
dredge with their icy nets the deepest
plates of this green Sargasso Sea
where Christ-like we tread upon the
graves and perceive the heavens.

Are these fishers of men, these
markers pressed to the beating hearts
of the long departed, their stories
pulled wide-eyed to the earthly surface
in a silvered froth of regret and memory?

I do not know. It cannot be my
place to judge or ascertain.
I am no Messiah. The cypress
here will always drape in prayer
its sacred hands upon this special earth.

We walk among the stories now,
as they too may walk among us,
some greened with grace's lifting flush,
others still stark before the lens in that
eternal bewilderment of the dying.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

A thank you from farther away



CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Editor

This past week, our daughter was sick for the first time. Really sick.

It started suddenly, without warning. On Sunday evening, my wife and I put her down to sleep, happy as a clam, and Monday morning she woke with a guttural cough and a bad temper. Her breathing was ragged and she was using her abdominal muscles to do so. She had a bad temper – did I already mention that?

After she finished beating me up as I changed her, my wife and I figured out what we were doing. We kept her from daycare and my sister came by to give us a hand watching her, as I worked to get our monster special Farm and Fall Fair Edition out. Our daughter, usually a ray of sunshine, ever-excited to experience the world, was beside herself, having tantrums, refusing to eat and all-in-all acting

completely out of character. I think we might have gotten a preview of “the terrible twos,” and boy, will we have our hands full.

We took her to Alexandra Hospital in Ingersoll, not relishing a long wait time at London’s infamous emerge – and what a blessing we did. The nursing staff and doctors which saw us were exemplary. I have been very fortunate that I have not needed to use our health-care systems much in the past and the only real prolonged experience I have had in hospitals was the palliative care department to say goodbye to someone I hold close, where I wasn’t paying much attention to the staff, I confess.

This time around, I saw just how much empathy and care each staff member had to share. Our daughter was doted on, given exemplary care from people who we could tell were busy, as patients filtered in and out. Emerge departments being what they are, we could sense a little of what our temporary neighbours were going through and our daughter’s cough seemed quaint in comparison. Nevertheless, each time a nurse or doctor stepped into our room, we were the centre of their attention.

A young student came into check on us and gave our daughter a toy she kept on her keyring, something which kept her occupied for a good

part of the evening.

Another nurse kept her well-fed and hydrated with popsicles and juice, both a first for her. Another kept her occupied with a game of peek-a-boo through a privacy curtain.

And when we had to take x-rays, a nurse helped me hold her as the tech took picture after picture, all while she wailed and threw a few haymakers our way (sorry again!).

They also got to the bottom of what was the problem (a spot of pneumonia) and got us out in record time. After a week of antibiotics and acetaminophen, our little one is back to her same cheery self, playing discordant notes on a toy piano and being the cheeky girl we missed last week.

Lastly, the nurses and doctors assuaged two nervous parents who were sick with worry, and who, as it turned out, had nothing to worry about – because of them.

This is a very long-winded way for me to say thank you to everyone with the Rural Roads Health Services – and for all health-care practitioners. I know we were not the most dire case in the hospital that evening, but your professionalism and care meant the world to us. The fact that there are so many kind people working in the system in Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada and the world truly is awe-inspiring, especially after seeing it firsthand.

Quote of the Week

“If we all give a little, we can do a lot.’ And I think this is a good example of when we invite everyone to the table to give a little, we can do great impact to our city.”

– Trevor Biehn of the Stratford and District Council of Churches quotes Richard Kneider of Simple Dreams Ministries, speaking of the fundraising efforts for the warming centre.

