

2025- YEAR IN REVIEW

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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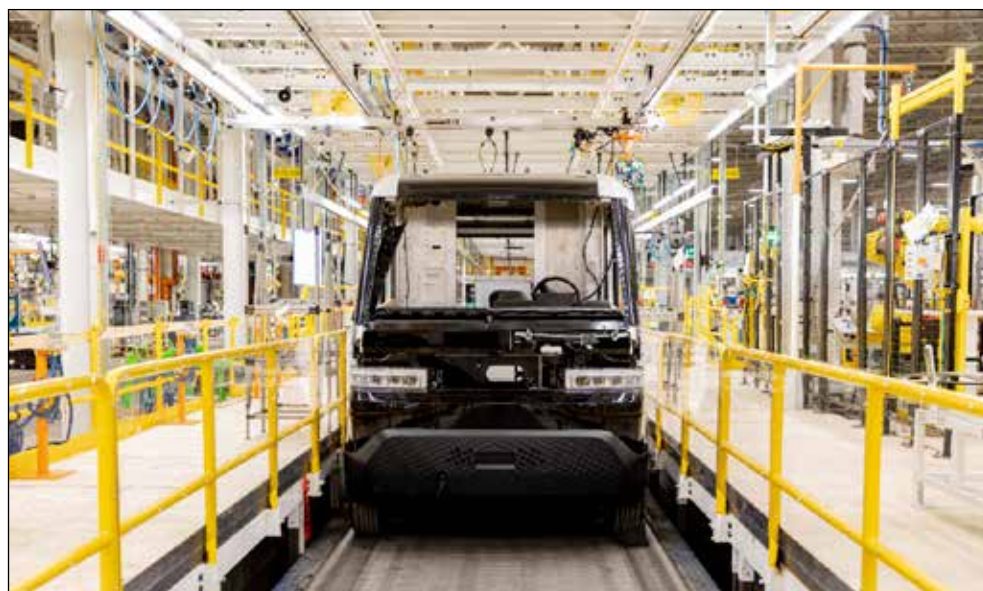
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YEAR IN REVIEW – FROM THE EDITOR



LEE GRIFFI

Editor

This is the Echo's second year in review edition, which is good on two fronts – the paper is still going strong, and I still have a job. The feedback my colleagues and I have received from you, our readers, has been heartwarming to say the least. My commitment to you is we will continue to bring you the news and information you need to stay informed of what's happening in your community. Could we do better, always. I have never been satisfied with the status quo throughout my career and I am not about to start now. The move to become a weekly newspaper is also on the table, so stay tuned. I moved to the Friendly City in February which has made it a bit easier to stay on top of things and I have enjoyed getting to know people, particularly some business and property owners in the downtown core. People have come back downtown after months of Streetscape construction, but as I look out of Crabby Joe's I see Phase 2 hasn't quite been completed. Stay tuned for a story in the new year.

I was not in favour of the project moving ahead in 2025, mainly because I think the city could have worked on other issues such as figuring out how to clean up the downtown. The amount of untagged garbage is absolutely unacceptable. Building owners need to be fined and, when possible, tenants as well. As for tagged garbage that is put out days before the Wednesday pickup day, there is a bylaw on the books that states no garbage will be placed on the curb until the sun goes down the night before. To my knowledge, this has never been enforced but it should be. Another issue is empty retail space with garbage strewn across storefronts. This is a terrible look for the downtown and owners need to be held accountable.

Council approved updates to two bylaws around maintenance standards for properties at its Dec. 11 meeting. The

changes provide clearer direction on maintenance requirements and make it easier for staff to enforce and address violations. Council identified the need to update these bylaws as part of their Strategic Plan reprioritization to help enhance the vibrancy of the downtown core by increasing standards for vacant properties. Let's just hope the bylaws are enforced. Outside of the core, the former homeless encampment on Stonex property in the woods beside its operation on Juliana Drive is an absolute disaster. A large encampment was cleared by the city after the company complained, but nothing has been cleaned up as of press time. Why not? My calls to Stonex have been ignored by management. One of my biggest disappointments in 2025 involves the \$16,000 faux skating rink rented by the BIA, or city, I still can't find out the truth on that one but I am not letting it go. The BIA claims the expense was never approved but it was paid out of its coffers. My job as a journalist is to find the truth and help hold people accountable, when necessary. I want to BIA to succeed but I believe the only way they can do that is to break all ties with the city, hire their own full-time manager and start over again. The city has too much influence and control over it and it needs to stop for it to succeed. The city has its own budget for Downtown Development Officer Kelly Baird, and the BIA has its own budget that comes directly from property owners. The two are seemingly mixed together right now, something that benefits no one. On a positive note, our Ingersoll coverage is improving with the addition of Kyrah Smith. She lives in the town and is all over the many events taking place there. We also have Jeff Tribe continuing with his fantastic sports coverage, Ron Yuzark at events in Woodstock, with Emily Stewart and Alex Hunt covering that arts beat, primarily. Our future looks bright and I welcome community members to reach to us with story ideas and letters to the editor. While I can't guarantee space in the Echo, I can tell you I will look at each and every one of them. Thank to our readers and feel free to provide us with feedback, both positive and negative. We are in this together. So, in closing, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah, Happy Kwanza, or whatever else you are celebrating this time of year. This is a time for all of us to reflect, regroup, and be thankful for our friends and family. I realize this paper will come out after the World Junior Hockey Championships are over, but my New Year's wish is that we win gold. We can't come fifth again, can we?

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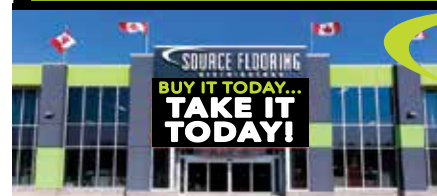
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2025 MONTH BY MONTH

An overview of the stories from Woodstock, Ingersoll and area in 2025

January

A sit-down with the mayor of Woodstock

It is a decades-old tradition for politicians to sit down with journalists for year-end fireside chats to talk about the year that was and the year that is to be. While there isn't a fireplace in Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione's office at city hall on Dundas Street, he was gracious enough to spend some time with the

Echo. In part one of a two-part series, much of the conversation centred around homelessness and the issues of mental health and drug addiction, which all go hand-in-hand and continue to be the single most talked about file in the city. The Woodstock Hospital recently made an application to the provincial government to bring a Homeless and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hub (HART) to the city.

Woodstock was not named in the first round of announcements, but Acchione is confident the second round will provide good news. "The application process has gone well. No questions were

asked by the government that I am aware of, so that is always a great indicator. The Woodstock Hospital has been fantastic in going ahead and making sure the process has been seamless." Part two looked ahead to 2025 and upcoming developments including Streetscape and a new industrial park the city hopes will take off in the near future. At a recent Oxford County Council meeting, a motion was passed to amend the county's official plan, meaning 89 acres of land can be developed into an industrial subdivision not far from the Toyota assembly plant. The land is mainly agricultural with some woodland and wetland areas.

Front page photos (Clockwise from top left):

1. HART Hub – The former hydro building in downtown Woodstock was purchased by the Woodstock Hospital and is under construction to eventually house the city's HART Hub (Lee Griffi photo).
2. Streetscape – Phases 1 and 2 of Woodstock's Streetscape project were completed in 2025. Any plans for further phases have been shelved until at least 2027 (Lee Griffi photo).
3. CAMI – Workers at the GM plant in Ingersoll faced layoffs followed by a complete shutdown of production. No word yet on what future, if any, Unifor workers have at the facility (Contributed photo).
4. Homeless Encampment – Homeless encampments on public and private property continued to be a problem for Woodstock in 2025 (Lee Griffi photo).

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Feeding Oxford County just got a little easier



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Community stakeholders gather on Jan. 30 to unveil a brand-new van that will help Stronger Together Ingersoll Community Harvest (STICH) to assist with Food Rescue Feeding Oxford's work in moving perfectly good food, that once would have been tossed in the bin, to other organizations that provide it to the less fortunate. The van was paid for with a \$25,000 grant from the Farm Credit Corporation.

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

The property is on the north side of Highway 2 and the east side of Highway 401 and is beside 136 hectares of city-owned land. Acchione said he declared a conflict of interest on the issue as the property is right behind his home. He added he wasn't involved in any conversations or voting but could talk about factual information. "The city property has been owned since maybe 2008. It all needs to be serviced from underneath the 401, so it's quite the undertaking to get it to that point, but we are getting there. The city is looking to make a deal with the province to allow the services to get through."

Acchione added the sky is the limit as to what could come on that land. The next question is, can the city support more housing along with the industrial opportunities. The mayor has made it abundantly clear the city is looking to acquire land at its northern end for further development, land in East Zorra-Tavistock Township. EZT has said it would enter into a conversation with the city once its Secondary Plan has been completed, but that has been delayed by the province. Acchione said he would like to work with the neighbour to the north.

Town of Ingersoll launched Downtown Enhancement Plan

The Town of Ingersoll launched a Downtown Enhancement Plan to "strengthen the future of the downtown core." A news release explained the ambitious plan is designed to transform downtown Ingersoll into a vibrant, inclusive, and economically resilient district. "With a focus on fostering sustainable growth, attracting new businesses, and creating a dynamic environment for both residents and visitors, the Downtown Enhancement Plan will serve as a strategic blueprint for the future of the town's core." The Downtown Enhancement Plan, set to be completed by April 2025, will include a comprehensive community engagement process. This will ensure that Ingersoll residents have a voice in shaping the future of their town. This input will help guide the development of a plan that aligns with the community's wants and needs. The town has selected Urban Insights, in partnership with Durrell Communications, as the lead consultants in the plan's development. "We recognize the immense potential of downtown Ingersoll and are excited to collaborate with our community on a plan that will strengthen our historic core while addressing the needs of today's and tomorrow's residents and businesses. This is an exciting opportunity to enhance our downtown as a place that reflects both its rich history and its dynamic future," said Director of Economic Development and Tourism, Curtis Tighe. The move was identified in the town's strategic plan in 2022, more specifically, the goal to increase commercial activity. Tighe said many new businesses have opened in the core recently, but retailers are facing new challenges. Area fire departments received provincial cancer prevention funding. The Ontario government invested \$30 million

Big Wreck headlined 2025 version of Cowapolooza



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The City of Woodstock announced Canadian rock band Big Wreck as the headliner for the 22nd version of Cowapolooza

over three years to provide 374 municipal fire departments with funding to support cancer prevention initiatives. Locally, Woodstock received just under \$16,500 and Ingersoll was given just over \$8,000. The funding through the Fire Protection Grant was used to purchase equipment and make infrastructure upgrades to help reduce the long-term effects of exposure to fire-related contaminants and chemicals. Woodstock Fire Chief Jeff Slager explained it is an exciting time in the fire service and emergency management sectors. "We are seeing an unprecedented number of grant application opportunities which is great, and this is an excellent one from the province of Ontario. The department has added 11 new firefighters in the last two years.

recipient of the funds to be able to put towards equipment that will be effective for our firefighters." Slager said this particular grant proposal asked for a wish list of items that could be used to boost cancer prevention, something he has been advocating for a long time. "We have had growth in our department over the last few years as far as staffing goes, and every firefighter has two sets of bunker gear. If a set becomes contaminated at a fire or any type of scene where a carcinogen can get on the bunker gear, our firefighters can remove it." The department uses what are called extractors or washing machines and dryers, so firefighters are able to have a quick turnaround.

