

STRATFORD *TIMES*

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Local businesses launch Save the Avon Bucket Challenge

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

After news broke July 24 that a sluice gate at the RT Orr Dam in Stratford had become stuck open due to debris, local businesses responded in the most Stratford way possible: they banded together to “help fill Lake Victoria” with a heartfelt and humorous social media movement now known as the Save the Avon Bucket Challenge.

It started with a call to support the Boathouse – a business directly affected by the falling water levels – by ordering takeout and renting bikes. But it quickly turned into a full-blown show of community spirit, as residents filled up buckets with water and poured them into the lake.

“It was just a silly idea that one of our staff members thought up,” said Kelan Herr, Boathouse owner. “Coincidentally, another local business also did it and it was featured on CBC, so it snowballed from there.”

The Boathouse took to Instagram and Facebook on Aug. 3 to call on other local businesses to join the effort.

“Because if Mother Nature won’t fill the river... maybe we can help,” read the post. “We’re kicking off a local challenge to raise awareness (and have a little fun) around the water shortage here in Stratford.”

Downtown businesses showed up in full force, including staff from Starlight, Bentley’s, Pazzo and Grotto Hair Studio, among many others.

Several businesses began posting videos of themselves

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



Stratford was buzzing this weekend as people came out to enjoy the SpringWorks World in a Weekend International Puppet Festival. Pictured here is Ginka, prowling Veterans Park downtown (AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Coach sings praises as Stratford paddlers return with bronze, silver and gold from Germany

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Over seven days of racing in Germany, Stratford youth showed the world what dragon boat racing means to the Festival City.

Eight local junior boat paddlers helped Team Canada win a combined 33 medals at the World Dragon Boat Championships in Brandenburg, Germany on July 14-20. Local coach Ken Gene sang their praises, highlighting both their dedication and skill, as well as the national team’s dominant performances.

“Collectively, Canada dominated on the medal end,”

Gene told the Times. “We did pretty good on the junior end. The U.S. team was pretty strong on a few of the divisions. The U18 women did very well, that’s where the gold medals came from, and Alexandra Stephens was part of the U18 cruise that got the gold.”

As Gene said, Alexandra Stephens brought home seven medals, including two golds, as a member of the U18 women’s team, as well as five silvers with the U18 women’s and mixed squads.

Laynee McIlwain collected a total of six silver and bronze medals on U16 women’s and mixed boats. Avery DeWitt and Grace VanZandwijk were both members of

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SKIP THE DISHES

Local businesses launch Save the Avon Bucket Challenge to support Lake Victoria

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

tossing buckets of water into the exposed lakebed, tagging other shops and restaurants to join the Save the Avon Bucket Challenge – a playful nod to the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge that went viral on social media over ten years ago.

Stratford’s small business community has long been known to rally in times of need – especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic – but this moment of light-hearted collaboration shows how the city’s entrepreneurs continue to support one another in tough times.

“Our lake/river is a centrepiece for all to visit and enjoy, and it is always a bit of a blow to our businesses downtown when one of our major attractions is removed,” said Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area.

“The thing that makes me smile and warms my heart is how the small business community pulled together and, rather than a lot of sadness, has started a bucket challenge, where they are challenging each other to bring a bucket of water to the river and fill it back up again as there is not much rain in sight.”

The draining of Lake Victoria has hit hardest for businesses that rely on the waterfront for summer income, such



Kelan Herr, owner of the Boathouse, stands with Nikki Wagler and Nicole Streicher of Coles and Keys before taking part in the Save the Avon Bucket Challenge — a playful community initiative to raise awareness about low water levels in Stratford’s Avon River.

as the Boathouse, Stratford Walking Tours and the Stratford Razzamajazz boat tours.

“The August long weekend is usually the peak of our season – filled with boat rides, paddle rentals and the joy of summer days spent in this beautiful park,” read a recent post from the Boathouse. “But this year, the Avon River has looked very different.”

Even businesses not directly affected by the water levels are stepping up in support.

Olive Your Favourites posted a heartfelt message on Instagram in response to the Boathouse:

“Seeing it in person is a bit of a gut punch. As a business owner who relies on this time of year to be busy, this is just heartbreaking to see. I know you’ll make the best of it. The positive spirit everyone down there has will hopefully bring some good karma your way – and we’ll be pedalling before we know it!”

Boathouse owners Kelan Herr and Melissa Kerr say

they’re in constant contact with the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) for updates and information, and that the agency has been nothing but supportive.

“UTRCA has been very helpful, keeping us informed and updated,” said Kerr. “The City of Stratford has also been very supportive during this time.”

The UTRCA also weighed in, sharing its appreciation for the local response. While the water from the challenge isn’t expected to meaningfully replenish the river, the organization says the gesture does no harm – and brings much-needed awareness.

“Treated drinking water isn’t what the river needs; however, the amount that will be poured into the river through this bucket challenge is negligible in terms of harming the species that are there,” said Erin Carroll, aquatic biologist with the UTRCA.

“So we’re looking at it as a great way to show support for the community and build awareness and attention for the Avon River. The Avon River is something that needs to be protected, and so I think this is a positive example of people kind of recognizing that the Avon River needs care, too.”

“I am not surprised to see Stratford businesses taking this on, because it’s an amazing community.”

In a message to the community, Herr said the support doesn’t surprise him – but it does mean everything.

“To our community – thank you. This is my first year owning the business, and I’ve always been surrounded by small businesses in Stratford, but just seeing how everyone rallies behind us has been amazing. They’re stopping by to show their support, asking us how they can help and what they can do to support us. We’re just really grateful for that.”

If you’d like to show your support, you can visit the Boathouse. They are currently offering takeout by phone or text at 519-271-7739. For those who still want to enjoy the parks, they offer bike and e-bike rentals. Gift cards are also available.

The Stratford Razzamajazz is now offering concerts from the lakeshore rather than on the water. Schedules can be found at www.stratfordrazzamajazz.ca.

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Lake Victoria water levels drop after dam malfunction

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

During a heavy rainstorm on July 24, a sluice gate at the RT Orr Dam in Stratford automatically opened to release water and prevent flooding of upstream roads and buildings.

Although the gate was only open briefly, debris became lodged beneath it, preventing it from fully closing. As a result, water from Lake Victoria continued to drain over several days.

In a July 31 update, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) said, "Water levels in Lake Victoria continue to lower at a rate of 25 mm/hour. Debris under the sluice gate still prevents the gate from fully closing."

As the water receded, the narrowing river channel exposed much of the lakebed, a dramatic sight captured and shared widely on social media by locals and visitors alike.

The changing water levels have affected local wildlife and small businesses that rely on the waterfront, such as the Boathouse. The UTRCA noted its aquatic biologist had been on site, monitoring the situation closely.

"The gradual drawdown has provided time for species to move to larger pools of water; however, as water levels continue to drop and water temperatures increase, some aquatic wildlife may get stranded," the authority said.

Four days after the issue began, UTRCA staff successfully dislodged the blockage, allowing the sluice gate to close. Lake Victoria will now begin to refill, though how quickly that happens depends largely on rainfall.

Maintaining a steady flow in the Avon River downstream is a top priority during this process to support aquatic health.

For the latest updates, visit: thamesriver.on.ca



After a sluice gate at the RT Orr Dam was unable to close for several days, Lake Victoria's water levels drastically fell, leaving behind many exposed areas of the lake bed. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

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Editorial

Finding my voice in the town that raised my kids



AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

When we initially moved to Stratford, I thought I was making a decision for my two daughters. At the time, they were in Grades 4 and 6, and I believed moving back to a smaller town was the right move for our whole family. Coming from Barrie, where

they were born and raised, I wanted them to experience a life similar to what I had growing up in Chesley – small-town life with strong community connections. I wanted them to have every chance to thrive in a place that felt safe and supportive. What I didn't realize was that Stratford wouldn't just shape them – it would quietly reshape me, too.

This fall, my daughter is heading off to McMaster University. It's one of those milestones that feels so big you don't know whether to cheer or cry – so you do both. And as I reflect on her journey, I keep coming back to the role this town played in getting her there. St. Michael Catholic Secondary School was more than just a place for academics.

It gave her a space to find her voice, build confidence and grow into the strong, grounded young woman she is today.

Stratford gave her community. It provided her with teachers who genuinely cared about her success, peers who challenged and supported her and an environment where she could discover who she wanted to be. But looking back, I now see that while I was focused on her becoming, I was quietly transforming, too.

Stratford gave me a new perspective on who I was and what I wanted to be. Living in a town where people around me were building lives as actors, writers, small business owners and singers was something bigger cities don't often show is possi-

ble. I found connections in the small business world through the Chamber of Commerce, which showed me that I could build a life around the career I always wanted – writing. I made friends who push me to be the best version of myself, and I found that I am capable of being my own powerhouse – someone my kids can look up to – all because of my small town.

I left a long-term relationship. I stepped away from nursing – a career I had devoted myself to for years. I moved into my own place for the first time in two decades. And in the middle of all that change, Stratford held me. It gave me space to heal, grow and start over – not just as a mother, but as a woman finding her own

voice again.

I've written many stories about this community – about the local food centre helping families, the paramedics bringing life-saving equipment to rural towns, and the growing need for mental health supports. But this one is different. This one is about what happens between the lines of those stories: the quiet strength of a place that lifts you up without asking for anything in return.

Now, as I watch my daughter get ready for university, I feel nothing but gratitude. For the school that guided her. For the town that supported us. And for the version of myself that I've found along the way.

Stratford didn't just raise my daughter. It raised me, too.

Healthy routine meets sudden life changes



GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

While I may not be as physically fit as I would like, my intentions for living a long, happy and healthy life have always been good.

I can't count how many times I've started going to gym, or committed to jogging in the mornings, or developed a home workout routine, or started seeing a therapist and working on my mental health, or started eating a clean and healthy diet. I've started trying to live a

healthier life over and over again, but without fail, something happens in my life that always seems to blow that new routine out the window.

From deaths in the family and chang-

es in jobs to moving to a new home and, at the same time, suddenly having to take care of my fiancé, Julia, after she broke her leg on moving day, major life changes consistently get in the way of reaching my health and fitness goals.

Or at least, those are the excuses I give myself when I inevitably stop.

According to experts, it takes between two and five months to solidify a routine and make it a habit. I have maintained new routines for longer than five months before, but those times in my life were always relatively stable.

As soon as the stress of the unfamiliar begins to take hold, I turn to my old comforts – fast food, television and my intoxicant of choice (I'll let you guess which one). While I do feel a sense of guilt for abandoning each of these routines that had, up until these points, made me feel so good about myself, the siren songs of my comforts are too appealing to ignore.

So here I am, writing this column as I set out on yet another healthy routine.

As Julia is once again walking without assistance, the two of us have formed an account-

ability group with one of our friends through which we are exercising for 15-20 minutes twice a day.

While Julia works on her strengthening exercises, as prescribed by her physiotherapist to help build the muscle back up in her leg, I have chosen yoga. While I'm still new to yoga and the stretches and balancing exercises can be quite challenging, any fitness routine that encourages you to lay flat on your back and close your eyes at the end is a good one in my books.

On top of the exercise, we have also taken to making smoothies packed with all sorts of fruit, yogurt, kale from our garden and other goodies that both regulate our digestive systems and actually help to curb our appetites. Not only has this smoothie replaced my coffee in the morning, but it also keeps me full longer and, when I do get hungry, the ravenous, shaky cravings I once experienced have reduced to a dull hankering.

I'm not questioning it; I'm just accepting it as the miracle it is.

As I always am when I start a new health and fitness routine,

I'm full of hope and positivity.

"This time feels different," I say to myself, knowing I've said those words before.

One glimmer of hope this time around is the fact Julia and I recently undertook another relatively major life change just days after we started our new routine – we bought a puppy.