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Publisher

Stewart Grant • stew@granthaven.com

Editor

Connor Luczka • connor@granthaven.com

Times Reporter

Amanda Nelson • amandajanevriter@gmail.com

Graphic Design / Sales Inquiries

Sarah Cairns • stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Business Development

Heather Dunbar • heather@granthaven.com

Billing Administrator

Cindy Boakes • boakescindy1576@gmail.com

Contributors

Galen Simmons, Spencer Seymour, Julia Schneider,
Gary West, Paul Knowles, Emily Stewart, Lisa Chester,
Fred Gonder, Sheila Clarke, Irene Roth, Lee Griffi,
Stuart Lender, Sydney Goodwin, Patrick D. Burk

36 Water St. St. Marys, ON, PO Box 2310 N4X 1A2
stratfordtimes@gmail.com | 519.655.2341 | granthaven.com



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STRATFORDTIMES

Guiding Principles

1. Everyone has a story
2. The news should be free for all to enjoy
3. Good news beats bad news
4. A Newspaper should be a community effort (contribute to your local paper!)
5. Newspapers document history
6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Opinion

As I See It From America: Is nonsense and falsehood the face of the future?



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

It is always a hard thing to face change. I have found that out in many ways this past week. It seems that some people are very resistant to change while others look at it as water off the back of a duck, or a proverbial swan, as a Stratford reference. I guess I might be in the middle somewhere, probably most of us are. It does seem that at this point in my life change is happening all around me, and what I accept and what I struggle with is inevitable. It seems to be the nature of the beast. We just move forward and do the best that we can.

As you get older, it seems that you must undergo change just to keep in touch and be a part of today's world. Professionally

it gets harder to compete with the young set and all the different and massive things that are happening with computers, artificial intelligence and communications in general. It does make it quite a challenge. One of the things that I dread every day is a major change that I will no longer be able to work with or even want to learn about. Artificial intelligence (AI) is one of those things.

AI and how people are using it is an enigma to me. I have seen it be a very useful tool at times and I have seen it be a decisive negative tool at others. I have seen things that have been created as beautiful and uplifting and I have seen creations that are questionable and tools for falsehoods and promoting fear. It has become the tool of those that want to manipulate opinion based on untruths rather than facts. It is useful to promote unfounded information while not having a person or group take responsibility.

This past weekend I was privy to three such posts on Facebook that really made me want to react and post yet more negatively about the posts themselves. It is my nature to want to correct what is wrong and make it right and yet, I was also wondering

if by doing this correction, I would be spreading the untruth in the AI post and thus making the bad information more readily available to more people. It is a quandary. Perhaps our government should step in and start working on this issue and design a path to move forward and protect people from the falsehoods.

Well, you guessed it. Congress had a kick start on this issue and then decided to adjourn and go home until after the elections. This was one of many issues including the upcoming impeachment votes for our Secretary of Defence and the president as well as AI influence and the push back against massive health-care cuts that will leave hundreds of thousands without insurance and social security cuts and reforms. These are important issues that needed to be addressed but because of the flawed and imperfect political system they were set aside for campaigning and fundraising for individual campaigns. The worst thing about all this is that they admit that this was the reason to adjourn and not work on these issues.

This was especially apparent when one of our sitting representatives admitted that the negative use of AI against his young opponent was helpful in his campaign. This particular campaign took some professional photos from when the candidate was much younger and used AI to manufacture negative news. This candidate used to be a model as well as a veteran, a volunteer firefighter and a black hawk pilot. He served his country well and continues to serve his country and community to great lengths. The depiction of a certain type of gay lifestyle, that may or may not have been the lifestyle of this candidate at the time, certainly has nothing to do with his professional ability to serve today and yet, that was the focus of the campaign against him. Much of this I believe is the pot calling the kettle black, as my mother used to say.

The current occupant of the White House passed on AI saying he was not concerned in the

least and saw no reason to inject controls or programs or even have hearings on the matter. This while the issue is becoming more and more pervasive in our communities and especially in our news cycles and informational content on the internet. Even now the U.S. Government and our tax dollars are paying for a Pro-Trump AI generated commercial that is highly illegal, yet somehow it happens. This leaves me with many questions. As our use of computer technology increases, should there be some sort of oversight with a degree of enforcement? Would that be against free speech? Would it be controllable itself and who would oversee the commission? I guess that is a question for some time in the future. It won't assist with all the nonsense and falsehoods of today, or is nonsense and falsehood the face of the future?