Two Oxford residents bilked out of nearly \$250,000

Police investigated two more frauds in the county, much to the chagrin of at

least one member of the Oxford OPP. On Jan. 13, police were notified of a fraud involving Bitcoin that resulted in the loss of over \$200,000 for a resident of Zorra Township. The same day, police were told about another fraud involving Apple Pay cards that resulted in the loss of approximately \$40,000 for a resident of Tillsonburg. The two frauds are not connected but they both involve fraudsters asking for payment through abnormal means, such as Bitcoin and gift cards, and communicating over the phone or through social media platforms.

Community Safety and Media Relations Constable Randi Crawford said people need to think these situations through before sending payment.

Regardless of what people are calling you for, if someone is asking you for an abnormal form of payment, it is likely a scam. You need to take some time and explore it more." It is rare for someone to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars, but it doesn't make Crawford feel any better about the crimes. "My heart absolutely breaks for any victim, and in this particular situation, I don't know all the details, but it is likely that person's life savings or at least a large part of it." She added scammers come up with believable excuses about why a payment didn't go through or they have what appears to be a legitimate story about an investment.

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2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Former Woodstock chief of police passes away

Retired Chief of Police Joseph Opthof began his career in 1967 and worked his way up through the ranks, serving the community for almost 33 years. From 1997 to 1999, he was the Chief of Police, leading both the Oxford Community Police and Woodstock Police with dedication and respect. Chief Opthof will always be remembered for his leadership and the positive impact he had on the community “He was not just a Chief, but a mentor and a role model to many, especially the officers who worked alongside him. His legacy of service, integrity, and care will never be forgotten,” said a statement from police.

Ingersoll service club committing to helping community members with social challenges

The Rotary Club of Ingersoll announced a long-term agreement with GM Canada to take over the former CAMI gymnasium, located adjacent to the Seniors Centre in the town. “Our vision for this building is to transform it into a community warehouse dedicated to supporting local user groups who assist our fellow citizens with food insecurity and other social challenges,” explained club president Adam Funnell.

Revitalization of the building started in the spring. “Together, we can create a space that supports and strengthens our community,” exclaimed Funnell. Ted Comiskey is the former mayor of Ingersoll and a past president of the service club. Funnell said the idea was Comiskey’s and came out of a need for Inter-Church to have a location to put its Christmas hampers together to help those in need during the holidays.

“There was the CAMI gymnasium adjacent to where we have our Rotary meetings and (Comiskey) began knocking on doors with GM and got in touch with the folks in Oshawa. We, along with another past president, Fred Freeman, got together to talk about how we could make it work.”

Woodstock approved for HART Hub

A HART Hub is coming to downtown Woodstock. The Oxford Ontario Health Team (OHT), Woodstock Hospital, and other community partners announced the Ministry of Health has officially approved a joint Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) application. The Hub, when operational, will support those facing homelessness, mental health, and addictions in Woodstock and Oxford County. The former PUC building at 16 Graham Street has been purchased by the hospital and renovations will begin as soon as possible.

“Woodstock Hospital is proud to collaborate with our Oxford OHT partners to bring the vision of the HART Hub to life,” said Perry Lang, President and CEO at the hospital. “We look forward to working with our community partners to offer comprehensive wraparound care to support our most complex populations through their treatment and recovery journey.”

The building was purchased for \$1.6 million out of hospital reserves. Lang admitted there is a fair bit of work that needs to be done at the site before it can become operational and there is no opening date set.

Zorra signs deal with developer for massive housing project

The housing landscape in Thamesford could soon look much different after an agreement between Zorra Township and a Burlington-based developer. “Zorra Township Council approved in principle a development application that would see over 1,000 residential units developed on the former Maple Leaf Foods (MLF) lands in Thamesford. This will be the largest development in Zorra’s history and fulfill council’s vision for this brownfield project,” said a press release from the township. Ward 2 Councillor Katie Grigg said the community needs to provide alter natives for first-time home buyers and those wishing to downsize but continue living in Thames-

ford. “This development will meet the community’s needs for years to come. It is significant, not only in the population increase it will eventually reflect once built out, but also in the increased access to goods, services and amenities it will facilitate through the mixed-use zoning, as well as the viability for businesses to thrive.” In terms of what commercial development may come along with the new homes, Grigg said there is one type of business everyone wants.

“I’ve heard there are efforts from the developer to get a grocery store in town, which is something I know we are all hoping for. I would love to see some sort of food sales, whether it be a grocery store or farmers market-style business.” She added the additional population could present a viable business case for an investor.

February

CAMI lays off nearly 80 workers

In what would be a sign of things to come, 79 junior team members at the CAMI Automotive plant in Ingersoll were given layoff notices and the union was far from impressed. A letter sent to all employees by Unifor Local 88 Chair Mike Van Boekel made the union’s position quite clear. “It is shocking and brutal how this is being handled. I am hearing this is a Detroit call - we have too many members for two shifts and instead of supplying proper notice and following the law of the federal government, (General Motors) are approaching junior members and notifying them they are laid off and asking them to leave the plant.”

Sources told the Echo management alerted the employees in person Monday morning. Afternoon shift workers were given the news by telephone and were told not to come in for their shift. Laid off workers will be getting 80 per cent

pay for two weeks. “Please know that we are deeply sorry for the members and their families this impacts,” added Van Boekel.

“We do not agree on how this is being done. You don’t walk up to people working on the lines and lay them off and tell them to go home. This is devastating news. Many of these members have spouses and families also working here and the ripple effect is terrible,” he explained. The union also believed federal labour laws were broken.

Feeding Oxford County just got a little easier

As Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie pointed out, Oxford County’s motto is “Growing stronger, together.” The recent purchase of a van to help a few community organizations make sure everyone has access to food is just one example of that sentiment manifesting.

“The other thing that Oxford County is known for is we have great farmland, and we grow great stuff,” Petrie said during a brisk afternoon where the van was officially unveiled. “Our farmers feed our cities and at the end of the day, there’s no reason in this area, the country, that anybody should go hungry.” He added programs that share food and make sure it’s getting to people – and the people making sure it’s getting to people who need it – are fundamental to what our community is about. On Jan. 30, Petrie joined a number of community stakeholders for the unveiling. In November of last year, Farm Credit Corporation (FCC) announced a \$25,000 grant to Stronger Together Ingersoll Community Harvest (STICH) to help with Food Rescue Feeding Oxford’s work in moving perfectly good food that once would have been tossed in the bin to other organizations that provide it to the less fortunate.

Two assaults at Woodstock high

2025 Oxford Stewardship Award goes to Gord and Lisa Ross Paramedic Services



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Left to right are April Nix, Oxford County; Rob Davies, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority; award winners Lisa Ross and Gord Ross; and Cher Sprague, Stewardship Oxford.

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2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Community Futures celebrates Women's Day early



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Alisha Wilson of Transitions Equine Assisted Encompassing Wellness, Kirsten Young of Heart of Oxford, Carole Eriksson of Oxford Women in Networking, and Jennifer Peace-Hall of Finkle Street Tap and Grill were the panelists for Community Futures (CF) Oxford's International Women's Day celebration at the Elm Hurst Inn and Spa on Feb. 25.

schools

A pair of disturbing assaults at two Woodstock high schools led to charges against two teenagers and serious injuries for two victims.

A young offender has been charged with assault as the result of an incident at

Huron Park Secondary School where a student was attacked and received serious but non-life-threatening injuries. "There was an attack with a pipe and a charge of aggregated assault with a weapon laid. The suspect is in custody but I can't release the name as it is protected under the Youth Criminal Justice Act," explained Woodstock Police Detective Jamie Taylor.

Sources tell the Echo the assault was a case of student-on-student and the injuries were very serious and extensive. A video of the incident was also circulating on social media. The Criminal Code of Canada describes aggravated assault as "someone who wounds, maims, disfigures or endangers the life of the complainant. Everyone who commits an aggravated assault is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding four years."

Oxford County digging out from snowfall not seen in years

The most consistent volatile winter weather seen in years led to most of us staying home. At the same time, it meant long hours for area municipal staff who were plowing streets and roadways despite not being able to keep up at times.

While Woodstock and Ingersoll did not declare Significant Weather Events like the rural townships in Oxford, staff were working hard to keep up with dozens of centimetres of snow over a short period. Alex Laros is Acting Director of Public Works in Woodstock and said this is the most snow he has seen in 20 years in the public works business. He added it was a challenge for the city to keep up. "For my guys, the two biggest conflicts they ran into were parked cars in their way and getting close to their hours of service. They can only operate the heavy equipment for 70 hours in a full week then they need to take time off."

There are always complaints when we have such large snow events that pile up the snow for several days at a time. Laros explained he was extremely pleased with how the city dealt with it.

London developer unhappy with Woodstock council rejecting development plans

Woodstock City Council turned down a development known as 401 Lakeview Drive in the north end of the city, but the developer is vowing to use any and all available tools to see the proposal built.

"Farhi Holdings Corporation (FHC) submitted a redevelopment proposal at our site after over three years of technical studies, consultation with staff and neighbours and support from councillors and provincial partners who wished to see increased density on this site," explained Jim Bujouves, President of the London-based company.

"Understanding the close proximity to

Eleventh annual Canadian Dairy Expo had another successful year



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Cows line up in the Cow Coliseum during the 2024 Canadian Dairy XPO (CDX) last year. This year, founder Jordon Underhill expected to crack 18,000 guests coming through its doors.

an existing neighbourhood, FHC made several changes in a resubmitted application that among other things: added underground parking for the mid-rise buildings, increased the park space, increased the tree protection area, had independent peer reviews of our traffic study and rearticulated density to County Road 59 away from the lower density units. These changes not only met the demands of the opposing neighbours at the time but also received full staff support and led to their recommendation to approve our development." He said his company finds this decision by council hypocritical as the city is currently investigating annexing valuable farmland from East Zorra-Tavistock, a move only delayed because EZT's Secondary Plan approval has not been approved by the province. "Their own studies show they are out of developable land. We believe that council cannot deny intensification projects supported by their own staff while looking to expand their municipal boundaries.

We are hopeful that our application will receive Oxford County Council support and if not, FHC is prepared to use the full rights afforded to us by the Planning Act to ensure Provincial housing targets are met."

Former Norwich retirement home worker charged with fraud

The Oxford Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police arrested and charged a Tillsonburg woman after a fraud investigation that stemmed from multiple incidents at a retirement home in Norwich. Last August, police were

notified of a possible fraud. The initial investigation determined there were several victims with an estimated loss of over \$50,000. Police say the amount of missing money has now reached more than \$190,000. The investigation is ongoing. A 50-year-old woman has been charged with one count of fraud over \$5,000. The name of the charged party is not being released due to concerns for their well-being, according to police. The London Free Press recently talked to the woman who was charged. She told the newspaper she feared for her safety. "I've been getting threatening messages, and my family's been getting threatening messages. People want to see me destroyed and want to hurt me." While police have not released her name, the investigation centred around Julie Vitias who was employed at the home before being let go by owner ship once details of the investigation emerged. The Echo has reached out to Vitias several times but has not received a response. "I'm glad it is kind of over with and I am glad for the families. They know who is really responsible for everything," said a former coworker who did not want her identity revealed and is being called Jane. Despite just one count of fraud, Jane said she was told the penalty would be the same if multiple fraud charges were laid. "I just hope she gets over a year because if she gets a year less a day she only has to go to a local jail. If she gets over a year she goes to prison."

