

Exeter Examiner

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Heated rivalries: Charity hockey tournament returns

DAN ROLPH

Editor

The rivalries may already be getting intense, but the experience will all be in good fun as the community comes together in support of a good cause.

The third annual charity hockey tournament will be back in at the South Huron Recreation Centre April 9, bringing together six teams from local businesses to raise funds and collect food donations for the Huron County Food Bank Distribution Centre.

Jenn Case of Huron Tractor, one of the tournament's organizers, spoke to the Examiner about the tournament that already has the community buzzing with excitement.

Case said the idea for the tournament came as there was a decline in donations to the local food bank due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We were just trying to think of something that would bring people together and impact the community at the same time," said Case. "Hockey seemed to be that ice that just worked."

The first tournament featured teams from Huron Tractor and Jayden's Mechanical in 2024, but that roster doubled in size in 2025 to include Huron Motor Products and the McCann Group.

In 2026, Baker Holdings Corporation and Delta Power Equipment are stepping onto the ice, bringing the tournament to a roster of six teams.

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(BARRY JOHNSON PHOTO)

TUNDRA SWANS RETURN TO THE BEND

Tundra swans have returned to the region, bringing with them the hope of spring. The area acts as a stop as the swans migrate north to their breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic.

They're back – Tundra swans arrive to rest on their journey north

JUDY FINKBEINER JOHNSON

Examiner Correspondent

Thousands of snowy-white tundra swans announce their arrival each year around the final weeks of winter, and their presence is heralded as a promise of spring.

The chatty birds communicate with others flying in their group with honking or bugling sounds. If they are closer than one hundred feet above you on their ap-

proach, birdwatchers can listen for the whistling sound the wind makes as it passes through their wings. That sound is the reason tundra swans are also called whistling swans.

Since the centuries that created the now non-existent Lake Smith and two other small lakes that made up the massive 17,000-acre wetlands called the Old Thedford Bog, generations of tundra swans have followed their incredibly precise GPS to the same places. A popular

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Hospital Auxiliary Rummage Sale returns to Exeter this May

MEG PEARSON

Examiner Reporter

The South Huron Hospital Auxiliary's popular rummage sale is set to return this spring, continuing a long-standing community tradition that supports patient care at South Huron Hospital.

The large annual sale will take place at the South Huron Recreation Centre arena floor on Friday, May 29, from 2 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., and Saturday, May 30, from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Donations are being accepted on Thursday, May 28, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the South Huron Recreation Centre's Zamboni entrance.

While the exact origins of the rummage sale stretch back decades, many local residents remember attending as children, and it has remained a well-supported event in the community ever since.

Bev Anstett, co-ordinator of the rummage sale committee, said the event serves three important purposes.

"First of all, it's a fundraiser to support the hospital," Anstett said. "All the money we raise goes directly into patient care."

Funds raised through the auxiliary support various hospital initiatives and equipment purchases, helping enhance patient care locally.

But Anstett said the sale is about more than fundraising. It has also become a gathering place for the community.

"The second purpose is that it's a social and community event where people can get together and participate," she said. "We hope volunteers enjoy themselves and feel good about being able to help."

The third aspect reflects a commitment to sustainability, something the organizers refer to as the "four Rs" — rummage, recycle, reduce and reuse.

"We hope we can keep things out of the landfill and pass items along to someone who can use them," Anstett said. "It also allows families to purchase items at a very reasonable cost."

The May sale is the larger of the auxiliary's two annual rummage sales, and in addition to household goods, shoppers can expect to find clothing and furniture items available on the arena floor.

Organizers do ask donors to be mindful of what can and cannot be accepted. While a wide range of gently used household goods are welcome, items such as large furniture, mattresses, electronics, computer equipment, car seats, single cups, plates, glasses and other oversized or difficult-to-handle items cannot be accepted.

The event requires significant volunteer support each year. Anstett estimated that about 250 volunteers help organize the large sale, working across different departments and shifts to sort donations, set up the arena floor and assist shoppers.

Preparation for the sale begins months in advance, with a volunteer committee co-ordinating advertising, organizing departments and recruiting helpers.

"We're always happy to welcome new volunteers," Anstett said. "Some people work a couple of hours, while others help throughout the whole event. Any help is appreciated."

Volunteers are especially needed for set-up on Wednesday evening, donation drop-off day on Thursday and clean-up at the end of the sale on Saturday.

Residents interested in volunteering or donating items are encouraged to watch for updates on local community Facebook pages and the South Huron Hospital Gift Shop Facebook page. They can also contact Anstett directly.

Whether donating, volunteering or simply stopping by to shop, Anstett said the goal remains the same.

"We like that it raises money for the hospital, but we also like that it brings people together," she said. "It's really about maintaining that sense of community."

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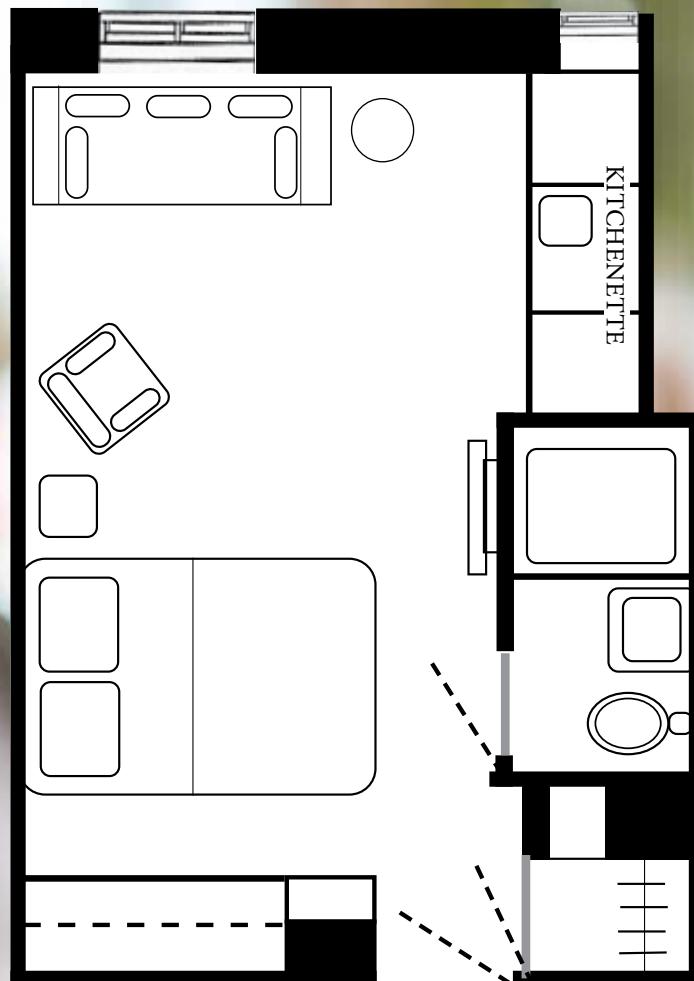


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EDITORIAL

In a digital age, community newspapers have a vital part to play



DAN ROLPH

Editor

There's no doubt that there are those who might think starting a new newspaper in 2026 is a strange choice in this modern digital world.

But when I took to social media to announce that the first issue of the Exeter Examiner was available, I received a reminder of why it's more important than ever to have locally owned and staffed newspapers — especially in a small community like ours.

I had spent time drafting a Facebook post that both spread the news about our first issue and conveyed how

thankful we were and continue to be for the support of this community.

When I finally hit that big blue "Post" button on the page, I watched as the announcement immediately disappeared into the ether, never to be seen again.

I thought it might be some sort of technical glitch, so I tried to create that same post once again.

No luck.

That's when my internal alarm bells started to go off and I began investigating. After a little digging, I noticed that several other posts had vanished from our Facebook page without any warning or reason.

It was only then that I realized that Facebook was censoring our content because I had included a link to our website (exeterexaminer.com) both in those older posts and the one I was trying to create.

When Canada passed Bill C-18, also known as the Online News Act, in 2023, Face-

book chose what proved to be a unique approach in response. Unlike Google, which eventually negotiated an agreement that sees them paying \$100 million each year to fund the journalism they profit from by sharing news selling and advertisements on it, Facebook instead opted to block all news content on its platform in Canada.

To many observers, that move was made by Facebook in the hopes of avoiding a new precedent being set where social media companies could be forced to pay journalists and media companies for profiting off their content.

Almost three years later, debates continue about whether Facebook or the Canadian government should have handled the Online News Act differently. What hasn't changed in that time, though, is the negative impact it's had on everyday citizens looking to stay informed.

Without real journalism being shared on Facebook, the

void that was left after its removal has been filled by unverified misinformation that users may not always be aware they're viewing.

Sometimes it can be easy to spot the most obvious falsehoods that come across a Facebook feed, but even the most informed people can glance at a post or a comment and internalize it without realizing.

And in an age when it's easier than ever to falsify videos and images with artificial intelligence, misinformation is becoming more difficult to identify with each passing day.

Those brief, unnoticed moments where we view misinformation can accumulate, and in time they can leave us forming opinions not based on facts at all.

That's why it's so important to look for news you can trust in the places you can trust.

A community paper like the Exeter Examiner is the perfect place to look.

We are not faceless entities

or bots who are trolling the comment section of a post.

We are your neighbours, living in the same towns and villages that you do, wanting to know about the important things happening in our communities.

The internet has changed our world by making information accessible to everyone with ease. But in an age where it's becoming increasingly difficult to recognize what's true and what isn't, having the ability to speak about what you're reading with the person who wrote it when you run into them at the grocery store or the arena can go a long way in helping you figure out what's fact and what's fiction.

That's the strength of a community newspaper, and it's a strength that's needed now more than ever. We are accountable for what we publish, and the weight of that responsibility is not something we take lightly.

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Exeter Examiner Guiding Principles
N E W S P A P E R

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

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Huron County approves budget, omits Airport Line roundabout despite legal concerns

DAN ROLPH

Editor

Huron County council has approved its 2026 budget, omitting the proposed roundabout at County Road 83 and Airport Line despite warnings that the county could be liable if someone is injured at the busy intersection.

The budget that was approved by council at the March 18 meeting will see the county's tax rate increase by 2.78 per cent, resulting in the median residential property adding just over \$34 to its annual tax bill. The median farm property will tack on another \$39 to its taxes.

Despite the budget's approval, it was the continued debate over a proposed roundabout at the intersection just west of Exeter that made up the bulk of the meeting.

The project would have been funded through gas tax funding, which is provided to municipalities throughout Ontario by the provincial government, meaning the project's removal from the budget has little effect on the overall levy since it would not have been funded through property taxes or reserves.

A motion that would have opened the door to rescinding council's move in February that removed the roundabout from this year's budget failed to garner the two-thirds majority it needed in the chambers during that March 18 meeting.

Supporting that motion were councillors George Finch, Jim Dietrich, Glen McNeil, Jamie Heffer, John Becker, Alvin McLellan, Doug Harding and Warden Jamie Heffer. Those opposed were councillors Paul Klopp, Trevor Bazinet, Leah Noel, Bill Vanstone, Bernie MacLellan, Marg Anderson and Jim Ginn.

The deferral of the roundabout marks the second time county council has pushed back the project that could have cost \$3.2 million, having first delayed the project in 2025 with the intent of moving it forward in 2026.

Since a roundabout was identified by consultants B.M. Ross as the preferred solution to the intersection's safety woes, the county has undergone the process of preparing the site for construction, including purchasing surrounding lands and completing the design process that settled on a single-lane roundabout for the site.

According to a report presented during the meeting, there were 10 collisions from 2021 to 2025 at the intersection—a reduction from the 16 collisions

seen from 2017 to 2021. Though there was a drop in total collisions, both periods saw severe crashes and crashes that resulted in injuries.

Collisions seen at the intersection often involve turning movements, angle collisions or drivers failing to stop.

The report states, "These types of collisions are commonly associated with rural two way stop controlled intersections where drivers on the minor road must judge gaps in higher speed traffic on the major road. Further to note is the presence of serious injury collisions in both analysis periods, which is generally a good indication that current measures are not sufficient."

Also included in the report was an analysis from the county's legal counsel. That analysis found that deferring the roundabout project for another year or cancelling it altogether could leave the county legally liable if a serious collision occurs after identifying the intersection as a safety concern.

"If the project were cancelled or significantly delayed and a serious collision occurred, the county could face potential negligence claims on the basis that it was aware of the hazard and had already identified a reasonable improvement," the report reads.

Larry Shapton, a resident who lives near the intersection, spoke to council through a delegation at the meeting about how he and other neighbouring property owners were disappointed in council's initial decision to remove the project from the 2026 budget in February during budget deliberations.

"We just don't understand," he said. "We were very shocked and upset."

"Someone will continue to get hurt or killed at that corner, with the council well aware of the risk. They recognized it as early as 2021, and they're still not going to act on it."

Shapton pointed to a May 15 incident at the intersection where emergency crews responded to a collision involving a pickup truck and another vehicle that resulted in at least one injury as an example of the risks at the intersection.

"The big one, I feel, is going to happen," he said.

Following Shapton's comments, Coun. Jim Ginn labelled the intersection's dangers as an enforcement concern that may not need a roundabout to improve safety, instead pointing to a stronger police presence as a solution.

"We have thousands of intersections in Huron County that are not flat or on hills or on bends," he said. "This inter-



(HARRY TEPPER PHOTO)

Huron County council approved its 2026 budget during the March 18 council meeting, opting to keep a roundabout for the intersection of County Road 83 and Airport Line out of the slated projects for the year. The intersection has been identified as a safety concern by consultants and staff, while the county's legal counsel has advised that delaying or cancelling the project could leave the county liable if a serious collision occurs. Above is the result of a March 15 collision at the intersection that resulted in an injury.

section, in my mind, is no more dangerous. We just need to enforce the laws that are in place."

Coun. George Finch, a former police officer, described viewing the intersection as an enforcement issue as "reactive," agreeing with the county's staff and consultants.

"When I was policing, I used to sit at that intersection and watch them go through, continuously near misses, and then I would go and give them a ticket," he said. "I have given tickets to people who have gone through the stop sign several times."

"This is an engineering problem. We have to get that through our heads. We are not experts."

While speaking to councillors, Huron County public works director Imran Khalid echoed Finch's comments.

"We do think that this is an engineering issue," he said. "There are improvements that you can make to that intersection for improving safety."

"Enforcement will not address the root cause of the collisions."

Coun. Bernie MacLellan disagreed with the county's public works director.

"It's all 90-degree corners," he said. "The sightlines do not appear to be a problem."

"Accidents happen at every corner," he added, noting he also wasn't convinced by the county's legal counsel regarding

liability risks.

Finch said the roadway is one of the busiest in the county, and that traffic volumes will only get worse—particularly as the busy tourism season sees travellers taking the route as they drive toward the lakeshore.

"To take the position of 'well let's wait and see what happens' all while more collisions occur, respectfully, is not a sign of good leadership," said Finch. "I am personally not willing to risk anyone's life and never have been. Kicking it to the next council is also, respectfully, irresponsible and completely unconscionable."

Coun. Trevor Bazinet said he was concerned about the county setting a precedent if they moved forward with a roundabout at the intersection while taking issue with Finch's comments.

"I'm a little tired of having leadership being questioned in this council chambers," he said. "I think we're all good leaders. We're here to make tough decisions, and we don't always agree. That's a good thing. That's democracy."

Meanwhile, Coun. Glen McNeil said the intersection "haunts" him, and that he is concerned about the county being liable after identifying the area as a safety concern.

"To ignore our legal counsel is at our peril," he said.

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Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Shirley Keller. A former writer for the Signal Star and other media. Her blogs on Facebook are wonderful, she puts into words what many are already thinking. They vary from rays of sunshine to takedowns of political personalities. Her writing talent needs to be recognized!

If you would like to nominate someone for Senior of the Week, contact us at info@exeterexaminer.com

WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

1. What 1994 film features a character describing a Quarter Pounder with Cheese as a "Royale with Cheese" in France?
2. What legendary musician wrote "Purple Haze," "Little Wing," and "Voodoo Child"?
3. The Pyramid of Giza is the only ancient wonder still standing today — what other ancient wonder was also located in Egypt?
4. What is the name of the galaxy closest to our Milky Way?
5. In the Bible, who is the eldest son of David?
6. Which country is known as Suomi?
7. How many lines are in a limerick?
8. Do male or female toads croak?
9. What magical phrase did Ali Baba use to open the cave?
10. In Toy Story, what is the name of the boy who owns Woody and Buzz?

This week's answers are found on pg. 26

POLICE BRIEFS

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Go-kart driver charged

A 24-year-old Bluewater resident has been charged by police after a complaint about a go-kart being driven on the road led to the driver's arrest.

Huron County OPP said the resident was stopped on Feb. 19 just before 11 p.m. on Queen Street in Hensall after officers received a complaint about a go-kart being driven on the road.

Following the go-kart driver's arrest, they were charged with operation while impaired — alcohol and drugs and operation while prohibited.

They were also charged with two counts of driving while suspended under the Highway Traffic Act.

South Huron resident charged with impaired driving

A woman from South Huron has been charged by police following a March 22 traffic stop.

According to Lambton County OPP, an officer stopped the 44-year-old woman around 9 p.m. on Lakeshore Road near Army Camp Road after the vehicle allegedly nearly struck a police vehicle head-on.

After her arrest, the woman was charged with operation while impaired — alcohol and drugs and oper-

ation while impaired — blood alcohol concentration over 80 and dangerous operation.

Alleged impaired driver arrested following traffic stop

A 68-year-old man from Kettle and Stoney Point is facing impaired driving charges following a traffic stop in Lambton Shores.

Police said officers stopped the man on March 22 just before 9 p.m. while on patrol on Lakeshore Road near Jenna Road.

Following the stop, the man was arrested and charged with operation while impaired — alcohol and drugs and operation while impaired — blood alcohol concentration over 80.

Traffic stop leads to impaired charges

Police have charged a 32-year-old South Huron man with impaired driving offences following a traffic stop.

According to Huron County OPP, the man was stopped on Feb. 19 around 7 p.m. on Huron Street East in Exeter. Police allege that the driver had consumed alcohol before getting behind the wheel and that breath samples found they were over the legal limit.

As a result, the driver was charged with operation while impaired — alcohol and drugs, operation while impaired — over 80 and dangerous operation.

Exeter Examiner welcomes two new team members



Judy Finkbeiner Johnson
Sales Rep and Writer

Growing up here on a family farm, Judy's path led from a one-room school, to graduating from SHDHS and Western University to marketing and communications work in Toronto with national trade associations. She has worked as a wedding magazine editor, a travel writer living in Flemish Belgium with her husband, Barry, and decades later, back to her heart's land here in ad sales and writing for the It Starts at the Beach Guide. A curious storyteller, "soul food" is family, friends, nature, and the arts.



Barry Johnson
Sales Rep and Photographer

Born in Niagara Falls, Barry graduated from Toronto's Ryerson Photo Arts. Like the unexpected twists of the Falls' wild mouse ride, which he assembled and test rode as a teenager, life led to his graphic arts career with GAF, Agfa, Xerox and 3M, and four years in St. Niklaas, Belgium, travelling 200 days a year to clients in the U.K., and Europe — a treat for this "born with a camera" man. Moving to Exeter, he was in ad sales for the It Starts at The Beach Guide.

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They're back – Tundra swans arrive to rest on their journey north



Tundra swans can often be found off Greenway Road near Highway 21, east of the Lambton Heritage Museum, when they arrive in the region.