Please let me know how you feel about this article. Contact me at burk.patrick1956@gmail.com



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The 11th annual Spruce Lodge Car Show in Stratford was another resounding success, with over 100 vehicles filing into the Festival City for the evening.

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Opinion

WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH CONSERVATION OVERSIGHT



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

How do you get your news? Freedom of information is a cornerstone of democracy. It's our way of ensuring responsible government. We read about press freedom challenges in other countries. It may be that we should look closer to home. Are you familiar with non-disclosure agreements?

In November of 2025, the provincial government tabled Bill 68-legislation to reduce our conservation authorities from 36 to seven. In the face of strong public and expert response, the government reduced the final amalgamation from 36 conservation authorities to nine. The province argued that having 36 separate authorities with varying standards, staffing and technical capabilities creates unpredictable delays for builders, landowners and farmers.

The conservation authorities are primarily funded by local municipalities; the province provides only two per cent of funding. The bill created the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) to provide centralized leadership, financial oversight and consistent strategic direction across regional watersheds. This board would be appointed by cabinet, and centrally controlled by Queen's Park, under the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Bill 68 passed on Nov. 27, 2025 – without public or expert consultation.

It was heralded as more efficient but was widely seen as government control of conservation lands for development, currently protected by conservation authorities. They maintain the environmental integrity of our watersheds and ensure effective control of flood and natural disaster safety. The list of opponents of the legislation was long and impressive. This was not a popular initiative. It was perceived as one more loss of local control (following school boards, Bill 5 and the strong mayor legislation) and a very dangerous one.

We should all be aware that the UTRCA board has been advised that the new transition committee for the much larger regional Conservation Au-

thorities requires every member of the committee to sign a non-disclosure agreement that declares all meeting materials, discussions, presentations and related records strictly confidential. Essentially all members of the transition committee will be muzzled.

The Stratford Times devoted considerable coverage to amalgamation in December of 2025. We are situated in the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and within the upper Thames River watershed. Our conservation officers have wide ranging expertise covering floodplains, nature, wetlands and headwaters, and especially, the communities within which they work. Previously every conservation authority had local government and members of the community on their boards. To put it simply, they not only are experts in their science, but they also know and work with their communities.

They know the local governments in their areas, and they know the residents of the communities, including farmers, businesses, students, environmental groups and hunters. They also know the unique strengths and challenges for their areas – which is how they maintain the integrity of the environment and our resilience to natural emergencies such as

fires and floods.

The conservation authorities protect the basic ecology of our areas – from the migrating birds to their habitat wetlands that cleanse our water, to the forests that protect our land from erosion, to the purity of our waterways from chemical and waste pollution to invasive species. They do an amazing job of keeping in touch with the community, including representation on the Stratford energy and environment committee.

Part of the rationale for amalgamation was greater transparency and accountability. Non-disclosure agreements applying to amalgamation procedures do not meet that definition.

From removing habitat protection from endangered species (habitat is more than just their nest or den) to enabling destruction of critical wetlands which function as necessary havens for migrating birds and flood control, to the destruction of vast peat bog lands in the Ring of Fire which will release tonnes of carbon dioxide and the more damaging methane, to lack of consultation with Indigenous residents of the land, there has not been a pattern of safeguarding our natural resources. In these times of a planet that is seriously out of balance in seven out of nine planetary bound-

aries, we need our conservation officers now more than ever – and we need them to be free to speak to concerns in our natural environment, from within our communities. Non-disclosure agreements have no place in provincial government procedures with our conservation authorities.

UPDATES:

Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of Sept. 29, 2026: 425.80 ppm. Each 1 ppm of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere equals about 7.82 gigatonnes (billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide. That layer of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere is stopping heat escaping. Carbon dioxide comes mostly from fossil fuel and plastic production, which is why the planet is seriously over-heating.

Try something different this autumn! Don't clean up your leaves and garden! Both places are filled with helpful insects and pollinators seeking shelter for their cocoons and themselves over the winter. Add a brush pile in a corner – great shelter!