Community Futures Oxford celebrates International Women's Day a little early

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Carole Eriksson of Oxford Women in Networking told the audience at Community Futures Oxford's annual International Women's Day event that success doesn't need to be overnight – it could be achieved one day at a time. "We work for a one per cent improvement a week, and if you can improve one per cent a week it's more than 50 per cent a year," Eriksson shared. "Even if you do one per cent a month, how many people improve more than 12 per cent a year?"

On Feb. 25, Eriksson joined Alisha Wilson of Transitions Equine Assisted Encompassing Wellness, Kirsten Young of Heart of Oxford, and Jennifer Peace-Hall of Finkle Street Tap and Grill at the Elm Hurst Inn and Spa in Ingersoll to explore collaboration, partnerships, and the manywomen-owned businesses of the county in a panel discussion. All four women are business-leaders in the region and spoke about the success the supportive ecosystem that they and other leaders foster in Oxford County has had. Peace-Hall, for instance, came to the panel with her perspective on the hospitality industry. Once, competing restaurants were just that, competition, but now the industry is more supportive.

March

County raises the cost of a garbage bag to \$3

Oxford County Council turned down a one-dollar hike in the cost of a bag of garbage at a previous regular meeting, but it was back on an agenda thanks to a motion by South-West Oxford Mayor, David Mayberry. Council voted to up the cost of putting a bag of garbage on the curb to \$3, representing a 50 per cent increase. The recorded vote wound up 7 to 3 and will come into effect Jan. 1, 2026. The motion to hike the fee in May was defeated by a 5-5 vote but two members of council changed their minds this time around. Phil Schaefer, Bernia Martin, Katie Grigg, Brian Petrie, Mark Peterson, Mayberry and Jim Palmer voted in favour of the motion. Jerry Achione, Connie Lauder and Chris Parker opposed it. Lauder replaced Deb Tait while Paker sat in for Tillsonburg Mayor Deb Gilvesy. Grigg took the spot normally held by Warden Marcus Ryan. All three regular councillors were away for the March break. Petrie, who also voted for the increase at the last meeting, said his decision comes down to the math involved. "It is going to have to be paid for one way or another... We still need the same amount of revenue, regardless. The big increase here is in our waste collection contracts. Not one person I talked to said they didn't want their garbage picked up." Coun. Lauder explained her no vote came as a result of several factors, including the threat of tariffs from the US president, which could add to the financial pressures people face today.

Woodstock hockey coach arrested following game ejection

Woodstock Police charged a 42-year-old city man af-

Maggie's Wake ready to sing and dance for early St. Patrick's Day celebration



(TARA DUNPHY PHOTO)

Southwestern Ontario Celtic band Maggie's Wake sang and danced with their 'most lovely friends and fans' at Theatre Woodstock on March 14.

ter an ugly scene at a Woodstock arena.

On Saturday, March 1 at about 8:43 a.m., an incident during a youth hockey game led to the arrest of a 42-year-old coach from Woodstock. Police say the disturbance occurred during a 7-year-old's hockey game when the coach argued a call with the referee, challenging a referee's decision. The confrontation escalated when the coach began shouting profanities at the official and the game was stopped. The referee ejected the coach from the game and police said he continued to cause a scene by shouting and refusing to leave the premises. An arena staff member, employed by the city, then called police for assistance to have the male removed from the facility. Police arrived and escorted the coach to his dressing room to gather his personal belongings.

"However, the situation escalated further as the coach continued to be disruptive, yelling at spectators. Police attempted to escort the male out, when he became violent. In a violent outburst, he physically resisted officers and began swinging his arms, leading to a confrontation. Two officers were forced to physically restrain the coach after he assaulted them," said a news release. The coach was arrested for causing a disturbance, two counts of assaulting police and resisting arrest.

Police arrest fourth suspect after Woodstock assault and robbery

On Feb. 27, Woodstock Police investigated a robbery at a residence on Pavey Street in Woodstock. Three suspects were arrested shortly after the incident took place and a warrant was issued for the fourth. On March 5, members of the Provincial Repeat Offender Parole Enforcement (ROPE) squad located and arrested the individual at large in Burlington. Police say a search of the woman turned up a significant quantity of suspected Fentanyl and Methamphetamine with an estimated street value of over \$9,400. The 38-year-old female from Woodstock has been charged with aggravated assault, forcible confinement, armed robbery and two counts of possession of a Schedule 1 substance for the purpose of trafficking. She is being held in custody for a bail hearing.

Police attended the home at 751 Pavey Street following reports of a male who had been assaulted and robbed of personal items. The victim sustained serious but non-life-threatening injuries and was initially transported to Woodstock Hospital but was transferred to London Hospital for further treatment. At this time, it is believed that the victim was targeted. As a precautionary measure, College Avenue Secondary School and Oliver Stephens Elementary schools were placed on a hold and secure status for the afternoon.

What is going on in Woodstock high schools



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The Echo ran a story on two disturbing assaults at Woodstock high schools earlier in the year, including one where a victim suffered severe injuries as a result of a beating from a steel pipe at Huron Park. Another incident occurred at College Avenue. In both instances, videos were posted on social media as students recorded the violence. Those incidents led to a two-part series where we were able to talk to a student about what really goes on in our high schools. For her safety, we will call her Jane, and we will not reveal the name of the school she attends. “It’s been pretty good overall,” she started with. “But my very first day there, I was walking with one of my friends who went to a different elementary school, and she was getting dirty looks from some random girl. She asked my friend if she wanted to go outside and fight. This was the first day of school.” Jane added nothing happened and the girls walked away from each other, but she knew of many fights, both on and off school property.

“I have seen lots of videos of them. Two girls were fighting (just off school property) one day, and then two other girls were there the next day. The one girl was at school for a week after she had the fight with a black eye and then she was expelled.” This reporter was provided with a video of an assault in a hallway at one of the city’s high schools, and it was disturbing to say the least. It showed many students watching, and some videotaping. There was also a teacher present but no one stepped in to help the victim as he lay motionless on the floor. It has been several years since the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) has had an official policing program in its high schools. The desire to bring one back, at least in Woodstock, has fallen on deaf ears at the board level. Woodstock Police investigated 47 violent incidents in city schools in 2024, a jump of 11 over 2023 and 24 more than 2022. Deputy police chief Nick Novacich said those numbers are concerning. “The fact there has been a steady increase over the last few years is worrisome, and that’s just what is being reported. I have a feeling schools are dealing with some incidents internally and for some reason we aren’t being notified.” Novacich said parents often do not want to pursue criminal charges, even when their child is a victim, but police would at least have a record of the occurrence. At the same time, he explained the level of violence during two recent and serious assaults

(outlined in part 1 of this series) raises a huge red flag, along with the crowd of students watching and videotaping. “It’s alarming that so many people just stand around watching and don’t intervene.

Are some of these things staged for social media purposes, are they sometimes willing combatants?” The deputy chief explained he recently met with the city’s high school principals and delivered a firm message. “There’s got to be zero tolerance here. They have to be safe places.”

Vehicle theft on the rise in Woodstock - Police offering prevention tips

Police warned the public after an increased number of vehicle thefts. “In 2024 we had 118 stolen vehicles so far in 2025, we have 18 confirmed stolen and seven attempted thefts,” according to Inspector Jamie Taylor, who added the up take in thefts isn’t just a Woodstock problem.

“It’s much larger than that. There are communities across the province and country going through this. When you mention Woodstock’s proximity to the 401 and 403, it certainly adds a layer of complexity with criminals being able to come in and out with quick access, it creates an issue.” Police say several high-end vehicles have been stolen with the help of relay and reprogramming technology in the past month. Reports indicate newer model pick up trucks and sport utility vehicles with keyless entry and push start technology are top of mind for the bad guys. The thefts typically occurred overnight.

April

Leatherbarrow cleared by city’s IC

Coun. Kate Leatherbarrow was cleared of any wrongdoing surrounding a potential conflict of interest surrounding the city’s Streetscape project. John Mascarini, a partner with the law firm Aird and Berlis LLP, is the Integrity Commissioner (IC) for the city and received three complaints surrounding Leatherbarrow’s involvement in approving Phase 1 of the downtown revitalization project. “We have concluded that the Councillor did not contravene her obligations of disclosure and recusal from participation and voting as set out in section 5 of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. She therefore did not have to file a written statement set out under section 5.1. Moreover, there was no evidence presented in any of the Applications that she sought to use her office to influence a decision or recommendation by City staff.” A code of conduct filing was also made against the councillor as a result of controversial social media posts she made following a story in the Echo, but it was dismissed without an investigation being conducted.

Ingersoll mayor confident county homelessness plan will make a difference

Oxford County Council passed a Homelessness Response Strategy called Housing for All. It is described as a multifaceted approach containing several steps, provisions and partnerships with community groups in an effort to greatly reduce homelessness in Oxford by 2033. “Everyone needs a place to call home. In many communities, including Oxford County, finding appropriate, affordable housing can be a challenge. Buying a home may be out of reach and affordable rental housing can be difficult to find. As a result, some of the most vulnerable members of our community face housing insecurity,” said the report’s introduction. Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie said it’s about keeping people in their homes and transitioning people out of temporary housing into their own homes with the care

they need. “The strategy is an outline of where we want to go and staff are going to be working on bringing forward the items and programs to make it happen. Having the HART being awarded is a great thing to help this along and we are working on fixing the 24-hour emergency shelter system to make sure it’s providing the services we need.” He added the entire basis of the plan was to see what programs and services were available, what works, what doesn’t and who does what. It also spells out the role of the county and what help is needed from other levels of government and organizations.

“I’ll give you a great example. The government of Ontario provided funding through its Homeless Prevention Program. Oxford County was able to put out an RFP for transitional housing here in Ingersoll. The United Way came to the table and the community gathered with them and we were able to get the project completed and I believe people are moving in very shortly.” Petrie said another goal is to not waste taxpayer dollars and organizations time on efforts that aren’t going to see tangible results.

Strong mayor powers given to several area heads of council

The Government of Ontario continued to bolster the unilateral decision-making powers of mayors across the province with a proposal to expand strong mayor powers to 169 additional municipalities effective May 1, including Ingersoll and South West Oxford.

In 2022, through changes to the Municipal Act, strong mayor powers were first granted to the heads of councils in Toronto and Ottawa, and then to mayors in 48 additional municipalities in 2023. Though several municipalities declined the enhanced mayoral powers, a total of 47 mayors in Ontario now have these strong mayor powers.

“Heads of council are key partners in our efforts to build homes and infrastructure across the province,” said Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Rob Flack in a press release announcing the latest proposed expansion. Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie is one of the 169 mayors in the expansion.

“I want to start by saying that at no time was this change requested, and I didn’t have any knowledge that the change was coming prior to the release from the province. I have been clear in my stance on Strong Mayor Powers that it’s not something I support.”

He added the town has an elected group of people who work together to achieve goals of and everyone deserves an equal voice and vote at the table.

GM laying off hundreds of CAMI employees

General Motors is temporarily halting and then reducing production of the BrightDrop electric delivery van at Ingersoll’s CAMI Assembly Plant. The union representing the workers said it is devastating for Unifor members, their families, and the entire Ingersoll community. Employees were told of their fate last Friday and sent home. “This is a crushing blow to hundreds of working families in Ingersoll and the surrounding region who depend on this plant,” said Unifor National President Lana Payne.