(BARRY JOHNSON PHOTOS)

Mute swans, with their orange bills, can also be seen by birdwatchers in areas around Grand Bend.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

spot is on Greenway Road near Highway 21, east of the Lambton Heritage Museum.

Tundra swans pause there to rest and feed on the remnants of 2025 crops of corn and soybeans and underwater vegetation. They need a huge amount of energy for the arduous journey north from their overwintering grounds in Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, and the Carolinas to the Canadian Arctic. Their round-trip journey north to breeding grounds and south to overwinter is over 12,000 kilometers long.

Binoculars, a camera with a telephoto lens and a cell phone for researching information or swan calls can help when viewing the swans. The late-winter winds that are unimpeded by structures are often strong and very cold and raw, meaning birdwatchers may wish to dress for the cold temperatures.

For comprehensive information from Lambton Heritage Museum about tundra swan migration routes, Thedford

Bog information, swan numbers during sightings, a quiz and much more, visit returnoftheswans.com. The museum is also hosting a Tundra Swan exhibit, which is running until April 4 this year.

In other areas, like south of Grand Bend on the way to Sarnia, two other swan species may be seen: the longest and heaviest native North American trumpeter swan and the mute swan. Mute swans often glide along the water with their wings partially raised.

Researching the difference between a tundra swan and a trumpeter swan may be helpful since they look similar.

Tundra, trumpeter and mute swans all have a white body. There can be some staining of the neck feathers from “bottoms up” tipping up in the water to feed on underwater vegetation.

Tundra swans have a black bill, which usually has a yellow patch near the eye. Meanwhile, Trumpeters have a black bill with a black patch that extends from the base of the bill to the eye, and mutes possess an orange bill with a raised black

knob on its upper part near the base.

Tundra, trumpeter and mute swans are all strikingly impressive in terms of size and wingspan.

Tundra swans generally weigh between 14 and 20 pounds, with a body length ranging from 3.5 to 4.5 feet and a wingspan of 5 to 6.5 feet. Trumpeter swans tip the scale at 20 to over 30 pounds, reach lengths of 4.5 to 5.5 feet and boast an expansive wingspan from 6 to 8 feet. Mute swans weigh in at 24 to 32 pounds, measure 4 to 5 feet in length and display impressive wingspans between 6.7 and 7.8 feet. These measurements highlight the grandeur and presence of swans, making them a captivating sight for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts alike.

Swans usually mate for life and deeply grieve the loss of a partner. After a lengthy period, the survivor might mate again. Both male and female co-parent young.

The vast majority of a tundra swan's more than 25,000 feathers are on its

neck.

The honk of the tundra is higher than the deeper vocalizations of the Trumpeter. The mute swan has a hoarse, muffled call when bothered that can't be heard as far away as other swan species' sounds, and pairs greet with a brief snore.

Tundra Swans are seen in the region only during migration when they gather as staging areas in flocks. At a distance on land, they resemble snowbanks, while on water they can look like floes of snow-covered ice.

Mute swans are exotic swans native to Europe and Asia, imported into North America in the mid-1800s for their beauty. They are the type of swan celebrated in “The Ugly Duckling” by Hans Christian Anderson.

Swans are celebrated in stories, songs, ballets and film. White swans symbolize grace, love, purity, and transformation. Black swans are associated with mystery, uncertainty, and surprise and sometimes become the villains in tales.

Two dog maximum kept in South Huron

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

Three dogs are still one too many in a South Huron household.

After debating a staff report suggesting South Huron's animal control bylaw be revised to allow three dogs per dwelling, council voted to stick with the current limit.

The existing South Huron bylaw sets the maximum number of cats and dogs per dwelling at four, with a limit of two dogs.

Under the bylaw, residents are allowed the options of four cats and no dogs, two dogs and two cats or one dog and three cats.

Staff were asked to review the bylaw after a resident requested an exemption because they had five cats.

The review looked at animal control bylaws in sur-

rounding municipalities, focusing on the maximum number of animals per residence, kennel licensing, care and control of animals and fines.

A common overall limit of animals per dwelling was five, with a maximum of two or three dogs. Some bylaws allowed an additional dog in rural settings.

Other bylaws set limits on household pets such as hamsters, ferrets, rabbits, fowl, mice and rats.

The review of neighbouring municipal bylaws also found the fines in South Huron's animal control bylaw were low by comparison.

It was proposed that the fine for allowing a dog or cat to run at large be increased from \$100 to \$150, while the fine for allowing a dog to bark, whine or yelp excessively would be increased the same amount.

Another proposed change would have exempted livestock and herding dogs from the number limit provided the owner kept livestock on the same property and was

within a rural zone.

Deputy Mayor Jim Dietrich said he opposed increasing the limits.

“Three dogs to an apartment, or even a house, I'm sorry I don't think that is right,” he said.

On the other side, Coun. Marissa Vaughn said she had no problem with three dogs in a residence.

Coun. Wendy McLeod-Haggitt said some rental agreements for apartments in South Huron specify whether tenants are allowed animals and if so, how many.

“They would never allow an obscene amount of animals in a one bedroom apartment. That would just cause way too much chaos with the other tenants in the building,” she said.

Mayor George Finch said under Ontario's Residential Tenancies Act part of an agreement that states no pets allowed is void.

Plan to merge Ausable Bayfield conservation authority with Thunder Bay dropped

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

South Huron will lose its representation on the local conservation authority under the Ontario government's latest consolidation plan.

The same goes for other municipal councils such as Bluewater, Huron East and Lucan Biddulph.

In his latest update, Environment Minister Todd McCarthy announced the province plans to shrink the number of conservation authorities from 36 to nine instead of the seven originally planned.

The newly created regional conservation authorities will still be municipally governed by cities, regional municipalities and counties, but lower-tier municipalities such as rural townships and towns will not be participating, he said.

Board chair of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority Brian Petrie said the new system means a loss of valuable rural and farm representation.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the rural voice is getting eroded," said Petrie. "We need that perspective and it is going to get lost for sure."

The new consolidation plan, which still needs approval of the Ontario Legislature, drops the proposal to merge the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority and other authorities along Lake Huron with the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority 1,500 kilometres away.

Instead, the plan is to create a Lake Huron Regional Conservation Authority that will merge the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority with Maitland Valley, Saugeen Valley, Grey Sauble, Nottawasaga Valley and Lake Simcoe.

After receiving more than 14,000 comments on its original plan, the province also dropped the idea of creating

a regional conservation authority that stretched from Windsor to the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

The plan now is to split that area into two separate conservation authorities with the Upper Thames part of the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority along with the Lower Thames Valley, Essex Region and St. Clair Region conservation authorities.

Ray Chartrand, chair of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, said they had advocated for merging with just the Maitland Valley and the Saugeen Valley conservation authorities.

"Those three conservation authorities, their watersheds butt up to each other. Those three made perfect sense," he said.

The suggestion, however, went nowhere.

Chartrand said the local municipalities, which pay the levies for the conservation authority, still want to be involved.

The hope is that will happen through the creation of "Watershed Councils" that the province has promised to set up as part of the overhaul of conservation authorities.

"They made a commitment that watershed protection at the local level with local expertise and local service delivery will still be in place. That is what we are hoping for with the watershed councils," Chartrand said in an interview.

In the transition to the new regional conservation authority, Chartrand said it will be business as usual at the Ausable Bayfield.

"We are still going to go after the same programs and deliver the same services right through this transition and keep doing it the same way as we have always done," he said.



(DAN ROLPH PHOTO)

A plan that would have seen the region's conservation authorities merge to include Thunder Bay has been revised by the province. Under the new proposal, the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority would be amalgamated into one of Ontario's nine new authorities.

"There is not much more we can do than make it work the best way we can."

Environment Minister McCarthy has maintained the conservation authority system needed to be overhauled to provide consistent standards, reduce administrative overlap and provide faster permit approvals for housing development. The regional conservation authorities will have stronger capacities for watershed management and flood resilience.

The Opposition NDP has condemned the plan, saying it will undermine local control and the ability to respond to local problems.

"Conservation authorities were created to safeguard Ontarians and their homes from environmental disasters. Doug Ford and Minister McCarthy see them as an unnecessary hurdle for their developer friends looking to make a profit," said NDP environment critic Peter Tabuns.

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Buckthorn: A prickly problem



JASON RAMSAY-BROWN

Examiner Columnist

In the late nineteenth century, Ontario farmers thought fondly of common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), a small, shrubby tree brought here from its native range in Europe and Asia. It grows quickly, forming dense thickets that make excellent windbreaks and hedgerows. As an added benefit, it was considered medicine for various conditions including constipation and rheumatism. As farming spread throughout Ontario so did buckthorn, framing fields throughout the province.

In the twenty-first century, buckthorn is known as one of the most widespread and troublesome plants on the landscape. Able to thrive in sun or shade and a wide range of soils, it's now found in woodlots, hydro corridors and along roadsides and riverbanks across all of southern Ontario. Whether you're driving a sideroad outside Exeter or wandering the trails at the Pinery, there's likely a buckthorn in sight both ahead and behind you.

The problems with buckthorn are plentiful. Classified as a noxious weed under Ontario's Weed Control Act, our farmers are probably aware of the agricultural issues. Over winter, buckthorns host the soybean aphid (*Aphis glycines matsumura*), an invasive insect that feeds on the crop, reducing

yields. It also hosts the fungi that causes oat crown rust (*Puccinia coronata corda* f. sp. *avenae*) and barley crown rust (*Puccinia coronata* var. *hordei*), which cause serious damage to these grains. For these reasons alone, buckthorn is an often-used example when discussing the economic impacts of invasive species on industry which the Invasive Species Centre recently estimated could be as high as \$3.6 billion each year in Ontario.

Buckthorn's impact on our natural world is more severe. As is the case with many plants introduced from abroad, buckthorn is of little ecological value to local insects and wildlife. Deer, for example, avoid browsing buckthorn in favour of just about anything else. This puts additional pressures on other food sources, reducing opportunities for those species to spread while more and more buckthorn fills the void. On the flip side, many of our most common birds, like American robins (*Turdus migratorius*) and cedar waxwings (*Bombicilla cedrorum*), will feed on buckthorn berries. Unfortunately, these provide them little nutrition and have a notable laxative effect. The birds fly away full but poorly nourished and quickly pass the seeds elsewhere furthering the spread of buckthorn.

Once buckthorn has taken root it's likely to form dense thickets with alarming speed. The shade produced can severely limit nearby plants access to sunlight. For all but their most shade-loving neighbours, this is likely a kiss of death.

Buckthorn's impact on soil is just as vicious. Its leaves are high in nitrogen, and when they decompose they deliver that nitrogen to the soil. This

may sound like a good thing, but it's important to understand that our native plants, species that could have been found here long before settlement, generally prefer much lower levels of nitrogen than those brought here from elsewhere. Buckthorn's impact on the soil makes it less suitable for natives and more friendly to exotic species. Where the spread of buckthorn leads, other species of questionable ecological value follow.

As one might expect, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) routinely works to manage buckthorn on their properties. In 2024, they conducted an important management trial in Hay Swamp supported by a grant from the Invasive Species Action Fund. The trial evaluated three different techniques involving varying degrees of mechanical mulching and herbicide application to assess their success rates and costs per acre. Trial results will be compiled later this year.

Public lands, like those managed by ABCA, benefit from large-scale solutions and the experience of practiced professionals. Private lands are a different beast. Most of us may not even recognize buckthorn to see it, let alone understand how best to battle this scourge.

Buckthorn is a tall understory shrub with multiple stems that can eventually reach the heights of a small tree, some six to eight metres. Its grey-brown bark is often cracked or flaky and dotted with small spots called lenticels. Leaves are egg-shaped with jagged edges and veins that curve towards the tip. You'd think its characteristic thorns would be the tell-tale sign but there's a more distinctive trait: look just beneath the



(JASON RAMSAY-BROWN PHOTO)

Common buckthorn is known as one of the most troublesome plants in the landscape, causing as much as \$3.6 billion in damage to Ontario's agricultural industry.

bark for a layer of orange tissue called the cambium. Any of the popular plant identification apps should prove reliable in confirming identification.

Strategies for removal depend on size. The Ontario Invasive Plant Council offers a comprehensive Best Management Practices document on their website, ontarioinvasiveplants.ca, which is full of excellent advice.

Seedlings and small plants are easy to pull by hand. Be sure to get as much of the root as possible and tamp down the disturbed soil after. Saplings will likely require use of a weed-pulling tool as the roots hold soil firmly. Removed materials are best stashed in a sealed bin or contractor bag for a year before disposal. When that's not possible, hang the plant upside-down from a nearby branch with its roots exposed to sunlight.

Significant challenges come when you're dealing with mature buckthorn. The most common approach is to cut it down close to soil level. Girdling can work but is not nearly as effective. With either approach, be prepared to manage resprouts for up to three years. Stumps

can be tarped over to minimize resprouting.

Making the best use of your time is key to long-term success. Removing a dozen trees is a great start, but preventing three dozen from spreading their seeds may be an even greater victory.

Prioritize the removal of females before they start fruiting in July. Lob off all branches in reach while waiting for girdling to do its job.

The next two years are critical. Buckthorn can produce a huge number of seeds, which stay viable for many years after they fall. Expect those to sprout. The best defense is to introduce competition by planting natives. An outstanding choice is black elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) which has leaf-out and leaf-fall timing similar to buckthorn. Another suitable choice might be northern spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) which is fast-growing and plentiful around these parts. Look for local native plant sales and nurseries to source these and other suitable choices. If planting isn't an option, consider mulching or tarping the exposed soil to help suppress that next generation of buckthorn.

FCC to support producers as fertilizer market uncertainty grows

FARM CREDIT CANADA

Contribution

As conflict in the Middle East heightens concerns about the rising cost of inputs, Farm Credit Canada (FCC) is expanding its trade disruption customer support program to help agribusinesses, farm operators and food processors affected by rising fertilizer costs and energy prices.

FCC president and CEO Justine Hendricks said rising global tensions can leave producers wondering how it may

affect the inputs they rely on.

"While we cannot control those events, we can ensure producers have the financial flexibility and support they need to navigate uncertainty," said Hendricks. "FCC is ready to help producers keep their operations moving forward."

Originally introduced in response to trade tariffs affecting Canadian agriculture, this FCC program will now also offer support to help producers and agribusinesses manage financial pressures caused by unexpected market shocks.

Global urea prices have already risen

amid concerns about potential supply disruptions from a region that plays a major role in global nitrogen fertilizer exports.

Through the trade disruption customer support program, FCC is offering relief for existing customers and new clients who meet lending criteria. The program offerings include access to an additional credit line of up to \$500,000, new term loans and the option for existing FCC customers to defer principal payments for up to 12 months on existing loans.

FCC said it will continue to work with

industry partners to ensure that Canadian agriculture and food businesses can navigate changing market conditions and keep the industry moving forward despite uncertainty.

Customers and noncustomers who are interested in finding out more may contact their local FCC office or call 1-800-387-3232 to discuss their individual situation. Lending due diligence will be carried out on all applications.

Lucan craft show aims to make vendor scene welcoming for newcomers

DAN ROLPH

Editor

An annual craft show in Lucan is ramping up for another year of welcoming a diverse slate of artisans to the community, continuing its decade-long tradition of being a space for crafters to find their footing in the sometimes overwhelming realm of shows.

Held on Mother's Day weekend each year, the Not Your Mother's Craft Show is organized by Sheena and Dave Clark, who have lived in Lucan for 21 years.

Sheena, who owns Bearly in Business, where she creates teddy bears, pillows and quilts made from clothing, started the show after participating in other established shows and finding them challenging as a crafter.

"The first one we did cost I think \$800, and we were so stressed," she said. "It was so much money, we didn't know how to set up, we didn't know what to bring. Everything felt so scary, and I didn't want to keep reaching out to the organizer."

Those experiences led to the idea of creating a craft show for newer vendors where they can find their footing to one day take on larger shows elsewhere. That show materialized in the first Not Your Mother's Craft Show in 2016, where as many as 2,500 shoppers visited the Lucan Biddulph Community Memorial Centre to peruse the vendor setups.

Dave said the show often welcomes vendors who have been honing their craft for years, but who may have been nervous about getting into the craft show world.

"We make it as easy and comfortable for them as we can," he said. "Nothing's better than when a stranger comes up and talks about how much they like your product. That's a big thing."

"I love bringing new vendors in," said Sheena. "I love getting people excited about doing it."

Since the first show in 2016, Sheena said she's learned a great deal about what it takes to ensure the Lucan show's success. Work starts in September the year before the event when she begins creating the list of vendors, welcoming back many who have participated before while also reaching out to potential new vendors.

"You need some change," said Sheena.

Change also came to the show several years ago with the addition of a second day, turning it into a weekend-long event.

As a juried craft show, Sheena said she takes a hands-on approach when curating what crafters bring to their booths, aiming to avoid duplication and ensuring a diverse selection of goods for shoppers as they browse through the vendors.

With the show aligning with Mother's Day, Sheena said they hope to be a place where shoppers can spend time with their mothers. This year's show has nearly 150 spots for vendors as well as an eating area, which she said makes the show a place where you can spend the day.

"We really want to be the Mother's Day place to be," said Sheena. "People can relax and have a coffee."

The show also coincides with Lucan's town-wide yard sale, and Dave said the



(DAN ROLPH PHOTO)

Sheena and Dave Clark are the organizers of Lucan's Not Your Mother's Craft Show, which will feature nearly 150 booths with a wide selection of crafts on May 9 and 10.

combination of both events sees the town welcoming visitors from throughout the region and beyond.

"It's really drawn a lot more out-of-town people, and the numbers are reflecting it," he said.

Throughout its decade of welcoming vendors to the community, Sheena said there have also been challenges they've had to overcome. Construction at the arena and the COVID-19 pandemic saw the number of visitors drop substantially.

As well, the craft show community has been left dealing with a growing problem of scammers, and Sheena said the Lucan show is no exception to that

trend. Scammers often reach out to potential vendors who publicly express interest in participating in a craft show, posing as organizers and pressuring those potential vendors to send money.

"It's so frustrating," said Sheena. "It's worse every year."

Despite those challenges, Sheena said the show is on track to not only welcome as many visitors as its most successful year, but that they're expecting to grow for years to come.

"I'm super proud of it," she said.

The Not Your Mother's Craft Show will take place May 9 and 10 at the Lucan Biddulph Community Memorial Centre.

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Over 180 local students take to Ontario's West Coast Musicfest stage

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Over 180 local students take to Ontario's West Coast Musicfest stage

Exeter Examiner Staff

The Blyth Festival Theatre resonated with the sounds of talent on March 11 as over 180 student musicians from across the region gathered for the Ontario's West Coast Musicfest.

Hosted in partnership by Central Huron Secondary School and the Blyth Festival, the educational event was made possible through the County of Huron's Supporting Local Youth program.

The festival showcased the musical dedication of students from Central Huron Secondary School, Stratford District Secondary School, St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School and St. Michael Catholic Secondary School.

"We are gracious to the Blyth Festival for their support in offering an exceptional venue for youth musicians from across our Region," said Aaron Neeb, chair of Ontario's West Coast Musicfest. "It is important for our local youth to have spaces and opportunities to perform, improve, and collaborate in Huron County."

As an official affiliate of Musicfest Canada, Ontario's West Coast Musicfest offers local school ensembles the opportunity to perform and be evaluated against a national standard. Ensembles that meet this high standard of performance receive an exclusive invitation to the National Competition, which will be held this year in Niagara Falls. Ensembles are required to perform at least one piece composed by a Canadian composer.