Piper the two-month-old beagle is incredibly cute and incredibly active, making lying down on the floor to do yoga more of an exercise in avoiding being bitten than one of peace and tranquility. However, Julia and I remain committed to our routine and we have decided that when it comes time for our exercise, Piper spends some time in the crate – a decision I believe is good for all three of us.

So, while I realize this new routine has all the same potential for fizzling out, if I can intentionally carve out the time I know I need regardless of what comes my way, maybe this time will be different.

And if not, I'm not going to beat myself up about it. That shame only makes the call of my comforts stronger, and I don't need that in my life anymore.

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Coach sings praises of Stratford paddlers



Team Canada dragon boaters Everett Weaver, Daniel McArthur, Daniel Bean, Devin Keane, Alexandra Stephens, Avery DeWitt, Grace VanZandwijk and Laynee McIlwain return from the world championships with some impressive hardware. They collectively won 33 medals for the country.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

the U16 women's and mixed teams, with DeWitt paddling and VanZandwijk drumming, which brought home one silver and four bronze medals.

In the U18 men's bracket, Daniel Bean earned four silver medals. Devin Keane won three silvers with the U16 mixed small boat team. Daniel McArthur helped the U16 mixed small boat team to two silver medals, while Everett Weaver also captured a silver with the U16 mixed small boat group.

"Everyone came back pretty happy," Gene explained. "Pretty tired coming back, they took a week off. And we're back racing again in Woodstock this weekend."

As Gene explained, eight Stratford paddlers tried out to be on Team Canada this year and all eight made the team. It is indicative of Stratford's ongoing legacy when it comes to dragon boat racing excellence.

"Dragon boat has been in town since

1996. Our club system has been around for quite awhile," Gene said. "... This area has been a hotbed for paddling and dragon boat for awhile. I believe, with these athletes going to worlds, I've had 34 national team paddlers come from my club. It's strong in town."

Youth weren't the only Stratforders representing Canada in Germany. Grant Borysiuk captured an impressive haul of hardware as well, competing with the Canadian national team for the second time. He was a member of the senior 'A' boat and won three gold medals in the 500-metre small boat mixed, 2,000-metre open, and 2,000-metre mixed events. Borysiuk also earned silver medals in the 200-metre open, 200-metre small boat mixed, 500-metre open, 1,000-metre open, and 1,000-metre mixed boats. Borysiuk is a member of the Thames River Paddling Club.

With files from Spencer Seymour, Times Regional Reporter.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



COMING EVENTS

August 9	Yard and Bake Sale, 8:00 am - 12:00 pm, items for everyone
September 14	Chicken Parmesan Dinner \$25 per plate. Complete details available in August and September Coming Events
September 17	Ladies' Auxiliary Luncheon, \$16 per plate. Complete details available in August and September Coming Events
October 4	Bus Trip to the Toronto Argonauts vs Hamilton Tiger Cats, BMO Field. Tickets are \$95 per person. Call Dean Listman 519-273-4463 to book your seat.

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Local Community Food Centre launches year-round tax and financial literacy program

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

The Ontario government has provided \$60,900 in funding to the Local Community Food Centre through the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Seed Grant stream.

"The Tax Smart, Thrive More program at the Local Community Food Centre is a great resource for our community," said Matthew Rae, MPP for Perth-Wellington. "The program helps teach smart money management and offers free tax returns – the first step to empower individuals in our community to find success and confidence with their personal finances."

With the funding, the centre plans to establish a volunteer tax clinic and launch a financial literacy program to support low-income households across Perth County.

"Stratford is underserved in terms of providing volunteer tax clinics," said Margaret Smart, executive director at the Local. "We'll be recruiting and training volunteers who will come alongside people and complete their taxes with them."

The Tax Smart, Thrive More program offers friendly, non-judgmental tax filing support and accessible workshops on topics such as budgeting, fraud awareness and government benefits.



The Local Community Food Centre received a grant to help establish a volunteer tax clinic and launch a financial literacy program to support low-income households across Perth County. Pictured: Tonya Haverkamp, Matthew Rae, Margaret Smart, Jen Vredeveld. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

"It's for people looking for help to do simple tax returns," said Smart. "If somebody is intimidated by the process, who maybe hasn't done it before or just needs somebody to come alongside and make sure that they check all the boxes,

we can now help those people."

Alongside tax filing, the program features tailored financial literacy workshops led by a community member with lived experience.

"We took a little bit of a more holistic

approach, and we made it both a financial literacy and a tax clinic," said Smart. "We hired somebody who has some lived experience of low income and has had to overcome those barriers themselves to be able to relate realistically to people who are low income, and to do financial literacy in a way that speaks into real-life situations."

By helping people understand their finances and access the benefits they're entitled to, the program aims to empower residents to make informed decisions and improve long-term well-being.

"One of the best ways to address food insecurity is getting money in people's pockets," said Smart. "The more money you have, the better options you have in terms of how you feed yourself and your family. Being able to access the benefits and credits is key."

To qualify for many support programs – such as the electricity support program – an up-to-date tax assessment is required.

The program is available year-round, not just during the usual March and April tax season. Anyone in a low-income tax bracket can access the services at the Local by appointment. Drop-in dates and times will also be available.

For more information or to book an appointment, contact the Local Community Food Centre.

Provocation Ideas Festival looking for your Stratford stories; announces fall programming

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Provocation Ideas Festival (PIF) is looking for your stories about Stratford this fall, as it unveils 2025/26 programming.

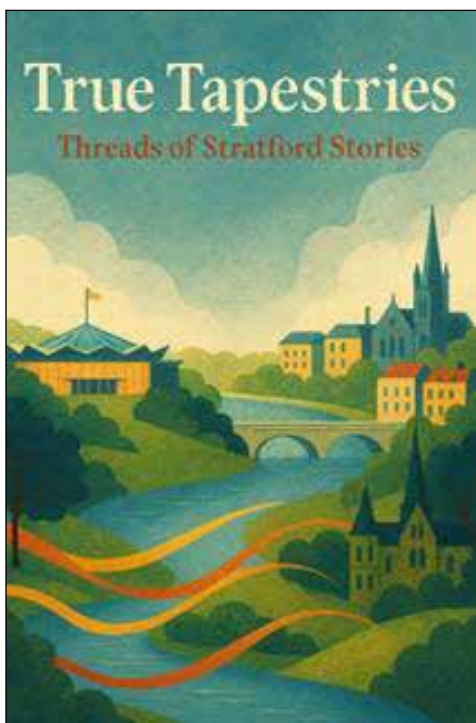
Mark Rosenfeld, founder of the festival, said that they are trying to evoke the cult classic "Vinyl Café" show in this year's True Tapestries: Threads of Stratford Stories event.

"They used to solicit stories, and the stories had to be short, true and they had to be compelling," Rosenfeld said about the old CBC program. "Each session they broadcasted those stories – and they were really, really gripping. So we came to the realization, you know, let's continue that tradition but for Stratford and Stratford-based stories."

In collaboration with the Stratford Perth Museum, the Stratford Public Library and Blue Moon Publishers (a local publishing house), PIF is calling on past and present residents to share a true story or poem that's 500 words or less and inspired by one word out of roots, risk, change, home, secrets, hope, loss, firsts, belonging or dreams.

Stories and poems will be selected by a panel of local writers and artists and brought to life on stage by performers and musicians on Nov. 15 and 22 of this year at the museum. Those interested are asked to submit by Sept. 8.

True Tapestries is not the only event slated



The True Tapestries: Threads of Stratford Stories event aims to embody the spirit of the cult classic CBC program Vinyl Café, as the Provocation Ideas Festival has started soliciting past and present residents to share their stories about Stratford.

for this year's PIF. Continuing the theme of "City of Dreamers," this fall organizers hope

to explore

Highlights include Maker Multiverse: Constructing Futures, an all-ages, hands-on experience at the library where participants help build an imaginative cityscape using LEGO, robotics, 4D printing, and recycled materials. The program takes place Aug. 18 to 28 and culminates in October when the creations are publicly exhibited at Copperlight (the former Knox Presbyterian Church), after a panel of urban planners, sustainability expert and design thinkers discuss new visions for Stratford.

On Sept. 29, the spotlight shifts to Revival House for Unknown Talents, a benefit gala where celebrated Canadians unveil their hidden gifts – from visual art to musical performance – paired with a silent auction of one-of-a-kind creations.

Dream Weavers transforms the Grand Trunk site from Oct. 4 to 5 into a glowing village of story tents, inviting audiences of three or four attendees into the tents for a close, immersive experience with local storytellers.

"It'll be on the outside of the Grand Trunk site, and it will be a grassy area near it because we can't get into building for safety reasons," Rosenfeld explained. "... We thought this would be a great opportunity to do something in front of the kind of the site as part of Culture Days Ontario, which would draw people to see what that site might become. And part of the storytelling that will take place is in transfor-

mation of change. Of course, that's an area that is slated for transformation ... So just having the visual of 10 tents that are lit up at night in front of the Grand Trunk site will hopefully also convey to people, here are possibilities – these are the possibilities of what that site might become, and let's talk about it. Let's envision, let's dream and let's tell story."

Fall programming continues with Constructing Futures from Oct. 16 to 30, a participatory visioning project for Stratford's future. Flavours of Home takes place from October to March and is a culinary storytelling series celebrating newcomer journeys.

The season closes on Nov. 28 with Northern Wit, a live comedy event and CBC IDEAS panel hosted by Nahlah Ayed exploring how satire shapes Canadian identity. As Rosenfeld explained, humour and satire seem a core part of Canadian identity, and the panel will explore that relationship between comedy and nationalism. PIF and CBC IDEAS are in the process of finalizing the lineup for both the comedy event and the panel and will make announcements as they are finalized.

Rosenfeld shared that likewise more events are being considered for this fall's programming and will be announced when details are confirmed.

For more about PIF's 2025/26 lineup, visit <https://www.provocation.ca/2025-events--stratford>.

July 16 city council briefs: City nets \$120,000 for homelessness program

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The City of Stratford will soon unveil a program to address long-term housing pressures and homelessness, rather than short-term emergency responses.

The announcement was made at the city council meeting on July 16, when John Ritz, the city's homelessness and housing stability supervisor, presented his report on the program. As he explained briefly, it will be a pilot program that will support individuals and families through housing allowances and other initiatives.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH), through the Homelessness Reduction Innovation Fund (HRIF), will provide \$120,000 for the city to design, implement and evaluate the project, which will target individuals experiencing homelessness who require a moderate or low level of support to achieve housing stability.

The city's social services department estimates that it will reduce the names on the local By-Name List (BNL) by 18 per cent. The BNL is a real-time list of all people experiencing homelessness locally, according to the city's website.

According to the department's most recent update, there are 149 households experiencing homelessness in the area (Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys). Out of that figure, 115 are single adults, 19 are youth aged between 16 and 24 and 15 are families.

More information on the program will be available in the August 15 edition of the

Times.

Expect a charge next time you charge; new fees for EV stations roll out as early as September

Council unanimously approved new user fees for the electric vehicle (EV) charging stations it operates.

Currently, the city does not charge for the use of charging stations, save the standard parking rate users must pay while in a spot. The new fees staff proposed are \$2.50 an hour for the level two charging stations and \$16.50 an hour for the much faster level three charging stations, with no additional fees for parking.

The city operates about 14 charging stations across its properties. Most are level two spaces and only one is a level three station. More level three stations are slated to be installed and operational at the Stratford Rotary Complex by November 2026.

The fees will be collected through an app from the supplier, Chargepoint, which charges the city a 10 per cent processing fee.

As part of the push to recoup operational costs, council also exempted EVs charging at a station from the overnight parking restriction.

Staff intend to amend the governing by-law to implement the fees in September.

If the fees take effect that month, revenues are estimated to be \$15,500 in this operating year alone. Gross revenue for 2026 is "conservatively" estimated to be \$24,519.