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

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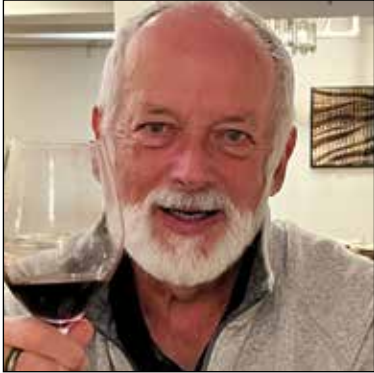
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: “Forest bathing” is a great experience, but not what you think



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

One key difference between travelling as a tourist, and travelling as a travel journalist, is that as a tourist, you get to choose your own activities. As a travel journalist, I do get to consult with my hosts, but usually, the itinerary will include a number of destinations or activities that are not my idea.

And that's how we ended up “forest bathing.”

When I tell friends that we went “forest bathing,” I'm usually met with a combination of bafflement and false assumptions. Many of which, I must confess, we shared before we headed out on this newest adventure.

We were staying at Le Baluchon Eco-Resort, a terrific getaway in the Mauricie region of Québec. We were hosted by “Québecauthentique,” the regional tourism association that represents Mauricie and the neighbouring region of Lanaudière.

I will write more about Le Baluchon in a future feature, because this is a hidden gem, easily accessible from southern Ontario, and a fabulous destination for a couples' getaway or a family holiday.

But for this week... back to the forest.

Our “forest bathing” guide be-



Our guide, seated beside the Rivière du Loup as it passes through the le Baluchon Eco-Resort.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

gan our experience by noting all of the misconceptions the term engenders.

There is no actual “bathing.” You don't get wet. You don't wear a bathing suit. You don't need a towel.

Instead, forest bathing is a rough – and admittedly confusing – translation of a Japanese term, “Shinrin-yoku”, which can also mean “forest therapy.”

The concept is, participants take time to immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of the forest. Guides will suggest activities that will help us to focus on our immediate surroundings, thus leaving stresses of the outside world behind, at least for an hour or two.

“Sure,” I thought, with considerable skepticism. As is not uncommon, I was wrong. It was a wonderful experience.

The first bit of our slow stroll

along a river and through the woods took us across a wooden bridge that spans the Rivière du Loup (an ancient name for the local waterway, unrelated to the Québec city of the same name). Our guide invited us to cross the river, one at a time, taking all the time we wanted to take in the view.

That was a good hint of what was to come. Forest bathing is anything but rushed. And honestly, as I stood in the middle of the bridge, gazing at the river, I could already feel a sense of relaxation.

We then were directed through a series of voluntary exercises. They're voluntary, because being forced to do something would be antithetical to the purpose of the whole thing, right? But we did them all.

We walked slowly down a path in the forest, simply observing the trees, plants, and occasional birds

around us. Then our guide stopped, produced some padded mats, and invited us to sit on rocks beside the river and, simply, be. It was incredibly peaceful.

That lasted a while, and then we resumed our stroll. A few minutes on, she reached into her back pack and pulled out magnifying glasses. That exercise involved looking closely at whatever we chose to observe: flowers, leaves, insects, anything that drew our attention.

I have to tell you, you cannot be focused on a tiny green spider, almost invisible to the naked eye, as it explores a flower, and still think about your job, your to-do list, or anything else. You are truly immersed in the moment. I could have carried on with this exercise for a long time, flower to flower, bug to bug. It was lovely.

After our guide collected the magnifiers, she produced blind-

folds. We took turns – my partner was blindfolded, and I led her to touch plants, even a clump of soil. Then she led me on the same adventure, and the impact of being denied sight while experiencing sound, touch, and smell was very powerful.

Finally, we were invited to collect something – a flower, a twig, a pebble, anything that caught our attention – and then we sat on logs and had a form of tea ceremony, during which we shared our reactions to the experience.

I know – this may sound very airy-fairy. But we found it to be a clearly practical way to de-stress.