(AARON NEEB PHOTO)

Members of the Central Huron Secondary School Jazz Band performing at the Ontario's West Coast Musicfest in Blyth on March 11th, 2026. From back left to right: Dominic Srigley, Elizabeth Howson, Alexander Roes and Cam Boulton. Front left to right: Aminah Hassan and Anthony Mero.

"I think it was important for schools to have a local option where they could play the music they've been working on and share with their peers," said youth organizer and volunteer Hannah Hewitt. "In many cases, bands would be travelling up to three hours away to attend a Musicfest regional competition. Hosting it locally makes the event more accessible."

Performances were adjudicated by music professionals: Paula Ortelli, a retired music educator from Stratford, and Laura Lee Matthie, a retired music educator from Orillia and former president of the Ontario Music Educators' Association.

Following adjudication, Ontario's West Coast Musicfest announced that the following ensembles performed at an exceptionally high standard and have received official invitations to perform on the National Stage:

- The Stratford District Secondary School B100 Band
- The St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School Concert Band
- The Central Huron Secondary School Jazz Band
- The Central Huron Secondary School Senior Band

New cab service aims to fill transportation gap in Grand Bend and area

MEG PEARSON

Examiner Reporter

Residents and visitors in Lambton Shores now have a new option for getting around, thanks to a locally built transportation service with a focus on reliability, community and connection.

Launched in mid-February, Dabs Cabs is a Grand Bend-based taxi and shuttle service founded by Robert Latta and his partner, Yasmine Kennedy, who have called the area home for the past three years.

The name Dabs Cabs also carries a personal story. "Dabs" has been Latta's nickname since he was a teenager—a reference to his habit of greeting people with a fist bump rather than a handshake. The name itself was suggested by a friend, tying the nickname into a fitting acronym for the business, Downtown and Beach Shuttle. The idea for the business came about on a night when transportation was in particularly high demand.

"New Year's Eve, I was scrolling my phone and there were six, seven, eight posts of people looking for rides," said Latta. "And the response was always the same—there were no cabs available. That's when I realized how real the need was."

That same evening, Latta decided to step in, offering himself as a designated driver through a Facebook post. The response was immediate, and it was enough to spark the idea for a full-time service.

"A month and a half later, we were open," he said.

While Grand Bend is known for its busy summer

tourism season, Latta said the goal behind Dabs Cabs is to serve the community year-round, not just when it's convenient.

"Too often, communities like ours are treated as seasonal markets," he said. "Companies show up when it's busy or profitable, but the people who live here year-round are left without reliable service. We wanted to build something that's actually here when people need it."

Since launching, the business has already begun to grow with a steady increase in calls for a wide range of services, from rides to work and medical appointments to airport transfers and special trips.

"It started with late-night rides and dinners, but now we're getting calls all across the board," said Latta. "Doctor's appointments, grocery runs, people picking up vehicles, even airport shuttles. It's really become something the whole community is using."

The company currently operates multiple vehicles, with plans to scale up further as demand increases heading into the busy summer months. Even as seasonal traffic ramps up, Latta said local residents will remain the priority.

"We started early because we wanted to get to know the locals, the people who rely on us every day," he said. "And that's not going to change. We're building this for the community first."

Beyond transportation, both Latta and Kennedy emphasize that the business is rooted in supporting the broader Grand Bend area.

"The whole idea is about community," said Latta. "If we're not highlighting and supporting the businesses that support us, then what are we doing?"

Kennedy added that partnerships with local restaurants and businesses have already begun to take shape, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.

"They want customers, and we want to bring them customers," she said. "We promote each other, and it's been really positive."

The service also plays a role in promoting safer transportation options, particularly during late-night hours and the busy summer season.

"People want a safe way to get home," Latta said. "If there's no reliable option, that's when people make risky decisions. We want to be there so they don't have to."

Dabs Cabs currently operates Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to midnight, Fridays and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. and Sundays from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., with extended hours expected during the summer season.

Rides can be booked by phone, through their website, or via an upcoming mobile app, which is expected to launch soon.

As the business continues to grow, Latta said the mission remains simple.

"Our focus is to show up on time, provide safe and courteous service, and be something people can count on," he said. "We live here. We care about this community. And we're here to stay."

Gateway brings farmer's safety and well-being program to the Southwestern Ontario Dairy Symposium

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health (CERH) attended the Southwestern Ontario Dairy Symposium in Woodstock in recent weeks.

According to a press release, Gateway participated as an exhibitor and gave a brief presentation, discussing the Farmer's Safety and Well-Being program.

Gateway CERH connected with farmers, dairy producers, industry leaders and agricultural professionals throughout the event while attendees visited the Gateway CERH booth to learn more about the organization's programs and research initiatives.

During the symposium, Gwen Devereaux, president of Gateway CERH, gave a

presentation highlighting several key priorities.

These priorities included promoting the farmer's safety and well-being program and SHED Talks, advancing research that reflects real world agricultural needs as well as collaborating with industry partners to strengthen rural well-being.

By participating in the Dairy Symposium, Gateway said it continues to strengthen relationships within the agriculture sector and advance the program's mission to support the health, safety and well-being of farmers in our rural communities.

For more information about Gateway CERH and its Farmer's Safety and Well-Being program initiatives, please visit gatewayruralhealth.ca/shed-talks.



(PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY GATEWAY CERH)

From left are Gateway CERH board chair Dan Stringer, Gateway CERH president Gwen Devereaux, Gateway CERH research assistant Nyden Greenfield and Gateway CERH vice-president Pat Redshaw.

Flexible thinking for better mental health

TANYA MACINTYRE

Examiner Reporter

During my career I hosted a program called "Conflicting Interests," where I interviewed people from opposing sides of an issue.

Those conversations reminded me of how quickly political discussions can divide friends, families and communities.

Intolerance shows up in many forms.

Sometimes it's loud and obvious, other times it's more subtle, appearing in dismissive comments, rolled eyes or avoiding conversations altogether.

Intolerance often stems from rigid thinking – the belief that one's own views are the only right ones. This rigidity is part of human nature.

We all hold our personal beliefs about what matters most to us. These values are subjective and shaped by our culture, upbringing and life experience.

Alongside values are virtues. These are character traits that put those values into practice. Honesty, discipline, courage and compassion are examples of virtues that tend to be respected across cultures.

Values answer the "what and why" of our lives. Virtues reflect the "how."

Problems arise when values harden into demands, and when flexibility gives way to dogma.

When thinking becomes extreme, it can fuel emotional distress. Anger, frustration and anxiety tend to rise when we insist others must share our outlook.

Over time, that emotional load can damage relation-

ships, alienate colleagues and take a toll on our own mental health.

This is where cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) can help. CBT can be used to successfully treat anxiety and depression, and a host of other illnesses.

It can also be a powerful tool for examining rigid patterns of thought. CBT can teach us the power of the pause. When we take a few seconds to reflect and ask ourselves – is my thinking helping me or hurting me?

Flexible thinking doesn't mean abandoning our values. It means recognizing that others have their own values.

Through reflection, we can shift from an all or nothing mindset to one that allows room for dialogue and compromise.

When we reach a state of enlightened self-interest, we can look after our own needs in ways that also consider the well-being of others.

This balanced perspective opens the door to healthier conversations. Instead of ridiculing or condemning people who disagree with us, we can focus on understanding their viewpoint, even if we ultimately continue to disagree.

This doesn't just preserve relationships. It also lowers the emotional temperature in political discussions.

CBT encourages us to think for ourselves while respecting the right of others to do the same, even when their thinking seems illogical or misguided. We don't need to agree with everyone, but we can choose to stay open, flexible and respectful.

In the end, it's in our collective best interest to hold onto tolerance. Shutting down conversations, name-calling or escalating into hostility and violence helps no one.

What strengthens our communities is the willingness to stay engaged calmly, respectfully and with the humility to know we don't hold all the answers. This kind of mindset not only protects our relationships, but it also protects our mental health.

Tanya MacIntyre is a Certified CBT Specialist, Mental Health Fitness Trainer, and owner/operator of Red Roof Recovery (RRR) and its training division ~ Mental Health Fitness Alliance (MHFA).

DISCLAIMER: This content is not intended to constitute, or be a substitute for, medical diagnosis or treatment. Never disregard medical advice from a doctor, or delay in seeking it, because of something you have watched, read, or heard from anyone at RRR or MHFA.



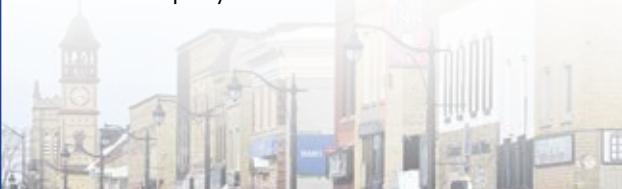
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Lambton Shores receives \$1.3 million in provincial infrastructure funding

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

The Municipality of Lambton Shores has received \$1,368,750 in provincial funding.

According to a press release from the municipality, the funding comes through the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program's health and safety water stream.

The funding will help support the building rehabilitation project at the Arkona sewage treatment facility.

The provincial funding program aims to support municipalities in building and upgrading infrastructure that enables housing development and protects existing communities. The stream provides funding to address critical water, wastewater, stormwater and flood or erosion infrastructure needs.

Upgrades supported by the funding include the rehabilitation of the Arkona facility's effluent building, the replacement of aging filtration equipment and related electrical and mechanical upgrades.

"These improvements will help ensure reliable operation of the facility, support future growth in the community and improve the quality of treated water leaving the facility," the municipality stated in a press release.

Lambton Shores Mayor Doug Cook said infrastructure project is a critical one in the community.

"The investment helps ensure the Arkona facility continues to meet the needs of our residents while supporting future growth in our community.

The project has an estimated cost of \$1,875,000. With the province supporting up to 73 per cent of the project costs, the remaining more than \$500,000 is being financed through the municipality's wastewater reserve fund.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Lambton Shores has received a \$1.3 million grant from the province to make improvements at the Arkona sewage treatment facility. Pictured are Lambton-Kent-Middlesex MPP Steve Pinsonneault, left, and Lambton Shores Mayor Doug Cook attend a March 19 cheque presentation.

Local writer hosting 10th Soulful Writer's Retreat on Lake Huron

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Local writer and mentor Susan Regier will host the 10th Soulful Writer's Retreat for Women this summer at her lakeside home, welcoming participants from across Canada for four days of writing, reflection and creative exploration.

The retreats, which began in 2017, have become a sought-after writing getaway for women who want to deepen their craft while stepping away from the distractions of everyday life, according to a press release.

Two retreats will be held in 2026: the ninth, from June 15 to 18, and the milestone 10th, from Aug. 24 to 27. Each gathering brings together a small group of writers for guided sessions, quiet writing time and thoughtful conversation.

The retreats are open to women at any stage of their writing journey — whether they're working on a novel, memoir, personal essays, or writing for their business. Regier will share techniques drawn from her years of teaching creative writing at Fanshawe College, along with insights gained from more than 25 years running her own copywriting business.

Participants are also introduced to the conscious writing process, a reflective approach that helps them write with deeper purpose and presence.

Regier said the retreat is intentionally small and personal to create a "deeply connected" space for growth.

"Women come here to reconnect with their creativity, step away from their busy lives, and discover the stories that are waiting to be written," she said. "It's especially meaningful to see several participants return more than once."

Guests stay at Regier's private home in St. Joseph. The retreat includes everything they need to feel supported, inspired and free to write, including daily lessons, writing prompts, group discussions, delicious home-cooked meals and daily walks along the beach and through the forest trails.

Petra Remy of Edmonton, Alta., who has attended the retreat twice, said, "It was truly transformative. Susan creates a safe, inspiring space where creativity flows naturally. Her beautiful home, nourishing food, peaceful natural setting and the morning swims all added to the magic. I left the retreat with renewed confidence in my voice and a deeper belief in my writing journey."

For more information, visit soulful-writersretreat.com.



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SOUTH HURON COUNCIL BRIEFS

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

Council remuneration reported

The total bill for South Huron councillor pay and expenses in 2025 came to \$213,166, up from \$208,057 in 2024.

The 2025 breakdown reported at the March 16 meeting was:

- Mayor George Finch \$41,045
- Deputy Mayor Jim Dietrich \$32,610
- Wendy McLeod-Haggitt \$29,670
- Ted Oke \$29,314
- Marissa Vaughan \$28,747
- Milt Dietrich \$27,313
- Aaron Neeb \$24,464

The amounts are for the remuneration and expenses paid by South Huron and don't include pay and expenses by the

County of Huron.

Development charges meeting set

A special council meeting has been called for April 27 at 4 p.m. to discuss the proposal to triple development charges in the municipality.

A report prepared by consultants Watson and Associates said the charges should be increased from \$6,206 to \$18,641 for a single-detached house.

Developers have said the increase could stifle the economy and put homes out of reach of new buyers.

Kirkton landfill report

Monitoring of the closed Kirkton landfill in 2025 found a number of chemical contaminants in the groundwater that exceeded Ontario standards.

The report by Wilson Associates Consulting Hydrogeologists said there are

no users within the leachate plume and no off-site users of groundwater could be conceivably impacted by the landfill.

The Kirkton landfill was closed in September 2006. There is currently no activity taking place at the site other than groundwater monitoring and perpetual care maintenance.

Taxicab regulation dropped

South Huron council has voted to get out of the business of regulating taxicabs.

A staff report recommended council repeal its taxicab bylaw, saying that the regulation of taxicabs and other vehicles-for-hire is best managed at a regional level as companies often operate across multiple jurisdictions.

Other ride-sharing platforms such as Uber or Lyft are currently not regulat-



ed by the municipality and this could be seen as treating local taxi companies unfairly as they have to adhere to a by-law while ride-sharing operators do not, the report said.

Residential recycling fee dropped by South Huron

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

South Huron residents will get a break on their utility bill — at least for a while.

In a split vote, council approved dropping the residential recycling fee of \$47.68 a year, effective March 1 this year.

But the reduction might not last long and future utility bill charges could end up going higher.

The move to cut the recycling fee portion of the utility bill for residents follows a decision by the Ontario government to require producers of recyclable materials to pay the recycling cost instead of municipalities.

The shift in charges applies to residential materials. Industrial, commercial and institutional properties still have to pay for recycling services.

With the change, it only makes sense to cut the recycling fee for residents, said Coun. Marissa Vaughan who made the motion.

“The reality is we are not being charged anymore for residential recycling so I don't believe we should be passing that on to our residential users,” she said.

A staff report presented to council earlier in March suggested the utility bills be charged at the same level as in the past by shifting the amount charged for recycling to the amount charged for garbage collection. As a result, residents would see virtually no change in their utility bills.

Don Giberson, South Huron's infrastructure and development manager, said curbside garbage collection in the municipality has been subsidized for years by revenue from the landfill. Re-

serve funds from the landfill operation have been basically plundered to fund the curbside program, he said.

That leaves the municipality vulnerable to not having the money required in the future when the landfill has to be expanded or replaced.

“We have a deep hole that has been created and this is an attempt to get out of it,” Giberson said.

Vaughan's motion approved by council calls for a detailed financial review of waste management and landfill tipping fees. The motion noted the user fee rates currently collected do not appear to cover operational costs.

Arguing that utility bill fees should be maintained at their current level and not changed, Coun. Aaron Neeb said cutting the fees now might require a bigger jump in garbage charges in the future to cover costs.

“If we reduce the costs, that money still needs to be recouped and it is going to be recouped with more interest down the road,” he said.

“We could see rates changing drastically over the next six months to a year.” Staying with the current charges provides ratepayers with consistency, he said.

Coun. Ted Oke suggested going halfway — cutting the charges to residents by 50 per cent and putting 50 per cent into reserves for the landfill.

“Someday we are going to have to replace or expand our landfill and we need to start building up our reserves for that purpose as well,” he said.

The motion approved by council sets the annual recycling fee for industrial, commercial and institutional users at \$71.40 per bin.

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BACK IN TIME

30 Years Ago
 March 27, 1996 — Hensall fire chief Jim Hyde recently presented a certificate for 20 years of service on the Hensall department to Pete Zwaan. Ken Gascho and his wife Della of the Zurich area are of the new residents in Hay township who grow sunflowers and sell the seeds as bird food. Seip's Valumart of Exeter has been named the independent store winner of the Foodland Ontario Retailer Award for the best creative display.

40 Years Ago
 April 2, 1986 — The 67th birthday candle was lit by president Fern Dougall of the Hu-

rondale Women's Institute as she presented a rose to Ila Moir, who has been a member for all of the 67 years and a leader of many, many 4H Homemaking clubs.

55 Years Ago
 April 8, 1971 — Exeter council Monday night unanimously approved in "principle" a mobile home park, but indications were clear that it will be some time before such a development takes place in the community. Local businessman Len Veri has proposed a 19-acre development in the area of Riverside Drive in the vicinity of the local curling club and a Kitchener firm has apparently

optioned land east of the local fairgrounds for a proposed mobile home park.

65 Years Ago
 April 3, 1961 — Bob Hayward, who drove Miss Supertest III to two straight wins in the Harmsworth trophy race, spoke to the Lucan Lions Club recently and received an honorary membership in the club.

South Huron District High School is advertising for four teachers for the 1961-62 term.

George Glendinning of RR8, Parkhill has won about \$1,200 in the recent running of the Irish Grand National Sweepstakes.

75 Years Ago
 April 4, 1951 — Martha Cochrane was named winner in a public speaking contest for Grade 8 students at the Exeter Home and School Association meeting Tuesday night.

Alice Carter, who recently earned her Gold Cord as a girl guide, accompanied by Mrs. Robert Luxton travelled to Toronto to attend the Gold Certificate presentation at the U of T.

April 6, 1951 — Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Lindenfield have moved into their new brick residence on Main Street.

Pte. Ray Snell, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Snell arrived in London after serving two

years overseas in a tank corps of the Governor General's Footguards. He saw heavy fighting in the hills of Italy and with the Canaaras in France, Holland, Belgium and Germany.

Mrs. Elmer Bell and her mother Mrs. Hedley, who have been living in Wingham have arrived to make their home in Exeter where Mr. Bell has taken over the law practice of Mr. J.W. Morley.

Mr. Russell Balkwill has purchased a lot from J.A. Stewart, east of his residence and is excavating a foundation for a new house.

Lucan Guide Scout Hall ramping up to event-filled spring

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

The Lucan Guide Scout Hall is gearing up for a busy spring, with three community-focused events set to take place in the coming weeks.

The hall at Lucan's Market Street Park will play host to a pop-up market on March 28 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., with admissions by food donation in support of

the Ailsa Craig foodbank.

Shoppers will be able to browse an array of local vendors offering everything from fresh foods and clothing to hand-crafted jewellery, home décor and toys. Adding a sweet touch, a bake sale will offer visitors Girl Guide cookies, Scout seeds and birdhouses, perfect for supporting local youth initiatives and welcoming spring.

The culinary calendar continues with the annual spaghetti dinner on April 16 from 5 to 7 p.m. Entry is by donation, with all proceeds benefiting the Lucan Guide Scout Hall. The classic meal includes a hearty helping of spaghetti, a drink and a homemade dessert, with the option to add a hot dog for those with extra appetite.

Rounding out the spring slate, the Lu-

can Scout Guide Hall committee will host an electronic waste collection at Market Street Park on April 25 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Residents are encouraged to bring items such as computers, cell phones, cameras, televisions, DVD players and more for responsible recycling, helping keep the community green and clutter-free.