Mayor, MP honour Diane Sims as Order of Canada recipient

Stratford resident, author and activist Diane Sims was recently in Ottawa to be invested into the prestigious Order of Canada – but her celebration didn't end there.

Mayor Martin Ritsma, Stratford city council at large and MP John Nater honoured her in council chambers on July 16 as well.

"This person that I know ... has made Stratford a better place," Ritsma said. "However, she's not going to stop there."

Sims, who is living with end-stage multiple sclerosis (MS), has been a tireless advocate for barrier-free accessibility and medical assistance in dying (MAiD), for which she has been approved for. She is known among the public, and indeed by council, for being relentless in her pursuit of a freely accessible Stratford, Ontario and Canada.

On behalf of the city, Ritsma presented Sims a certificate before every councillor around the horseshoe stood up and shook her hand.

Nater used his time to illustrate just how rarified the air that Sims breathes is. Since its inception in 1967, fewer than 9,000 Canadians have been invested into the Order of Canada.

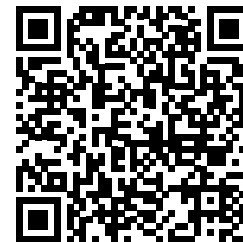
"More Canadians have been struck by lightning since 1967," Nater joked. "... And since our Blue Jays are doing so well right now, more people have made it to big leagues in the MLB than have been invested in the Order of Canada – so you are more special than a major league baseball player here in Stratford. So Diane, I want to say thank you for what you've done for our country. Congratulations, and I know

you have so much more to offer."

Ever the activist, Sims did not accept her accolades that evening silently. Given the floor by Ritsma, she shared a little about the journey she took to end up in Stratford, and reminded council that the bridge to Tom Patterson Island is not accessible. As she said during a previous delegation this year, it isn't enough that the city will make efforts to make it accessible when the bridge is due for replacement in many years, it needs replacing now.

"People in wheelchairs can't get to Tom Patterson Island," Sims explained, after receiving accolades from Ritsma and Nater on July 16. "It is just a shame. And people with walkers, canes can't get up that steep slope. And it's simply appalling. So that is my latest project, and you will continue to hear more about it as it as my work progresses. So thank you very much for listening to me. And it's always, always such an honour to be here and to be in front of all of you who serve our city so well."

For more on Sims' journey, read the story on her induction ceremony in the July 25 edition of the Times, which can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/yc3wsc9s>.



To read more about Diane Sims' Order of Canada journey, scan the code and scroll to page 7

UTRCA relocate over 1,000 mussels at risk after Lake Victoria drain

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After the torrential rain on July 24 jammed up the RT Orr Dam and Lake Victoria drastically drained over several days, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) staff were hard at work rescuing and relocating over 1,000 exposed freshwater mussels.

In the exposed areas of the lake, UTRCA staff found freshwater mussels, snails and crayfish. As Erin Carroll, aquatic biologist at UTRCA, explained, only the mussels were relocated.

"We were worried that they were stranded, because freshwater mussels don't have enough, let's say sense, to go back to the water," Carroll said. "Sometimes they'll go in circles. Sometimes they'll go the wrong direction. They were showing signs of stress, they were starting to open up, so we just thought that the best thing there was to collect them up in buckets and get them back into the water."

About 1,074 mussels, all about 20 centimetres in length, were collected in buckets by crews of about 10 people over three days and relocated upstream where there was more water. Carroll said that they were carefully placed in gravelly areas "where they would be happiest." She added that staff also monitored backwater pooled areas

to make sure no fish were being caught in potentially isolating areas.

The UTRCA will be keeping an eye on the biodiversity of the lake and river over the coming days to make sure that the ecology of the area bounces back. Additionally, they will also be watching water levels – and the local forecast. The lake will be dependent on whatever rainfall comes over the area in the coming months.

Staff have done some flow augmentation between the Orr Dam and the weir on John Street to make sure that water levels are as ideal as can be. Although there has been online speculation about alternative ways of filling the lake, Carroll said that treated municipal water wouldn't be what the river needs to remain healthy.

"Our staff have been in touch with City of Stratford staff, just going through possible solutions but it's pretty tricky," Carroll said. "I think pretty much the only option is that steady rainfall to build it back up."

She added that the #AvonBuckets trend circulating social media right now was a great way to share awareness of the river's health and what stewardship means, and the amount of treated water being poured into the river through the challenge was relatively negligible.

For more on that initiative, view our cover story in this week's edition.

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Shelterlink and Collective District Charity Shop's partnership "mutually beneficial"

Item donations can be dropped off at any time at Shelterlink on 130 Youngs St., third floor, by ringing the buzzer and indicating you're there to donate items.



Rent goes through the roof as workers struggle to afford housing in Perth-Huron

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Workers in the region are being suffocated out of the rental market, with new videos from United Way Perth-Huron (UWPH) providing a glance at the skyrocketing rents and evictions that are making it nearly impossible for residents to find affordable housing.

The United Way have recently released the “Workers Need Housing” videos that showcase two local workers struggling to afford their rent due to the economic costs. Emily and Victoria of Perth and Huron counties share their stories about financial stress they face.

“We really wanted to zero in on the fact that the people featured in our videos are workers. Take Emily, she’s an ed-

ucated professional earning a good salary, but when she was evicted, her next rental cost over \$1,000 more a month,” said Will Wellington, social research and planning manager at UWPH. “Then there’s Victoria in Huron County, who works seven days a week, doing everything she can to make ends meet. Yet, she and her husband are paying more than half their income for a one-bedroom tiny apartment.”

Wellington continued by saying that there is a basic understanding in our society that if someone works hard, they should be able to afford a place to live, which is a core component of the social contract in North America. Wellington adds that the housing crisis is shaking the foundation of working hard and affording necessities based on income.

The released videos were supported by the Four County Labour Market Planning Board (FCLMPB), which has produced research that shows that housing is the leading barrier to hiring across the region. Despite low unemployment in Perth-Huron, employers continue to face ongoing labour shortages in sectors like retail, hospitality and healthcare.

“Those sectors are essential industries for our region but when you run the numbers, the wages in those fields often aren’t enough to afford housing locally,” said Wellington. “That’s why the planning board has identified housing as the top barrier to hiring. It’s holding our region back from reaching its full potential, including our ability to staff emergency rooms consistently and ensure essential services are properly supported.”

The United Way has launched an initiative called United Housing aimed at developing new community housing projects throughout the region. The first builds are underway in North Perth, with several others currently in development. As part of the broader campaign, the organization is encouraging residents to get involved by signing the “Speak Up For Community Housing” petition available on its website. The petition calls for increased investment from both the provincial and federal governments.

“Ultimately, investing in community housing is going to be much better for our region and save our communities more money in the long run, compared to the current situation where unfortunately more people are ending up on the streets,” said Wellington.



Emily and Victoria share their stories of economic struggle in the “Workers Need Housing” video series released by the United Way Perth-Huron.

(KRIS VON KLEIST PHOTOS)

Food bank usage surges in Stratford as soaring cost of living forces families to make tough choices

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

As grocery bills climb and housing costs soar, more Stratford families, including those with two working parents, are turning to the food bank for help. The Stratford House of Blessing (SHOB) is now serving 33 new clients each month, and staff say demand has nearly tripled over the last five years.

“This is how we’ve been operating over the last number of years, that they just keep increasing. So from the end of 2024, we calculated back five years that there was a 197 per cent increase,” said Eva Hayes, executive director at SHOB.

“The reality is we’re an organization that, ideally, would be working ourselves out of a job. We don’t want to have to exist, but unfortunately, with the way the numbers keep rising, that doesn’t seem likely.”

Hayes believes that the number one reason that people are seeking the food bank more than ever is due to the high cost of living.



Eva Hayes, executive director at the Stratford House of Blessing, is always ready to provide food for the community.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Jennifer Morris, community and services manager at the Salvation Army Stratford, says that organization has seen a continued need for support and notes that donations have also seen a drop.

“Meeting that demand, however, is getting harder as donations drop,” said Morris. “At this time of year, a lot of food banks tend to see a significant decline in donations. People usually think

about giving during the holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. During summer, it really quiets down. People are busy or away, and we’re just not top of mind.”

Hayes said that at the House of Blessing, clients can visit the foodbank once a month to receive consistent basic items such as pasta, peanut butter, milk, eggs and two meat choices. Visitors can also choose from canned vegetables, soups

and other pantry items.

“While many of these items come in through community donations, often the organization needs to purchase additional food to meet demand. We always need the basics,” said Hayes. “Our warehouse coordinator recently placed an order to supplement the areas where donations fall short. We have funds set aside to buy what we don’t receive in donations, ensuring every family leaves with a full basket.”

Hayes said that the volunteer base at the House of Blessing is being served by stable numbers, alongside the drop in financial donations. Hayes adds that the decline of financial donations is likely tied to broader economic struggles. “The community needs the money to support their family, and we understand that.”

To help meet with the demand, SHOB is preparing for its major fundraisers this fall, with Empty Bowls taking place on Oct. 24. Guests enjoy soups from local restaurants and take-home handcrafted bowls, with all proceeds going towards supporting food bank programming.

Books, bonding and fresh air: Library's Sunshine Storytime builds community

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Families gathered under the sun at the Stratford Education Recreation Centre (SERC) playground to share something simple, yet powerful: a story. Organized by the Stratford Public Library, Sunshine Storytime offers a chance to connect through books and the outdoors.

The Stratford Public Library's Sunshine Storytime invites families to gather at the SERC playground for a special reading experience led by library assistant Beth McEvoy. More than just a story in the park, the local event highlights the power of community connection through something as simple and meaningful as listening to a story together.

The program will run every Thursday until Aug. 14 from 11 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., following the sPARK Literacy program. After a morning filled with creative learn-

ing and developing new skills, Sunshine Storytime gives kids a chance to relax and allows people from the community to join.

"There's something truly special about reading in the great outdoors. The natural environment adds to the experience; we might see a bird or hear a sound that sparks a new idea or conversation," said Trish MacGregor, children's librarian. "It opens new ideas for us to explore, stretch our bodies and learn together. It feels just like summer. The sounds of children playing, gathering under a tree to sing, read and grow as a group. These are the kinds of moments childhood memories are made off."

MacGregor said that McEvoy was the natural choice to lead both programs. With her background in child studies from the University of Guelph, McEvoy brings her experience in educating children to every session.

"Beth has this gentle, encouraging pres-

ence," McGregor said. "She remembers every child's name and makes each one feel like the most important person there. Caregivers have told us again on how special she makes their little ones feel."

In addition to storytelling, Beth also weaves music, singing and hands-on learning activities into her programs, a combination that has resonated deeply with local families. Programs like Sunshine Storytime play a meaningful role in strengthening community ties with Stratford.

As a free drop-in event, families can attend whenever it fits their schedule, with no registration required. This flexibility fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging. Children often reconnect with friends they have not seen since the school year ended. Newcomers to Stratford also discover where they can meet others and feel at home.

"The library is for everyone, and all are

welcome here," said MacGregor. "Community connection happens within our walls, but it extends far beyond them, especially through our outreach efforts in the summer. The outdoor programs invite people in, help them feel a part of something and show them that there's a place for everybody at the library year-round."



Sunshine Storytime (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
at SERC allows children to experience a variety of different stories, developing their creativity and imagination, says local children's librarian Trish MacGregor.

SUMMER SAVINGS WITH STRATFORD KIA'S PRE-OWNED DEALS

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sPARK Literacy program blends books and outlearning together

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

In the Stratford Public Library's sPark Literacy program, kids will have the opportunity to explore picture books, science and outdoor scavenger hunts designed to spark curiosity and creativity, bringing the joy of reading and nature together.

Running up until Aug. 14, every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. sPARK Literacy focuses on integrating literacy in a nature infused environment at the Stratford Education Recreation Centre (SERC) playground. Designed for children ages six and lower, but open to older children as well, all will have the opportunity to experience literacy education in a combination of styles – through picture books and nature-based learning along with scavenger hunts, creative activities and science exploration.