“General Motors must do everything in its power to mitigate job loss during this downturn, and all levels of government must step up to support Canadian auto workers and Canadian-made products.” Mike Van Boekel is the Chair of Unifor Local 88 and explained the news didn’t come as a surprise. “Our sales have been slow, and we’ve been doing rotating layoffs so every two weeks a shift would work then another shift would work, but we just got back to two shifts in February where everyone was back. Every month has been better,

Mayor votes in opposition



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

SWOX Council declared the township an unwilling host for wind turbine projects.

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but not where we want or need.” He added GM thought they would hit a home run with the electric-powered vans, but despite a significant increase in sales year over year, Van Boekel said the product just hasn’t caught on yet. Unifor and GM ratified a new contract in September of last year, meaning any employee laid off receives 70 per cent of their full wage.

May

Woodstock woman wants camp removed

Beth Merryweather and her husband live on what could be called a hidden gem of land in Woodstock. Right off Main Street, but beside a tiny and beautiful hidden park. They found their forever home and enjoyed the seclusion of the deep lot with beautiful trees and flowers. They pay taxes. Then, they had company. For over two years, a homeless encampment with a couple and their dog has been living on the city land adjacent to her home, and Merryweather said things have gotten progressively worse. She said it’s long past time for the city to act. More residents have moved into the encampment, some thing Merryweather attributes to the decommissioning of the homeless camp at the intersection of Ingersoll Road and Dundas Street.

“Once the city moved in to take that one down, more people were coming here. They are building something over there. I hear them hammering every day. I don’t know how many people are down there now, but there are now five tents that I can see.” Merryweather explained a man named Paul, his girlfriend and a dog were the only residents until the encampment down the road was cleared out. “I explained to you what happened on the weekend. I called the fire department Friday night when I saw flames going up high. It smells toxic. My neighbour called the police on Saturday after one of them had a dirt bike in the woods and was racing around the neighbourhood at 6 a.m. I’m pretty sure he doesn’t have insurance.” She added loud banging and hammering at the site is continuous, as is the sound of generators running 24 hours a day, even when recent daytime temperatures reach the 20-degree mark. Despite her disdain for her current neighbours, Merryweather is sympathetic to those who are homeless.

The cost of Woodingford Lodge

Residents of Oxford County might be surprised to know just how much money the three Woodingford Lodge sites are costing them. The three homes are

operated by Oxford County, a 160-bed home in Woodstock and two 34-bed satellites in Ingersoll and Tillsonburg. The bottom line is the county billed residents about \$12.8 million over and above what the province supplied them for the 2025 budget year. There is a huge difference between for-profit long-term care (LTC) and municipal homes. Private homes operate on what the Ontario government gives them.

Caressant Care owns and operates several homes in Oxford County and has a similar bed count to Woodingford. While the for-profit company has no obligation to release its funding numbers, it cannot get additional funding to provide care and pay for other expenses other than from within. Oxford County CAO Ben Addley explained all municipalities in the province are required by law to provide long-term care beds, although the statute is generic when it comes to how many beds. “Historically, the reason we are in the three urban centres is a little bit of equalization of service rather than just operating one home. As you saw in the numbers, and private operators would experience the same thing, The financial breakdown shows just how expensive the 34-bed satellites are to operate. On a per-bed cost, Ingersoll this year shows a cost of just under \$67,500 while Tillsonburg comes in at just over \$64,000. That compares to a bit over \$52,000 per bed at the much larger Woodstock site. According to the provincial Ministry of Long-Term Care, no new long-term homes are being built with fewer than 128 beds to maximize economies of scale.

Oxford County installing more traffic calming measures

Oxford County committed to install eight new Community Safety Zones this year. The location of the zones was decided through an eligibility and evaluation process in consultation with area municipalities and implemented in five municipalities across the county,

United Way Oxford announces most successful campaign to date



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Kelly Gilson, Executive Director of United Way Oxford, presents a King Charles III Coronation Medal to Beth Taylor, a long-time community volunteer and retired educator with a 30-plus year history with the United Way. Later that evening Gilson received the same honour.

including two in Woodstock and Ingersoll and one in Embro. The number of safety zones has exponentially increased over the last few years, moves coinciding with increased traffic on many county roads. Frank Gross is the county’s manager of transportation explained there aren’t many areas left where they could


be implemented. “I would say as far as county roads go, I would say yes. We have addressed the areas where there are parks and schools, but some other areas may still be warranted based on pedestrian volumes.” Gross added the county has a specific criteria to implement a Community Safety Zone, one that

Cost of Woodingford Lodge 2023-2025

2023				
	WOODSTOCK	INGERSOLL	TILLSONBURG	TOTAL
MINISTRY FUNDING	(11,884,431)	(2,766,411)	(2,737,280)	(17,388,122)
NET EXPENSE	19,224,465	4,974,672	4,867,360	29,066,497
LEVY	7,340,034	2,208,261	2,130,080	11,678,375
# BEDS	160	34	34	228
LEVY\$/BED	\$45,875	\$64,949	\$62,649	\$51,221

2024				
	WOODSTOCK	INGERSOLL	TILLSONBURG	TOTAL
MINISTRY FUNDING	(13,433,752)	(3,066,083)	(3,007,340)	(19,507,175)
NET EXPENSE	21,400,639	5,380,580	5,281,211	32,062,430
LEVY	7,966,887	2,314,497	2,273,871	12,555,255
# BEDS	160	34	34	228
LEVY\$/BED	\$49,793	\$68,073	\$66,879	\$55,067

2025				
	WOODSTOCK	INGERSOLL	TILLSONBURG	TOTAL
MINISTRY FUNDING	(14,868,467)	(3,297,313)	(3,273,982)	(21,439,762)
NET EXPENSE	23,228,904	5,590,081	5,455,440	34,274,425
LEVY	8,360,437	2,292,768	2,181,458	12,834,663
# BEDS	160	34	34	228
LEVY\$/BED	\$52,253	\$67,434	\$64,161	\$56,292



Wishing you a happy and healthy 2026!

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isn't driven by the province. "It is based on what criteria other municipalities are using. It's a two-stage process and the first warrant is where there might be a school, recreation area, community centre, seniors home, hospital or high-pedestrian volumes." He added if an area meets one or more of these points, the second warrant kicks in. It looks at the factors surrounding road safety.

June

Norwich school has two Pride flags destroyed

Two Pride flags have been removed from a Norwich elementary school and burned on its grounds. Oxford OPP is investigating the incidents that took place at Emily Stowe Public School recently. Police say two individuals attended the Jerdon Street address, removed the flag from the flagpole, and lit it on fire. Video surveillance shows two suspects wearing hoodies. "It's being investigated as a mischief and we are gathering information to see if there is factual hate/bias related evidence to support a hate crime charge," explained OPP media relations Constable Randi Crawford.

"We will go to the Crown attorney, who is the one who can call it a hate crime." She added if someone is charged with a hate crime they could receive an increased penalty upon conviction. She added crimes like these are disheartening for police and she is hoping the public will provide the OPP with tips so the culprits can be caught. "Our media partners are so helpful in getting information out there. We rely on the community to help us help them. We know in small towns and townships, a lot of people hear and see things but maybe don't feel comfortable coming forward."

Woodstock opens new splash pad

The City of Woodstock celebrated the official grand opening of the Finkle Street Splash Pad on May 24 at the Reeves Community Complex. Families came together to enjoy an afternoon filled with excitement, water, and family-friendly activities. The pad is the largest in the city and features more than 30 spray elements, including a splash bucket. Designed with inclusivity in mind, it offers fun for children of all ages and abilities. In addition to the water features, guests explored the new accessible playground, carefully designed to meet a variety of mobility and sensory needs. A nearby shade pavilion provided a comfortable space for families to relax and take shelter from the sun or rain.

Ingersoll's MURC finding request not approved by province

"Shocked, to say the least." Those were the words Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie used to describe the town's unsuccessful funding application. The town sent out a news release Wednesday morning to inform the public and the media. "The Town of Ingersoll expresses its deep disappointment following the Ministry of Sport's decision not to approve the town's application to the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund," said the release. The money was requested for the town's Multi-Use Recreational Centre, expected to break ground next spring. "It's extremely disappointing and sad that the province failed to see what this funding and project mean to our community and our partners," said Mayor Brian Petrie, emphasizing the significant impact the funding would have had on advancing local, regional and provincial goals.

Petrie said the town received a form letter from the province regarding the bad news, but no explanation was provided. "It's frustrating because we brought so

Biologist warns changes will erode conservation efforts



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

An Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) worker holds up a native turtle. Last year, a record-setting 10,000 turtles were released into the wild in an effort to curb dwindling populations in the region – and it paid off. For the first time in over a century, the population is on the rise in the watershed.

much to the table as far as collaboration to the whole project. It's really hard to understand how we didn't meet the threshold to receive any funding whatsoever. I know there were a lot of applications out there."

SWOX Council declares township unwilling host for wind turbine projects

With people lined up on the road waiting to get in and over 300 in attendance, South West Oxford (SWOX) Council declared the township an unwilling host to future wind turbine projects in a 5 to 1 vote at its June 17 meeting. Councillors Pickard, Buchner, Durston, Gillis and Way voted to support the motion while Mayor David Mayberry voted against. Coun. Pete Ypma was not at the meeting as he decided to sign a lease option to lease with the Cedar Flats wind project.

Mayberry expressed concerns about not following municipal guidelines, saying that's why he was voting in opposition to the motion. A group called South West Oxford Residents United in Opposition to Wind Turbines delegated at the meeting and asked for the unwilling host designation. The group, working alongside South West Oxford and Malahide, say NO to Wind Turbines, gathered 1245 signatures on a petition and expressed concerns about loss of property values, damage to well water, inadequate setbacks, noise and other community impacts.

July

Broken water main forces closure of OCAB

The Oxford County Administration Building was closed indefinitely to staff and the public following a water leak. Water damage is present in varying degrees on all four floors of the building and Warden Marcus Ryan said there are some theories as to what occurred,

but the investigation is ongoing. "A water pipe in the ceiling of the top floor, a connection in the water pipe, leaked. Crews are still investigating to find out exactly why that happened. It is a cold-water pipe, thankfully not wastewater." Workers are removing insulation from all other pipes in the building to examine all connectors in the building. "They are doing that investigative work on top of all the remediation work to try and save as much furniture, drywall, carpet, as possible. We know where it happened, when it happened and what specific piece of hardware was involved. We just don't know why it happened in that piece of pipe," added Ryan. 2025 Woodstock Fair won't have midway.

While a fair doesn't seem like a fair without a mid way, the Woodstock Agricultural Society carried on with the 2025 version of the event without the rides area residents are used to seeing.

"Unfortunately, it is true that we will no longer be able to provide the midway for the Woodstock Fair going forward. This has nothing to do with the Woodstock Ag Society or their members, but everything to do with rising costs and limited resources during that time in our schedule," said a statement from Campbell Amusements. "After the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit our industry particularly hard, the company restructured to one unit instead of two. This makes it very difficult to set up in multiple locations at once, which is something we had to do to provide the fair for Woodstock. The public feedback we received from our last few years, as well as decreased attendance and rising costs, led us to the decision to remove the stop from our route," it added. "We were really shocked," said society president Casee Killing. "We received an email, I think it was January 16, letting us know they are no longer able to participate in our fair this year. Woodstock Streetscape Phase 1

"I am super-excited." Those were the

Greener Pastures Eco Farm's project with Ducks Unlimited restoring a pond and a dream



(CARL AND ANDREA VANROOYEN PHOTO)

Greener Pastures Eco Farm brought a pond to their property with the help of Ducks Unlimited.