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SPORTS

Irish Six ends PJHL run as league plans new Lucan organization

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

Lucan's junior hockey team is set to undergo a major transition as it heads into the 2026-27 season.

After the Lucan Irish Six board of directors announced that it would not renew the team's Provincial Junior Hockey League (PJHL) membership, the league has confirmed that junior hockey will continue in the community.

In a statement released by the organization, the Lucan Irish Six cited a thorough review of the team's current circumstances and long-term direction as the reason behind the decision.

The decision came off the heels of a

challenging season for the team that saw game attendance remain low. The Irish trailed the PJHL's West Yeck division in the regular season with 10 points, well behind the seventh-placed Aylmer Spitfires at 39.

As well, the Irish failed to find success in the playoffs when they faced the Exeter Hawks in the first round, who swept them in a best-of-seven series.

"After exhausting available options, we believe that stepping away at this time is the most responsible course of action for the organization and its long-term future," the Lucan Irish Six board said in a statement shared through Instagram.

Though the move marks the end of the

Irish Six in its current form, PJHL commissioner Terry Whiteside confirmed a new ownership and governance group will be established in Lucan, ensuring the community remains home to PJHL hockey next season.

As part of that process, individuals interested in becoming part of the new board of directors are encouraged to submit their resume and a brief biography to commissioner@thepj.ca. The league will review all applicants and determine the composition of the new leadership group.

In addition to board positions, the PJHL is also seeking community members interested in supporting the team through an auxiliary group. These vol-

unteers will play a key role in organizing fundraisers and assisting with game day operations, helping to ensure a strong foundation for the franchise moving forward.

The league has also confirmed that all players who were part of the Lucan Irish Six at the conclusion of the season will have their playing rights retained by the new organization.

The PJHL emphasized that it will work as quickly as possible to finalize the new group, giving the incoming organization the best opportunity to prepare for the 2026-27 season both on and off the ice.

Heated rivalries: Charity hockey tournament returning in Exeter

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

"We actually had so many people reach out wanting to get involved," said Case.

As part of the tournament, each team that participates donates \$1,677 to the food bank, meaning this year's event will have raised over \$10,000 before skates have even touched the ice "It's putting your money where your mouth is," said Case. "If we're asking for donations, just to know that we're donating at the same time is heartwarming for everyone."

With the tournament building up to its third event, the rivalries between the teams have become one of the defining traits of the fundraiser and food drive. The teams take to social media, sharing videos that feed into the rivalries with creative pranks and harsh words, spreading the word about the tournament.

"It's rivalries meeting generosity," said Case. "People enjoy the back-and-forth banter between who's playing, and they come out to cheer on their favourite team."

This year's matchups will begin with



(PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY THE MCCANN GROUP)

The third annual charity hockey tournament is returning to Exeter April 9 for an evening of intense hockey action in support of the Huron County Food Bank Distribution Centre. Pictured are the participants in last year's tournament. Photo contributed by the McCann Group

Jayden's Mechanical taking on the McCann Group. Huron Motor Products and Baker Holdings Corporation will take to the ice next, while Huron Tractor and Delta Power Equipment will cap off the evening with their faceoff.

With Huron Tractor having been topped by McCann Group 8-5 last year,

the team is looking for a win this time around. Meanwhile, Delta Power Equipment will be looking to impress the crowds with their debut in the tournament.

"I don't think either side wants to lose very bad," said Case. "I'm sure it will be very entertaining."

Though Case said organizers hadn't set a specific fundraising goal, she noted that they hope to see this year's fundraiser and food drive garner more support than last year's already successful event.

"Last year, the support of the community was incredible," said Case. "With the amount of people who showed up, we raised more than \$6,000 in donations and two truckloads of food."

"People who don't normally watch hockey were coming through the doors with canned goods."

While speaking about the importance of supporting the Huron County Food Bank Distribution Centre, Case said it's become a staple in the community.

"You need the food bank," she said. "There's people struggling. There's farmers struggling. Everybody's struggling. It's just a way to help out."

"All of businesses involved are community driven. They want to help out, and the food bank feels like a no brainer in this situation. They are great for the community."

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MINOR SPORTS

SCRAPBOOK

(DAN ROLPH PHOTOS)



It was two days filled with hockey action on March 19 and 20 as the March Melt 4-on-4 tournament was in full swing. The independent tournament at the Lucan Biddulph Community Memorial Centre was organized with support from Lucan Minor Hockey, opening the ice to nearly 150 U9, U11 and U13 players from local teams and surrounding associations. Pictured is Hudson Grace as she takes a shot on goal while playing in the tournament.



Emmett Loft scores a goal in style, guiding the puck behind his back.



Taking a shot on net is Gracie Bebbington, who was on the ice March 19 with other U9 players.



Alden Kerslake and Jackson Allan go for the puck as they play during a March 19 matchup.



Holly Mayer scans the ice for an opening as she controls the puck during the tournament.



Payton Corby was one of the nearly 150 players who participated in the tournament in Lucan.

Exeter Hawks fall in second round of playoffs



(DAN ROLPH PHOTO)

The Exeter Hawks have been eliminated in the second round of the PJHL West Yeck division playoffs by the Mount Brydges Bulldogs. Pictured are Ty Wheeler of the Exeter Hawks and Ben Funston of the Mount Brydges Bulldogs during their March 14 game in Exeter.

DAN ROLPH

Editor

The Exeter Hawks' playoff run came to an end in round two as they were eliminated by the Mount Brydges Bulldogs, closing the book on their season.

The Hawks skated into round two of the Provincial Junior Hockey League's West Yeck division playoffs on a high note after sweeping the Lucan Irish in a best-of-seven series. But the Bulldogs proved to be a more challenging matchup, with half of the round's games being decided in overtime.

Exeter started the series strong in a neck-and-neck March 6 game at the South Huron Recreation Centre. The teams went scoreless through the first period, but that scoreless streak ended thanks to Exeter's Tanner Thayer, who scored at 12:23 of the second frame on the power play, assisted by Justin Skirten and Harrison Meulenstein.

Thayer's goal remained the sole goal of the evening until Mount Brydges tied the match about halfway through the third period, pushing the game into two periods of overtime before Meulenstein ended the game with a 2-1 win for Exeter. By the end of the game, the teams were completely even with 36 shots apiece.

The series continued March 7 in Mount Brydges, where the Bulldogs and the Hawks racked up a goal each in the first frame. However, a two-goal sec-

ond period for the Bulldogs built a lead that the Hawks couldn't overcome, even with their final third-period goal from Danny Scott.

With Mount Brydges scoring one final goal, the match went to the Bulldogs 4-2.

Though their third matchup on March 10 in Exeter saw the teams once again nearly tied in shots on goal, the scoreboard leaned much further in favour of the Bulldogs by the final buzzer. The teams scored a goal each in the first period, but the rest of the night went to Mount Brydges, who found four more goals and wrapped the game up 5-1.

The Hawks came back with a vengeance for game four of the series on March 13 in Mount Brydges, securing the only shutout of the matchup off of goals by Carter Bowerman, Jack Taylor and Meulenstein, leaving Exeter with a dominant 3-0 victory.

From there, the remainder of the round two was decided by two nights of intense hockey action, each of which wrapped up in an extra frame of sudden death overtime.

The fifth game brought the teams back to Exeter on March 14, where the Hawks delivered a flurry of shots that left them 24 shots ahead of the Bulldogs by the game's end. The teams traded blows throughout all three periods, pushing to the third buzzer with a tied scoreboard.

Despite the strong Hawks offence,



(DAN ROLPH PHOTO)

Exeter Hawk Jack Taylor celebrates scoring during the March 14 game against the Mount Brydges Bulldogs.

Bulldogs goalie Parker Barnard held on until Tim Jozsa of Mount Brydges ended the extra period at 18:22, making the match a 6-5 win for the Bulldogs.

The sixth and final meeting of the Hawks and the Bulldogs on March 16 proved to be an exhilarating game fit to cap off the best-of-seven series.

Mount Brydges started by building a two-goal lead in the first period, but Meulenstein put Exeter on the board in the final seconds of the frame.

From there, the Hawks found their stride and overcame that deficit, secur-

ing four more goals and building a sizable three-goal lead about six minutes into the third period.

When the Bulldogs erased the deficit with three quick goals in the span of about a minute, the teams were forced to decide the outcome in overtime. Dominic DiFrancesco scored the winner for Mount Brydges, eliminating the Hawks and bringing their season to an end.

Following their victory against the Exeter Hawks, the Mount Brydges Bulldogs are set to face the North Middlesex Stars in the West Yeck division finals.

Exeter Examiner

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March Break Funday returns in Hensall



It was a day filled with ringette action, as well as arts and crafts, on Tuesday, March 17, when March Break Funday returned to Hensall. Hosted by First Stride Skating, the event welcomed 90 ringette players from Forest, St. Marys, Mitchell and Goderich to a day of fun.

(PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY FIRST STRIDE SKATING)



Organized by independent ringette coaches Alana and Michele Hodgert, the Funday continued a decades-long tradition in the community.



90 ringette players from throughout the region took to the ice to play ringette, while also participating in fun crafts.



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COLUMNS

Chamber Connect: temporary foreign workers and rural realities



COLIN CARMICHAEL

Examiner Columnist

One of the realities of doing business in Huron County is that our labour market does not look like that of many other parts of Ontario. We are part of a region that consistently records the lowest unemployment rate in the province.

On the surface, that sounds positive. Low unemployment usually suggests that most people who want to work are working, that businesses are active, and that families have income to spend in their communities.

Those are good things.

But low unemployment has another side, especially in a rural economy. For employers, it often means there are not enough available workers to fill open positions.

In February, the unemployment rate in the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula economic region was 5.1 per cent, compared with 7.3 per cent for Ontario as a whole. That gap helps explain why labour shortages in Huron County are not occasional or temporary. They are a chronic challenge.

Employers may be able to find some applicants, but not always in the right numbers, with the right skills or in the right locations. Often, vacancies go unfilled for months.

That is why a recent announcement from the federal government regarding the Temporary Foreign Worker Program matters.

The new measures create a limited rural exemption that would allow local employers to maintain current numbers of low-wage temporary foreign workers and temporarily raise the cap from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the workforce through next March. More importantly, the announcement recognizes something rural communities have been saying for years — that labour market conditions in places like Huron County are fundamentally different from those in urban centres.

This is a positive step for Huron County employers — not because temporary foreign workers are anyone's first choice, but because they are often the only practical option when local recruitment has been exhausted and businesses still cannot fill essential jobs. In Huron County, this affects agriculture, manufacturing,

hospitality, food processing, health care and other sectors that communities depend on.

This is an issue on which I have been directly involved. Through the Huron Chamber's advocacy, I have worked to ensure that rural Ontario's voice is heard in conversations with local, provincial and federal policymakers about immigration and workforce pressures. That has included my participation in the Reimagining Immigration Task Force, a national coalition of chambers of

commerce and employer associations that continues to meet regularly and advocate for practical reforms. Among its proposals is the Canadian International Workforce Program, a model that we have argued should replace the Temporary Foreign Worker Program with a more realistic and responsive approach to chronic labour shortages.

This federal announcement is, at least in part, a direct result of advocacy efforts that included the Huron Chamber's role in helping bring rural Ontario's perspective to that national table. That matters, because too often policies are shaped around urban assumptions and then applied broadly, even where they do not fit local realities.

The larger point is that public policy has to start with reality. In Huron County, employers are often not deciding between a local worker and a foreign worker. They are trying to keep businesses operating when the local labour pool is already stretched thin. Recognizing that reality is not about lowering expectations. It is about making sure rural communities have workable tools that reflect the actual labour market conditions on the ground.

GREY MATTERS: Safety without sacrificing freedom a new look at independence this spring



ANNETTE GERDES

Examiner Contributor

March always feels like a reset. The days are getting longer, the sun feels warmer, and even if winter hasn't completely let go; we know spring is coming. It's the time of year when many of us start thinking about fresh starts, cleaning out cupboards, getting back outside, and shaking off those winter habits. It's also a good time to think about something we don't always talk about openly: independence.

Lately, there's been a lot of

discussion in the media including pieces in The Wall Street Journal about senior safety and what it really means to live independently. The stories all circle around the same question: how do we stay safe without feeling like we're giving something up?

For most older adults, independence isn't just about where you live, it's about choice. It's about deciding what your day looks like, when you get up, what you eat, who you see, and how you spend your time. No one wants to feel like that's being taken away. But here's the part that's changing independence doesn't have to mean doing everything alone. Having a little backup can actually protect your freedom and independence. That backup might be as simple as:

· Regular check-ins:

A phone call, a neighbour dropping by, or a family member popping in even a quick

“how are you today?” can make a big difference.

· Emergency plans: Knowing exactly what to do if something unexpected happens can prevent panic and confusion.

· Help with meals: Whether it's occasional meal delivery, a friend bringing over a dish, or a prepared meal service, this support keeps nutrition on track without extra stress.

· Home maintenance support: Snow removal, minor repairs, and heavy chores can be a burden. Getting a little help frees energy for things that matter most.

· Living arrangements with support nearby: Retirement communities or homes with on site support gives peace of mind without taking away choice. None of this takes away independence. In fact, it often strengthens it. When seniors feel secure, they can go out more, participate more, and simply enjoy life. Confidence

replaces worry, and that's freedom in action.

March is actually a great time for what I like to call a “safety reset.” Not because something is wrong, but because being proactive is always easier than reacting during a crisis. Ask yourself:

· If I fell tomorrow, how quickly would someone know?

· Is my home set up to prevent accidents?

· Am I getting enough social interaction?

· Do I feel supported, or do I feel stretched thin?

Sometimes the answer is, “Everything's working just fine.” And that's wonderful. Other times, it might open your eyes to small adjustments that could make life easier and help you feel more confident in your independence. Retirement living has changed a lot over the years. It's not what it used to be. Many communities today offer private spaces, social ac-

tivities, meals, and support all while keeping independence front and centre. For some people, moving isn't about losing freedom. It's about gaining simplicity, connection, and reassurance.

Safety and freedom don't have to compete with each other. It isn't safety versus independence it's safety supporting independence.

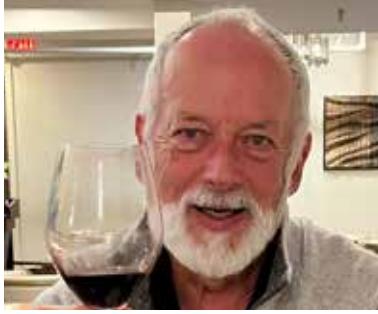
As we head into spring, maybe the goal isn't holding tighter to doing everything alone. Maybe it's choosing the kind of support that lets you live confidently, sleep a little easier, and enjoy your days without worry.

Because real freedom isn't about proving you don't need anyone. It's about knowing help is there and still living life your way.

Annette Gerdes is the General Manager at the Goderich Place Retirement Residence

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: A bridge to nowhere and a palace bereft of Popes



PAUL KNOWLES

Examiner Columnist

Any of us who got anywhere near a French class in school remembers the song, “Sur le pont d’Avignon l’on y danse, l’on y danse.” (“On the bridge of Avignon, they are dancing”). We probably learned it right after “Frère Jacques”.

Turns out, we were badly misled. As we learned during a fascinating tour of the southern French city of Avignon.

Oh, there is a bridge, all right. Or part of one. While it once spanned the Rhône River, most of it is gone. It was built in the 1100’s, with 22 spans connecting the west and east banks. But most of it was destroyed by floods in the 17th century, and today, only four spans remain.

But that’s not the problem with the song. The problem is, they didn’t dance on (“sur”) the bridge – they danced “sous” (under), and the prepositions got switched in the centuries since the song was first sung. So if you go to Avignon, and want to be historically accurate, dance under the remaining bits of the bridge, not on top.

Although, frankly, the broken bridge is not close to being the most interesting thing about

Avignon. This ancient city can date its founding to the Neolithic period (the “New Stone Age”, from 10,000 to 2,000 BC). Artifacts from those dates have been found in Avignon, and there are a lot of archaeological ruins from the Greek and Roman period of the city.

But two features stand out above all others: the 14th century city walls, which still completely enclose the old city; and the Pope’s Palace.

These two outstanding examples of architectural heritage are related, since the walls were built by order of Pope Innocent VI.

The walls run for 4.3 kilometers. They enclose 151 hectares – the entire old city, including the Pope’s Palace. And therein lies a story.

For although we think of Rome – or more properly, the independent city-state of the Vatican – as the historic seat of the Papacy, this was not always the case. In 1309, Rome was a hotbed of political intrigue, and Pope Clement V moved the Papal Court to Avignon, in France, where it remained until 1376. By then, the Avignon Papal Palace had housed seven Popes. The last of those, Gregory XI, returned to Rome in 1376.

But it didn’t end there. Even while Popes reigned in Rome, several other papal wanna-bes were elected Pope in France; they’re now referred to as “antipopes”. Two of them also were based in Avignon. The second of these, Benedict XII, was eventually kicked out of Avignon.

And by the way, in 1409, in an effort was made to solve the

dispute, a third Pope was elected at a council in Pisa, intended to replace the two other claimants. This didn’t work, so now there were three “Popes”.

It wasn’t until 1417 that the “schism” ended and only one Pope was again recognized by the entire Roman church. And you thought church history was boring.

All of this comes to life when you visit the sprawling, soaring Pope’s Palace in the heights of historic Avignon. We toured the site as part of our terrific Viking River Cruise on the Rhône River.

The Palais des Papes is one of the largest and most important medieval gothic buildings in Europe. Much of it is open for tours – including the rooftop, which provides amazing views of the city of Avignon.

Construction of the Palace began in 1252, half a century before it became the sole residence of a Pope. But when the Papal Court was moved to Avignon, successive Popes devised increasingly grand additions and alterations, including several extra towers, a grand chapel, and adjoining buildings. Eventually, the size grew to encompass 16,500 square meters. The medieval Popes were determined to build monuments, perhaps to God, but more likely to their own memories.

After the Pope moved back to Rome, and the messy business of competing Popes was resolved, the Palace remained as property of the church, but was largely ignored for about 350 years. Things got worse during the French Revolution, when it was



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Unusual modern art installations are on display throughout the ancient Palace.

seized by revolutionary forces. In 1790, it was the site of a massacre of counter-revolutionaries, and then became a prison.

Finally, in 1906, it was named a national museum. Our tour guide pointed out that “there is no link with the church anymore.” Restoration work started on building, and that has continued ever since. Tour leaders guide you carefully around scaffolding and across temporary bridges.

Most of the rooms continue to be unfurnished, so the architecture is the star of the show. Although during our visit, several of the rooms were adorned with incongruously modern art installations by sculptor Jean-Michel Othoniel.

We did see a few rooms where the walls still carry original mu-

ral from the 13th and 14th centuries, an intriguing juxtaposition the with ultra-modern art in neighbouring halls.

Perhaps the most impressive sight on the tour comes as you stand on the rooftop and peer through the castellations; at that moment, you are looking at 12,000 or so years of human history. And later, if you wish, you can dance under (or on) a bridge.

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



The Pope’s Palace.



The Pope’s viewing window in the Avignon Palace.

All Aboard: The London Huron and Bruce Railway



BOB HEYWOOD

Examiner Columnist

In 2026 we have to really stretch our imagination to conjure in our minds the extreme isolation experienced by the early settlers to Huron County.

There was no road leading north of London to Exeter in 1832 when James Willis first made the trek through the Queen's Bush. In fact, there was no Exeter at all when he arrived. It is probable that he would not have encountered many other immigrants of European origin, especially after he got north of Elginfield.