"Beth McEvoy, our library assistant, runs the program and she's great with the kids. She also runs our Sunshine Storytime program," said Trish MacGregor, children's librarian. "This program provides a great opportunity to connect with the library and do group activities that help towards building knowledge with children's literacy and develop early learning social skills."

The program days will provide a heavy focus on literacy-based games, creative exploration and opportunities to engage



Beth McEvoy, assistant at the Stratford Public Library, runs the sPark Literacy program, bonding with the kids and encouraging, movement, sensory skills and play. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

with stories through interactive ways. Children will be immersed in hands-on nature-based activities designed to engage all senses. Activities will range from water play, sensory walks, obstacle courses and more, all with the aim of sparking curiosity and movement in an outdoor

setting.

"We're using the outdoors where children can develop and learn new skills in a hands-on way," said MacGregor. "This is a very open-ended approach. For example, a toddler might explore by touch and sight, while an older child might want to

write down the things they discover.

"Same goes for when the children are reading and working with books. We retell the story and sometimes we focus on the concepts within it," said MacGregor. "An example is, with opposites, directions or colours, we create activities that expand on those ideas. For stories like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, we use materials like magnet tiles so the children can retell the story themselves while they're moving and playing."

The program is designed to be book-based with a strong focus on a selected author, a story and sometimes a book series. Each session uses the stories as a foundation for related activities, allowing children to explore key concepts through play, movement and creative learning.

Launched in 2022, sPARK Literacy was Stratford Public Library's first in-person programming following pandemic restrictions. It was created in response to community feedback, with parents and local partners helping shape a safe and engaging way for families to reconnect.

"As things began to open up, we saw families reconnecting. It created a beautiful opportunity to build community and support early literacy and learning that would help children socialize again," said MacGregor. "That's really how the program began, and we loved it so much – and so did the community – that we continued it ever since."

Queer Book of the Month

HEATHER LISTER

Stratford Public Library

Learned by Heart by Emma Donoghue
@ SPL FIC Donog

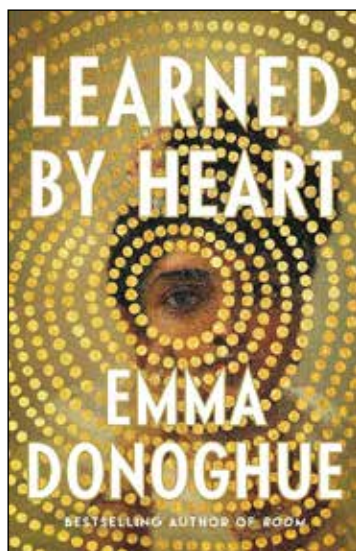
The year is 1805 at a school for young ladies in the city of York, England, when Anne Lister and Eliza Raine, both fourteen years old, first meet. The two quickly form a strong friendship, and later begin an intense love affair. Intimate relationships between women were considered taboo at the time, and *Learned by Heart* is Emma Donoghue's fictional account of the romance.

Anne Lister and Eliza Raine were complex, convention-defying young women, but very different people: tom-boyish Anne became an unlikely partner for shy and sensitive Eliza.

Eliza and Anne's relationship was ultimately doomed because of the era in which it took place, and sadly Eliza, suffering from

fragile mental health, spent the rest of her life, after her time with Anne, in an asylum, from where she wrote letters to Anne. Anne in turn described their relationship and her feelings for her friend in journals that were written in code. Indeed, in an author's note at the end of the book, Donoghue describes the extensive research that was necessary to decipher the journals and bring the world of these two young women to life.

Learned by Heart is a tender, but haunting account of forbidden love and fans of Gentleman Jack, the television adaptation of the life of Anne Lister, will find this account of the early years of the women's time together fascinating.



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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. The Spanish word "lobo" means what?
2. What does rpm stand for?
3. Who was the longest reigning King in England?
4. What U.S state hosts the annual Oshkosh air show?
5. Who starred in *The Naked Gun*? (1988)
6. How far is a marathon?
7. A sommelier is known to do what?
8. Which country has won the most FIFA World Cups?
9. How many legs does a lobster have?
10. In *The Simpsons*, what is the name of the bartender?

This week's answers are found on pg. 26

STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

From Stratford to Colombia: Local athlete lifts her way to Pan American success

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Kristen Pearn, a Stratford-born athlete, is making waves in the Olympic weightlifting scene after her performance at the Pan American Championships in Colombia earlier this summer.

Placing eighth in the 77-kilogram weight class, the former varsity softball player says she started weightlifting when she joined the local gym, Hydra CrossFit in Stratford, after competitive university sports left a void.

"I didn't really know where to put my energy after playing university softball," she said. "A few friends go to Hydra and highly recommend it. Everyone said great things about it – and they were right."

What started as a way to stay active quickly turned into something much bigger. After four years of CrossFit, she was approached by a coach who noticed her natural talent in Olympic lifting when she joined the gym in Ottawa.

"There are a lot of Olympic weightlifting coaches at CrossFit gyms, so there's quite a bit of overlap. One of them told me, 'You're really good at this. You should sign up for an official meet.' So I did," she said.

Her first meet was in January in Toronto. From there, she qualified for nationals, then for the Pan American Championships, all within just six months.

Now training with Canada Barbell Club



Kristen Pearn, a Stratford-born athlete, is making waves in the Olympic weightlifting scene, placing eighth in the 77-kilogram weight class

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

in Ottawa, she still keeps close ties to Train Hydra in Stratford, where her journey began.

"I was really hoping to hit a qualifying total for worlds and fell a bit short," she said. "But next season, that's my goal – I just need to increase my total by 10 kilograms."

While competition is part of her drive, it's not the whole picture.

"I've always been a competitive athlete, but the community, the coaching and the constant challenge of CrossFit and weightlifting have been such a positive part of my life," she said. "I've found something that's good for me – mentally and physically."

That mindset shift has extended beyond the gym. Growing up with a more muscular build, she said the CrossFit and weightlifting space helped her embrace her body for what it can do, not how it looks.

"It's not about looking a certain way or appeasing some beauty standard," she said. "I feel empowered because I can lift heavy, and I appreciate my body more now than ever. I'm just happier and more confident in who I am."

She hopes her success inspires others. "I feel like there's so much pressure when you get to be around 16, but there's no set time frame for anything," she said. "People might look at me and say I've passed my time, but here I am; I'm just getting started."

2025-2026 Stratford Warriors season schedule released

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Greater Ontario Junior Hockey League unveiled their 575-game 2025-2026 season schedule on Aug. 1.

For the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors, the road to the Sutherland Cup begins on the road against the London Nationals on Sept. 17. Then on Sept. 19, the Warriors open their regular season home schedule against the Waterloo Siskins at the William Allman Memorial Arena.

During the season, there are several notable games the Warriors fans would like to see at the Allman Arena.

Warriors fans can expect to see rivalry games at the Allman Arena against the Listowel Cyclones (Oct. 14 and

Dec. 10) and the St. Marys Lincolns (Jan. 16 and Feb. 8).

The first cross-conference game of the season takes place at the Allman Arena on Oct. 3 as Stratford welcomes the Hamilton Kilty B's to town for the first time since the 2023 Sutherland Cup. Over the season, the Warriors will face the Eastern Conference finalists Fort Erie Meteors (Oct. 4), Welland Canadians (Nov. 14) and the Caledonia Corvairs (Nov. 15).

Stratford will have their first oppor-

tunity to avenge their conference semi-final loss on Oct. 12 against the Chatham Maroons. Warriors fans will get their first chance to see the team host the Maroons on Nov. 7. The two teams play again on Feb. 4 and the regular season finale on March 8.

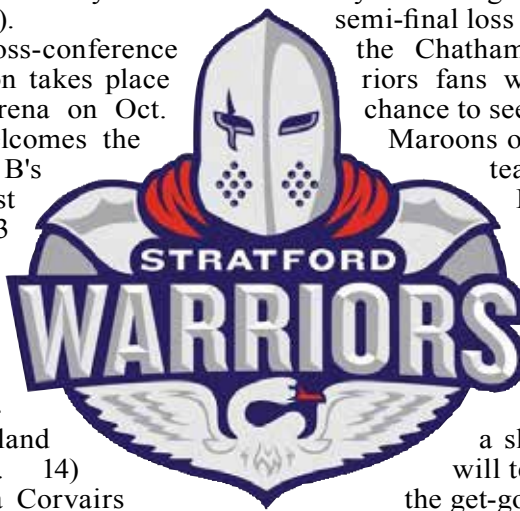
Before the real fun begins, however, the Warriors will embark on a slate of games that will test the squad from the get-go.

The Warriors are set to play at the eight-team Eli Palfreyman Memorial

Global Invitational Tournament from Aug. 20-24, hosted by St. Andrew's College in Toronto and the Ayr Centennials at the North Dumfries Community Centre.

Afterwards, the Warriors are scheduled to play four exhibition games in preparation for the upcoming season. They will play three games in five nights, starting with a home game at the Stratford Rotary Complex against Plymouth Victory Honda on Aug. 26, followed by a home-to-home game against the St. Marys Lincolns on Aug. 29. Then on Aug. 30, the Warriors travel to St. Marys before finishing off exhibition play against St. Andrews College at the Allman Arena.

For the full schedule, head over to the GOJHL website.



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Glosnek, Mewhinney win third Legion district golf title

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

Al Glosnek and Dave Mewhinney, representing the Stratford Legion Branch No. 8, won the Under-55 Regular Division Championship at the District 'C' Royal Canadian Legion golf tournament for the third time on July 12. The tournament was hosted at Scenic City Golf Course in Owen Sound.

The duo shot 71 to take the top spot, finishing just two strokes ahead of second place.

Mewhinney credited Glosnek for his strong performance throughout the day despite some challenging playing conditions.

"Under tough windy conditions from the blue tees, Al played lights out, and I, being a little nervous from the back tees, managed my way around the course," said Mewhinney. "I made some key pars, but Al was the anchor. We as a team take each and every shot seriously because it usually comes down to one or two shots. We have seen it many times."

Mewhinney and Glosnek have a long track record of success together, having six zone titles, three district championships and one provincial first-place win to their names.

The tournament stayed close until the final four holes, where, according to Mewhinney, Glosnek hitting another gear propelled the tandem to the win.

"The key to the win was the last four holes," Mewhinney explained. "It was very windy, but Al won the tournament with his play on those four holes. We got pars on those four holes despite the wind and that made the difference for us."

Mewhinney added the duo has remained together for a decade-and-a-half because of their strong cohesiveness.

"Golfing as a team means we both contribute in whatever ways we can, and we communicate and consult each other," Mewhinney told the Times. "That's what has made us successful since joining together as a team in 2010 for the Legion."

Paddlers return from Worlds



Grant Borysiuk of Stratford captured an impressive haul of hardware. Borysiuk, competing with the Canadian national team for the second time, was a member of the senior 'A' boat and won three gold medals and five silver medals.



The most experienced member of the Stratford Dragon Boat Club, Shirley Holland, poses with Avery DeWitt, the youngest member of the club. The Stratford Junior Dragon Boat paddlers combined for 33 medals at the World Dragon Boat Championships in Brandenburg, Germany on July 14-20. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)



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Hyde advances to second final in his rookie season at Sonoma

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

It was a quick and consistent weekend for Spencer Hyde, the Canadian driver for Head Racing. He added his second final round and highest ever qualifying position to his already stacked NHRA Rookie of the Year resumé at the Denso Sonoma Nationals at Sonoma Raceway. In addition to the final round and No. 2 qualifier, Hyde also set a new personal best for speed and accrued bonus points during qualifying.