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first words out of the mouth of Mayor

Jerry Acchione when asked how he felt about the progress on the first part of the city's downtown revitalization project. "To see it come from talking about it 10 years ago to what we have today, I am pumped. I am excited to see how clean and accessible it is, and I can't wait to see the stamping and the sealing. It will make it all just pop and finish it off nicely," he added. The Echo has talked to some business owners and residents alike to get their thoughts on how Phase 1 measures up in their minds. The answers range from underwhelming to not bad to amazing. Acchionesaid he has heard nothing but positives. "Not a single person has come out and said I don't like it and I wish it was more. A couple of questions on did we chose the lighting, why did we choose

the parking, but nobody saying they don't like it." While the asphalt stamping will add a different look to Phase 1, it is also the main reason why the project will

likely wind up about five weeks behind its original completion date. The city's Business Improvement Area (BIA) sent an email to affected businesses last Friday. "As you may have heard, there was a delay in getting the stamp for the patterned asphalt from the USmanufacturer. The stamp was ordered in March of 2025, however, due to layoffs at this supplier our stamp was not manufactured. Un fortunately, this only came to light when the contractor arrived in Woodstock to complete the work," said Kerry Baird, the city's Downtown Development Officer.

Kennedy nominated for

Kennedy nominated for prestigious music award



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Woodstock country singer Traci Kennedy's song about her daughter K'Lee reached number one on the Canadian Indie Country Countdown and was nominated for a prestigious Josie award. K'Lee died by suicide three years ago.

Parade wows Friendly City fans



(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

Woodstock celebrated one of its most cherished traditions on May 19, as the 77th annual Victoria Day Parade brought excitement and community spirit to the streets.

prestigious music award

About four months previous, the Echo ran a story on a Woodstock woman and musician dealing with the tragedy of her daughter's suicide in 2022. Traci Kennedy wrote and recorded 'You Never Said Goodbye' and decided to release it. What happened next was nothing short of a country music explosion as the song climbed up the Canadian Indie Country Countdown. The song has also been nominated for the Social Impact Song of the Year at the upcoming Josie Music Awards in the fall. "My jaw dropped. I was sitting on the couch when I saw the nomination come in, and I had to take a few minutes to absorb it before I could even speak and say anything to my husband. It was surreal to know this song made that much of an impact and was noticed," explained Kennedy.

The Josie Music Awards are one of the largest in dependent music award shows in the world. They recognize and honor the achievements of independent artists across a wide variety of genres and roles in the music industry. It was founded in 2015 to celebrate independent music artists, songwriters, producers, and industry professionals who are not signed to major labels. It covers not only country, but rock, pop, gospel and other genres.

August

Woodstock YMCA closing its doors in September

The Woodstock YMCA announced it would be closing all operations in Woodstock other than its childcare centre. The Dundas Street location will shutter its doors in two months. "After deep consideration, including extensive analysis, the YMCA of Southwestern Ontario has made the difficult decision to close their health and fitness branch located in Woodstock, effective September 30, 2025," according

to a press release sent out on Tuesday.

"For the past year, the YMCA has extensively reviewed the future of our health and fitness operations in Woodstock. This has included a focus on our community's needs, the suitability of the site in its current state and their responsibility as a charity to make the best use of resources, including donors' contributions, and to ensure sustainability for years to come. As part of this process, several community partners were engaged in hopes of finding a viable shared solution for this location. While encouraged by the level of interest, no formal commitments were made," it added. The Dundas St. building remains for sale.

Ingersoll's fourth annual Pizzafest brings in hundreds

There was not a parking spot to be found downtown Ingersoll on July 24th. The town's fourth annual Pizzafest was in full swing with local vendors, music, and most importantly pizza. The event took place from 4 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. with free admission.

The Ingersoll Pipe Band gave a performance drawing a crowd while Ingersoll BIA Coordinator Virginia Armstrong and volunteers set up for the Pizza Contest. Five local pizzerias (Tito's, Domino's, Pizza Hut, Little Caesars and Gino's) would compete for the title of Best Pepperoni Pizza and Best Creative Pizza. The panel consisted of six judges including Brian Petrie Mayor of Ingersoll, Ingersoll Councillor Kristy Van Kooten-Bossence, town employee Kale Kruse, Oxford OPP Staff Sergeant Rafal Schubert, Marcie Culbert from Heart FM and our very own Lee Griffi, Editor of the Woodstock-Ingersoll Echo. After two rounds of the judges tasting pizzas and giving their scores, it was time to tally up the points. "The truth is it was very hard. It came down to the technical details. They were all absolutely fantastic," said Petrie. "When it came to

2025 Year in Review Trivia

by Stewart Grant

1. What popular numeric-based phrase annoyed parents and teachers alike in 2025?
2. Who led the Toronto Blue Jays in postseason hits and batting average?
3. What movie won "Best Picture" at the 2025 Oscars?
4. Canadian Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led what pro sports team to a championship in 2025?
5. The G7 Summit in June was held where in Canada?
6. Who is Robert Francis Prevost better known as?
7. Who was elected as Mayor of New York City in November?
8. What AI chip maker is the world's most valuable company at year end?
9. What is the most populated country in the world as of year end?
10. What was the name of the hero who tackled and disarmed one of the gunmen at Bondi Beach, Australia on Dec. 14?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27!

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pepperoni, Domino’s took it home! And when it came to the Best Creative Pizza, Gino’s,” he added during the awards ceremony.

Woodstock celebrates local artist’s new exhibition at art gallery

Woodstock’s own Jaquie Poole was featured in a new retrospective at the Art Gallery, tracing her artistic journey from early works to today. The display was brought to the community by Poole and

curated by Danielle Hoovenaars from the Woodstock Art Gallery. Pulled from the gallery’s permanent collection,

Present in the Moment is an exhibition that focuses on works that stretched across Poole’s entire life.

Living in Woodstock since 1957, Poole has had a long career as an artist, working in a variety of mediums such as painting, photography, drawing, collage, medium, and assemblage. She was born in Port Colborne to artist Betty McArthur who passed away in 1994.

We have work by Betty McArthur and Jaquie Poole in our permanent collection and this exhibition is a part two to an exhibition that we mounted from 2024 to 2025 which was called Present in the Moment but that included work by McArthur,” said Hoovenaars. “That’s where the concept of this exhibition came from, an opportunity to present work by the mother and the daughter and draw these parallels in terms of their practice and their connecting message of trying to stay present in the moment.”

Oxford County Council rejects TVDSB trustee adoption

A pair of Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) trustees asked Oxford

County Council to ‘adopt’ them into the fold. Ultimately, councillors accepted the request as information since there is no available mechanism to make that happen. The Ontario Ministry of Education announced the results of an audit into the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) on April 23. As a result, the government appointed Paul Bonifero to oversee the board and, in doing so, replaced the Board of Trustees. As long as TVDSB is under supervision, Bonifero will make all decisions normally made by the board. Trustees are also no longer paid and have had their email access removed. “Let me start by saying we are here representing our elected positions as Oxford County’s public schoolboard trustees and we are not here representing

A Festive Weekend in Ingersoll



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Santa and Mrs. Claus at the 28th Annual Ingersoll Rotary Christmas Parade.

Oxford County celebrates its first-ever Master Chef



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO))

Elm Hurst Inn Chef Philippe Coeurdassier, left, was recognized as a Master Chef. He and the Director of Food and Beverage, Sergio Dell’Osso, work together to ensure a high-quality dining experience.

Southside Park hosts annual midway



(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)

Woodstock residents and visitors celebrated the unofficial kickoff to summer over the Victoria Day weekend with a fun-filled midway and the 77th annual Victoria Day Parade. Shahmeer was excited to drive on this ride.

Streetfest brought crowds back to a hungry Downtown Woodstock



(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)

The Bubbleology show was performed by Miss T, the Bubble Queen, delighting audiences at Summer Streetfest.

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Woodstock celebrates local artist's new exhibition at art gallery



the TVDSB,” exclaimed trustee Leanne Hopkins. “All our resources as trustee... have been removed, and really the only role we have currently under the supervision is advocacy,” she added.

Hopkins talked about concerns about planning for the new Turtle Island elementary school in Woodstock, which is slated to open next year. She said families are reaching out, saying their children will be sent to different schools next week. “They have one going to Hickson and one going to Zorra. You can see that could be an issue for our families...as it could add a stress level. Without having a local representative there to assist them in a pathway to come to a resolution for their issue...could leave them without that being answered.”

Ingersoll Pipe Band celebrates anniversary

The Ingersoll Pipe Band marked its 115th anniversary in grand style on Aug. 16 with a spectacular parade and pipe band tattoo that drew enthusiastic crowds to downtown Ingersoll and Memorial Park. The celebration began at 1 p.m. with a parade that stepped off from Wingham Street and Charles Street, winding its way through town before concluding at “Bonnie” Holmes Mott Yvonne Memorial Park. Spectators lined the streets to cheer on the colorful procession of pipers and drummers, who proudly showcased the time-honored sounds of the Great High

land bagpipe and drums. Joining the band for the occasion were five other distinguished guest bands.

September

Woodstock Police chief hanging up his hat

After nearly 30 years of distinguished service, the Woodstock Police Service (WPS) Board announced the retirement of Chief Rod Wilkinson, marking the end of a career dedicated to public safety, leadership, and community service. “Chief Wilkinson began his policing career in 1997 and quickly rose through the ranks, demonstrating exceptional skill and commitment in every role,” according to a news release from the force’s Police Services Board. “His early years included major crime investigations as a Detective Constable in the Criminal Investigations Branch, where he oversaw complex cases and homicides, developing a reputation for investigative excellence.” Wilkinson held numerous leadership positions, including Uniform Road Supervisor, Staff Sergeant, Inspector of Operations and Deputy Chief of Police. He managed uniform patrols, supervised civilian staff, led high-risk incident responses, and oversaw the Ontario Sex Offender Registry. His strategic planning and operational leadership were instrumental in shaping the current organization’s approach to modern policing.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)
Danielle Hoovenaars at the Woodstock Art Gallery stands among the works of artist Jaquie Poole.

Annual farm show draws thousands again



(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show turned Woodstock and area into the hub of Canadian agriculture from September 9 to 11, welcoming over 36,000 attendees and more than 650 exhibitors to its sprawling 100-acre site.



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2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Wilkinson explained he had nothing but positive words to say about his experience in Woodstock. “Looking back, I am proud of what we have accomplished together. With the support of an excellent and forward-thinking administrative team that continually pushed for innovation and meaningful change, we added many new sworn and civilian positions, enhancing the department’s capacity to serve our community.”

CAMI employees face another extensive layoff

It was another hit for the Oxford County labour force and employees at Ingersoll’s CAMI manufacturing plant. General Motors has informed the union at its CAMI Assembly Plant in Ingersoll that production will resume this fall — but at a much slower pace than originally planned.

Unifor Local 88 Chairperson Mike Van Boekel said the plant has been shut down since May, when the last round of layoffs was announced, and workers have been waiting for clarity on when operations would restart. “Staff are coming back around Nov. 17 with one shift but at a slower line speed. Out of roughly 1050 production people, we have 400 coming back.” Van Boekel added the hope was always to return to work with two full shifts or at least a single strong one, but the demand still isn’t there for the product. “Sales are getting better every month, but they just aren’t there yet.” CAMI manufactures two versions of the Bright-Drop electric delivery vehicle. Production started in 2022 following a \$1 billion retooling of the plant.