The trip would have included staggered sightings of shanties and primitive log structures where other European immigrants had staked their claim, but for the most part in those early years, your nearest neighbour may have been a few miles away.

When Willis, or James Handford or John Balkwill, some of the earliest arrivals, needed to buy a tool or supplies, they walked to London. As settlement increased and more farm lots were purchased from the Canada Company, stump strewn roadways began to emerge, eventually allowing oxen to maneuver a primitive cart and its contents to a destination.

Horses were nonexistent until a few prudent businessmen realized the immense need and the vast market that was presenting itself. The Handfords, Bawdens and a Mr. Berry from Hensall all began to import horseflesh from Europe to meet the local demand.

As the roadways were improved by both statute labour and hired crews, eventually the stagecoach became the preferred conveyance for passengers on a long journey. Local stage operators began to spring up including the Hawkshaws and the Guenthers in the Exeter area and of course the Donnellys and the Flannigans from Lucan. Stiff competition for the traveller's fares soon arose between the stage owners. Some "not so sub-

tle" espionage ensued even leading to injury and death.

Fortunately, the golden age of the railway would soon render the horse drawn stagecoach obsolete. The long-distance traveller and the delivery of the Royal Mail and other freight would soon be destined to be transported by a steam powered locomotive.

In 1845 the London and Gore Railroad Company, which had been incorporated in 1834, re-incorporated as The Great Western Railway (GWR). At its peak the GWR stretched 852 miles, earning a substantial part of its revenue by serving as a bridge line between New York Central and Michigan Central Railroads. Ontario towns and villages soon became eyewitnesses to the economic boom that would usually come to the communities that were fortunate enough to have the railway pass through. Local entrepreneurs and businessmen such as Isaac Carling,

James Pickard and W.H. Verity from Exeter and the Petty Brothers from Hensall were elated to hear rumours of a planned rail line from London to Wingham. The Pettys quickly purchased most of the land on which the town of Hensall would eventually be built.

However, much of the lobbying with the railway companies was done by Blyth's Irish and tenacious first reeve, Patrick Kelly. He arrived in 1866 and eventually owned a lumber mill, a flour and grist mill, a sash and door company, along with several hundred acres of timberland. Kelly understood that Blyth and himself would profit greatly if he could attract the railway to their village.

Blyth's closest rail shipping point was 11.5 miles south at Clinton where the Grand Trunk (GTR) travelled east to west from Stratford to Goderich. What Blyth needed was its own north/south track route.

First, he approached the GTR but the company was not interested. Then Kelly headed to Hamilton to plead his case with the GWR. They were impressed with the Blyth reeve's presentation, presenting figures and showing the value of goods like flour, lumber, livestock and more, already being shipped from Huron to the Buffalo market.

The GWR began to envision

the profits to be made with an extended London to Wingham rail line. John Carling, owner of Carlings Brewery in London was also very interested in seeing the proposed route come to fruition. His brother Isaac, Exeter's first reeve and first merchant, also stood to profit greatly in the building of the line through our town.

The directors of the GWR sent the message back to Huron County through Blyth Reeve Kelly that the company was very interested, but their decision to go forward would depend on whether each municipality would subsidize the building of the line. The City of London promised \$100,000 while the province offered \$178,000, Exeter kicked in \$10,000 while Stephen and Osborne gave \$17,500 and \$25,000 respectively. Every municipality along the proposed line committed to their grants wisely and generously.

However, Lucan and Biddulph decided they would reap the benefits without contributing. They both relished the results of the project, but they already had the east to west Grand Trunk Line since 1860. Biddulph refused to pay while Lucan finally voted to pay the \$7,000 subsidy. The GWR became impatient and were enraged by the "skinflint" antics of Biddulph. The company ordered the surveyors to move the stakes two miles west of Lucan into McGillivray Township, completely bypassing both village and township, much to their everlasting regret.

The London, Huron and Bruce Railway Company was incorporated in 1871 to construct a line from London to Blyth, later deciding to extend the infrastructure to Wingham. Some five years later in the spring of 1875, construction began on the project.

The route for the tracks was surveyed, affecting hundreds of land owners for 74 miles, usually cutting farms in two. Much of the land, especially north of Clinton, was still thick bush lot, making the task more onerous and expensive. The adherents of the new railway had conducted dozens of meetings in small rural communities. There were not many objections.

Farmers, manufacturers and businessmen alike desired a swift and convenient route to London. Municipal officials re-

alized the benefits a rail service would bring to their communities and realized they would lose office if they went against the people's wishes. There were jobs for everyone along the route with general construction workers receiving \$1.25 per day while a man with a team received \$3.25 per day.

From the spring of 1875 until December of the same year, deals were signed, trees were cut, land was leveled, trestles were engineered and built and iron rails were laid. Farmers received payment for the lands either sold or expropriated. In Exeter, Isaac Carling owned most of the land west of the Main Street through which tracks would be laid and on which the station would be built. As a merchant the railway would bring his mercantile goods from urban centers, and as a tanner, Carling's hides and leather could be transported to city and on to international markets. According to the January 27, 1876, Exeter Times, Carling cashed in again by being awarded a contract for supplying 1000 cords of wood for the London, Huron and Bruce.

The Stratford Beacon recorded, "The last rail of the London, Huron and Bruce Railway was laid last Saturday, December 11, 1875 and London now has a direct line to the rich and populous country north. The line has been constructed with marvellous celerity and economy in the face of numerous obstacles and great engineering difficulties." Starting in London, the stations included Hyde Park Junction, Ettrick, Ilderton, Denfield, Lucan Crossing (2 miles west of Lucan in McGillivray Township since Biddulph would not grant a subsidy for construction), Clandeboye, Centralia, Exeter, Hensall, Kippen, Brucefield, Clinton, Londesborough, Blyth, Belgrave and Wingham.

The directors of the London, Huron and Bruce Railway decided it was time to have a party to celebrate their outstanding accomplishment. The Clinton Era newspaper of January 13 gave a full report of the festivities.

"The Grand Western Railway Authorities sent thirteen passenger cars on Monday evening, some cars were left at the Clinton station and the remainder taken to Wingham." The next morning dignitaries and businessmen from Kincardine, Lucknow,

Brussels and Wingham crowded on the southbound train, stopping at every station to admit more invited guests. At Exeter, 44 more men climbed aboard including W.H. Verity, I. Carling, T. Coates, D. Johns, T. Fitton, J. and R. Pickard, Dr. Hyndman, three Eacretts and this writer's great-great-grandfather, Samuel Sanders, a councillor in Stephen Township.

Eventually, London was reached in six hours.

John Carling and his fellow directors had planned the party well, which included tours of factories and landmarks, parades, bands, fireman's exhibition and finally a grand banquet at the city hall at 6 p.m. Apparently the Huron County contingent left their "temperance practices" at

home as they partook in over thirty toasts during the evening. MP Thomas Greenway from Centralia and MPP Archibald Bishop from Osborne Township both proposed toasts. Reeve Kelly of Blyth and John Carling both received standing ovations for the great contributions the men had made to the project.

One report stated, "The hall was getting so noisy by this time, that no one was really listening to the toasts, but still more were proposed." Those who were able to remember recall that the Railway was "well christened" during that evening of January 11, 1876.

On the following Monday, January 17, the railway was opened for passenger traffic. The line soon became known as the "Butter and Eggs Special" because of the numerous farm passengers who embarked all down the line with crates of eggs, crocks of butter and bushels of garden produce for their regular customers at Covent Farmer's Market. Other passengers were irate over late arrivals and sitting on hard seats over a rough rail bed. They mused that the LH&BR actually stood for "Let'er Hit and Bounce."

The truth of the matter was that the original wood burning locomotives travelling at 12-15 miles per hour were slow, but they were nearly supersonic compared to the stagecoaches on the rugged roads of that day. Some late arrivals were due to farmers hailing the train at their farm for a personal boarding. Brings back memories of Petticoat Junction.

About Time and Times: An introduction



JUDY FINKBEINER JOHNSON

Examiner Columnist

It is with pure delight that I was introduced to the Exeter Examiner, a member of the Grant Haven Media family of community newspapers. Distributed throughout the community in mid-March, this local newspaper burst onto the scene like the daffodils in our flower bed at the front of the house. Appearing with the promise of spring, they send up leaves and buds bravely into our world, facing the uncertainties of climate and conditions.

Sometimes I look at these intrepid flowers-to-be as a metaphor for how the hamlets, villages, towns and rural communities move through their seasons, through centuries and decades into our present with the hope for a brilliant future. And sometimes I simply look at them with gratitude that the ever-busy squirrels investigating everything don't like to eat them!

With my first column in the Exeter Examiner, my focus is on introducing myself, the experiences and environment that shape my perspective and view of the world around me—my “roots and wings.”

STORIES, ROOTS AND WINGS

From childhood on, I have often been described as a storyteller, with my “head in the clouds.” Yes, it is true that I tend to see my world as a series of illustrated stories. My roots run deep in the area. As an adult when I travel the roads of my youth, with my mind's eye I have a clear view of the farms of people I knew, their homes and farm buildings, and recall the tales of their lives. In their places now are often fields of corn or soybeans, absent of any trace of them.

And yes, about my wings, also true. I am a dreamer with insatiable curiosity. There is so much to learn about and explore during my life's journey. This special part of the planet that I am so fortunate to call home is a source of endless “soul food.” It is filled with the stories of people, of places here and long forgotten, of past events that shaped the present and of present happenings that enrich our lives. There is an abundance of fertile land and variety of nature to enjoy everywhere.

DEEPLY ROOTED

Back to roots. On my paternal line, there are now eight generations here in the area. I am in the fifth, sort of a “middle child” position. The pioneer couple in their early 20s arrived here in 1842 from the Black Forest in Germany. They ventured across an ocean neither would have seen before getting on a ship for a weeks-long voyage to the New World. They then travelled inland on roadways, then primitive roads, and eventually on paths through the forest to where they settled northwest of Crediton.

In early days, with their neighbours, they built the corduroy

roads that fronted farm lanes.

When I was a child, if the winters were harsh enough to lead to a major spring thaw, top sections of that road would give way, exposing short sections of the logs that formed the corduroy base of timber to prevent horses, wagons, and people from being mired in mud during wet conditions. Today that same road is paved.

Like the barns that my Finkbeiner farmer ancestors built when they arrived, my appearance is weathered by time and times. The view from my vantage point now has changed over the years as has theirs. The cast of individuals in earlier generations here has moved through the landscape and years with many things in common with those today. Roots and wings. Dreams and deeds. Promise and potential. And the foundation of faith—faith evidenced in the abundance of the nature surrounding them and as underscored by the brick farmhouses, timber barns and area churches that still stand proudly today, faith in the future that they built for.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The same qualities of those early pioneers are echoed in those who came to this area throughout the decades that followed and those who will come here into the future. They too are building new lives here, bringing with them their experiences and skills to create a new future for themselves and those who will follow them. This area is a celebration of many cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and skills, elements that create strong foundations for vibrant communities.

WINGS AND WINGING IT

Here's a key thing I have learned over my decades. That like pioneer roads, life journeys do not necessarily follow a clearly defined path. My intention was to live locally always.

It took me from the years graduating from Exeter's South Huron District High School to return to the area after my father passed in 2008. My 90-year-old mother needed assistance to remain on the family farm. It was then that I made my way back here to my heart's forever home.

My parents filled their farmhouse with opportunities to learn. Before smart phones and Google that I cannot imagine a day without now, and even television, there were more chances to learn than ever were taught in school. Arriving in the mailbox was National Geographic magazine, and newspapers including the London Free Press and Exeter Times-Advocate.

Dad talked about geography and history and flying. Mom bought hardcover books at local estate sales and drove to Exeter library to borrow books to read. We learned common sense by example, how to respect nature and the farm animals raised and ways to practice regard for the stewardship of land. We learned appreciation for living in this area that my mother, raised in the dustbowl of the Great Depression in southern Manitoba, called Eden when she first visited it as a young war widow with her three-year-old son.

My wings were tested by moving where job opportunities to earn a living were located: first Kitchener, then Toronto, and a brief stint in Cobourg. Then my

path led back to Toronto, and on to spend four years in Flemish Belgium where my husband worked helping to establish a graphic arts and medical arts film factory. Our plan was to return to Toronto “for a year,” which turned out to be more than two decades, before wending our way home via London and Arva.

Along the way I told a lot of stories in print. There were travel features throughout Europe and others in the U.S., profiles of businesses and people, national wedding magazine editor work and a long career in marketing and communications work for not-for-profit organizations.

So here I am now, doing exactly what that little girl with a bowl haircut, walking on the laneway by the creek back to the family farm bush dreamed about, telling stories. Stories that began well before hydro and indoor plumbing arrived, about personalities, personal history, and places past and present. Another circle of life. I am blessed.

NEXT COLUMNS

Up next, sharing information on a Lenten and Easter tradition in my family was making authentic soft pretzels. The legacy recipe went back to the Black Forest, using home-made lye to dip the pretzels in before baking. Part religious history in twisted rolls, part spring tonic and cleanser and totally delicious!

Then, want to journey with me back to my public/elementary school days? True stories about events that could never happen today will take us back in time to the one-room country school.

Mentoring Matters: Spring fundraising season has begun



AMY WILHELM

Examiner Columnist

This week, I'd like to share with our community why the many events we host through the year matter so much.

You may have noticed that we are frequently organizing fundraisers—and it's fair to ask why there are so many. While we are part of a national orga-

nization, Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Huron (BBSSH) does not receive core funding from our national office. What may also come as a surprise is that only 3 per cent of our annual operating budget comes from program-specific government funding. That means the remaining 97 per cent must be raised through other means.

As a not-for-profit organization, we rely heavily on community support to deliver our mentoring programs. That's where our community makes all the difference.

Through grants, individual and corporate donations, sponsorships, third-party initiatives, service clubs, our social enterprise, The Little Shop and the many fundraisers we host, we're able to bridge that gap and continue

offering services that make a meaningful difference.

We have now entered what I like to refer to as our spring fundraising season—a particularly busy time for our organization. We recently wrapped up a very successful Bowl for Kids' Sake weekend at the Town and Country Bowling Lanes in Zurich. While the main event has concluded, we're looking forward to two upcoming corporate bowling nights scheduled for April. The momentum continues with several more events being planned, including our Spring Quarter Auction and The Little Craft Show. Not long after, we'll tee off for Golf Fore Kids' Sake. It's a full calendar filled with opportunities to share our story, connect with the community and raise the essential funds needed

to keep our doors open and our programs running.

In just a few weeks, we'll be hosting our Spring Quarter Auction on Thursday, April 9, at the South Huron Recreation Centre. While this is a long-standing event in the South Huron community, it will only be our second time hosting. If the fall event was any indication, it's sure to be a great time! Participants are invited to bring their quarters, raise their paddles and bid through three exciting auction rounds, with time to browse vendor booths during intermission. Tickets are available at The Little Shop or by contacting our office.

Our fifth annual Little Craft Show is coming up on Saturday, April 25, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the South Huron Recre-

ation Centre. With more than 60 vendors to explore and a penny sale featuring a variety of generously donated items by vendors, there's something for everyone. It's also perfectly timed for Mother's Day shopping! This event is a great way for our community to

shop local and find those perfect and unique gifts, as well as restock on some third-party favourites

We invite you to join us as a valued supporter and an important part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters community. Consider sponsoring one of our events or attending and taking part.

By supporting, you are helping to make us #BiggerTogether.

Riddles

What has a thousand needles but can't sew?
A porcupine.

I sometimes run but I cannot walk. What am I?
Your nose.

When I'm ripe, I'm green. When you eat me, I'm red. What am I?
Watermelon.

What can you break without touching it?
A promise.

Where does today come before yesterday?
In the dictionary.

What has many teeth but cannot bite?
A comb.

I am an odd number. Take away a letter and I become even. What number am I?
Seven.

What has a head and a tail but no body?
A coin.

What tastes better than it smells?
Your tongue.

Two fathers and two sons are sitting at the table, yet there are only three people. How is this possible?
One grandfather, one father, and one son.

What do eggs, a safe, and a whip all have in common?
They all crack.

Sudoku

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

Solutions on pg. 26

Pet of the Week

MAKE SURE IDENTIFICATION IS UP TO DATE!

Make sure your dog or cat has a microchip for identification and wears a tag with your relevant contact information. Note that you will need to update your contact information with the microchip company if you move or your number changes. With accurate registration associated with the unique microchip number, a lost animal can be traced back to its owner as soon as they are scanned by a veterinarian, animal shelter or pound.



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MURPHY

Make way for Murphy, the 107-pound golden retriever who runs Eidt's BMR Express with the confidence of a CEO and the charm of a professional cuddler. This oversized ball of sunshine struts into work each day ready to greet customers, collect treats, and parade around with stuffies. In short: Murphy isn't just Pet of the Week—he's Pet of the Century, and he knows it. Murphy is a family member of the Elliot's family from Seaforth.



Nominate your pet to be a Featured Pet by emailing info@exeterexaminer.com

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

- GRAND BEND
- BEACH
- SUNSET
- HURON
- LIGHTHOUSE
- COTTAGE
- SANDBAR
- WAVES
- PINERY
- MARINA
- DUNES
- LAKESHORE
- SUNBURN
- SEAGULL
- BONFIRE

We noticed "Grand Bend" was missing in our last word search, so it felt fitting to make it the focus this time

COMING EVENTS



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MARCH

Grand Bend Area Community Health Centre

Programs and Partnerships

Lambton Heritage Museum. Free Indoor Walking program. Please bring your indoor running shoes. Coffee time follows. For more info contact cmaxfield@gbchc.com GBACHC

Boardroom . Every Tuesday and Thursday Please contact Mary at 647-295-8292 or email mpnorris58@gmail.com to book an appointment. Grand Bend Area CHC , 69 Main St East .

Support group program with trained facilitator Randy Chapman. 1-800-561-5012. Adult Day wing at GBACHC.

, Good Neighbours of Bluewater 28 Goshen St N Zurich. Everyone welcome.

Are you looking after a loved one and need some support? Contact Kate Mason 519-238-2362 x 241 for more information and to register. Grand Bend Area CHC

Hensall Arena. Contact Grace at gbonnett@gbchc.com Fun social walking program with

coffee and chatting to finish every Wednesday 529-238-2362 x 202

Meet at the Lambton Heritage Museum parking lot 9:00 am Email Lindsey lindseyashworthducharme@gmail.com

. Free program for adults with children birth to 6 years. Adult Day Wing, GBACHC , 69 Main St East Grand Bend Contact earlyon-childcare.ca or 519-786-6161 x 9226.

GBACHC . Open to anyone in the community who needs medical attention (Not an Urgent Care or Emergency Centre) 69 Main St East.

March Break at the Library

EXETER LIBRARY BRANCH

March 25th Easter Basket Program BBBS

We're excited to launch our Easter Basket Program! We're collecting donations of Chocolate, Outdoor activity items, Hygiene products, Craft kits and Supplies, Socks and Gift cards. Drop off your donations at the Little Shop in Exeter to help fill baskets of joy!

Any questions reach out to Meghan at meghan.hartman@bigbrothersbigsissters.ca

Sun., March 29 - 1 p.m.

Eggseter Easter Hunt - Hosted by the South Huron Optimist Club. Morrison Dam Conservation Area, Exeter (Behind the ABCA building). Cost: \$2 per child. * Open to all children 12 years old and under * Must be accompanied by an adult * All children must be Pre-Registered and Pre-paid at the Exeter Library * Limited to 300 children - register early to avoid disappointment. Draw for three Bikes - must be present to win.