"We had one of the greatest weekends that we could've had," said Hyde. "We made seven really good runs, the most of any other Funny Car out here. We were quickest ET in the second round and Q4, and only smoked the tires once. That's really awesome."

During qualifying, all four of Hyde's runs were strong passes, with his best run coming during the second round of qualifying, a 3.865-second, 333.58 mile per hour (mph) pass. This run was a new personal best for speed, and is what pushed him to No. 2 qualifier, the highest he has ever qualified for race day. Hyde's runs during the second and third rounds of qualifying were the second quickest of the round, earning him two bonus points each. During the fourth and final round of qualifying, his 3.882-second, 327.98 mph pass was the quickest of the round, the only pass made in the 3.8's and earned him three bonus points. His seven bonus



Spencer Hyde and the Head Inc Funny Car raced to their second final round of the season today at the Sonoma Nationals. (NHRA/NATIONAL DRAGSTER PHOTO)

points total was the most of any other Funny Car team this weekend.

"Coming into race day, I felt really good, knowing the car was in such a great spot," said Hyde. "I knew if I just continued to do my best as the driver, we had a really good shot at making it far in competition."

In the first round, Hyde was up against No. 15 qualifier Alexis DeJoria. Even though Hyde had the qualifying advantage, he knew he had to take DeJoria seriously if he had a shot at advancing. The

pair was named the Marquee Matchup for Funny Car, which proved to be the right call. DeJoria just barely left on Hyde, but he quickly made up ground and got around her with a 3.870-second, 332.75 mph pass.

"You never know what Alexis is capable of, so it felt good to get around her," said Hyde. "This was the first time we've ever raced each other during eliminations, and I have a feeling we have many matchups ahead of us."

The second round of racing was a redo

of the Northwest Nationals semi-finals, where Hyde just barely lost to Ron Capps by one-thousandth of a second, in one of the best side-by-side drag races of the season. This time, Hyde successfully got one over the three-time world champion, with a 3.872-second, 333.00 mph pass – the quickest of the round.

Hyde has now earned eligibility in four Mission #2Fast2Tasty Challenges this season, by advancing to at least the semi-finals four times in 12 races. He won his first challenge appearance at the NHRA 4-Wide Nationals in Las Vegas and is looking for a repeat performance in a few weeks at the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals.

"It felt so good to get that win over Ron," said Hyde. "He's my hero, but I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder after losing to him in such a close race last weekend. And then he knocked me out of my third Mission #2Fast2Tasty Challenge yesterday. Now we'll get to do a redo of that as well in a few weeks in Brainerd."

The one and only time this weekend Hyde smoked the tires came during the semifinal round of eliminations. Fortunately, Hyde had a bit of luck on his side. Despite opponent Jack Beckman making it to the finish line first, he crossed the centreline, disqualifying his run, allowing Hyde to advance to the finals.

"You never want to win that way, but a round win is still a round win," said Hyde. "I'm just glad Jack only barely crossed the

CONTINUED TO PAGE 15



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Hyde advances to second final in his rookie season at Sonoma

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

centerline, so nobody came close to being hurt. Skill is important in this sport, but sometimes being lucky is even more important."

Reigning Funny Car world champion Austin Prock was Hyde's last opponent of the day, in what was his second final round appearance of the year. Even though Hyde made a solid 3.956-second, 323.35 mph pass, the points leader brought the heat and pulled out a win with a sporty 3.904-second, 333.82 mph run.

"You can't be too upset losing to what I think everybody would consider the best Funny Car team in the world right now. They're pretty dominant," said Hyde. "But hey, we're showing everybody we can hang, so that's all we can do."

If Hyde had won this weekend, he would have become the first Canadian to win a national event in a professional category since Jeff Arend won in Funny Car at the O'Reilly Auto Parts Route 66 NHRA Nationals in July 2012. He is now looking forward to breaking that streak shortly, with an optimistic outlook for the rest of the season.

"I have a lot of confidence at this point in the season," said Hyde. "The last few races have been really good, and I think

this is a good time to get hot, going into the Countdown. We want to try and make a run at a championship, and albeit, it's going to be tough, but we want to be in the mix. We want to be talked about. Jim (Head) and Dave (Leahy) have got a great handle on this car, as they proved this weekend. And I think I'm driving alright. I have to get those lights to be a little bit quicker to keep up with Prock and them guys, but we're getting there. We're happy."

Hyde and the Head Racing team will be back in competition at the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals on August 14-17 at Brainerd International Raceway. There will be two qualifying sessions on Friday, August 15 and two qualifying sessions on Saturday, August 16. For tickets or more information on the Lucas Oil NHRA Nationals visit nhra.com.

Qualifying Results

Q1: 3.933 sec, 325.06 mph; Qual. 6

Q2: 3.865 sec, 333.58 mph; Qual. 2

Q3: 3.902 sec, 328.14 mph; Qual. 2

Q4: 3.882 sec, 327.98 mph; Qual. 2

Bonus Points: +7 (second quickest of Q2 and Q3; quickest of Q4)

Race Results

First Round:

Spencer Hyde, Stratford, Ontario, Head

Inc. Funny Car, (.098), 3.870 sec, 332.75 mph def. Alexis DeJoria, Los Angeles, Calif., Bandero Café Funny Car, (.095), 3.913 sec, 332.84 mph

Second Round:

Spencer Hyde, Stratford, Ontario, Head Inc. Funny Car, (.093), 3.872 sec, 333.00 mph def. Ron Capps, Carlsbad, Calif., NAPA Auto Parts Toyota GR Supra Funny Car, (.090), 3.886 sec, 333.25 mph

Semifinal:

Spencer Hyde, Stratford, Ontario, Head Inc. Funny Car, (.096), 5.235 sec, 146.05 mph def. Jack Beckman, Corona, Calif., PEAK Chevrolet Camaro SS, (.082), 4.498 sec, 184.67 mph, crossed centerline

Final:

Austin Prock, Pittsboro, Ind., Cornwell Tools Chevrolet Camaro SS, (.070), 3.904 sec, 333.82 mph def. *Spencer Hyde, Stratford, Ontario, Head Inc. Funny Car, (.096), 3.956 sec, 323.35 mph*

Mission Foods Drag Racing Series Top Ten – Funny Car

1. Austin Prock	1020
2. Matt Hagan	819
3. Jack Beckman	815
4. Ron Capps	782
5. Paul Lee	735
6. J.R. Todd	621
7. Dan Wilkerson	617
8. Spencer Hyde	568
9. Bob Tasca III	534
10. Alexis DeJoria	533

Send in your sports reports

Coaches and/or parents are invited to send in your sports reports and pictures to the Stratford Times to let Stratford and area know how your teams are doing throughout the new 2025-26 season (and to create some great scrapbook material to be reflected upon in future years).

Game reports should be kept to a

maximum of 100 words. Please include a brief description of what happened during your games, including the names of those who scored and any special efforts made by your players.

Please have all reports and pictures in by the end of the month by emailing stratfordtimes@gmail.com.

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Ontario 

Ride for Sight yard sale fundraiser continues

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Despite a tornado warning threatening the event to be called off, Ride for Sight Central Ontario still held their fifth annual fundraising yard sale in Stratford.

Ride for Sight Central Ontario held a charity yard sale outside of Zehrs on July 26, featuring items like DVDs, clothing, toys and home décor. Yard sale organizer Wilf Sukowski was pleased with the turnout, in spite of the tornado that hit Mitchell and surrounding area a few days prior on July 24.

"It's better than we thought it was going to be because we pretty well got our set-up destroyed two nights ago. We were actually in the yard in Mitchell, our storage unit there, to get some more tables just as the tornado went through," he said.

Initially, Sukowski said he considered postponing the yard sale due to weather. However, he and Pauline Williams spent all of Friday salvaging what they could to include in the sale. Before the storm, there were enough items to cover 30 more vendor tables, including electronics, but it was destroyed from the storm.

Still, Sukowski was eager to talk to the Times about Ride for Sight and its impact in vision care.

Ride for Sight started in 1979 with a group of motorcyclists riding their motorcycles in support of their colleague who started losing

their eyesight. The group held fundraisers to help their friend cover medical costs.

Since its inception, Ride for Sight raised \$34.8 million. In 2024, the Central Ontario chapter raised \$90,000 from events like yard sales in Stratford and across the region. All money raised will support the Fighting Blindness Canada foundation to fund vision research at Canadian firms.

"There's no money that goes from the federal government to eye research. It's all done through private donations," Sukowski said.

A few years ago, one of the research companies was able to develop an artificial retina.

"People that could never see before could actually see now," Sukowski said.

There's demand for research looking at retinitis pigmentosa, which tunnels vision and reduces it by about 10 per cent each year until vision is removed completely.

"That's a big thing they're trying to find a cure for or some way to help people," he said.

The Yard Sale in Stratford was held ahead of the 47th annual Ride for Sight weekend in Fenlon Falls, Ont. from Aug. 8 to 10. The motorcycling event will feature live music, camping, a poker run, dinner and silent auction. Next to Friday the 13th, Ride for Sight is the second largest motorcycle rally in Canada with about 500 to 1,200 bikers in attendance.

More information about Ride for Sight Central Ontario can be found by visiting <https://www.rideforsight.com/ontario-central>.



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- Strathroy (Welder L1 2025)

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STRATFORD NISSAN



Stratford launches inaugural Every Voice poetry contest to celebrate Perth County's literary talent

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Reporter

Stratford's poet laureate, David Stones, in partnership with Destination Stratford and the Stratford Public Library, has announced the launch of the Every Voice poetry contest – a project designed to amplify diverse poetic voices throughout Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys.

This inaugural contest represents more than just a literary competition – it's a celebration of self-expression and the powerful art form of poetry across the region.

"The Every Voice poetry contest is a mainstay of my Stratford poet laureate mandate," said Stones. "The focus of my three-year term is to bring poetry to the people, and people to poetry. Every Voice has the power and capacity to unite and engage our community around universal, resonating themes, ensuring that the diversified voices of our poets and storytellers ring pure and true."

There are two contest categories: youth ages eight to 18, and adults 19 and older. The contest aims to select winners from across the county, and Stones plans to create an anthology of around 200 poems written by local residents.

"This is a unique opportunity to have poetry published," said Stones. "(The contest submissions) will culminate in an anthology. So a lot of writers and poets and storytellers have never been published before. This is their opportunity."

The 2025 contest serves as a pilot project,



Perth County launches poetry contest. Left to right: Zac Gribble, executive director, Destination Stratford; Mayor Martin Ritsma, Mayor of the City of Stratford; David Stones, Stratford poet laureate; Krista Robinson, CEO, Stratford Public Library; Deputy Mayor W. Dean Trentowsky of the Municipality of West Perth. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

ect, with organizers envisioning Every Voice as an annual celebration of local literary talent.

"Part of our work at Destination Strat-

ford is to share the authentic stories and experiences from our community with the rest of the world," said Zac Gribble, executive director of Destination Strat-

ford. "I can't think of a better way to give voice to this region than through the Stratford poet laureate's Every Voice poetry contest and anthology."

Stones says this year's theme is resilience, which can be interpreted by poets in many ways.

"Resilience seemed like an excellent theme for this time, this era, this segment of evolution in our community," said Stones. "True poets and true storytellers and true writers are left to interpret that word in terms of what it means to them. It could mean personal struggles – emotional, physical. It could mean political struggles, tariffs, the economy, jobs, well-being, economic, physical, mental."

This collaborative effort between Stratford's poet laureate, Destination Stratford, and the Stratford Public Library demonstrates a shared commitment to fostering arts, culture and storytelling throughout Perth County.

"The resulting anthology and awards event will be celebratory milestones in the cultural evolution of our wonderful community," said Stones. "It's all very exciting and I'm deeply appreciative of the involvement and support of Destination Stratford and Stratford Public Library in this rather historic undertaking."

For contest guidelines, submission details and deadlines, visit splibrary.ca/every-voice or contact David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate, at poetlaureate@splibrary.ca.