Turns out, there are plenty of credible medical and psychological studies that attribute significant benefits to forest bathing. They have found that the experience can help relieve high blood pressure, heart conditions, skin conditions and asthma. There is no doubt that it alleviates stress.

The technique was developed in Japan in the 1980s and is widely practiced there, today. And it is more common in Canada than I had imagined. As just one example, the Ontario Parks website has a section on forest bathing.

If you think this is something you could do on your own, without a guide, you are probably right. But I believe a guided experience, like ours at le Baluchon, is better – because your guide has the experience and the means to draw you away from your own daily concerns, and give you an hour or two of stress-free peace. What a gift!

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.



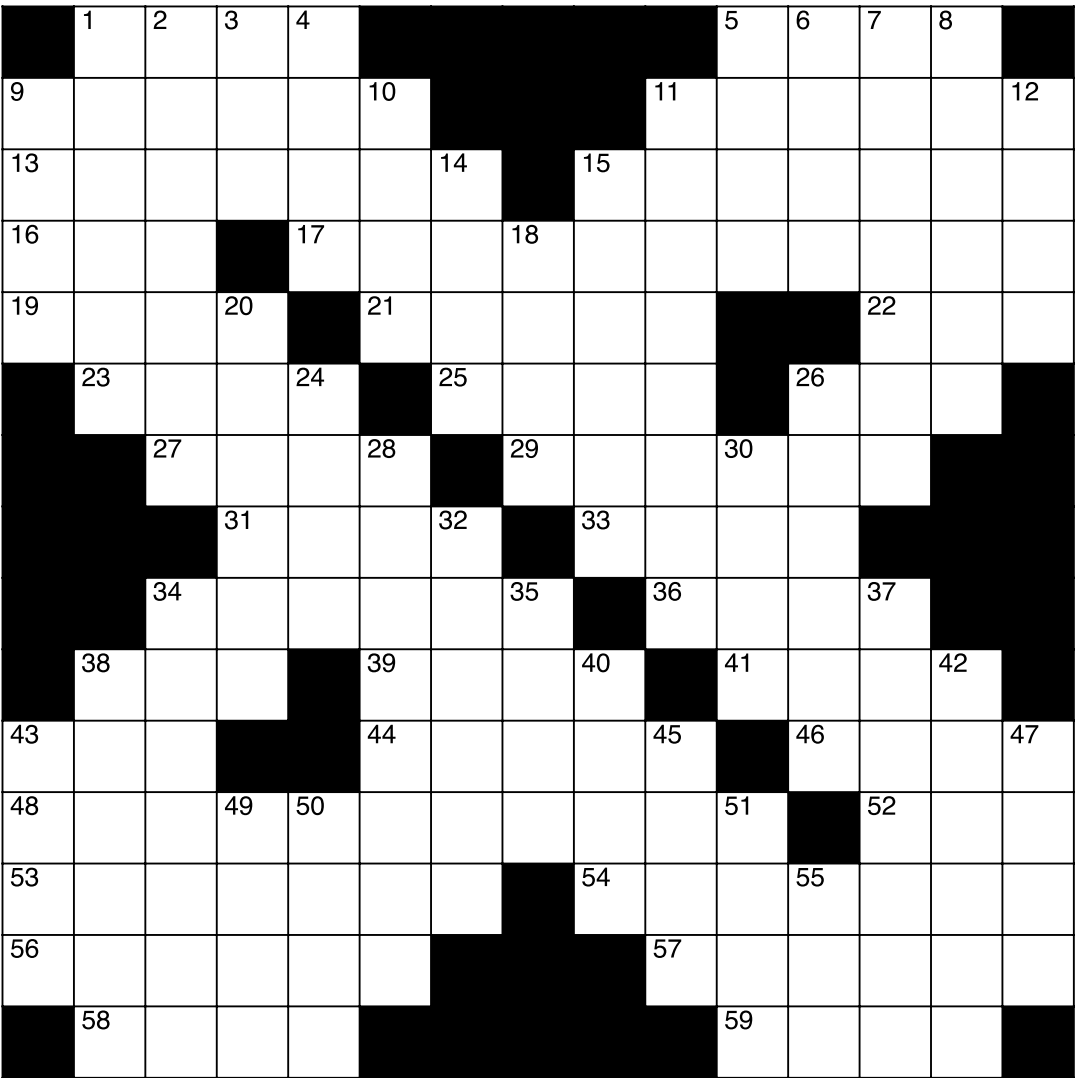
Forest bathing is essentially a directed stroll through nature... and a terrific stress reliever.