Oxford County paramedic system under strain

Ambulance response times are increasing in the county, and Oxford County is considering how best to respond to the growing demand. As the county’s population continues to grow in both rural and urban areas, officials say new strategies and resources may be necessary to ensure timely emergency care for residents. East Zorra-Tavistock and Zorra have the poorest response times in the county, mainly due to the fact the two towns have seen high population growth. “Tavistock and Thamesford used to be called small settlements, but they are pretty well-established areas where historically there haven’t been ambulance stations,” explained Ryan Hall, the county’s Chief of Paramedic Services. “We have had them where the majority of the calls are, which is Woodstock, Tillsonburg and Ingersoll.” Norwich and Drumbo also have stations and there is another location just north of Embro. Hall said the growth in the rural areas is expected to continue. “With long-term care beds being opened in Tavistock and the former Maple Leaf property in Thamesford being zoned for residential development. That’s going to make it even worse,” he added. Hall explained rural areas received a few calls every month twenty years ago but now 15 to 20 is more the norm. “It has crept up quite slowly, but we are at that threshold now where it makes sense to respond to these areas from a closer location.”

Oxford County conducting a forensic investigation after cyber attack

Oxford County has released a few more details regarding what is now being called a “cybersecurity incident,” but very few details are known. “Last week, we shared that Oxford County was responding to a technical incident relating to its informa-

tion system,” said a press release. “We shared this update ahead of full information to be as open as possible, as early as possible, with residents and partners.” The county engaged third-party cybersecurity experts to assist with containment, remediation and to conduct a forensic investigation. In addition to the measures in place before this incident, the county is working with third-party cybersecurity experts to

introduce additional security measures as needed to mitigate potential future harm to its system. All systems are operating normally and there are no changes to the service provided to the public. “Our focus from the start has been, and will continue to be, determining whether and to what extent information within our systems may be compromised,” said Warden Marcus Ryan. “We operate with a high degree of caution and awareness when it comes to cybersecurity. It is disappointing for us to share this news, and we acknowledge the concern it may cause for our residents and partners.”

October

Streetscape Phase 2 nearing completion

The second phase of the \$50 million Streetscape project in downtown Woodstock was expected to be finished soon. “The south sidewalk and coloured concrete have been completed. Traffic light poles, junction boxes, cabinets, and fixtures have also been installed. The next two weeks will be quite busy on the site. Sidewalks and coloured concrete will be completed on the north side. Street light poles and fixtures will be installed as well as tree grates, guards and trees. Site

furnishing will be installed as well as the stamped asphalt,” said a statement from the city. The information did warn that much of the outstanding work is weather-dependent, but the schedule should allow for completion of Phase 2 over the next couple of weeks. Not everything has gone smoothly, however, as a section of the concrete sidewalk at the southeast corner of Dundas and Light Streets will need to be redone after a person or people decided to walk on concrete that wasn’t set. The added cost will be absorbed by Armstrong Paving and Materials Group, who were awarded the tender for Phase 2. “It’s up to the contractor to replace at their expense. It is their responsibility, and to their benefit since they are responsible for the cost, to protect the area to avoid that type of thing from happening,” added the statement. It is standard practice for construction companies to staff concrete areas until they are fully set.

Woodstock BIA clashing with city over Shared Services Agreement

The city’s Business Improvement Area (BIA) and City of Woodstock are at odds when it comes to the agreement the two share to run the downtown organization.

At the forefront is a five-figure expense to rent a skating rink that the BIA board said wasn’t approved. There is no written record showing the board approved the \$16,281.60 expenditure to rent a skating rink for roughly six weeks in March and April of this year. The Echo recently sent the BIA board several questions, including one about the rink, and received a lengthy written statement in response. “There is no record in any meeting minutes showing board approval of this expenditure,” said the reply. There were two mentions of rental anywhere in agendas

Walk for Lupus fundraiser held in Woodstock



(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

Participants showing their support for Lupus Ontario with purple hair included Terry Aurel Mel Jaxon Isabella and Braylyn.

Wienerfest moves to Burford



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

For the first time in the event’s 25-year history, Wienerfest was not held in Woodstock.

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

and minutes, which are posted on the organization's website, one in the July agenda package.

"BIA was told DDO's Downtown Budget was paying for it. NO board discussion or approval. Request City to repay BIA forthwith." The Echo reached out to the company that rented the rink. A new unit could be purchased for \$15,000. The DDO is the city's Downtown Development Officer, Kerry Baird, who reports to Brad Hammond, the city's economic development commissioner. Her role is to support the BIA's activities for an average of 17.5 hours per week.

General Motors shuttering production in Ingersoll

General Motors ended the BrightDrop delivery van production at its CAMI plant in Ingersoll. Employees found out this morning via a letter signed by GM Canada's managing director, Kristian Aquilina, and plant director Bill Harkness. "Team – today we shared some difficult news. GM has made the decision to end production of BrightDrop due to slower-than-expected market growth. This means team members at CAMI will remain on layoff. We will be assessing the site for future opportunities," stated the letter. GM added the vehicle's production isn't being moved elsewhere. Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie said today's news was tough to take. "They've been through hell for a long time now, and this is just one more nail, as they say. We have gone through a lot and I think we can get through this as well." On the positive side, Petrie said the plant isn't closing, but the announcement will have wide-ranging effects on the economy.

"We know that only 10 per cent of its workforce lives in Ingersoll, but there is a reason why this is national news. This affects more than just the town." CAMI contributes 12 per cent of the town's tax base, something not lost on the mayor.

Woodstock honours local veterans with new commemorative crosswalk at cenotaph

The City of Woodstock paid tribute to local veterans ahead of Remembrance Day with a commemorative crosswalk at the cenotaph in Victoria Park. The new crosswalk is located at the corner of Graham Street and Buller Street and features a red and white striped pattern, with the silhouette of a soldier and the phrase "Lest We Forget" at each end. "Similar styles of crosswalks have been installed in many cities across Ontario. We consulted with our local Royal Canadian Legion Branch #55 to ensure this is a functional, respectful and meaningful memorial," said Jeff Molenhuis, Director of Public Works. The installation of the crosswalk coincides with the 100th anniversary of Woodstock's cenotaph, which honours local service members who died during the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War and the war in Afghanistan. The new crosswalk is a visual reminder of the sacrifices made by the men and women who have served our country.

November

Liberals unveil federal budget with a deficit of over \$70 billion

The first budget handed down by the

'Haunting of Woodstock' documentary dives into local history and ghost stories



(YOUTUBE SCREENSHOT)

A short film explored one of Woodstock's infamous ghost stories. Director Corey M. Slager and his team's documentary *The Haunting of Woodstock* looked into the history behind the 1862 hanging of Thomas Cook and the folklore surrounding his death.

Echo takes home Chamber Award



(CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PHOTO)

The Woodstock Ingersoll Echo was presented with the Professional Services Award at last week's Chamber of Commerce business awards dinner in Beachville. From left to right are Editor Lee Griffi, Publisher Stewart Grant, Advertising Representative/Distributor Sue Pieters and Salesperson Mamta Patel.

Ingersoll's second annual Good for the Soll festival draws over 4,000 attendees



(IKYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Ingersoll's second annual Good for the Soll music festival drew over 4,000 attendees, highlighted by headliner Sass Jordan.

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Woodstock honours local veterans with new commemorative crosswalk



(CITY OF WOODSTOCK PHOTO)
The City of Woodstock installed a commemorative crosswalk near the cenotaph to celebrate its 100th anniversary.

federal government in 18 months included a deficit of \$78.3 billion with no sign of a balanced budget. As expected, the two local Members of Parliament are divided on the effectiveness of the more than 400-page document and its impact on Canadians. Oxford Conservative MP

Arpan Khanna said he hoped to see some pocketbook issues to make life more affordable for Canadians.

“A lot of folks are struggling to get by. My office gets flooded with emails and phone calls from people trying to get help. People are working two jobs, doing everything right, yet they are barely making ends meet. I don’t see anything to help in the budget.”

Khanna also expressed his frustration at the size of the deficit, which is expected to drop to \$56.6 billion by the 2029/30 fiscal year and laid the blame solely on Prime Minister Mark Carney. “He promised to be that expert banker who would be fiscally responsible, but he’s brought forward a budget worse than Trudeau’s in terms of spending. When you run major deficits, it fuels inflation, leads to higher taxes and at the end of the day, it’s Canadians who end up paying the price.” Kitchener-Conestoga Liberal MP Tim Louis said the budget presented is the right one for the times we find ourselves in.

Unifor holds rally for CAMI workers

Members of Uniform Local 88, other locals and labour supporters held a ‘Solidarity Action’ at Ingersoll’s CAMI manu-

facturing plant. The rally was in response to General Motor’s; elimination of production of the BrightDrop EV delivery van. Local union chair Mike Van Boekel said he was pleased with the turnout early in the day but hoped more supporters would attend as the day went on. He added the rally was strictly to raise awareness.

“We want to make sure GM knows we aren’t going anywhere and also to send a message to the federal and provincial governments that they need to keep the pressure on.” He added the BrightDrop van may not have sold well, but the bigger problem with their employer is Trump’s rhetoric south of the border. “He doesn’t want any (automotive) investment out side of the States and wants all the jobs to go back there. GM sells hundreds of thousands of vehicles in Canada, and they make billions here, so they can supply jobs to Canadians.” Van Boekel explained Unifor had a constructive conversation with the federal government last week, but he is concerned about the auto sector as a whole. “It looks like they are paying attention now. Un fortunately, Chrysler took a plant down the week before ours. If they all keep doing this there will be nothing left in a month. The bleeding has to stop somewhere.” One of the potential uses for the facility, and some thing that came out of talks with the feds, is a military vehicle. Van Boekel said his members are willing to build anything to keep the plant going.

Woodstock Hospital releases HART Hub update

Large crowd to support workers affected by GM’s decision to cease Ingersoll production



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

Hundreds of Unifor Local 88 supporters turned out in Ingersoll at the CAMI plant to send a simple message to GM and the federal government – they want their jobs and want to get back to work.

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E: admin@unifor636.ca

BRENT THOMPSON
President

CRAIG WARNOCK
Financial Secretary

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Retiree’s meeting to follow

AGENDA

GUEST SPEAKER – LISA WOODS WOODSTOCK FIRE PREVENTION OFFICER
Nomination and Election for 1 Alternate Area Council Delegate
For Balance of Term May 2027
ROUTINE BUSINESS

Doug Steele
Unifor Local 636
Retired Workers Chapter
Chairperson
DS/cmcope343

Susan Veenstra
Unifor Local 636
Retired Workers Chapter
Recording Secretary

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

Woodstock Hospital released a long-awaited up date on the progress of the Oxford HART Hub. “Woodstock Hospital and a network of local partners, collaborating through the Oxford Ontario Health Team (OHT), are pleased to announce a phased-in approach to services for the Oxford Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub - a made-in-Oxford model of care that will connect health, housing, and social supports across the County,” according to a press release.

The release stated that while the term “Hub” may sound like a single site, it is actually a coordinated system of local organizations working together to lead people to supports for recovery and long-term stability.

“Part of this new system will be the Oxford County Wellness Centre. To ensure residents can begin accessing services while construction continues at the permanent Wellness Centre at 16 Graham Street, a temporary location will open at 369 Huron Street in Woodstock,” added the release. The location is the former Woodstock Private Hospital, which operated for years as a small long-term care home.