APRIL

April 3 and 4: The Upper Room Easter Production

showing on Good Friday, April 3 at 10am and April 4 at 6pm at Centralia Faith Tabernacle. Visit centraliafaith.com to book your free seat.

Thurs., April 9th -

SPRING QUARTER AUCTION

- Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Huron.

Doors Open at 6:00pm. Auction Begins at 7:00pm.

TICKETS \$5, EXTRA PADDLES \$2 EACH.

South Huron Rec Centre. 94 Victoria St East - Exeter.

Tickets available at: The Little Shop!

Contact Angie To Order Yours Today!

Angie.steckle@Bigbrothersbigsissters.ca



Ironwood Golf Club

Easter Breakfast Buffet

Sunday April 5th • 9-10am & 12 noon

Menu Includes

Scrambled Eggs, Pancakes, Sausage, Bacon,
Cheesy Potatoes, Toast, Fruit
Assorted Sweets
Coffee station & Juice

Adults \$19.95 plus tax • Children (3-9) \$9.95 plus tax
Easter treats for Children

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Space is limited

Exeter Examiner

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3 APRIL	GOOD FRIDAY 11:00 AM
5 APRIL	EASTER SUNDAY 10:30 AM <i>(with Brass)</i>

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7	5	2	4	6	3	9	8	1
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OBITUARY

Ross



Please note: Date of Celebration is Saturday, May 16, 2026.

Unexpectedly, as the result of a motor vehicle accident, on Saturday, February 7, 2026, Laura Natsuko (Nakamura) Ross, of Exeter, age 38, leaving behind a legacy of love, laughter, and devotion to her family. Born on August 24, 1987, in Goderich, she was the dearly loved wife of Rob Ross. Proud and adoring mother of Colin and Ethan Ross. Forever loved daughter of the late Brian Nakamura (2013)

and Linda (Haugh) Nakamura of Seaforth. Loved sister of Jason and Sarah Nakamura and their daughters Mya and Carmen of Kitchener and sister-in-law of Scott Ross of London. Lovingly remembered by her father-in-law and mother-in-law Jim and Mary Ann Ross of London. Fondly remembered by her aunts, uncles, cousins and many friends. Predeceased by her grandparents Ross and Irene Haugh, Tomiye and Yujiro Nakamura.

At the request of the family, cremation has taken place and interment in the family plot in CREDITON Cemetery at a later date. An Open House Celebration of Laura's Life, with refreshments, at the Crediton Community Centre, 38 Victoria Avenue East, Crediton, on Saturday, May 16, 2026, from 1 to 4 p.m. T. Harry Hoffman & Sons Funeral Home, Dashwood, entrusted with the arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to Cornerstone Montessori School in Clinton or Egmondville United Church.

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The Hub

March 25, 2026

Important Dates

Monday, March 7th
Committee of Adjustment
5:00 PM (EST)*

Monday, March 7th
Regular Council Meeting
6:00 PM (EST)*

Tuesday, March 20th
Regular Council Meeting
6:00 PM (EST)*

South Huron Council meetings are open for in-person attendance and continue to be livestreamed. See our website **Agendas, Minutes & Meetings page or the South Huron Youtube channel at meeting time to access the livestream video link. A recording of the meeting will be available on the municipal Youtube Channel following the meeting.*

South Huron Recreation Programs

Programs may require pre-registration, contact communityservices@southhuron.ca or see the Community Calendar at SouthHuron.ca for full information.

- Coffee, Cards & Checkmate—Dashwood Community Centre and South Huron Rec Centre
- Shuffleboard—Dashwood Community Centre
- Easter Centrepiece Workshop—South Huron Rec Centre
- Adult Dodgeball—South Huron Rec Centre
- Dashwood Easter Egg Hunt—Dashwood Community Centre
- Youth Badminton—South Huron District High School

South Huron Votes 2026 – update your calendars with important dates

- Candidate nomination period – May 1 to August 21 (2pm)
- Update school support with MPAC (mpac.ca/schoolsupport) by June 1. Following this date, contact the Municipal Office to update school support
- Check that you're on the voters list - confirm, update or add information to the Register with Elections Ontario (registertovoteon.ca) by August 12
- Revision period of the voters list – September 1 to October 26, 2026, reach out to the Municipal Office directly to confirm/add or update information on the voters list
- Voter Information Letters cards are mailed out end of September/early October
- Voting Period: 9:00 am on October 13 to 8:00 pm on October 26, 2026

For more information regarding the 2026 Municipal & School Board Election, check out the Municipal Election page on southhuron.ca, contact the Clerk at vote@southhuron.ca, or drop into the Clerk's Department at town hall (322 Main Street South, Exeter).

Reduced Load Limits in Effect

The reduced load limit period in the Municipality of South Huron typically runs from March 1 to April 30 of any given year, depending on weather and road conditions. Roads are most vulnerable to heavy vehicle damage in the early spring when frost is leaving the ground and load restrictions help to minimize the damage.

With the exception of Main Street, Exeter from the North limit of the Connecting Link (Walper Street) and the South limit of the Connecting Link (Huron Motor Products), all roads in South Huron are subject to restrictions during the reduced load limit period.

Questions or concerns? Please contact our Transportation Services Department.

Holiday Hours—Closed for Good Friday and Easter Monday

The municipal office and landfill site will be closed Friday, April 3rd and Monday, April 6th. The landfill site will be open Saturday 9am—4pm. There is no disruption to garbage and recycling collection on Friday, April 3rd.

For urgent municipal matters outside regular business hours please call 519-235-0310 x7

Join our Team

Building and Planning Department is seeking to fill the role of Planning Coordinator for a one-year, full-time contract for the purpose of covering a parental leave. Under the direction of the Director of Building and Planning/Chief Building Official, the Planning Coordinator administers, tracks and coordinates the technical review of applications pertaining to planning, land use & development.

See our Careers & Volunteer Opportunities page at southhuron.ca for details.

Exeter Cemetery Flowerbeds

In keeping with the provisions of the Cemetery Bylaw, flowerbeds may only be planted by municipal staff. Please note the deadline to purchase a new flowerbed or renew your current flowerbed contract is May 1, 2026.

Please contact the Clerk's Department at 519.235.0310 x232 or cemetery@southhuron.ca if you require assistance.

Our information is accessible! Contact us if you require alternative formats.

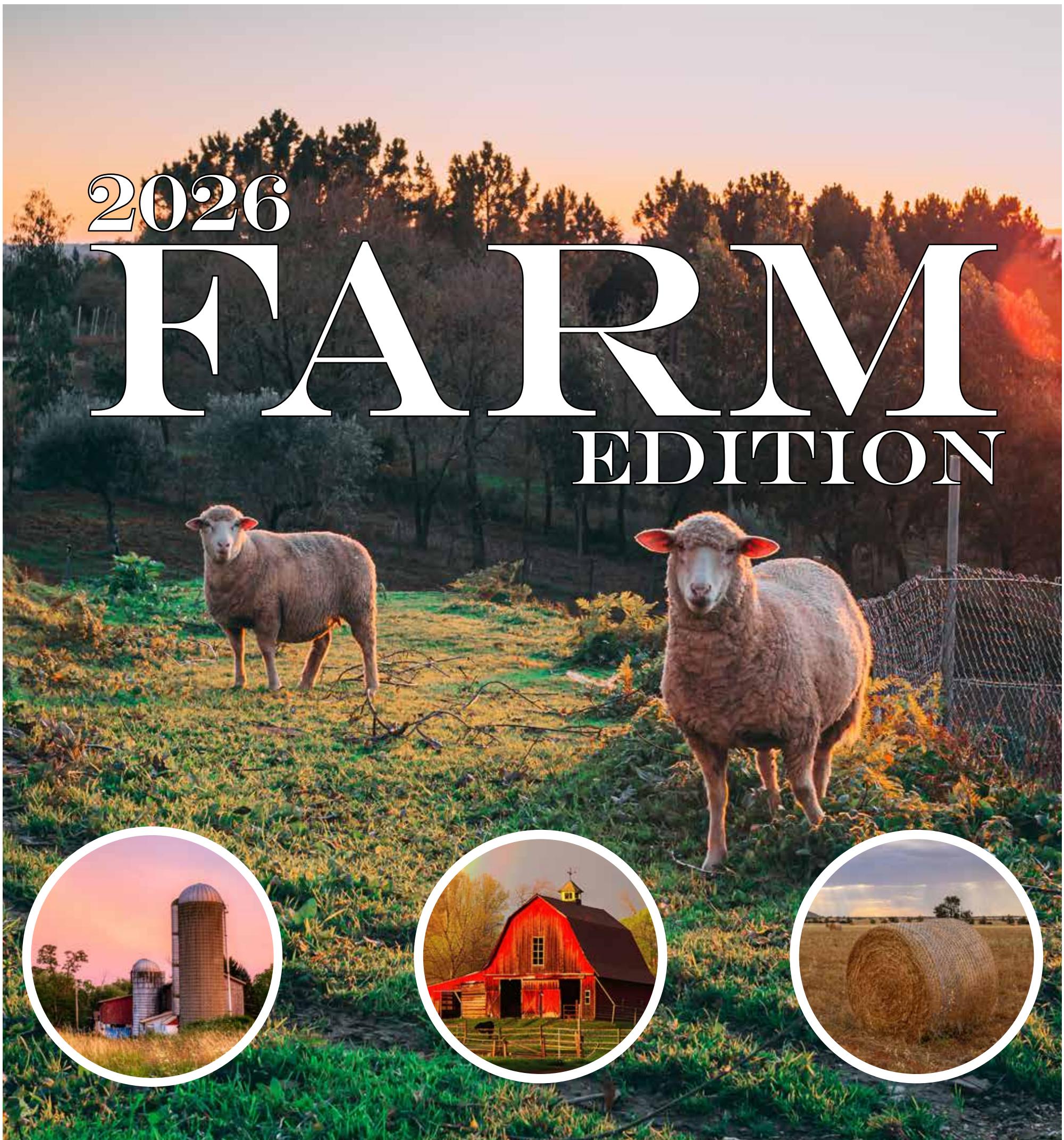
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2026

FARM

EDITION



Exeter Examiner
N E W S P A P E R

Huron farmland values continue to climb

JOHN MINER

Examiner Reporter

After dropping slightly in 2024, farmland values continued their upward climb in Huron County last year, according to the latest report by real estate appraisal firm Valco Consultants.

The report pegged average land values for Huron County at slightly more than \$30,000 an acre in 2025, a 4.1 per cent increase from the year before.

At the high end, some Huron County farms sold for just shy of \$50,000 an acre. At the low end, some land went for under \$20,000.

The annual Valco land value report covers 11 south-western Ontario counties - Huron, Perth, Oxford, Middlesex, Elgin, Lambton, Kent, Essex, Bruce, Grey, and Wellington.

Huron had the fourth highest average prices of the 11 counties with Oxford the highest at more than \$35,000 an acre. Essex had the lowest at under \$20,000 an acre on average. The overall average for the 11 counties was \$27,258 an acre.

A decade ago, farmland in Huron County was selling on average for less than \$15,000 an acre.

Report author Ryan Parker said livestock appeared to be a major factor in the land price difference between counties in 2025.

Beef and hog operations enjoyed very good margins in 2025 and livestock-dense areas had firm land values. But in areas southwest of London and along Lake Erie, where there are fewer livestock operations, demand was lacking.

One change in the farmland market that Parker observed is the number of listings of farm properties is up significantly from three years ago. There has also

been an increase in the number of farms put on the market that do not sell.

“As margins have tightened, especially in the crop sector, buyers have logically become more selective, which has resulted in overpriced farms not selling,” he said.

Buyers have had more time to consider a purchase, unlike a few years ago when they needed to make a snap decision if they wanted a shot at buying land.

“To me, it’s a better market. It is more sustainable,” Parker said in an interview.

He sees the trends from 2025 continuing in 2026 with crop prices flat.

Demand is likely to be higher in livestock-dense areas and further north, while it will likely be lower in southern areas with fewer livestock farms, he said.

What could swing prices would be a significant change in interest rates. Lower rates could trigger higher land prices, while a jump in rates could push farmland values down.

Another key factor to watch is the response of sellers to the slower market.

“If vendors lower their expectations, it is possible that could drag overall farmland values down.”

In the past year, the vast majority of farmland was purchased by local farmers, Parker said.

Investment funds have been less active in the market the last couple of years because land prices haven’t been climbing as fast, making land less attractive.

Parker estimates that investment fund action in the market is now at the lowest level it has been in the last 10 years.

“We actually have some pockets where investors are trying to sell right now.”



(JOHN MINER PHOTO)

Farmland values in Huron County climbed in 2025, and that trend is expected to continue this year.

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Lucan farm market looks to expand after first winter

DAN ROLPH

Editor

A new farm market in Lucan is looking forward to a year of expansion and growth as it aims to bring high-quality products from its own farm to the region.

The Good Food Farm Market was opened by owner Tina Gokstorp in November 2025 in the building that once housed The Hub and MJ's Roadhouse.

Gokstorp stepped into the realm of farming in 2022 when she bought a farm in Ailsa Craig alongside her father. Since then, she's become the sole owner of that farm.

"I don't have a background as a farmer," Gokstorp said. "It was a lifestyle property for us. My dad grew up on a farm in Sweden and wanted to move out into the country, and I wanted to move out into the country, so we bought it together."

Though she doesn't have an extensive farming background, Gokstorp said she did have some experience in small-scale chicken farming, which led to her decision to establish her farm with a focus on poultry.

"Chickens are a good entry product," she said. "They're a low capital cost, and they're a pretty quick return."

Looking to provide a wide selection for customers, Gokstorp started offering value-added products such as pre-marinated kebabs, chicken pot pie, seasoned chicken burgers and chicken noodle soup, though she has relied on renting commercial kitchen space to create those products.

"We love the products that we offer now," said Gokstorp. "They're working. People love them, we get a lot of repeat business, it's unique, they're delicious and it's a higher-quality chicken."

Gokstorp said she hadn't originally planned to expand into the business of running a farm store, but when Lucan Biddulph started looking for bidders to rent the property it had acquired with the plans of one day expanding the neighbouring arena, she jumped at the



(DAN ROLPH PHOTO)

Tina Gokstorp, owner of the Good Food Farm Market, stands in front of her store in Lucan, where she sells a mixture of her own chicken products and a selection of goods from other local farms.

opportunity — especially as she could make use of the former restaurant's kitchen space.

Since opening, Gokstorp has been working to refurbish the space to suit her needs. With one of her top priorities being getting the kitchen in a usable state, she said she hopes to start creating her already popular offerings there, as well as expand into other products that could be purchased both in the store and in the markets she frequents.

"This space allows us to put in a production kitchen," she said. "Because we do a lot of markets in Toronto, the store allows us to offer our products to customers locally, and we see the potential for cottage traffic stopping in on their way to Grand Bend, Goderich and Bayfield."

With her eyes on having a production kitchen functional by the end of May, Gokstorp said she also hopes to further expand beyond chicken, particularly as she begins exploring market farming.

Gokstorp said she also wants to begin selling baked goods made in house.

"You can't be a self-respecting farm store without selling butter tarts," she said. "I feel like that's just part of the

culture."

While she is committed to growing both her farm and the farm store, Gokstorp said she also intends to continue supporting other farms by offering their products to customers who are seeking local goods.

"We want to support other small farms who are in the same position as we were, where you can't afford a store," she said. "You're not really big enough to support the large retailers, so the small farm stores are a good partner."



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From field to fork: Chef James Eddington celebrates Huron County's bounty

MEG PEARSON

Examiner Reporter

For more than 25 years, chef James Eddington has built his restaurant around a simple idea: the best meals start close to home.

Long before “farm-to-table” became a popular buzzword, Eddington was already building relationships with local farmers and sourcing ingredients grown just down the road. When Eddington's of Exeter opened in 1997, the abundance of fresh, high-quality ingredients available throughout Huron County quickly shaped the restaurant's philosophy.

“We quickly realized the availability of fresh local quality ingredients right here on our doorstep,” Eddington said. “Building a relationship with local farmers and purveyors was a natural fit.”

Those relationships have become the foundation of the restaurant's success.

Today, Eddington works with a wide range of regional producers, including Hayter's Turkey, Metzger Meats, Firmly Rooted, Masse Fruit and Vegetables and Weth Mushrooms. For Eddington, these partnerships go far beyond sourcing ingredients.

“It's our DNA,” he said. “These relationships are very special, and we are so proud to serve and execute these local ingredients and to truly know the farmer and their story.”

About a decade ago, Eddington took his commitment to local food even further by purchasing a 25-acre farm along the shores of Lake Huron. The property now supplies the restaurant with specialty fruits, vegetables and flowers grown specifically for the kitchen.

“We grow specialty vegetables that we can use at the restaurant, along with unique varieties of apples, quince, blood peaches, kiwis and specialty flowers,” he said.

The farm also operates through crop-sharing partnerships with local growers like Masse Fruit and Vegetables, producing crops such as sweet corn, beans, pumpkins and squash.

Having direct access to the farm allows Eddington to design menus that reflect the rhythms of the seasons.

“We plan our seasonal menus around what is fresh and available,” he explained. “We also plant specialty items that we know we'll be using at the restaurant. It definitely is more work, but we know our patrons appreciate the quality and can taste the difference.”

That dedication to Ontario-grown food has earned Eddington's a Feast ON certification, a designation from the Culinary Tourism Alliance that verifies restaurants are genuinely committed to sourcing local ingredients.

“Feast ON is a certification program that actually audits the books and ensures we are sourcing local and not ‘greenwashing,’” Eddington said. “It's great to be part of such a terrific organization.”

While sourcing locally offers tremendous rewards, it also requires flexibility, skill and careful planning.

“It takes more time, planning, training, organization and chef skills to source, grow and support local,” Eddington said. “Unlike a chain restaurant that has a formula or receives food from a bag or box, sourcing and growing food and working with Mother Nature certainly has its challenges - but it is 100 per cent worth it.”

Even during the late winter months, the restaurant continues to highlight the flavours of the region using preserved and cellar-stored ingredients from the previous harvest.

Right now, diners might find dishes like butternut squash soup made from Eddington's own field, white beans from Van Osch Farms, rutabaga from Veri Fine Produce and honey sourced



(DAVID J. SCHWARTZ PHOTO)

Chef James Eddington is bringing the tastes of Huron County to diners at Eddington's of Exeter.

from Maitland Apiaries. A blood peach syrup made from fruit grown on the farm adds another local touch, while maple syrup season is currently underway across the region.

Looking ahead, Eddington will be sharing his passion for regional food on a larger stage. In June, he will travel to Edmonton to speak at the Taste of Place Summit, representing Feast ON and the province of Ontario.

“I hope to inspire the new generation of young chefs and industry professionals about how ‘taste of place’ is important,” he said. “I'm proud to showcase

Huron County and the surrounding area. We are truly blessed.”

After more than two decades in the kitchen, Eddington says the work still excites him.

“The fact that we are ever evolving and always learning,” he said. “It has been such a rewarding career. We've been blessed with great staff and the best customers.”

For a chef working in one of Ontario's most productive agricultural regions, the inspiration is never far away—often beginning just steps from the restaurant door.



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Oversupply and trade issues drive down dry bean prices for Ontario growers

AMANDA NELSON

Examiner Reporter

The 2026 Ontario Bean Growers annual general meeting was held in Stratford last month, where dry bean growers from across the region came together to discuss growing concerns around exports, particularly trade, transportation and domestic demand.

