

STRATFORD TIMES

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UTRCA expects significant costs for consolidation

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While staff and the board of directors for the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) don't anticipate cuts to service levels or relative funding for the area, they do expect a significant cost born from the plan to consolidate the province's 36 conservation areas (CAs) into regional authorities.

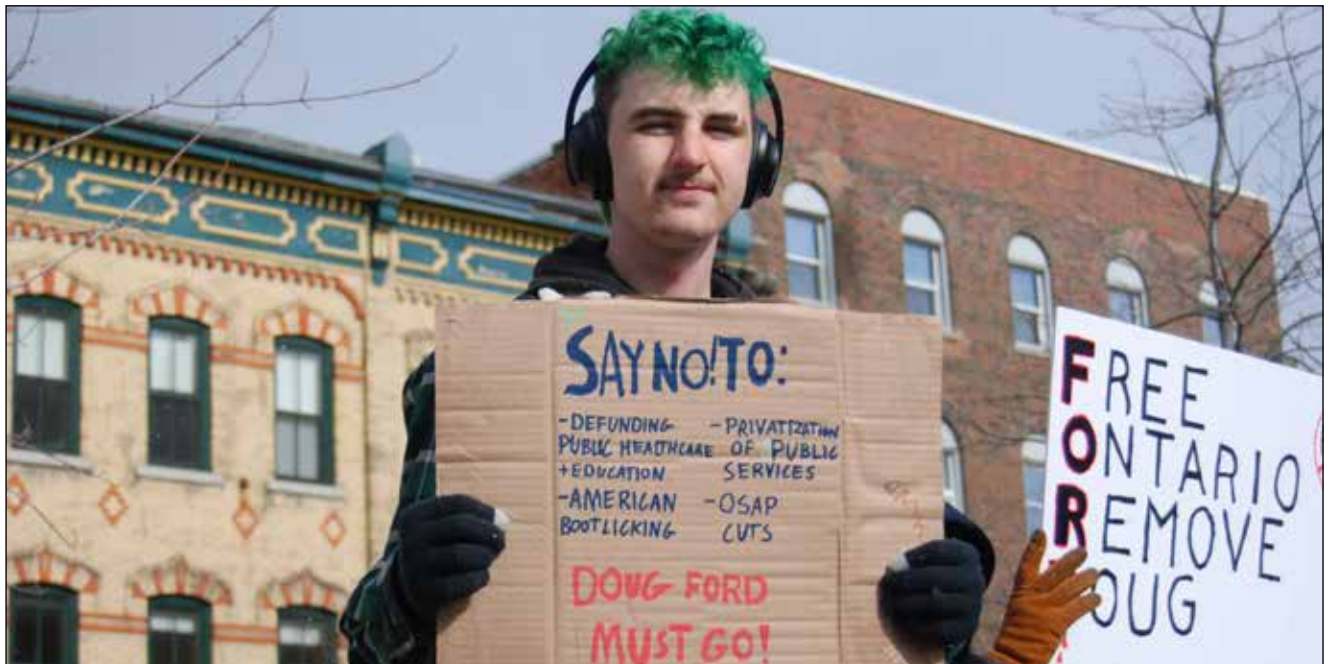
"There's lots of moving parts with this," said Tracy Annett, general manager of the UTRCA, at its March 24 meeting. "... There's still a lot of detail expected to come, and those details being through amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act.

"... We recognize there's going to be significant costs for transition," Annett went on to say. "Everything from IT systems, rebranding, policy and staffing harmonization. I look at the \$3 million across the province and don't think that's quite adequate."

The \$3 million Annett was referring to is the fund the Province of Ontario will endow to the newly created Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA), which will oversee the transition of CAs into their regional counterparts. As she said, that fund is meant to assist all 36 conservation authorities.

The OPCA was created late last year, when the province also indicated its desire to consolidate its CAs. Through Bill 68, the Plan to Protect Ontario Act, an

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Liam Carter's sign addresses several concerns, including cuts to OSAP, defunding healthcare and privatization. Carter was one of many protestors at Stratford Hall on March 28.

Stratford residents participate in Ontario-wide protest against Premier Doug Ford

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A group of protestors of all ages addressed a variety of concerns marching around Stratford City Hall on a snowy Saturday morning.