Stratford exhibit spotlights 50 years of gender-inclusive performances on stage

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Costumes, voices and local stories collide into "To Thine Own Self," a new exhibit that explores five decades of gender-bending performances on Stratford's stages.

The Stratford Perth Museum is proud to present To Thine Own Self, an innovative costumes and audio exhibit celebrating gender inclusivity and bold artistic choices that took place on the Stratford Festival stage over the last 50 years. The exhibit invites visitors to explore the rich history of gender representation, drag and theatrical risks that helped shape Canadian theatre.

"The exhibit grew from a simple idea to explore drag within the Stratford Festival Theatre archives," said Kelly McIntosh, general manager at the museum. I discovered a fascinating history of risk-taking performance like Pat Galloway's groundbreaking main role in Lorenzo de' Medici and Bill Hutt's performance."

McIntosh explained that Galloway is marked as the first woman to play a male role in Stratford and that decision would go on to reshape how gender fluidity and expression was done through the following



Kelly McIntosh, general manager at the Stratford Perth Museum, presents To Thine Own Self to the community, an exhibit for the community to reflect on the artistic bravery and much needed change. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

The exhibit is housed in two rooms at the museum which features iconic costumes, props and production photos and immersive audio interviews with some of Canada's most celebrated actors and theatre artists. The exhibit aims to reveal stories on how

Stratford Festival theatre took steps in exploring gender fluidity and identity.

McIntosh said that To Thine Own Self features ten productions spanning across five decades each notable for challenging traditional gender roles on stage. From Martha Henry as Prospero, Amaka Umeh as

Hamlet, Seana McKenna as Julius Caesar and Jonathan Goad's Titania. The exhibit provides an extensive focus on non-binary and gender fluid performances.

"It just happened that as we were developing this, a lot was also happening with the political landscape to make it even more urgent. We were having those cultural conversations about representation, drag, gender and identity, not just in the theatre but everyday life," said McIntosh.

"This exhibit became not just a retrospective but also a very current and vital conversation. There are risks involved with that but it's a conversation Stratford can and should be leading."

The exhibit has garnered praise from theatre professionals for its thoughtful curation and storytelling. It stands as a testament to Stratford's legacy, as a cultural leader willing to take artistic risks.

"We wanted the exhibit to go beyond the surface," explained McIntosh. "Yes, the costumes are beautiful and important, but our team is really interested in the stories they tell. How costumes can reflect shifting ideas about gender, power, identity and performance. It's just about what the actors wore but why and what it meant onstage and off."

Stratford Walking Tours expands to Stonetown with Spirits of St. Marys Walk

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A company that offers guided walking tours through Stratford's past is expanding to St. Marys with a new ghost walk launching in September.

Stratford Walking Tours owner and guide Lauri Leduc, a native of Perth County and a resident of St. Marys for the past two years, recently announced the upcoming launch of her Spirits of St. Marys Walk – a guided walk along the Thames River featuring some of the Stonetown's most sordid and gruesome historical stories.

"St. Marys has a lot of history, a really rich and diverse background and I thought there'd be an opportunity here to share some of those stories," Leduc said. "As well, the town's tourism office actually gave me a little nudge and said, 'Would you be interested?' I thought about it, did some research, looked into it and sure enough, there were lots of stories to tell and decided to expand here.

"It's great to be able to feature my new hometown in one of my walks as well. I grew up in Perth County, I'm familiar with the area, I have family connections here, so it's nice to be able to showcase St. Marys."

In Stratford, Leduc offers a variety of tours including her Tour and Tea starting at the Tom Patterson Theatre and winding along the Avon River, her Steps to the Stage tour focused on the history of the Stratford Festival, her History and Heritage tours which focuses on the people and events that shaped Stratford, her Lo-



Stratford Walking Tours owner and St. Marys resident Lori Leduc, pictured, is launching her Spirits of St. Marys Walk, which features tales of local history with a touch of the macabre told by Leduc along a two-kilometre path beside the Thames River. (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

cal Plants and Local History tour focused on the plants that grow along the Avon River, the history of the waterway and its importance to Stratford, and her Stratford Ghost Walk – the inspiration for her Spirits of St. Marys Walk.

For her ghost walks, Leduc tells stories she has crafted through historical research, original newspaper accounts and local myths and legends passed down through families who have lived in either Stratford or St. Marys for generations, which she then verifies through

her own research. For the St. Marys ghost walk, she developed the stories she will tell with help from the St. Marys Museum and Archives and Mary Smith, by reading through St. Marys history books written by local historians like Larry Pfaff and by encouraging her friends and neighbours to share any of the local ghost stories they've heard around town.

"We have lots of great buildings downtown, but I'm going to focus the walk along the riverside," Leduc said. "It's about a two-kilometre path, it takes about

an hour. We're going to tell stories about a disgraced 19th-century doctor who had to flee town, but his spirit allegedly still roams the town even though he left decades and decades ago. There's the quarry; I have some great stories from the quarry as well. It literally built this town – economically and our many beautiful buildings – but health and safety wasn't that prominent back in the day, so it led to lots of accidents.

"The newspaper accounts of the day were so graphic in their detail. They talk about their heads being crushed and people lingering for days before passing away. So, there's all these great, tragic stories about the quarry in that history, including one alleged incident about a gentleman who was tragically killed there who still haunts the quarry pillars to this day. So, lots of working in some of our history like the quarries, like the building of the town, but also some characters that were involved."

In addition to ghost stories and tales of tragic deaths, Leduc's tours are also an engaging blend of architectural insights, historical anecdotes and little-known facts about the past.

The Spirits of St. Marys Walk will start in September and run on Friday nights through the month of October. Leduc says the ghost walk should be of interest to locals and visitors alike, and everyone who participates will take home at least a little more knowledge of and appreciation for the Stonetown and its vibrant history.

For the tour schedule and booking information, visit stratfordwalkingtours.ca.

Stratford poet to launch biannual Pathways to Poetry Festival

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Stratford poet Heidi Sander is bringing three days of poetry to the Festival City with the upcoming launch of her inaugural Pathways to Poetry Festival Sept. 26-28.

Part of the fall Stratford Writers Festival, the poetry festival is presented in partnership with the Stratford Public Library and Fanfare Books, and will be presented at Here For Now Theatre and the library auditorium, showcasing a variety of events and talented Canadian poets.

"It's a festival made with and for our community," Sander said. "At the heart, it's just a desire to have poetry hold its rightful place at the centre of cultural conversation. Poetry exists at the edges of larger literary gatherings, and I just didn't want it to be an afterthought, so this festival was created to change that dynamic.

"I've created a festival that centres on Canadian voices and all that diversity that builds connections between artists and audiences and encourages creative risk taking. It's a celebration of poetry in all of those art forms. Poetry is a way listening, feeling and seeing the world in



The Pathways to Poetry Festival will take place Sept. 26-28 as part of the Stratford Writers Festival. (HEIDI SANDER PHOTO)

a different way. ... Poetry has this way of being very immediate and concise, and in this moment of global change and uncertainty, I just feel there's a deep need for connection. Poetry offers what I feel few other forms can; a place to reflect, to

resist, to renew. It's also an invitation to pause, to listen deeply, to make meaning. ... I just feel that's what we need right now."

Throughout the poetry festival's three days, there are many events featuring

both local and Canadian artists from beyond Stratford and the immediate area. The list of events includes:

- A poetry panel with Poetry Stratford featuring local voices.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 20

Local artisan blends baked treats and adventure stories at Stratford Farmers Market

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

By day she's known as the owner of the Bakery Dragon, aligning inventive cookies at the Stratford Farmers' Market, but when the oven's off, Stratford's own Jessica Seguin is diving into fictional worlds of pirates, puzzles and adventure in her children's book series called The Five Quarters.

While selling her baked goods every Saturday at the Stratford Farmers Market, Seguin is hard at work on writing her fourth self-published novel in her planned five-book children's series. Seguin says that both businesses have been dominating her summer agenda.

"I started writing it pre-pandemic. When the world shut down, I wrote a much too large book for the age range that I was looking for, which is between 10 and 12 years of age," said Seguin. "So, I broke it up into five smaller adventures that equal one big adventure."

Seguin says her book series, which kicks off with Oddities at the Outset, is focused on a coming-of-age story, where the characters are discovering themselves and integrating into the people they are destined to be. She explains that there are too many books that are focused on a "chosen one" where that character will become amazing and talented because they're special. Seguin dives into



Jessica Seguin author of The Five Quarters book series and owner of the Bakery Dragon at the Stratford Farmers Market. (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

a different approach where the character discovers that they are capable of incredible things within the structure of the word.

"Writing the book wasn't simple but that was the easiest bit,"

said Seguin. "Finding the support you need around to do it well, like editors, secondary readers and an illustrator, as well as someone to format the book for me, was challenging."

Along with balancing her writing, Seguin rents out the kitchen at the Falstaff Family Centre to bake tasty treats for her other business to sell at the Stratford Farmer's Market, which she named the Bakery Dragon.

"I like dragons, and I thought it was fun and clever and it's very me. The community at the Stratford Farmers Market welcomed me with open arms and it was very heartwarming for me," said Seguin.

Seguin, who has been selling her baked goods at the market since last December, said that not only have the vendors welcomed her as one of their own but have also provided positive reception on her writing endeavors. She believes that for people to do what they are inspired to accomplish they should just go for it.

"Fearlessly go for it, just like what Nike says. Even if you don't think someone out there wants what you have to offer, they really do and they will find you," said Seguin. "Everyone is looking out for their community."

"I think especially now in this world, where we're all trying to rebuild our sense of self and community after being separate for so long. I think that people should just do the thing, look out for others and be yourself. You will find your audience."

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Stratford's Ballinran Entertainment marks 30 years in film production

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Stratford production company Ballinran Entertainment is celebrating a milestone anniversary – 30 years making films that tell both local and international stories.

Founded in 1995 by journalist and filmmaker Craig Thompson, who launched his media career in his hometown of Stratford, Ballinran has spent three decades creating compelling content that spans the globe, from community storytelling to internationally acclaimed documentaries and cultural diplomacy initiatives.

"It's interesting that my whole career got started in Stratford working at the radio station, the Beacon Herald and for what would become Rogers Cable TV," Thompson said. "So, although I went away after high school, I came back and the company has been going 30 years. It's scary in one sense but rewarding in another. It's hard to believe that so many decades have passed to get to this milestone."

With a body of work that includes *The Truth Is in the Stars* featuring William Shatner, Whoopi Goldberg and Stephen Hawking, *Game Changers* with Alex Trebek, *The Captains*, the TIFF premiere and award-winning *Mostly Sunny* and the recent acclaimed film *Exclusion: Beyond the Silence*, Ballinran has consistently combined powerful storytelling with purpose-driven content.

The company has worked across North America, Europe, Asia and Oceania building partnerships with global broadcasters, streamers and public institutions.

That mission of illuminating extraordinary stories extends to Ballinran's commitment to the community, with its professional broadcast of the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, elevating the Rotary Club of Stratford's fundraising initiatives and supporting the Stratford Symphony Orchestra.

"I feel the timing is better now than it's ever been just because of changes in the overall media-production industry and

broadcasting industry," Thompson said, looking back on the past 30 years working in film and television. "There's a lot more access to the technology to make the content. ... The industry itself is going through a major shift right now which creates opportunities for those who want to get into the business."

In addition to its anniversary, Ballinran is marking 2025 with several major initiatives, including the launch of Stageview.TV, a CRTC-approved broadcast and streaming channel focused on arts and culture, and the development of Stageview Studios, a 25,000-square-foot production facility in Stratford designed to serve southwestern Ontario's growing creative-content ecosystem.