Alvin Klassen of Dry Bean World outlined current challenges as Canada continues to navigate overproduction of black beans and ongoing tariff changes that are limiting trade and creating uncertainty for growers.

“In the last five years, we’ve experienced several severe ups and downs in commercial markets related to supply and demand, with the influence of producer and dealer pricing,” said Klassen.

Despite steady global demand for dry beans, many growers are finding it harder to turn a profit.

Prices across North America have dropped sharply in recent years — in some cases by nearly half — while input costs such as fuel and fertilizer have remained high.

“Throughout North America, we are now sitting where bean prices are half of what they were three

years ago, and the cost of production hasn’t gone down at all,” said Klassen. “In fact, seed pricing hasn’t gone down, and it’s making it very difficult to sustain production.”

The issue, Klassen said, comes down to supply and demand. A strong harvest has left a surplus of beans in storage — known in the industry as “carryover” — giving buyers less incentive to pay higher prices.

At the same time, export challenges and limited processing options in Canada are making it harder for farmers to move their crops efficiently, adding further pressure to an already strained market.

Jeff English of Pulse Canada said the organization is working to increase domestic consumption through its “Love Canadian Beans” campaign, which aims to raise awareness that many beans sold in stores are grown in Canada and encourage more people to include them in their diets.

“It’s not about telling people how to eat, but showing them how beans can be incorporated into everyday foods we already know and love,” said English. “It’s about giving some familiarity to supporting what we see as a great, sustainably grown Canadian crop.”

English added that advancements in bean process-

ing technology could also help grow the domestic market.

“Now that we have companies extracting proteins and starches from pulse crops, we should have an opportunity to put more protein into different foods — not necessarily calling them beans, but using them as a high-protein ingredient,” he said.

Bill Rosenberg, parliamentary assistant to the minister of agriculture, food and agribusiness, also addressed growers, highlighting the significant role Ontario’s bean producers play in the province’s agri-food sector.

“Our agri-food sector now generates around \$52 billion in annual GDP,” he said. “This is why Ontario is known around the world for safe, nutritious and delicious food.”

“Eighty to 90 per cent of the beans grown here in Ontario are exported around the world, and that is something to be proud of,” he added.

Overall, the message to growers was clear: while global demand is growing, the industry must navigate trade instability, supply chain risks and the need to build stronger domestic markets to remain competitive.



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Hayter's Farms: A local legacy of nearly 80 years



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Hayter family of Hayter's Farms in Dashwood has been growing turkeys for generations, expanding to supply stores across Canada.

DAN ROLPH

Editor

The Hayter name is one most in the region will recognize, but Canadians from coast to coast are now learning it as they find their turkey products in their grocery stores.

Founded in 1948 by Harry and Frieda Hayter, the turkey farm based in Dashwood has remained in the family's hands ever since, with their son, Tom, serving as president of Hayter's Turkey Farms, while their daughter, Joanne Maguire, is president of Hayter's Turkey Products.

The family's roots in the land they continue to operate on run deep, with Harry having been born on that very farm. For years, the 120-acre property was used for mixed farming, but things changed when a neighbour put another idea into Harry's mind.

"It was a fluke thing that a neighbour lady decided to offer my dad some turkeys," said Maguire. "She felt that he would be good at doing turkeys."

Starting with a small flock of about 300 turkeys, Maguire said the first years of turkey farming proved to be challenging for her father.

"He didn't do very well the first time, but he kept at it," she said. "He enjoyed the turkeys."

It wasn't just a fondness for turkeys that led to Harry's decision to grow his

flock.

According to Maguire, her father found that the turkey manure, which is high in nitrogen, was an excellent fertilizer on the land that was poor at that time.

"That's why he kept going with the turkeys," she said. "It was good for the land."

Since those humble beginnings, the Hayter family has expanded their farm into an operation that grows as many as 70,000 turkeys at a given time. But the road to such growth was not one without challenges along the way.

For the first decades, the farm was what today is considered a "free-range" turkey farm, but when heat stroke saw them lose a flock in 1971, the operation moved indoors.

"After that, we started building our barns for them," said Maguire. "You can regulate a lot better with fans, they're cleaner and they're protected from predators."

For many years, the Hayters sold their whole turkeys locally to communities such as Goderich and Exeter, but substantial change came in 1984 when they built a provincial processing plant, the same year they opened their first retail store in Dashwood.

With the processing plant operational, they began selling not only whole turkeys, but various turkey products—a practice that has continued to grow into



(DAN ROLPH PHOTO)

With their turkey products available in stores across Canada, Hayter's Farms continues to operate a retail location in Dashwood on their farm.

the expansive selection that includes turkey bacon, sausages, turkey burgers and more.

"Something we always strived for over the years was that everybody would have the opportunity to eat turkey once a week," said Maguire. "Not just Christmas and Thanksgiving."

Change came again for the Hayters when their processing plant went federal in 1990, which Hayter's Turkey Products vice-president Elaine Hayter said has only improved their products.

"You have to be more attentive to how you're running your operation," she said. "But then it also instills a better product in the end, too."

As for their most popular products?

Hayter said it can be difficult to say what's getting the most attention from customers as the popularity of products changes depending on the season.

"During the barbecue season people gravitate to our turkey steaks and fillets and our turkey burgers," she said. "During the cold season, we've also provided our customers with oven-ready products like turkey lasagna, shepherd's pie and chilli."

However, Hayter said their ground turkey has continued to be a highly sought-after product.

"They use it for everything," she said.

Today, turkey products from Hayter's in Dashwood can be found in grocery stores across Canada—especially after

they entered a partnership with Sobeys several years ago.

With access to more markets in Canada, the Dashwood operation is in the process of expanding this year for the tenth time.

Hayter said the expansion will improve the operation's processing, as well as add lunchroom space for their more than 150 employees, human resources space and more.

"This has been probably one of our largest expansions we've done at one time," she said. "It's actually going to be multi-purpose addition."

"It will be multi-faceted. It's going to take a while to get exactly where we want."

What started as a small farm may have extended its reach across Canada, but despite that growth, Maguire said it's important that the business remains in family hands. She said the emphasis on remaining in the family goes back to her father.

"He was very family-oriented and church-oriented," said Maguire. "We all had our jobs growing up, and it just instilled that small town farm pride."

Now with a third generation of the family in roles spread throughout the farm, the Hayters seem set to continue their legacy of a family owned and operated farm for years to come.

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Farmerette documentary draws strong local crowd in Exeter

MEG PEARSON

Examiner Reporter

A strong turnout from the local community filled the South Huron Recreation Centre on Feb. 11 for a screening of “We Lend a Hand: The Forgotten Story of Ontario Farmerettes,” a documentary rooted in Ontario history and closely connected to the Exeter area.

As attendees filed into the seats they were welcomed by a moving photo slideshow projected across the big screen — a collection of images from the lives of the Farmerettes that, according to the film’s director Colin Field, did not make the final cut of the documentary.

Paired with the slideshow was a carefully curated soundtrack: favourite songs from the 1940s and 1950s, each one personally selected by the 20 former Farmerettes featured in the film.

The documentary, based on the book “Onion Skins and Peach Fuzz: Memories of Ontario Farmerettes” by local author Bonnie Sitter and Shirley English, a collaborator from London, tells the story of thousands of young women who worked on Ontario farms during the Second World War, helping sustain the country’s food supply.

Since its publication, the story has evolved into a stage production and the full-length documentary that has toured communities across Ontario.

Huron-Bruce MPP Lisa Thompson ad-

ressed the audience before the screening, noting the significance of the timing as Canada approaches International Women’s Day in March and recognizes the International Year of the Woman Farmer. She also highlighted the film’s growing reach and shared aspirations to one day present it at the Juno Beach Centre in France.

Among those in attendance were South Huron Mayor George Finch and West Coast Active Living’s Maureen Cole, who helped organize the screening.

The evening sparked thoughtful discussion and lively questions from the audience, including several attendees with direct family connections to the Farmerettes.

Teri Pearson, daughter-in-law of Phyllis (Herman) Thompson, shared that her relative worked as a Farmerette in 1941 on a peach and cherry farm in Niagara.

Also present was Margaret Green, a 101-year-old Exeter resident. Though not part of an official Farmerette camp, Green spent part of the war years living with her grandmother in Exeter, working in a local canning factory before eventually joining the Royal Canadian Air Force as an air traffic controller managing flights that helped protect food convoys crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

“It was really interesting work,” said Green. “I loved it.”

For Sitter, bringing the documentary



(MEG PEARSON PHOTO)

From left is Bonnie Sitter, Patricia Redshaw, Maureen Kole and director Colin Field.

home to Exeter was especially meaningful.

“Oh my gosh, how many people get to do something like this? It’s a real blessing,” she said.

The evening event marked the second screening of the day. Earlier that afternoon, about 50 students from South Huron District High School attended a spe-

cial showing sponsored by West Coast Active Living.

For those who were unable to attend the February screenings, another showing is scheduled for May 31 at Thames Road United Church. More information can be found at welendahand.ca.



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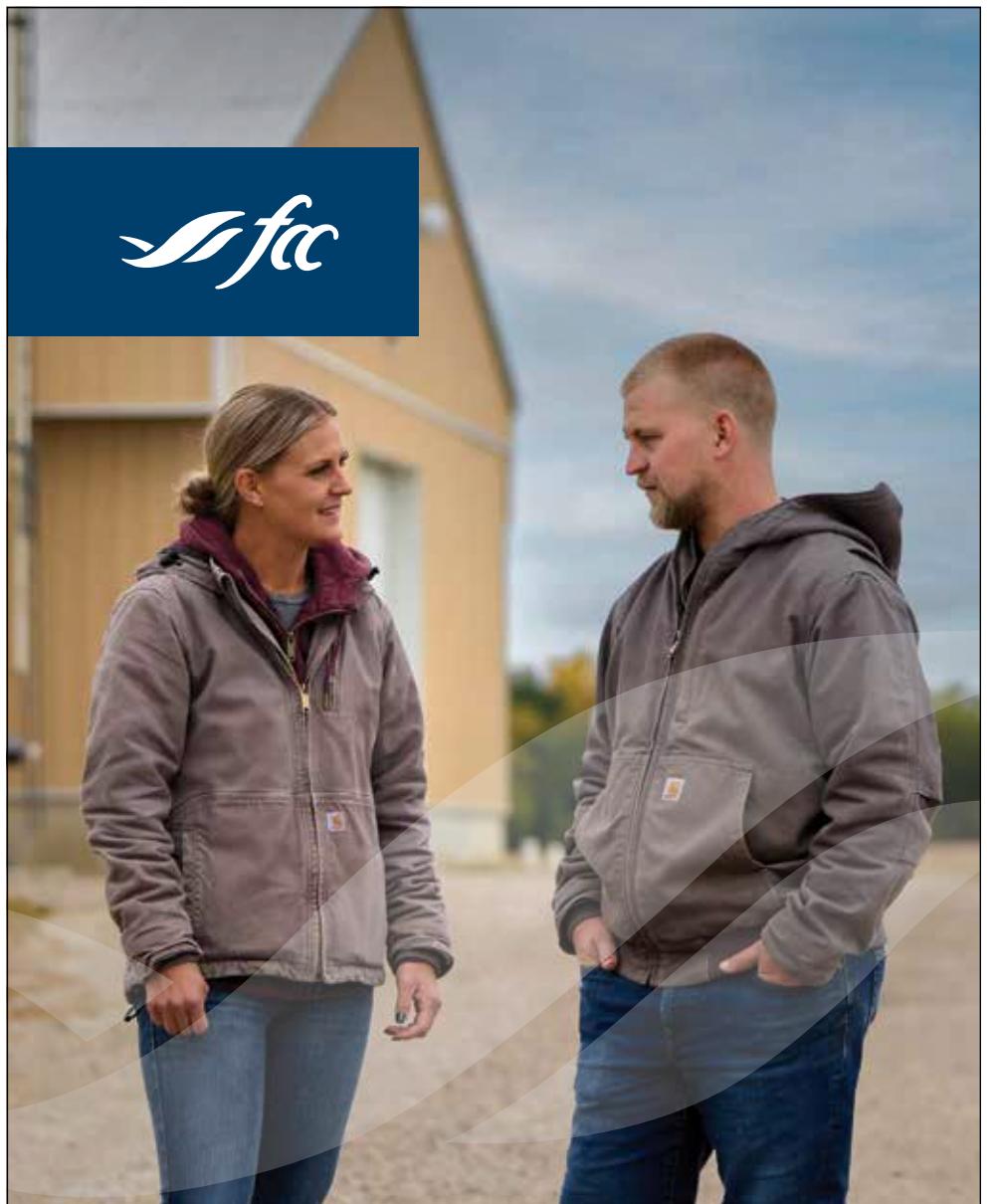


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Concerns about fertilizer availability amid turmoil in the Middle East

FARM CREDIT CANADA

Contribution

It's been more than a week since the U.S. and Israel launched their first missiles into Iran, and that conflict has current and potential economic implications.

These remain highly uncertain and potentially very widespread – oil and liquefied natural gas refineries are shuttered with the Strait of Hormuz paralyzed, bond yields have risen in sync with inflation concerns, and exchange rates are in a state of flux. There is no shortage of economic topics to explore.

Nitrogen is a vitally important nutrient; one of three macronutrients used in primary crop production. There are many different types of nitrogen fertilizer products, each of which requires different production facilities and importantly, access to an energy source, typically natural gas. Urea, ammonium nitrate, and anhydrous ammonia are the three most common nitrogen fertilizers produced globally.

Disruptions in major producing regions can upend global trade flows and prices. That was seen in 2022 with Russia's war against Ukraine: the halt of cheap Russian natural gas to European production facilities, as well as sanctions on Russian exports, choked off supply and caused prices to skyrocket. Collectively, the Middle Eastern countries have an even larger say in global availability of nitrogen fertilizers than Russia: on a nutrient basis, the region has historically accounted for 12 per cent of global production and nearly 25 per cent of global trade.

It's unlikely other suppliers will be in a position to fill this vacuum. In the European Union, a significant share of global ammonia production—a key input for urea—was lost in 2022 and a pipeline running through Ukraine has remained offline since the invasion.

Prior to the Iran strikes, the EU was still only operating at a reduced 75 per cent production capacity. The recent surge in natural gas prices could pressure European producers to further reduce that capacity. China continues to restrict fertilizer exports to meet domestic needs, with urea shipments largely paused until August this year. Before the strikes, it looked highly unlikely Beijing would reverse course on these policies before August. Now, it seems even less likely.

Markets have reacted to the potential threat to supply. After slowly creeping up all winter, U.S. urea futures shot up \$130 per tonne, nearly 30 per cent, in the first two days after the start of the bombing.

While Canada is a net exporter of nitrogen, some parts of the country still depend on imports to meet their needs. And, depending on the crop and region, there are different times of the season when more fertilizer is required. Obviously, spring planting is a prime consumption period. But in the east, the spring is also a time when winter wheat is typically top-dressed.

Corn typically requires more in the early summer as well. And post-harvest, producers may opt to spread fertilizer before the winter freezeup, in preparation for the next growing season.

As utilization changes month-to-month, so too does Canada's import volumes. The timing of imports is dictated by seasonal demand, strategic planning and preparing for the upcoming growing season and weather. Fertilizer movement typically peaks in April and May to support just-in-time delivery for seeding and summer topdressing.

A survey conducted by RealAgristudies in 2022 found that, by late March, 45 per cent of producers had their spring fertilizer needs already stored on

farm. However, there was a significant regional split.

More than 50 per cent of producers in the Prairies had their fertilizer on farm, but only 17 per cent of Quebec producers and 10 per cent of Ontario producers could say the same. In the Maritimes, the number was 0 per cent. On the east coast, the situation will be extremely challenging as price is frequently determined when producers pick up product on the way to the field. Pre-buying at a set price is rare. Producers in eastern Canada simply do not have the same on farm storage capabilities, making them more vulnerable to market conditions in the spring.

Now, despite the lack of on farm storage, some inventory may be sitting with wholesalers and retailers. Statistics Canada's latest fertilizer inventory data for December provides insight into these inventory levels and here again we note a regional divergence. While urea inventories in the west are the highest levels they've been in a decade, in the east, they are at their lowest levels since 2017.

However, one reason stocks looked elevated is that many farmers chose not to pre-buy or apply fertilizer last fall. That meant less product was sold, leaving more fertilizer sitting in retail and wholesale storage heading into winter. It also sets up the possibility of stronger than normal demand at planting, at a time when global supply is already tight.

Any disruption to imports or shipping during this narrow window would create supply challenges and higher prices to support just-in-time delivery for seeding and summer top-dressing.

Given the aforementioned shipping bottlenecks, some fertilizer may not reach North America in time for spring planting. A shipment that would normally be loading in the Middle East today might not arrive to the farmer until May. This may force farmers to adjust application timing or reduce use.

Canadian prices mirror the trends in the U.S. futures market. Complicating matters for farmers, Canada still has a tariff on Russian fertilizer imports. These tariffs are adding approximately \$100 per met-

ric tonne for Canadian producers compared to their U.S. counterparts.

Not all crops require the same amount of fertilizer. Pulses, for example, are nitrogen-fixing, meaning they do not require it. But others are more fertilizer intensive. In terms of cost for all fertilizer, not just nitrogen, and prior to this recent price movement, we estimated fertilizer would account for 20 to 25 per cent of the total cost of growing a crop in 2026.

Unlike 2022, when rising input costs were offset by strong commodity prices, 2026 is shaping up very differently. Farm Credit Canada is estimating a 40 per cent increase in the cost of nitrogen would cut average Saskatchewan margins in half, from \$50 per acre to \$25 per acre for an average wheat and canola rotation. It would also lower average margins in Ontario from \$365 per acre to \$345 per acre for an average corn and soybean rotation. These margin estimates are provincial averages and exclude the cost of land which is much higher in Ontario than in Saskatchewan.

The margin estimates only account for the shock to the nitrogen price. They do not consider potential margin compression because of other fertilizer price increases, potential yield reduction (resulting from less fertilizer being used) or higher fuel prices. A prolonged conflict could disrupt regional fertilizer production, especially if natural gas supply—critical for nitrogen fertilizer production—continues to be limited out of the Strait of Hormuz. Unless the war is resolved quickly, expect global fertilizer supplies to tighten further and put additional pressure on global food production and prices.

Communication during turbulent times such as these is crucial. Farmers may want to contact their crop input retailers to confirm they'll have the tonnes they need this spring and work together on any back-up plans which might include adjustments to crop mix, fertilizer rates and target yields. Early discussions with credit providers may be necessary as well should the need arise as seeding approaches.



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Teresa Van Raay begins third term with Ontario Federation of Agriculture

DAN ROLPH

Editor

Teresa Van Raay is looking ahead to three more years of advocacy on behalf of the province's farmers.

Van Raay, a Dashwood native, was re-elected as an Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) director-at-large in November 2025, beginning her third three-year term with the organization.

Before she was first elected to serve in the OFA, Van Raay was a director with Ontario Pork for 14 years—an experience she described as eye-opening as she got to hear about the issues that farmers in the industry were facing.

"I realized how many more issues there are," she said. "When you look at taking on the diversity of concerns in all Ontario, it's daunting."

Van Raay said some of the most prominent issues facing farmers in Ontario include trade and land use, which she noted is vital to the future of growing food in Canada.

"Once land is asphalted or cemented over, you're not going to grow too much," she said. "Getting the word out about how important it is for Canadians to grow our own food, that's one of my biggest goals."