The Fight Ford protest outside of city hall on March 28 was part of a province-wide Fight Ford protest that addressed the disapproval of Ontario Premier Doug Ford and his government's actions and plans. Some passing by the protest honked their horns in solidarity or praised the movement when walking by.

Protestors carried a variety of signs addressing concerns over the cuts to the OSAP program, as well as health care privatization, environmental concerns and Bill 5, also known as the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act.

Bill 5 allows the government to move forward with projects without restrictions like existing laws. The bill has received a lot of criticism for its potential environmental impact.

"There's only an hour; we could spend two hours talking about Ford because he's done so much to an-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



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UTRCA expects significant costs for consolidation

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

amendment to the Conservation Authorities Act established the OPCA and proposed to create seven regional CAs. At that time, it was proposed that the UTRCA be consolidated with eight other conservation authorities into the Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority.

Since then, the province has amended its plan. It is now proposing to consolidate the UTRCA with the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA), the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) and the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) to create the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA), one of nine regional CAs.

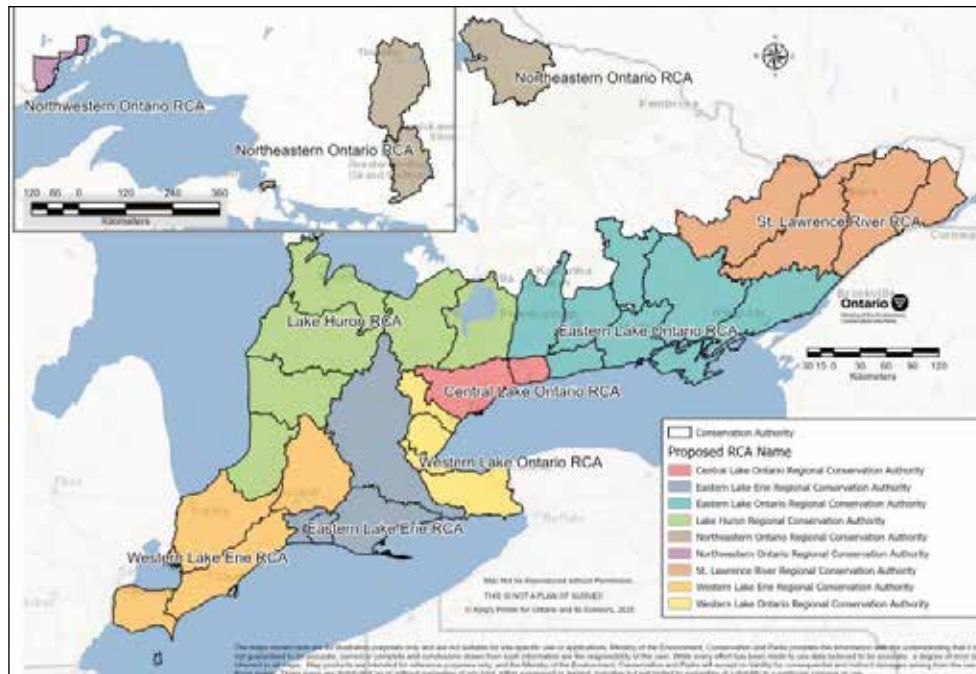
While there has been significant public

pushback due to a fear of waning local representation and service delivery, including from the UTRCA's board of directors, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks is arguing amalgamation is a necessity that won't impede local voices and will better service delivery.

Under the current system, more than half of all municipalities served by a CA exist in the jurisdictions of two or more CAs, meaning much of the work they do is being repeated. By amalgamating, the province means to have a more consistent and efficient workflow across CAs. Additionally, in line with feedback and representation-fears, the province is now mandating regional CAs establish at least one "Watershed Council" to ensure watershed management is done by local expertise.

"The intent is not to shut down conservation authorities," chair Brian Petrie reminded the board when the 2027 budget was brought up during discussion. "It's to keep them going, and all the rhetoric and all the messaging has been the same service level. My guess is that the province wants those budgets in place to give the regional (CA) time to be able to do the ... transition work."

"... There's certainly a lot of questions on that and



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A map of the proposed Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA), which would see the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) consolidate with the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA), the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) and the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA).

bodies fighting each other on that one. "There's going to be a lot more information. There's going to have to be a tsunami of information come forward at some point, so we're going to get it whether we want it or not." The establishment of the regional CAs is expected for early 2027. As Petrie said, more information will be released in the coming months.