A view of the Rivière du Loup.

Crossword

- CLUES ACROSS**
1. Difficult
5. Coarsely ground corn
9. A group of similar things ordered one after another
11. Loved Romeo
13. Something to solve
15. Pelvic areas
16. Informal debt instrument
17. Ineffective
19. A device attached to a workbench
21. Related on the mother's side
22. "Fresh Prince of ___ Air"
23. Astronomer Sagan
25. C. Utah city
26. Turkey
27. Informal terms for money
29. Awakens
31. Those who favored Prohibition
33. Blabbed
34. Looked through
36. Rhode Island rebellion
38. A type of "cast"
39. One's duty
41. Where golfers begin
43. Make a mistake
44. Semitic Sun god
46. Ancient Greek City
48. Removed someone's head
52. A place to stay
53. Unwise
54. Most unnatural
56. "Dennis" is a notable one
57. Ointments
58. Examination
59. Leaked fluid
- CLUES DOWN**
1. Brave
2. A state of excitement
3. Jest at
4. Sandwich store
5. Chapter of the Koran
6. Dismounted from a horse
7. Small vehicle
8. Irked
9. A disreputable man
10. Monetary unit of Samoa
11. A list of woes
12. Weight unit
14. Alone, single
15. Broadway legend Bernadette
18. Monetary unit of Serbia
20. Worn by exposure to the weather
24. A body of traditions
26. Students seek one
28. Hydrophilic amino acid
30. Nasal mucus
32. Branch of U.S. Congress
34. Swinish
35. Russian assembly
37. Grant an exemption to
38. Set up in advance
40. Satisfy
42. Felt
43. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls
45. Witnesses
47. Strong insects
49. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
50. One of an ancient people inhabiting Scotland
51. Cheerless
55. Unhealthy



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Pet of the week



LEVI

Meet Levi, a 3-month-old kitten who is slowly discovering that the world can be a safe and welcoming place. When he first arrived at the shelter, Levi was cautious and unsure of people, but with support from staff and volunteers, he has made remarkable progress and continues to grow more comfortable every day.

Levi is looking for a calm, understanding home where he can move at his own pace and continue blossoming into the loving companion he's meant to be. He is currently receiving medication to help manage his anxiety and will need a patient adopter to help him transition off it over time. But watching Levi bloom into the cat he's meant to be will be a truly rewarding journey. You can meet Levi at our Stratford Centre or on our website at kwsphumane.ca/adopt/cats



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COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathawy Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford

Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games. Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room #1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from

September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

STEPS FOR SUPPORT

Every Tuesday morning and once a month on a Monday afternoon.

Hosted by Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth www.rotaryhospice.ca

Stratford Location

This walking group is an opportunity for people who are grieving to connect while walking alongside others who are bereaved. Contact Jaclyn at sw@rotaryhospice.ca to learn more and register. This is a free program.

PROBUS CLUB OF STRATFORD

Army Navy & Air Force Veterans Unit 261

151 Lorne Ave E, Stratford, ON N5A 2N9

Probus provides Fellowship, Friendship, and Fun for all men and women in their retirement and semi-retirement years.

We meet the 2nd Wednesday - September until June from 9:30 a.m.-

12 p.m. Website <https://www.probusclubstratford.com/>

Email probusclubstratford@gmail.com

CAREGIVER CONNECTION

2nd & 4th Wednesday of each month at 1-2:30 p.m.