"We're trying to build and create a space for content creators to get their stories out. And in Stratford, being one of North America's pre-eminent arts hubs, there's no better place to prove the film industry is thriving than here because we already have the largest props and costume ware-

house east of Hollywood, we've got actors, technicians, directors; and not everybody is working at the theatre. They're working in other creative industries. We've got people from Disney here, we've got people working on Star Trek; it's a remarkable creative ecosystem here in Stratford.

"It's the ideal place where we can generate content right here at home. It's not about bringing in Netflix or visiting productions, it's about using the talent and energy we have in the community to create content locally."

Though Thompson says he is extremely proud of how far Ballinran has come over the past 30 years, he said the company will remain focused on the future and committed to collaboration, innovation and telling untold stories. Through his work, he hopes Ballinran can continue to build and support a local film and production industry that could help diversify the city's workforce and economy, and put Stratford front and centre on the global stage for something other than theatre.



Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae presents Craig Thompson, president and executive producer of Ballinran Entertainment, with a certificate of recognition from the provincial government in celebration of the Stratford production company's 30th anniversary.



Pictured are William Shatner, Ballinran Entertainment president and executive producer Craig Thompson, and Stephen Hawking during the shooting of *The Truth Is in the Stars*. (BALLINRAN ENTERTAINMENT PHOTOS)

Stratford poet to launch biannual Pathways to Poetry Festival

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

- A Language, Landscape and Ancestry panel with Melissa Powless Day and Sadiqa de Meijer.

- A poetry and tea tasting event at Tea Leaves with Claire Chapple and Karen Hartwick, Canada's first tea sommelier.

- A Creative Bibliotherapy session where literature serves as a self-care tool through the process of reading and reflecting.

- "Poetry for Health and Harmony" reading with Mississauga's inaugural poet laureate, Anna Yin.

- An interactive Spoken Word Performance Workshop, allowing participants to perform their pieces and receive personalized feedback from actress Marion

Adler.

- The Charlie Mountford Fireside Chat, a special event honoring Stratford Poetry's founding, this year featuring Marilyn Simonds.

- Spoken Groove, a powerful, genre-blurring performance that weaves spoken word, dance and clean rap into one unified artistic experience, in partnership with the Provocation Ideas Festival.

- A kick-off "How To Speak Poetry" workshop with Stratford poet laureate David Stones.

"I wanted to feature Canadian poets, but the festival also maintains a deep, local sensibility. There are local poets featured, there are events that are rooted

in community taking place in familiar, welcoming space and the festival has been built through partnerships with local artists, with local organizations and venues," Sander said.

"While I wanted the festival to be solely focused on poetry, I also wanted to have an interdisciplinary approach so the poetry lives not only on the page or the stage, but through collaboration, so with dance, with music, soundscapes, even tea tastings – just different approaches that mirror the poetic mood and tone. I feel that these sensory experiences invite audiences to engage with poetry beyond listening; to taste it, to feel it, to move with it. And then there's also the wellness component of poetry, which kind of

comes back to poetry being needed right now."

Sander says she intends for the poetry festival to be a biannual event, held in both the fall and spring each year. She said she hopes this type of event will help locals, especially local poets or would-be poets, understand there is space for them to express themselves in Stratford, and that there is wide world of poetry beyond what is being fostered here in the Festival City.

For further details about the poetry festival and each of the planned events, visit stratfordwritersfestival.com and sign up for the newsletter for up-to-date information about more events to be announced.

Opinions

The power of pausing in August



IRENE ROTH

Times Freelance Columnist

At the start of each year, many of us set bold intentions. We scribble down goals, buy new planners, create vision boards and say, "This is going to be my year." January arrives with a rush of energy and ambition. But somewhere between winter's stillness and summer's buzz, that spark can begin to dim. Life happens, priorities shift, plans evolve, and we may find ourselves caught in a current of constant doing, rarely stopping to reflect or recalibrate.

That's why this time of the year can be such a valuable threshold. Many of us are still on holiday. We have time to do

a bit of exploring and thinking before the real busyness starts in September. This is an invitation to pause, take a deep breathe and check in with yourself. How are you really doing? What have you learned during the past six months?

Let's explore why pausing in August matters, and how you can use this moment to reflect with intention and move forward with clarity.

We often associate reflection with the end of the year – when we tally accomplishments and set new resolutions. But waiting until December to evaluate your progress is like trying to turn a ship around when it's already reached port. August reflections allow you to adjust your course while there's still plenty of time left to make meaningful changes.

Further, pausing in August can help you reclaim your focus. It invites you to ask: Are my goals still relevant? Is my energy aligned with my values? Am I taking care of my physical, emotional, and mental well-being? Without reflection, it's easy to drift into autopilot, living reactively rather than intentional-

ly.

Begin your reflection by looking back. Pull out your journal or planner and review the first six months. What stands out? What are you proud of? What surprised you? What drained you? This isn't about criticism or regret – it's about awareness.

You may have made progress you didn't celebrate or learned something vital through a challenge. Perhaps plans changed or unexpected responsibilities emerged. A compassionate review of the past helps us gather insights instead of regrets. Think of it as a gentle inventory. What's working? What needs adjusting? What can be released?

Too often, we overlook the smaller victories. Maybe you established a morning routine, set healthier boundaries or learned to say no without guilt. Maybe you showed up consistently even when motivation was low. These quiet wins deserve acknowledgment. They represent resilience, growth and self-trust.

Celebrating your efforts – not just outcomes – builds confidence and momentum. Grati-

tude for how far you've come can fuel your next steps.

Goals can become stale or out of sync with who we are becoming. August is a great time to reconnect with your why. Ask yourself: Do my goals still excite me? Do they reflect my values and priorities now? Life evolves – and so do you.

Sometimes we chase goals because they seemed important six months ago, or because others expected them of us. Use this pause to recommit or revise. It's okay to pivot. Real power lies in moving forward with clarity and purpose, not stubbornly sticking to plans that no longer serve you.

Reflection isn't just about logistics – it's also about mindset. Are you operating from scarcity or abundance mindset? Fear or faith? Overwhelm or intentionality? Use this pause to recalibrate how you're thinking about your life and challenges.

Maybe you need more rest. Maybe you've been chasing perfection and forgetting progress is enough. The power of pause lies in helping you see the internal patterns shaping your reality. With awareness comes

the ability to choose differently.

Once you've reflected and released, it's time to refocus. Set two or three intentions for the rest of the year. Make them meaningful, specific, and aligned with your current values. Whether it's prioritizing your health, launching a creative project, or deepening a relationship, let your next steps be rooted in purpose, not pressure.

Don't try to do it all. Aim for progress, not perfection. And remember that success is often found in the consistent, ordinary choices made with care and commitment.

The power of pause is profound. August reflections offer a rare chance to step off the treadmill of life and take a breath – to honour your journey, reset your direction, and move forward with greater intention. You don't need a dramatic overhaul. Often, just a few thoughtful adjustments are enough to create powerful change.

So, pause to do a bit of reflection. Listen to your intuition. You still have quite a bit of time to create something meaningful, and you get to define what that means.

Earth Rise: Enjoying without destroying our planet



ANNA KOWALCHUK

Times Freelance Columnist

Many of us love to travel, whether it's across town, across the country or around the globe. Travelling can be relaxing, entertaining and mind-expanding. And, with such captivating beauty, experiencing first-hand the many wonders of this astonishing world is almost impossible to resist.

But most of us are also aware that petroleum-powered vehicles, including airplanes, are a direct and massive (30 per cent!) cause of the over-heating of our planet to, now, critical levels. As I'm sure that neither you, dear reader, nor I wish to be that one uninformed hapless soul who tipped the Earth's temperature gauge from critical to fatal, these next three installments will be looking at some easy, stress-free ways

of travelling, without destroying the very and precious thing we are travelling to see.

For short-distance travel, there is so much to enjoy right here in Stratford. Hop onto any bus in your neighbourhood – by visiting the transit site <https://onyourway.stratford.ca/>, you will know exactly when it will be arriving at your stop. An adult cash fare is \$3, a student cash fare is \$2.50, and a child of five years and under rides for free. By purchasing tickets beforehand from various locations throughout the city, including the clerk's office at city hall, the trip will be even less expensive. Or, you can purchase and all-day family pass for four, which will accommodate one or two adults and two or three children, for only \$15!

With an average of twenty minutes of travel time, your bus will take you to the main terminal from which the downtown core is a short walk and even shorter bus ride on the #1 Huron or #3 McCarthy bus, onto which you can transfer for free at the terminal – but be sure to ask for a transfer pass when you pay your fare.

Get off at the very first stop, across from the majestic city hall, and you will find yourself on Downie Street and the heart of our beautiful city. Everywhere you wander you will encounter delights – ice-cream and

candy shops, jewelry and gem stores, a popcorn store, even a cat café, and so very much more.

A short walk north to Ontario Street will lead you to bookshops, toy stores, one-of-a-kind clothing and accessories boutiques, kitchen and furniture stores, as well as a variety of craft shops featuring brilliant creations by local artists and artisans.

Ready for a sit-down and a bite after all that exploring? Treat yourself to breakfast, lunch or dinner at one (or all – it promises to be a long hot summer!) of the many top-quality restaurants and cafés, each with its own unique style and enticing culinary fare. Good luck choosing a favourite!

But Stratford is nothing if not a theatre town. Enjoy the intriguing Canadian-featured offerings of the Here For Now Theatre, recently installed into its permanent location on St. Andrew Street, across from the library, and an easy five-minute walk west on Ontario Street from Downie.

And, with eleven productions on offer at its four locations, the Stratford Festival will also have a show or two (or three!) that will appeal to everyone in the family. The aforementioned #1 Huron or #3 McCarthy will take you almost to the front doors of

the glamorous Avon Theatre, and the #5 Devon bus will do the rest. Its first stop is just across the street from the avantgarde little Studio Theatre; it then continues up to Ontario Street, from which it is a five-minute walk north on Waterloo Street to the stunning and award-winning Tom Patterson Theatre; then it travels east to Queen Street from which it is, at most, a ten-minute walk north on Queen to the historic and iconic Festival Theatre.

If you are unsure as to where to disembark, feel free to ask the friendly and knowledgeable drivers who are more than happy to assist. Using public transit is far less expensive, far less stressful and far more Earth-friendly than car travel – but note that buses only run to 9:30 pm on weekdays, and 7:30 and 5:30 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

And what better way to end each day of visiting our lovely little city than to take a stroll along the enchanting Avon River. An easy walk north of the downtown, it is a world unto itself. With its banks recently restored to a more natural state, you can almost hear the happy hum of nature taking hold.

Following its gentle flow from east to west, it will lead you from the quiet nesting areas of birds and other wildlife at its east end in Lake Vic-

toria, to the Tom Patterson Island, ideal for picnics and marveling up-close the ducks, swans and occasional herons that make the river their home; from the three afternoons per week Art in the Park installation where you are sure to find a treasure or two, to the toe-tapping evening entertainment of the Razzamajazz music barge; and from the concession stand and Boathouse where canoes, kayaks and peddle boats can be hired for those wishing to have a more immersive experience of the river, to the glorious Shakespearean Gardens and beyond, the Avon River truly has something to offer everyone.

So, let's choose to travel to Stratford this year. Let's see what all the fuss is about, what thousands of folks from all over the world come here annually to see and do and enjoy. Let us, too, take the time to experience the many charms of our internationally renown little gem of a city – but let's do it with mindfulness and a commitment to tread lightly and keep it beautiful and bountiful for generations to come.

If you know of an individual, company or organization that deserves recognition for their innovative and sustainable environmental practices, please contact me at frogs-a-leaping@tutamail.com.

Opinions

Connecting for climate change with Katrina Moser

JULIA SCHNEIDER

Times Freelance Columnist

We live at a time when environmental issues are pressing to all except, it seems at times, those with the power to do anything about them. Recent provincial and federal Bill 5 and Bill C-5 are examples of how economic “progress” is being pitted against doing what we know is the right thing for the environment.