“The temporary site allows us to start helping people right now while building toward the full vision of the HART Hub,” said Teresa Martins, Executive Director of the Oxford OHT. “By working together across organizations, we’re ensuring that care is seamless — the right help, at the right time, close to home.”

December

Two geese in Southside Park test positive for avian flu

The City of Woodstock is advising res-

idents to avoid touching wild birds and bird droppings after two Canada geese in Southside Park tested positive for avian influenza. City staff have received several reports of sick or dead geese in the park over the last few weeks. As a precaution, two of the dead birds were sent to Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC) in Guelph for testing. Both tested positive for avian influenza. “We’re in contact with Canadian Wildlife Health

Cooperative to continue monitoring and tracking any sick or dead birds found in our parks,” explained Reta Horan, Supervisor of Parks and Forestry. “We’ve also been in touch with Southwestern Public Health to share information and resources on protecting the health and safety of staff and the public,” she added. Brian Stevens is a veterinarian with the CWHC at the University of Guelph. He said their role is to report their results

to government agencies.

“Unfortunately, there is no additional funding to increase monitoring after we have a positive result. This virus is known to be across Ontario and we have had a number of cases in SW Ontario this fall, so we already know it is circulating in wild birds in the region.” He added there are no protocols when it comes to birds in nature contracting the deadly disease.

Scottish culture on full force in Embro



The Zorra Caledonian Society Board was thrilled at the turn of this year's National Tartan Day.

(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

Black Excellence Awards celebrated in Ingersoll



(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

Rosemary Sadler, author of *The Black Book of Black History in Canada*, was celebrated that evening while standing alongside Heather.

Hundreds attend Ingersoll's second annual Canada Day Celebration



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

The town of Ingersoll was in no short supply of Canadian pride on July 1 at its second annual Canada Day Celebration.

2025 MONTH BY MONTH

ITOPA presents 7-10 Split after a five-year-long wait



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

From left to right, Adam Tanton, Becky Tanton, Nick Shua, and Crystal Paul brought plenty of laughs to ITOPA's production of 7-10 Split.

Oxford school board trustee opens up about being shut out

David Cripps wasn't allowed to talk to the media as a vice-chair and trustee of the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) – but the Ingersoll resident said nothing is holding him back now. The province assumed control of the TVDSB in April 2025, and on May 1 appointed supervisor Paul Boniferro to oversee all financial and operational decisions.

Even though Cripps and his fellow trustees aren't being paid and have no access to their email accounts or any other information, he is still doing what he can to help. "Director of Education Bill Tucker will take my calls, so if someone approaches me, I am still able to relay information to him, but that's really the extent of my role. There's

been no guidance other than the minister's musings, I'll call them." Cripps, a father of four, decided to run for office after having positive experiences with the education

system when his children were in school. "I have four kids and during my time there were all kinds of things that cropped and I felt super supported by principals and board staff, but there were also occasions when it was a bit of a challenge." He added the trustees he reached out to were always open and accessible.

"I wanted to continue that openness and lots of folks in Oxford feel we sort of play second fiddle since everything is in London. I made it part of my mandate to open up that accessibility." Cripps believed he and fellow Oxford trustee LeeAnne Hopkins were making progress and the pair addressed each municipal council in the county in recent months.

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Library Board Opening



Oxford County seeks an engaged citizen to join the Oxford County Library Board to help govern the library system for the remainder of the 2023-2026 council term.

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YEAR IN SPORTS



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Woodstock Wildcats U11 team won the International Silver Stick tournament in Saugeen Shores .



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Huron Park's libero Hannah Sirbu hit the deck to dig up the ball.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock Huron Park Huskie Garrett Foster drove to the basket against the defensive efforts of East Elgin's K. Friesen (rear) and H. Scott (foreground).



Ingersoll skip Taylor Posthumus came out of the hack during TVRA South East championships.

(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The Woodstock CI Red Devils captured the WOSSAA A senior girls' volleyball title with a three-set homecourt win over the West Elgin Wildcats, simultaneously qualifying for the OFSAA A tournament in Toronto.



(WOODSTOCK FC PHOTO)

The U14 Woodstock FC girls' team captured first place in the EMDSL indoor league, losing just twice in 17 games.

YEAR IN SPORTS



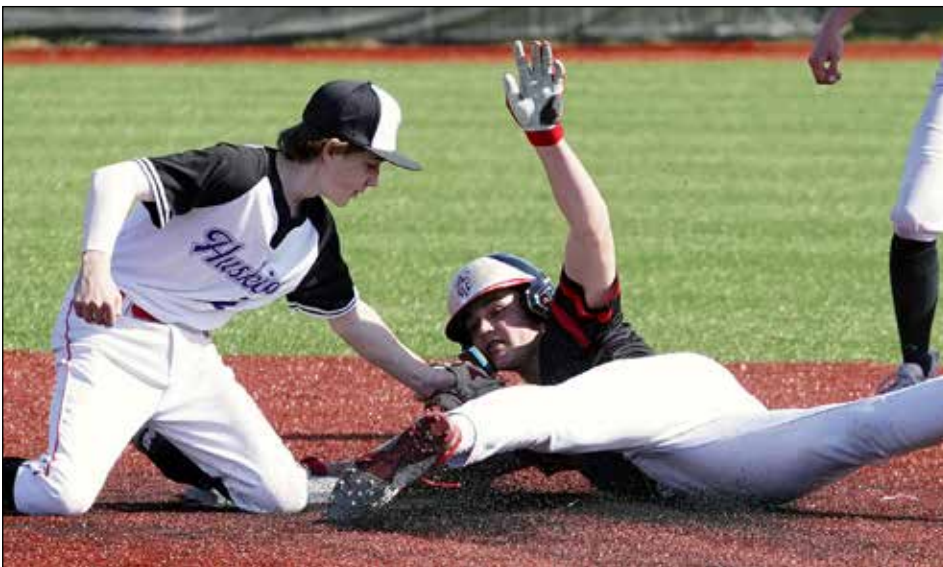
(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock CI's Will Halward was presented the TVRA South East Mr. Basketball Award at halftime of the senior boys' Captains/Veterans game by coach/game convenor Eric Molinaro. Molinaro was also pleased to report the event raised over \$1,100 for the Terry Fox Foundation, donated in honour of Captains/Veterans founder Bill Gillespie.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The South Oxford Ward's Automotive U11A Storm finished a remarkable 2024-25 season with silver medals in the OMHA A championship final.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Huron Park Huskies middle infielder Meyer Hawkins (left) completed a strong throw from catcher Austin Jackson by putting a successful tag on Lord Dorchester's A.J. Rusticus.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

St. Mary's forward Kingston McPherson (centre) was challenged successfully without a foul inside the box by Parkside defender Liam Langley but he did score his team's fourth goal.



Woodstock St. Mary's Warrior Caleb Allard (rear) executes a hard challenge against a St. Joe's opponent.



They are the champions: The Woodstock St. Mary's Warriors boys' soccer team players and coaches celebrated an OFSAA AA gold medal in the school parking lot, moments after getting off the bus from the Ottawa-based provincial championship.

YEAR IN SPORTS



(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

The Ingersoll Minor Baseball Association hit it out of the park with their annual Bat and Bash BBQ on July 27 at Victoria Park. Pictured is Saul who received his medal being held by his proud father Max.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock Stallions Keaghan Brett (left) worked against the numbers Friday evening at Cowan Park in a Men's Premier Division game.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The Woodstock FC U15 Strikers combined soccer and personal development during the season. In conjunction with an Elgin-Middlesex District Soccer League Tier II league cup, the team raised and donated \$2,500 to London Sick Kids Hospital and Ronald McDonald House.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Foldens-area PWHL hockey star Ella Shelton (front and centre) was dealt to the Toronto Sceptres by the New York Sirens in exchange for the third and 27th overall picks in the 2025-26 draft.



Ingersoll's Quorron Kelly (left) was called for goaltending on this shot from St. Mary's Warrior Johnny Bertoia



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers defensive back Ethan Butt knocked down a pass intended for Saunders Sabre Gavyn Laws with support from IDCI teammate Spencer Krajewski.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Showing decent form for a little league baseball non-pitcher, Sportsnet Blue Jays Central host Jamie Campbell fired a ceremonial first-pitch strike at the Canadian U13 tournament held in Woodstock.

YEAR IN SPORTS



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)
Ingersoll DCI junior Blue Bombers Eckjeet Singh (left) and Carson Darlington (centre) put up the block against Tillsonburg Gemini Logan de Leye (right).



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)
Family and legacy were front and centre as the Woodstock St. Mary's Warriors took on Ingersoll DCI on Sept. 24 at IDCI. From left, are program founder Mike McMahon's grandson Milton McMahon, Kobe Almeida, head coach Jeff Almeida, who played at Woodstock Huron Park under coaches Lorne Jenkins and Al Huras, and at right, Milton's cousin Corall McMahon.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)
Cory Bigham of Woodstock is a part of the Team Ontario Training Squad for 10 Pin Bowling, which will prepare him for Special Olympics Canada National Summer Games in 2026.



(WOODSTOCK WILDCATS PHOTO)
The Wildcats U15 team won the Smashville Girls Hockey Showcase in Nashville, going undefeated.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)
The Woodstock CI junior girls' basketball team capped a 22-1 2025 season with a 62-26 victory over St. Thomas St. Joe's in the WOSSAA AA championship game on Nov. 12 in Listowel



(ALEC RICHARD PHOTO)
Woodstock goalie Kobe Nadalin shakes out some cobwebs after an accidental collision with Tavistock forward Tucker Otto. Nadalin stopped 41 shots to earn his fourth win of the season.

Riddles

My appearance is lovely. My shape is round.
I come to life when turned upside-down.
What am I?

A snow globe

I float in the air, but on the ground I'm hard
to lift. I pile up in cold weather, if you catch
my drift. What am I?

Snow.

I'm raised with a cheer, filled to the brim,
and emptied by morning. What am I?

A champagne glass!

I'm loud, I pop and I sparkle bright,
welcoming a brand new year at night. What
am I?

Fireworks

I may not have any teeth in sight, but stay
out in the cold and I'm bound to bite.

What am I?

Frost!

I'm something old you leave behind and
something new you step into. What am I?

A year!

I'm the same for everyone, yet no two people
use me the same way. What am I?

Time!

Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27 Level: Advanced

Featured Pet



Erica

Nominate your pet to be a Featured Pet by emailing info@theecho.ca

Word Search

MONTHS OF THE YEAR

P	N	O	V	E	M	B	E	R	E	R	S
C	A	E	G	N	I	A	H	O	S	T	E
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- JANUARY
- FEBRUARY
- MARCH
- MAY
- JUNE
- JULY
- AUGUST
- SEPTEMBER
- OCTOBER
- NOVEMBER
- DECEMBER

COMING EVENTS

FREEZER MEALS PROVIDED BY ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

We know life is busy for many families today, and it can be so nice to have things in the freezer to allow us to eat well, and quickly. This fall, St. Paul's has been busy making different items you can simply pull out of the freezer! We have frozen ham & pea soup, cabbage rolls and cabbage roll casseroles, as well as individual turkey pies. We also have some lovely frozen apple and blueberry fruit pies ready for your oven! We'd love to make life easier for you this winter. For more details on what we have, and the prices, please call our church office at 519-485-3390 or by email: stpauls@execulink.com.