Arden Park Hotel

Caregiver Connection is a group for caregivers supporting someone with a life-limiting illness or decline due to aging. Learn about community resources, caregiver tools, and talk with others on a similar journey. All caregivers welcome whether you're a spouse, family member, friend, etc. supporting someone from near or far. Contact 226-921-7314 or referrals@rotaryhospice.ca to register. Free program.

Hosted by Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth - www.rotaryhospice.ca

YOUTH AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Mondays, 3:00-4:45 p.m., September 14/26-June 21/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free drop-in for students aged 11-18. Join us for snacks, board games, video games, and connection! Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

GRIEFSHARE

Stratford Christian Reformed Church, 190 Athone Crescent (parking on the upper level)

September 14 - December 14

Monday 1:00-2:30pm

When a loved one dies, it can feel like you're alone. Few people understand how painful & isolating your grief can be. At GriefShare, you'll find a safe, comforting place where you can talk with others about your grief. Contact: griefstratfordcereggroup2627@gmail.com Register: griefshare.org/findagroup

YOUTH LUNCH PERIOD PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., September 30/26-June 16/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free drop-in for high school students. Join us for snacks, games, connection (and occasional pizza parties!).

Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

PURE HEART PROGRAM

Hosted by Youth Unlimited YFC Stratford

Wednesdays, 3:00-4:30 p.m., September 30/26-June 16/27

382 Britannia Street, Stratford

Free art program for students aged 11-18. Join us for discussions, guest artists, art instruction, and more! Questions? www.yfcstratford.com info@yfcstratford.com 519-272-1614

AUTUMN IN THE WOODLOT

Saturday, October 3 from 3:00-4:00 pm

Raindate: Sunday, October 4

Sawyer Woodlot: 6100 Line 12, West Perth (Just North of Kirkton)

Hosted by Sawyer Preservation Woodlot Association

Join a local naturalist Denise Iszczuk from C.O.R.E Nature Experiences for a free, fun, family-friendly walk to discover the sights and sounds of the woodlot in autumn. Along the way, learn how to identify common trees and discover why trees are so important to a healthy forest. Come ready to explore, ask questions, and enjoy the beauty of the woodlot as it comes alive with the colours, sounds and surprises of fall!

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday October 5; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: “The Four-Season Gardener – Getting Ahead for Spring”, Kim Hutten and Marilyn Park, Grand Erie Master Gardeners. Learn about winter sowing, early seed starting, and seasonal planning. Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, October 6, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

93 Morgan St., Stratford

Speaker – Jaci Sinclair, of Gentle Awakenings.

Learn about Chair Yoga and it's healing supports

Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

ANNUAL PUMPKINFEST

Morningside Adult Community,

10 Homestead Place, New Hamburg

Saturday, October 10; 9-12 p.m.

Free admission and hot cider. Live music, no crowds, pumpkins, bake table, fresh flower centerpieces, small & bulk root veg, apples, kale, squash.

STRATFORD LEGION 100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Friday October 16; 6 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

Fun Casino (Tombola) Night. Doors open at 6 pm, play starts at 7 pm. Admission is by donation. Lots of prizes to be won.

STRATFORD LEGION 100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Saturday October 17; 9:30 a.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

Dedication of a new bench at the cenotaph at 9:30 a.m. Legion Open House 11 a.m.. BBQ at 12 noon. Meat Draw at 3 p.m. Dance to Strings & Traps at 7 p.m. All events admission is by donation.

STRATFORD LEGION 100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OPEN HOUSE

Sunday October 18; 11 a.m. - 2p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

LARGE RECORD SALE SUNDAY - STRATFORD

Approx 20,000 records on sale

Saturday, October 17; 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

ANAF Unit 261 Hall, 151 Lorne Ave E, Stratford

ADMISSION: Donation to Humane Society

New and used records

Rock • Metal • Punk • Soul • Jazz • Blues

45 rpms \$1.00 each • CDs \$5.00 / 5 for \$20.00

LONDON ORCHID SOCIETY

Sunday, October 18; 2 to 4 pm

Richards Memorial Church, 360 Edgeworth Avenue, London
Meeting Topic: Deb Boersma from Windsor, An Orchid Expedition on the Rio Negro, Brazil. The London Orchid Society meets the third Sunday of each month. Join us October 18, 2026 at 2:00pm for Deb Boersma from Windsor, ON. Her presentation is An Orchid Expedition on the Rio Negro, Brazil deep into the Amazon Rainforest. Everyone is welcome to attend the meeting for more information at www.londonorchidsociety.com; contact Daryl at 519-666-2927.