"The decisions made today affect our futures, and our next generation of farmers," she added.

When asked why she decided to seek a third term with the federation, Van Raay was clear that there's still work to do when it comes to advocating on behalf of Ontario's farmers.

"We're not done yet," she said. "It's a big portfolio, but the people in our industry who are elected to do this, all the ones who I've met, are in the positions for the right reasons. They want to make it better for their industry and for the next generations, all because we understand the importance of growing food."

Van Raay said she's taking many lessons from her time as director-at-large so far as she looks ahead to at least three more years of representing farmers. She said networking remains one of the most vital parts of

the work.

"One of the things that I love to do is put the right people together," she said. "That can make a difference."

Stepping outside the "agricultural bubble" is also important when speaking about issues facing farmers throughout Ontario, according to Van Raay, particularly with those not in the industry who live busy lives and may not be aware of those issues until they start seeing empty grocery store shelves.

"We are such a small population that we're not getting the news out there," she said. "If there comes a time that there's a shortage, then people are going to stand up and be aware. But it might be too late if we haven't realized the importance of food security in Canada."

Van Raay said the upcoming municipal elections scheduled for later this year are an important issue that has her attention. With OFA regularly organizing all-candidates meetings for elections, she said it's important to present the correct questions to those who could be making decisions in council chambers in the future, ensuring they understand their communities, particularly when it comes to land use.

"We don't want to be collateral damage because no one's thought about how a decision might affect the farmer," she said.

Ontario's recent announcement about the amalgamation of conservation authorities also has Van Raay's attention. Under the government's plan, the province's 36 authorities will be consolidated into nine, removing representation from lower-tier municipalities.

"That's a big deal," she said. "One of the things we were really pushing with OFA is to have agricultural representatives."

"From what we did see, that's not there. That's very important to our communities."

A topic that has been getting more attention, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has been mental health in the agricultural community—an issue that Van Raay said is close to her heart.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Teresa Van Raay was re-elected as an Ontario Federation of Agriculture director-at-large in November 2025, starting another three-year term of advocating for Ontario's farmers

"It's just become okay in the last seven or eight years to talk about it at the farm level," she said. "When a farmer's having a bad day, you just can't take a week off. The pigs still have to be fed, or the crops still have to get planted."

Speaking to farmers who may be struggling with mental health, Van Raay said Ontario's Farmer Wellness Initiative and the Guardian Network are programs worth highlighting. The Farmer Wellness Initiative provides mental health counselling to Ontario's farmers, farm families and employees at no cost.

The Guardian Network is a program driven by volunteers who are trained to identify those struggling with their mental health in the agricultural community, and Van Raay said she'd personally completed the training to become a guardian in the network.

"It's a really good program," Van Raay said. "The more we talk about it, the more it's okay to talk about it."

With such a wide range of issues needing attention, Van Raay said OFA's supporting staff have made the expansive task manageable.

"It's a great team, and a really diversified team," she said.

With at least another three years ahead of her where she'll be advocating for Ontario's farmers, Van Raay said it's her love for her home that will keep her going.

"It's so important to have strong rural communities," she said. "I love where I live. I love my Ontario. But we can't keep coasting and think that somebody else is going to take up the baton."

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Local maple syrup producers rebound after shaky start to season



(DIANNE BRANDON PHOTO)

A maple syrup season filled with highs and lows hasn't held producers back from a successful harvest. Tom and Cathy Genoch of Bayfield Maple stand with their four children, Joe, Alice, Charlotte and Seb.



(SAMANTHA LAWSON PHOTO)

Steven Hern of Hern Line Heritage Maple Products works his sugar bush near Exeter.

SAMANTHA LAWSON

Examiner Reporter

Local maple syrup farms are ending the season on a high note despite inconsistent and unpredictable weather at the beginning of March.

Recent warm weather has caused the sap to flow, and temperatures dipping below freezing at night create the perfect atmosphere within the tree.

"That's kind of what you want, but it needs to freeze — that's important. If it doesn't freeze then that's the killer," said Steven Hern of Hern Line Heritage Maple Products.

"During the season, you can go two or three days with the warm, and then it needs to freeze and the tree kind of resets and brings up more sap again."

Hern lives on a century farm outside

of Exeter and has made use of a wood lot on the property to make maple syrup for the past five years. He said he taps four hundred trees on the 12-acre woodlot in mid-February to mark the beginning of the maple syrup season.

Hern said the trees haven't let him down this year.

"So far so good," he said. "We're right on track I think to make a good crop so, can't complain at all."

"I've only been doing it for five years, I haven't seen a bad season, really. I'm a bit of a novice that way, as far as experience goes and long-term stuff."

Hern Line Heritage Maple Products aims to produce 1.5 litres of maple syrup per tap. And for 400 tapped trees, that adds up to a total yield of 600 litres of syrup.

Hern said they have produced over 300

litres as of mid-March.

"I think, with the way the weather looks, we'll get a few runs yet," Hern said.

Over at Bayfield Maple, with a larger production established, they're looking at a yield of roughly 2,650 litres for the season.

Owner Tom Genoch said his bush on Pavillion Road has about 2,800 taps. The production trucks in sap from an additional 1,000 taps on a property owned by Genoch's mother-in-law, Dianne Brandon, on the north side of Bayfield.

Brandon said they had an uncertain start to the season but still expect to get a good crop.

"We were really worried because it got quite warm, but it was early enough in the season that the trees didn't start to bud," Brandon said.

Brandon is a long-seasoned syrup producer, having made maple syrup with her husband Brian for the past 21 years.

The business has stayed within the family with Brandon's daughter, Cathy, and her husband, Tom, now carrying on the sweet tradition.

Bayfield Maple stocks their product on the shelves of numerous local businesses, including Shop Bike Coffee, and sells wholesale to Cait's Cafe in Goderich to be used in the cafe's food and drinks.

Whether it's large-scale or small-scale, making maple syrup has its ups and downs and remains entirely dependent on the weather.

In the end, a few weather hiccups weren't enough to sour the season. Thanks to a timely turn, local producers are set to enjoy a sweet spring harvest.

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Gateway CERH receives \$2,700 donation from Huron Perth Chicken Farmers

EXETER EXAMINER STAFF

Staff Contribution

The Huron Perth Chicken Farmers visited the Gateway Centre of Excellence in Rural Health (CERH) office Feb. 20 to present a \$2,700 donation in support of the Farmers' Safety and Well-Being program.

According to a press release from Gateway, the donation will directly support the organization's

initiatives aimed at promoting the health, safety and well-being of farmers and agricultural workers across Huron, Perth, Bruce and Grey counties.

Gateway CERH said it sincerely appreciates the generosity of the Huron Perth Chicken Farmers as they have been a generous donor for years. Their

support plays a vital role in advancing initiatives to improve the overall well-being of residents throughout our communities.

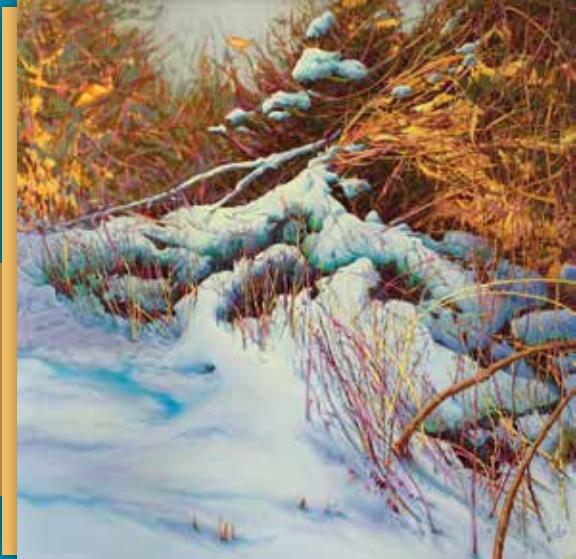
For more information about Gateway CERH and its Farmer's Safety and Well-Being Program initiatives, visit gatewayruralhealth.ca/shed-talks.



(PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY GATEWAY CERH)

From left are Gateway CERH research assistant Nyden Greenfield, Gateway CERH board chair Dan Stringer and Jessica Kuipers and Kyle Van Wyk of Huron Perth Chicken Farmers.

2025 Grand Prize Winner, Colette Begg "Undercover"



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Breaking barriers: Women in Canadian agriculture

FARM CREDIT CANADA

Contribution

Women play a critical role in Canadian agriculture but also face significant participation barriers.

Lack of resources and lack of recognition lead to under-representation among farm operators and in leadership roles within agriculture businesses and organizations. The growing skills gap across the agriculture sector makes it imperative to grow gender equity and lift women's participation in all aspects of farming.

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) estimates that achieving revenue equity—with female farm operators earning on average revenues in line with male farm operators—would add an additional \$5 billion to agriculture's GDP contribution. Achieving gender parity in the number of farm operators would magnify these economic benefits.

Recognizing the existing contributions of women could attract more women to the industry, which itself is a function of elevating the status of women's contributions equal to men's. FCC estimates that almost 88,000 additional female farm operators will need to be counted to achieve gender parity by 2026, 75 per cent are already farming but unrecognized as operators, and 25 per cent of which will need to be new entrants.

In the 30-year period spanning 1991 to 2021, the percentage of female farm operators in Canada increased from 25.7 per cent to 30.4 per cent. This upward trend is expected to continue, with the proportion of female farm operators expected to reach 31.1 per cent in 2026.

While encouraging, it's important to note that this trend is largely explained by men leaving the industry, not by more women joining. Farm consolidations and an aging farm population have reduced the total number of farm operators across Canada over time, with the number of men falling faster than the number of women.

While the proportion of women farmers has been steadily on the rise, the actual number of women in farming has not been growing by much. In fact, between 2016 and 2021 the number of female farm operators grew for the first time since 1991, but only by 2.5 per cent—translating to less than 2,000 additional farm operators. Women are also still less likely than men to be the sole decision-maker on the farm.

Female farm operators face very different economic circumstances than male farm operators. Female operators tend to have smaller operations and lower farm incomes. The median farm operating revenue bracket is the same for both men and women at \$50,000 to \$99,999. But approximately 58.6 per cent of female farm operators work on farms that reported less than \$100,000 in revenues, compared to 51.1 per cent of male farm operators, based on the most recent census data from 2021. Conversely, only 17.9 per cent of female farm op-

erators were

employed on farms with revenues of \$500,000 or more, compared to 21.9 per cent of their male counterparts. Women have gained some ground in recent years in high value markets for products like beef, poultry and eggs. Men continue to dominate the grains and oilseeds market.

In the fall of 2024, FCC interviewed women working in Canada's agriculture sector to learn about their experiences. Overall, these producers felt that things are slowly changing for the better. Yet women still face barriers to full participation in farming.

The public still expects farmers to be male. Stereotypically, in many farm families the man is labelled as the farmer, while the woman is labelled a farm wife. Girls growing up in farm families may not feel encouraged from participating in the more operational aspects of farming.

This early socialization can shape how women perceive their roles on the farm, and their confidence in engaging in all aspects of farming as adults. Women also tend to be expected to take on more household and childrearing responsibilities and often provide economic stability for their families through off-farm employment, making it more difficult to engage in production work.

Women reported that they often feel like they must prove that they are as knowledgeable, skilled and capable as their male counterparts, and often feel judged to be less competent because of their gender. And that non-production roles dominated by women like accountant, or finance manager are often deemed not as important as operational roles that tend to be male dominated.

Men are more likely to inherit the farm over women, as tradition dictates that these resources be passed from fathers to sons. Women are often excluded from succession planning, and in large part are still expected to marry into farm families if they want to participate in farming.

Numerous aspects of farming were not designed with women in mind. For example, most farm equipment has been tailored to the male physique, and these design limitations can make it more difficult for women to engage in the physical side of farming.

Many women shared that their views on their own potential were shaped by what they saw represented as they grew up, which typically was men as decision makers on the farm, and women in supportive roles. A lack of representation of female leadership in agriculture can make it difficult for younger women to feel confident that they can take on leadership roles.

Women in farming are more isolated than their male counterparts and have less access to networking, mentorship and support. As agriculture continues to be a male-dominated industry, most executive and board positions within agriculture continue to be held by men.

Women generally have less access to a network of like-minded peers sharing similar struggles who they can lean on for support and advice and often have the experience of being the only woman in the room.

This can be both challenging and intimidating. Women also face barriers to attending in-person networking events, as they are often juggling childcare and off-farm work.

The labour needs of Canada's agriculture sector are changing.

In this era of digital agriculture and data-driven decision-making, there is a growing need for highly skilled farm labour. Reflecting this need, there has been an overall upward trend in educational attainment in the agriculture labour force in recent years with a declining number of workers having no formal qualifications, and an increasing number of workers with college and university degrees.

This trend is even more pronounced for women, who are more likely to be highly educated than their male counterparts. In 2021, nearly one-quarter of female farm operators possessed at least a bachelor's degree, compared to only 14.5 per cent of male farm operators.

The proportion of female farm operators without any formal education was only 9.3 per cent, notably lower than the 18.2 per cent observed among male farm operators.

The current gap in educational attainment between female and male farm operators is greatest for operators aged 30 to 39. Within this age cohort, 36 per cent of women have a university education, compared to only 17 per cent of men.

A high level of educational attainment makes it easier for women to take advantage of new tools and technologies of farming as they emerge. Many of these innovations are making it easier to overcome some of the physical and social barriers that women in agriculture have faced in the past.

A growing number of female farm operators are adopting new production technologies—things like automatic guidance steering and GIS. These tools can make it easier for women to achieve work-life balance. Women who are highly educated are also well positioned to be thought leaders and champions of the agriculture industry, playing a leadership role beyond the farm level.

Women working in agriculture also continue to demonstrate a strong entrepreneurial spirit, leveraging their skills and expertise to enhance the value of what they produce. Women have been driving the emerging trend of direct-to-consumer sales of farm goods, with farms run exclusively or jointly by female operators being much more likely to adopt this marketing strategy. There are also a growing number of women working on farms producing organic goods and using sustainable energy sources and technologies. Women are also carving out space for themselves in growing niche markets, like sheep and

goat production.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to achieve gender equity in Canadian agriculture. Currently the industry falls behind wholesale and retail, finance, education, health care and several other industries in terms of women's participation. Women in agriculture today are highly educated and driven, with strong business acumen. They are well equipped to foster

innovation and accelerate new methods, tools, and technologies on the farm. At a time when productivity growth in Canadian agriculture is stagnating, leveraging their skills and entrepreneurial spirit will reap significant economic benefits.

Here are some potential strategies to consider:

- Increase the visibility of women in agriculture. Recognizing the important work that women are already doing on farms and in boardrooms across Canada is critical.

- Enhance mentorship and networking opportunities. This will help to reduce isolation and build community for women navigating the agriculture and food space. Programs like AgriMentor, that pair new and established women farmers with experienced mentors, and events like Advancing Women Conferences, can foster useful connections for women, helping to address time and cost barriers women often face when engaging in networking. Virtual initiatives can also help to make networking more accessible. The National Women in Agriculture and Agri-Food Network project is one example of a growing network that connects women in farming through both in-person and virtual initiatives.

- Ensure that women have equal opportunity to take on leadership roles. This requires not only reducing gender bias in promotion and hiring, but also ensuring women are supported in stepping into leadership roles when the opportunity arises, through access to things like flexible work arrangements and childcare accommodations.

- Improve access to resources. Women have historically been excluded from succession planning and equal access to land and capital. Programs that support women in accessing the resources they need to start their farm businesses are essential moving forward. FCC's Women Entrepreneur Program is one example of this. A broader cultural shift toward including women in succession planning is also needed to break this inter-generational cycle of exclusion. We are slowly seeing progress in this area, with more women being involved in farm transition planning.

Embracing the strengths and potential of women in agriculture can unlock billions of dollars in economic benefits for the agriculture sector. Achieving gender equity can drive innovation, improve productivity, and foster sustainability, leading to a more resilient and prosperous agricultural industry.



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Ontario soybean farmers face price pressure as China shifts buying and Brazil ramps up production

AMANDA NELSON

Examiner Reporter

Ontario soybean farmers are watching global trade negotiations closely as uncertainty around exports — particularly to China — adds to price pressure in a market already facing strong global crop supplies.

Brazil is expected to have a record soybean harvest in 2026, a development that analysts say will weigh on prices worldwide.

“There’s forecast to be record production in Brazil, and when there’s strong production, that has downward pressure on price,” said Brian Innes, executive director of Soy Canada. “That’s the first thing to watch for prices in 2026. The second is what happens globally with geopolitics and tariffs.”

Innes said changes in trade relations between major economies — especially the United States and China — can have a direct impact on the prices Canadian farmers receive.

“Due to the Trump administration, tariffs on soybeans have changed,” he said. “One thing to watch for 2026 is how the situation between the U.S. and China evolves, and how the situation between Canada and China evolves. That can have an impact on price if tariffs change.”

More than 70 per cent of Ontario’s soybean crop is exported, with prices shaped by global demand, particularly from China. While China historically sourced much of its soybeans from the United States, it is increasingly turning



to Brazil due to generally lower prices.

The Canadian and U.S. soybean markets are also closely linked through cross-border trade and processing, which could impact prices for Canadian farmers.

“Products flow back and forth across the border,” said Innes. “For example, Ontario soybeans are shipped to Michigan, processed into soybean meal, and then shipped back into Ontario. Soybean meal and soybean oil trade back and forth across the border, and that’s why prices are very linked.”

Soybeans are priced on global benchmarks — particularly U.S. futures markets — meaning Canadian prices move in step with broader world trends.

“The price that Ontario farmers see is based on what conditions Canada faces when exporting to the world, including China,” said Innes. “In the past, the difference between Michigan and

Ontario was largely tied to exchange

rates, but now, with global trade disruptions, Canada and the U.S. face different tariffs and different market conditions.”

Despite growing competition from lower-cost producers, Innes said Ontario remains well positioned as a high-quality soybean supplier.

Ontario is a global leader in identity-preserved and food-grade soybeans, a niche market that allows farmers to compete on quality rather than volume alone.

“We’re living in a time of unprecedented global uncertainty, and if market conditions change for Canadian soybean exports, that will have an impact on price,” said Innes. “But Canadian soybeans have been flowing under strong export conditions for some time, and that has meant strong demand for Ontario soybeans.” Unlike 2022, when rising input costs were offset by strong commodity prices, 2026 is shaping up

very differently. Farm Credit Canada is estimating a 40 per cent increase in the cost of nitrogen would cut average Saskatchewan margins in half, from \$50 per acre to \$25 per acre for an average wheat and canola rotation. It would also lower average margins in Ontario from \$365 per acre to \$345 per acre for an average corn and soybean rotation. These margin estimates are provincial averages and exclude the cost of land which is much higher in Ontario than in Saskatchewan.

The margin estimates only account for the shock to the nitrogen price. They do not consider potential margin compression because of other fertilizer price increases, potential yield reduction (resulting from less fertilizer being used) or higher fuel prices. A prolonged conflict could disrupt regional fertilizer production, especially if natural gas supply—critical for nitrogen fertilizer production—continues to be limited out of the Strait of Hormuz. Unless the war is resolved quickly, expect global fertilizer supplies to tighten further and put additional pressure on global food production and prices.

Communication during turbulent times such as these is crucial. Farmers may want to contact their crop input retailers to confirm they’ll have the tonnes they need this spring and work together on any backup plans which might include adjustments to crop mix, fertilizer rates and target yields. Early discussions with credit providers may be necessary as well should the need arise as seeding approaches.

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