Dr. Katrina Moser, professor of geography and environmental science at Western University, is well aware of the conflicts that this deep divide can create. In the Climate Conversation she delivered at city hall in June, she talked about when the impact of what and how she was teaching was having on her students really hit her.

After five years of delivering her second-year environmental studies class from the viewpoint of scientific fact, a student came to tell her how it made her feel.

“I’m so depressed,” she said.

Reflecting on this, Moser understood; what she was teaching was depressing. The Earth is warming and if nothing changes will reach a point when world inequalities make it impossible for many to survive. And yet nothing seems to be happening to change this future. People continue burning fossil fuels and clearing land, the root causes of the warming, and while they do so, politicians of all stripes ignore the climate to promote economic gain.

We know the problem. We know the

solution. But nothing is being done to fix it by those in charge.

Why?

Moser sees a colonial world view, in which man is at the top of Earth’s hierarchy with nature at his service, as the root cause. In this view, man is king and gets to decide the future for all. He has absolute power; it is divinely ruled. He is The Man.

What can be done to change this?

Moser’s solution, formulated after an intensive study to which she brought her scientific expertise, and many conversations with others, is that we need to approach the problem from a different perspective and we need to bring in the Indigenous world view to help us do so. We need to braid western science with Indigenous science, which is much different from the one with which we are familiar. Only by doing so will a sense of proportion and empowerment come.

Though necessary, this is not easy. As Moser explains, academia and the discipline of science within it are highly competitive and based on individual effort, not cooperation. The Indigenous approach and world view is fundamentally different. Instead of man at the top of the schemata, humans are part of the firmament, along with plants and birds and other animals. Earth is a “she,” not an “it.” Moser calls the western view the “ego” perspective, as opposed to “eco,” the Indigenous and ecological view, and says that the idea of the first, that the ecosystem’s services exist to benefit human needs, is wrong

and must change. We need to look at the rights of Mother Nature, instead of the rights to Mother Nature.

To illustrate the difference between how western environmental and Indigenous environmental science look at nature she gave an example from the chapter “Asters and Golden Rod” in Robin Wall Kimmerer’s ground-breaking book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*.

When asked what makes these species, with their purple and golden flowers, so beautiful together, the scientist will scoff and say that the reaction to them is an aesthetic thing and thus outside the purview of his field – a statement that leaves the questioner feeling dismissed and dissatisfied.

In fact, Moser goes on to explain in some detail, there is a scientific reason for the pleasing aspect of the two reciprocal colours of these flowers, which is also felt by bees. This may seem poetic, but it is also practical because, when bees flock to flowers to gather pollen they also carry life with them through their pollination. It makes sense – but not to the scientist locked in a restricted and proscriptive world view. He is unable to bring poetry and metaphor into a view of a holistic earth because he doesn’t understand the wisdom of Mother Nature.

What can we do?

“Climate change action begins by talking about it,” Moser said.

The definition of the rat race (and in-

sanity) is to continue to do over and over again what we have done before and expect a different outcome; we need inter-generational discussions and interviews to get beyond the usual social groupings that define and restrict us. We need face-to-face interactions (not social media encounters) to communicate with each other as we forge ahead. Into this conversation we need to bring the Indigenous “seven generations” perspective which looks at how our actions now will affect seven generations to come, instead of just tomorrow or the next day, the current framework for politicians.

The course that Moser now gives about environmental science is the result of much study, reflection, soul-searching, conversation and thought. The good news is that all are welcome to participate in it. Students at Western can take it for credit, but anyone who is interested can enrol free of charge and take it online. After her talk, I found that many in the audience already had, and many of those who hadn’t intend to as soon as possible.

If you too want to take her course, go to the Connecting for Climate Change Action enrolment page and enrol. The next course starts in September.

In the meantime, continue to root for those Indigenous leaders who are reminding political leaders of the wisdom, the strength, and the irreplaceable value of Turtle Island.

P.S., both *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and a version of it for children, are available at the Stratford Public Library.

Simple Dreams Ministries hosts Cruise Night fundraiser at Bethel Church



Classic car owners and enthusiasts from Stratford and the surrounding area flocked to Bethel Pentecostal Church in Stratford the evening of July 28 for the Cruise Night fundraiser car show in support of local charity Simple Dreams Ministries. (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)



The Judge, a 1967 GTO, was displayed at Cruise Night by its owners Calvin and Darene Schmidt of Wellesley.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US!
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Brocksden Country School Museum welcomes Beatrix Potter reader Heather Browning

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

You can learn more about beloved children's author Beatrix Potter and the book that changed her life at Brocksden Country School Museum.

The museum will host Beatrix Potter reader Heather Browning for an event on Aug. 9 with readings at 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. at the site on 2719 Perth Line 37. Browning will talk about Potter's life and how she became an author with her first book, the iconic *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

"I'm looking forward to being able to share about her life and of course the focus will be on Peter Rabbit, but there's

many more books of hers that I could share about. But she lived the life she eventually wanted to live and it was all based on her ability to become an independent person because of her writing her little books," Browning said.

Browning has been part of the Beatrix Potter Society since 2010 and also talks about the author's life to adults as a Beatrix Potter presenter. The retired elementary teacher has always had an interest in children's literature and has attended conferences and symposiums in North America and England as part of the society.

Also known for stories such as *The Tale of Jeremy Fisher* and *The Tale of Jemima Puddle Duck*, Potter was born in 1866

to an upper-middle class, but restricted, upbringing. For example, she wanted to grow up and become a farmer but wasn't allowed due to her family standing.

"That wasn't seen as something that girls could do, but really there wasn't a lot that she could do. She had a private tutor. She didn't go to a public school or anything like that or a one-room schoolhouse. She grew up with governesses and that sort of thing, so the fact she was able to become an author and illustrator is quite remarkable, I think, and it brought a lot to her life," Browning said. "It changed her life, actually, because then she started to be able to make money and buy Hill Top and that became her sanctuary and where she lived for the rest of her life."

Potter's Hill Top, where she wrote her stories, went to the National Trust after her passing. The home is now a historic site.

Jessie Jacob, operator of Brocksden Country School Museum, said to the Times there are parallels between the English author's life and Perth County's oldest schoolhouse.

"We are excited about this combination since the timeline is similar: Brocksden was built in 1853 and Beatrix Potter was born in 1866. Many of the settlers of Perth County were of English/Scottish descent," Jacob said.

More information about the Beatrix Potter Society can be found by visiting <https://beatrixpottersociety.org.uk>.

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FOOD TRUCKS

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Donations to Tavistock Agricultural Society

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OBITUARY



SIMPSON, MALCOLM ("MAC")

Malcolm Simpson, age 82, of Stratford passed away peacefully at West Perth Village in Mitchell on Sunday, July 27, 2025. Born in Tadcaster, England, son of the late George and Elsie (Pitts) Simpson. Beloved husband of Donna (Shaw) Simpson and loving father of David Simpson and wife Cheryl, Dean Simpson and wife Karen, Derek Simpson and wife Nancy. Cherished brother of Christine Millson of Brockville.

Loving grandfather of Jacob and wife Michelle & great granddaughter's Leah and Hailey, Gregory and wife Lindsay, Brady and wife Cleo, Courtney, Jamie and husband John & great grandson Dawson, and Morgan & friend Patrick. Predeceased by grandsons Matthew and Michael.

Mac was a hardworking, dedicated family man. He worked for 35 years at the Stratford P.U.C as an electrical lineman and supervisor. His love of family was always foremost in his mind, and with Donna by his side they spent countless hours in arenas and ball diamonds across all of Ontario and beyond watching their children play their favourite sports. In 1984 they turned their love of the Bruce Peninsula into a dream come true, building a loving family cottage in Cape Chin North, Ontario. This became their home away from home with countless hours building, renovating and relaxing with family and friends on the clear water shoreline of Georgian Bay.

Mac served as a Board Member at St. Paul's Anglican church for a period of time and settled into coffee clubs for his socialization in the later years with friends from Church and his old work crew.

One of Mac's great joys was transitioning to be a grandfather & great grandfather. He had this magnetic personality, smile and humour that will be missed and remembered forever within all of his family generations.

A private family service will be held at the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street, Stratford followed by interment in Avondale Cemetery. As expressions of sympathy, memorial donations to the Heart and Stroke Foundation or St. Paul's Anglican Church may be made through the funeral home. 519.271.7411. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

THANK YOU

Thank you

The family of the late Robert Beverly Trachsel, "Bob", wish to express sincere thanks and appreciation to relatives, friends and neighbors for the many cards, floral arrangements and memorial donations in memory of a wonderful dear husband, loving father and grandfather. Special thanks to the staff at London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC), Stratford General Hospital, the compassionate care provided by Care Partners Home Care Staff and the ladies from Tavistock Trinity Lutheran Church for the luncheon served at the "Celebration of Life" held at Tavistock Legion on July 12, 2025. Bob enjoyed the many phone calls and visitors who helped brighten his final days. A true sign of friendship and respect. Thank you to the Glendinning Funeral Home and their staff for their assistance and kindness from Winnie, Tim, Tina, Tanner, Tyler, Tayler and Fiance Taylor, Tarra, Darrell, Aaron and Rowan.

FOR RENT

Wildwood Care Centre (Retirement Living). Private room accommodations for Senior living available, can accommodate couples. Price \$2800 to \$4600 monthly. Meals, basic care, medication management and staff available 24/7. For tours call Lisa at 519-284-3628.

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\$ Cash Paid \$ for your RECORDS and LPs. Jazz, Blues, Rock, Pop, Folk, Soundtracks, and more. Selectively buying CDs, Cassettes, Turntables, and Stereo Equipment. For more information: **DIAMOND DOGS MUSIC** 114 Ontario St. Stratford / 226-972-5750

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Fair value offered for your vinyl records, cassette tapes & hifi components. Please contact **Sound Fixation, 519-801-5421, 4 George St. W, Stratford.**

I WILL PAY CASH FOR ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES – Coca Cola Pepsi any pop company, Brewery items Kuntz, Huether Labatts etc. Old radios and gramophones, Wristwatches and pocket watches, Old fruit jars Beaver Star Bee Hive etc. Any old oil cans and signs Red Indian Supertest etc. Any small furniture.

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

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PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

- The Community Calendar is for non-profit organizations to promote their free admission events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as a phone number, email address or website.
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
 - o Coming Events Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
 - o Coming Events Boxed Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
 - o Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

Riddles

- Why did August apply for a job?**
Because it didn't want to be the "last resort" of summer!
- What's August's favorite music?**
Anything with a hot beat!
- Why did the calendar break up with August?**
It needed some space before fall!
- What do you call a lazy August afternoon?**
Nap-tember prep!
- Why is August the most confident month?**
Because it knows summer revolves around it!
- What did one August day say to the next?**
"Hot enough for ya?"
- Why do kids bring sunscreen to August?**
Because it throws serious shade (and then takes it back)!
- Why don't secrets last in August?**
Too many fans!
- Why did the sun love August?**
It felt totally in its element!
- What do August and ice cream have in common?**
They both melt under pressure!

Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 26



Pet of the Month



ROCKY

Rocky is an extra-large, long-haired sweetheart with a heart as big as his paws. A little shy at first, especially around new people but this gentle giant quickly warms up with patience and kindness, becoming your loyal, cuddly shadow. He's still learning his basic manners so he'll thrive in a home ready to guide him with love and consistency. Rocky was recently shaved, but his beautiful fluffy coat will return with time and proper care (no more shaving, please!). If you're looking for a devoted companion who just wants to be by your side, Rocky is ready to meet you! Visit kwsphumane.ca to learn more about Rocky!

Word Search

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BEACH TIME

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

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4. Wisconsin
5. Leslie Nielsen
6. 26.2 miles (42.195km)
7. Recommend & serve wine
8. Brazil
9. Ten
10. Moe Szyslak

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

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