SACRED HEART PARISH EUCHRE

We invite everyone to join us for a Euchre afternoon. It will be held in Henderson Hall 133 John Street Ingersoll. Tuesday January 6 and 20 start at 1:00 pm. Refreshments provided.

OXFORD COUNTY FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, January 22: 6 p.m.
Craigowan Golf Club, Woodstock

Oxford OFA members and the community are invited to attend. This year's highlights include a keynote address by 'Wheat Pete' Peter Johnson, as well as the presentation of two prestigious awards: the Agricultural Hall of Fame Award to George Gilvesy and the Family Farm Award to Doanlea Farms, the Doan Family. These honours recognize outstanding contributions to agriculture and the dedication of local farming families. Tickets (on sale until Jan 14) and additional event details are available on our website at www.oxfordag.ca.

CURLING DAY IN CANADA - OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, January 31, Club opens at 12:30 p.m.
Ingersoll District Curling Club
36 Chisholm Drive, Ingersoll
Jitney play starts at 1 p.m. & 3:45 p.m., Canada's Big Shootout starts at 2:30 p.m., Bar open at 1 p.m., Kitchen open at 2 p.m., Silent auction tables open at 5:30 p.m., Live auction at 7 p.m., and Scotties 1 vs 2 Page Playoff Game on TV at 6:30 p.m.
ingersollcurlingclub.com

IN 2026 IT'S YOUR FIX!

INGERSOLL COUNTRY MUSIC JAMBOREE
Meeting every other Friday 1-4 p.m. at Masonic Hall, 190 Thames St. S. Ingersoll.

Happy New Year!
Welcome 2026 with our special deal

CRISPY'S
FISH & CHIPS

Cape Hake Fish & Chips
A tender, flaky white fish
with a delicate, mild flavour

2 FOR \$26

CRISPY'S FISH & CHIPS
194 SPRINGBANK AVE N, WOODSTOCK

Jan 3rd to Jan 15th

Join us, walk ins welcome. Qualifications - love 50-70's country music. Perform, listen, dance & enjoy! January 16 & 30, February 13 & 27, March 6 & 20, April 10 & 17, May 1, 15 & 29, June 5 & 19.

MONTHLY VON BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Last Tuesday of every Month:

10 a.m. to Noon
Ingersoll Pharmasave
19 King St. E., Ingersoll

TILLSONBURG DUPLICATE BRIDGE CLUB

Interested in Bridge? Join us every Friday at the Tillsonburg Duplicate Bridge Club at 1 p.m. at The Senior Centre. Don't have a partner? Come anyway and we will match you up with someone. For more information, visit their Facebook page: TburgBridge.

THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF OXFORD COUNTY

The Optimists bring out the best in Youth, Community, and Themselves. If anyone is interested in coming out to meet us and learn more about us please email brenda7621@outlook.com

REPAIR CAFÉ - TOSS IT? NO WAY!

1st Saturday of each month: 9 a.m. to Noon
St. John's Church 685860 Oxford Highway 2, Eastwood, ON N4S 7V9

St. John's, Eastwood, now affiliated with Repair Café International (look for us at repaircafe.org). Meets the first Saturday of every month 9am to noon at St. John's Church 685860 Oxford Highway 2, Eastwood, ON N4S 7V9. Repairs made to clothing, linens, household items, toys, musical instruments etc. Save money, learn how to make your own repairs. Volunteers welcome. Payment by donation.

THE CARING HEARTS SUPPORT NETWORK WILL BE HOSTING A "CAREGIVER CORNER" ON ZOOM

The first Wednesday of each month, beginning on Wednesday, January 7: 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

To Register: call or text 519-536-3370 or email info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com

GRIEF SUPPORT FOR MAID RELATED LOSS

This monthly in-person grief support group for loss related to Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) offers a compassionate, safe space to explore this unique loss. The group will meet the 4th Wednesday of the month from 1 – 2:30 p.m. at the Thamesford Library, 165 Dundas St., Thamesford. The group is free of charge and pre-registration is requested. To register or inquire about an evening group, contact 519-866-3016 or email faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca.

PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Third Wednesday of each month:

6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
21 Wellington St., Woodstock
(Virtual options available)

PCMH is a peer support program providing support to parents and caregivers across Ontario with lived experience raising children and youth with mental health challenges. For more information, please visit family.cmho.org or oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca. We are also on Facebook: Parents for Children's Mental Health ~ Oxford County

VON OXFORD GRIEF CARE:

FREE MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

Register at: oxford.griefsupport@von.ca or 519-539-1231
Ext 6299 or 6296

TILLSONBURG

WHEN: 2nd Tuesday of every month

WHERE: VON Oxford Office 24 Brock St. W., Tillsonburg

TIME: 6:30PM-8:00PM

INGERSOLL

WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month

WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll

TIME: 10:30AM –12:00Noon

WOODSTOCK

WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month

WHERE: Sakura House Hospice 715180 Oxford Rd.4, Woodstock

TIME: 10:30AM-12:00 Noon

THE LIONS CLUB OF WOODSTOCK

The Lions Club of Woodstock has been serving the community and Oxford County with kindness and generosity since 1931. The Lions always place the needs of neighbours and communities first. Through the dedication and hard work of our volunteer members, we are serving those in need together. If you are interested in becoming a member or simply wish to learn more by attending one of our monthly meetings, please email Steve Iorio at steveiorio4@gmail.com for more information.

COLOURING THROUGH GRIEF

Caring Hearts Support Network:

St. David's United Church,
190 Springbank Ave., Woodstock ON

Third Wednesday monthly. One time fee of \$15. Registration is required.

Call 519-536-3370. Check out website
www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday (2 to 4 p.m.) and 4th Tuesday (7 to 9 p.m.)

September to May

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

If you have never belonged to a stamp club, now's the time.

Meet new friends, grow your knowledge and collection.

Contact: Don Eaton dhfe@silomail.com

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

OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS

Are you looking to start a summer pastime? Are you interested in your family history? Oxford Branch has an extensive collection of family history and genealogical resources that can help you. **Come visit our Resource Centre at 82 Light Street, Courthouse Square, Woodstock. We are open Tuesdays to Thursdays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm** where volunteers are ready to help you get started or help you research for missing information. You can also connect with us on the web at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting genealogical research in Oxford County. Hope to see you through the summer!

OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS

Please join us on Monday, January 12 at 7:00 pm on zoom for Sidney Williams 'presentation of "Your Heirlooms and the Next Generation"'. Sidney is a museum professional, curator, and community heritage leader with deep roots in the Beachville District Museum and the Beachville District Historical Society. With a passion for a traditional craft, collections care, and public engagement, Sidney strives to make history tangible - whether through artifact accessibility, educational community programming, or hands-on experiences that connect visitors to South-West Oxford and Zorra Townships' stories of making and place. Sidney is the 2025 recipient of the Ontario Historical Society's Dorothy Duncan Award for Leadership in Heritage, recognizing her creativity, leadership, and commitment to ensuring small heritage institutions have a lasting and meaningful impact. To register for this presentation, please visit our home page at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. This is a free event and all are welcome to attend.

COMING EVENTS

BEACHVILLE LEGION EVENTS: 434852 ZorraLine, Beachville

EUCHRE
Thursday nights 7 p.m.

DARTS
Friday nights 8 p.m.

ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH 55 EVENTS: 642 Dundas St, Woodstock, ON

SHUFFLEBOARD
Every Thursday at 1:30pm

CADETS
Monday Nights

DART LEAGUE
Every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday,
Friday nights

EVENING ENTERTAINMENT
January 17: 7-11 p.m. - 50-60 Bros
January 24: 7-11 p.m. - DJ Kelly
January 31: 7-11 p.m. - Flashback

WE ARE CLOSED JANUARY 2

MEAT DRAW
January 3: 3 p.m.

SOUP N SANDWICH
January 8: 11:30-12:45 p.m.
Beef barley and Special is Hamburger and Fries

EXECUTIVE MEETING
January 6: 7 p.m.

PRIVATE FUNCTION JANUARY 10:
The canteen will be open in the afternoon but closed to the public for a private function.

NO GENERAL MEETING THIS MONTH

FAMILY ROAST BEEF DINNER
January 25: 5-6 p.m.
Prices have changed per person it's plus dessert Pre-order and pay by January 20th no later. So please contact Office or Canteen for more information.

WING NIGHT
January 31: 4:30-6 p.m.
One price for wings plus w/Fries a different price Pre-Order and pay by January 23rd no later. So please contact Office or Canteen for more information.

**OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
WINTER 2026 SPEAKER SERIES**

THE AGRICULTURAL ART OF ROSS BUTLER – PRESERVING OXFORD COUNTY'S HISTORICAL AND AGRICULTURAL ROOTS

Wednesday, January 28: 6:30 p.m.
Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock
Special Guest Speaker David Butler – Join David as he takes us through the history of his father's "Journey to Perfection" through art and agriculture, his roots in Oxford County and his special connection to the Oxford Historical and Museum Society (now the Oxford Historical Society). Free Admission, Donations Welcome!

HOW DO I LOVE THEE – VALENTINES THROUGH TIME
Wednesday, February 25: 6:30 p.m.
Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock
Special Guest Speaker – Scott Gillies, Chair OxHS – Bring your sweetheart and come curl up in the big comfy chairs at Chartwell Oxford Gardens and listen to the history of Valentines Day. Free Admission, Donations Welcome!

LITTLE ENGINES CAN DO BIG THINGS
Wednesday, March 25: 6:30 p.m.
Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave. Woodstock

Special Guest Speaker - Colin Currie, Director OxHS – join Colin as he takes us through Oxford County's rich railroad history and historical infrastructure that helped shape and connect cities like Woodstock and Ingersoll (CN/CP) and towns like Tillsonburg, Hickson and Beachville (CASO/ GWR), now featuring numerous surviving heritage train stations and active train-watching spots. Free Admission, Donations Welcome!

For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

**HURON PARK BAPTIST CHURCH
EVENTS:**
199 Berwick St., Woodstock, ON

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE
Wednesday, December 24: 6:30 p.m.

FREE MOVIE NIGHT – SIGHT AND SOUND PRODUCTION OF JONAH
Wednesday December 31: 6:00 p.m.

**YOUNG AT HEART (SENIORS)
LUNCHEON**
Thursday, January 22, 202: Noon
Music by Louanne Schultz
Please call the church for more details
519 -421-4722

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

REAL ESTATE

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REALTOR®

Gale Group Realty Brokerage Ltd.
425 Dundas St. Woodstock ON
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carlybrintnell@gmail.com



SUDOKU

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QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Six seven
2. Ernie Clement
3. Anora
4. Oklahoma City Thunder (basketball)
5. Kananaskis, AB
6. Pope Leo XIV
7. Zohran Mamdani
8. NVIDIA
9. India
10. Ahmed al-Ahmed

CLASSIFIEDS

TREES

Shade trees, Fruit trees, Apple, Pears, Peaches, Plums, Sweet and Sour Cherries, Apricot, Nectarines, Blueberry, Haskopp, Black Chokeberry, Grapes etc. Lots of Spruce, Pine, Cedars for windbreaks and privacy hedges, Sizes 1 to 6+. Flowering shrubs and much more. Come check us out Mon-Sat 7:00am - 6:00pm
Martin's Nursery, 42661 Orangehill Road, Wroxeter (1 concession north of Wroxeter on Belmore Line)



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