CHANGE HER WORLD FALL BOOK SALE

Thursday Oct. 22 4-8:00

Friday, October 23 10:00 - 8:00

Saturday, October 24 9:00 - 2:00

Belgrave Community Centre

Accessible parking, food booth Friday & beverages Thursday & Saturday. Payment by donation

All proceeds raised support the library in Chilumba, Malawi, Africa
COME STOCK -UP on winter reading.

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY CIRCUIT BOOK (STAMP) FAIR

Saturday, October 24, 2026

Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas Street, Woodstock

10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Free Admission & Parking

Stop in and buy some stamps and meet fellow stamp collectors.

About 8 participating stamp clubs. Contact: dheaton3e3@gmail.com

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

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB [L2S]

Monthly on Sundays, 2-4 p.m.

First meeting Oct. 25 at Griffith Auditorium, Woodland Towers.

Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/hour, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamanagement.com/l2s

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRES

Friday, November 13; 6 p.m.

Legion 804 Ontario St.

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



CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

OBITUARY



**PATRICIA ANNE EVANS,
NÉE GREGORY**

Patricia Anne Evans, née Gregory, born November 23, 1929, passed away peacefully at Campbell House in Collingwood on September 25, 2026 surrounded by her family.

Predeceased by her husband Don, Pat was the cherished mother to Wendy (Boris), Peter (Mary), and Betsy. She was a loving Grammy Pat to Greg, Allie (Shaun), Amanda, Fraser, and Yi Jiao, and great-grandmother (GG) to Remy and Maisie.

Don's career took them from Toronto to Sault Ste. Marie for twenty years, and then finally to Whitby. After retiring, Pat and Don returned to her hometown of Stratford. She never lost her love for Northern Ontario, particularly the beloved cottage on St. Joseph Island. Following Don's death in 2016, Pat moved to Collingwood where she continued to find joy in life.

Pat volunteered her time to many worthy causes. She will be remembered for her warmth, her laughter, her fine cooking, her generosity, and her ability to make friends wherever she went.

The family would like to thank everyone from Campbell House, Collingwood General and Marine Hospital, and Balmoral Place for the excellent care provided to Pat.

Friends are invited to celebrate Pat's life on Sunday, October 4 between 2 and 4 pm at Balmoral Place, 8 Harbour Street West, Collingwood.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating in her memory to Hospice Georgian Triangle Foundation or the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital Foundation through W. G. Young Funeral Home www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com.

WANTED

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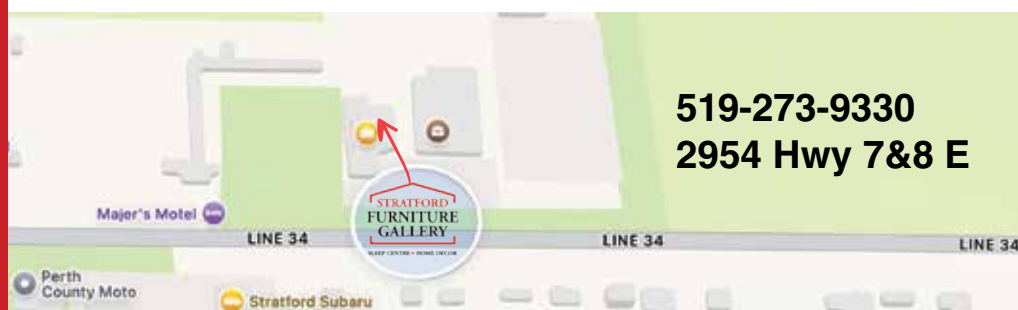
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