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Stratford residents participate in Ontario-wide protest against Premier Doug Ford

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

noy the people,” said Jane Marie Mitchell, who was in attendance. “These legacy projects he wants to do and put all this money into, there’s people here for healthcare, the corruption that’s in the government and now he wants these (Freedom of Information requests) to not be accessible, going backwards not just from the time that that policy is made ... It’s hard to find something good to say about Ford. Just everything he does – he’s not protecting the environment, he’s not protecting the conservative jobs; there’s a lot.”

In addition to Stratford, protesters held demonstrations in municipalities all across Ontario such as London, Windsor, Barrie, Toronto and Ottawa.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Several protestors part of the Fight Ford protest in Stratford held signs addressing health care and Bill 5.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



Rae says 2026 budget will support rural communities

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy introduced the provincial budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year on March 26, a budget that local Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae said will support the region.

“Our government is focused on protecting Ontario – keeping costs down, supporting jobs and making sure we come out of this period of economic uncertainty stronger,” said Rae in a media release.

“Ontario is navigating economic challenges with a pragmatic and prudent fiscal plan,” said Bethlenfalvy. “To help the province navigate these times and come out stronger, we are investing in strategic priorities such as energy, critical minerals, key infrastructure and critical technologies that will make our economy stronger, while cutting red tape and creating the conditions for businesses to grow, supporting workers and strengthening Ontario’s economy.”

As the global landscape continues to evolve and trade tensions and supply chain pressures impact the economy, the Government of Ontario aims to protect communities with a multi-year Tax Action Plan and the removal of the full 13 per cent Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) for all eligible buyers of new homes, for a maximum rebate of \$130,000 in relief.

“In the face of tariffs and economic uncertainty, we’re focused on supporting jobs, strengthening our economy and keeping costs down. I’ll continue to advocate to ensure Perth-Wellington gets its fair share of provincial funding,” said Rae.

Budget 2026 will:

- Expand investment in the Primary Care Action Plan to \$3.4 billion from 2025

to 2029, furthering the province’s plan to connect everyone in Ontario to a family doctor or primary care provider, an additional investment of over \$300 million.

- Increase Ontario Autism Program funding to nearly \$1 billion annually, enabling more children and youth to access core clinical services and strengthen sector capacity across the province.

- Inject an additional \$300 million over six years through the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, to help meet the needs of growing communities as they foster healthier and more active lifestyles for families and make sports more accessible.

- Invest \$9.4 million over three years to renew grants for the Summer Company and Starter Company Plus programs delivered through the Small Business Enterprise Centres network.

- Support Small Business Enterprise Centres as they meet growing program demand, expand advisory services and support new initiatives with an investment of \$3 million over three years.

- Cut the small business corporate income tax (CIT) rate from 3.2 per cent to 2.2 per cent, giving over 375,000 Ontario small businesses an additional \$1.1 billion in CIT relief over the next three years so that they continue to stay competitive and resilient.

Ontario’s plan does not raise taxes or cut services, though it does project a deficit of \$13.8 billion for the 2026-27 year. The government is projecting balance by 2028-29, projecting deficits of \$12.3 billion in 2025-26, \$13.8 billion in 2026-27 and \$6.1 billion in 2027-28, before planning for a surplus of \$0.6 billion in 2028-29.

To read the full budget, visit: <https://budget.ontario.ca/2026/index.html>.

Local transit secure provincial funding

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae has announced that local municipalities will be receiving \$882,866 to support rural public transportation, through the 2025-26 Gas Tax program. This funding can be used to expand service hours, increase routes, purchase new vehicles and improve accessibility to increase transit ridership.

“We’re maintaining this funding to help municipalities expand transit and keep people connected,” said Rae in an announcement. “This funding means better service and stronger communities across our riding.”

“As the mayor of Stratford, I know how important our local transit system is to our residents; to go to work, school, appointments and for other personal needs,” said Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma. “On behalf of our city residents, I would like to share my appreciation to the Province of Ontario for their ongoing support through the Gas Tax funding to enhance and improve Stratford City Transit.”

The Ontario government is investing over \$380 million in 107 municipalities across Ontario to improve local transit through the Gas Tax program.

“Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government is investing nearly \$70 billion in public transit to protect Ontario by building a stronger, more resilient, self-reliant economy,” said Prabmeet Sarkaria, Ontario’s Minister of Transportation. “Today, we’re ensuring municipalities can continue to deliver safe and reliable transit services for their communities.”

For 2025-26, municipal Gas Tax allocations have been maintained at 2024-25 levels. In addition to the Gas Tax program, the government supports municipal transportation projects through the Connecting Links, and Ontario Transit Investment Fund programs.

Funding amounts as provided by the Ministry of Transportation:

- St. Marys, \$163,485.
- North Perth, \$80,090.
- Perth East, \$73,121.
- Stratford, \$513,030.
- West Perth, \$53,140.

Humane society preps for kitten season

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

As kitten season approaches, the Humane Society of Kitchener Waterloo & Stratford Perth is gearing up for one of the busiest and most demanding times of the year. This annual period, which typically begins in the spring and lasts through early fall, brings a dramatic increase in the number of kittens arriving in shelters, many needing urgent care.

To prepare for the influx, the organization is mobilizing resources and calling on the community to lend their support. From medical treatment and food to foster care and staffing, kitten season places a significant strain on shelter operations.

As part of these efforts, the humane society is launching a new line of kitten season branded merchandise, with proceeds going directly toward the care of animals in need. The collection features two different design choices with multiple different t-shirt variations for men, women, unisex and children, as well as tote bags.

“One of the most important ways the community can help during kitten season is through monetary donations and direct

support to our initiatives and fundraisers, which allow us to provide medical care, food and essential supplies for the kittens in our care,” said Victoria Baby, CEO of the humane society.

The humane society is also actively preparing for Meowmosa, presented by Clean & Tidy, where they invite guests to indulge in all-you-can-eat brunch with bottomless mimosas, all while supporting vulnerable cats and kittens (and other pets). Taking place on Saturday, May 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Hampton Inn & Suites in St. Jacobs, this event offers a memorable way to celebrate moms, friends and community while raising vital funds for the humane society. Tickets are currently on sale on their website.

Monetary donations also help the humane society purchase specialized kitten food, medical supplies and equipment needed to help kittens grow healthy and strong. To donate and support visit: kws-phumane.ca/donate.

For information on how to become a foster parent, donating, adopting a pet or supporting other initiatives of the humane society, please visit: kwsphumane.ca or visit them on social media.

Suspected firearm turned out to be a pellet gun

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

After the Stratford Police Service received a report of a man with what looked to be a black handgun, the suspected firearm turned out to be a pellet gun.

On March 26 at 12:30 p.m. the Stratford Police Service received a report of a male on Devon Street, carrying a black handgun.

Local police received the report on March 26 at 12:30 p.m., arriving at the scene with Perth County OPP within minutes. They conducted an extensive

search of the area at that time, closing the area of all traffic and using drone equipment and thermal imaging, but were unable to locate the man.

After a community request for video surveillance, within seven hours the subject male was identified as a 19-year-old resident of Stratford, thanks to footage provided to police.

Police located him at his residence where it was determined that the firearm involved was a pellet gun, which resembled a Glock pistol.

The pellet gun was seized, and the matter is being investigated to determine if criminal charges will be laid.

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Second home care symposium scheduled for April 15

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After the success of last year's home care symposium, local advocate Paul Brown is back with another – and this time he is promising a larger panel of experts to match the community's larger interest.

As Brown said, by mid-March last year, the 2025 symposium had 35 people signed up. By mid-March this year, the 2026 symposium had 125.

"There was kind of an awakening at last year's event," Brown said. "And there was a thirst for information, and people were excited to hear the things that those speakers spoke about. But now we're looking for action, and how can we as a community bring the people, the powers that be, to see this as a major issue, not just because of the cohort of the population that's over 65, but (as) a way to change health care."

As Brown said, home care, the health-care services historically meant only for those who require care in their home, is an evolving idea. Taking inspiration from former Minister of Health Dr. Jane Philpott, Brown advocates for home care that is an integral and expanded part of modern Ontarian health services, where everyone has access to care right in the heart of their lives: their home and community.

"A lot of people think it's just for the elderly," Brown explained. "And when I use home care as part of primary care, it's health care for all. It could be a new baby business for new moms. It could be some of these new appli-

cations that (are) on your watch and on your cell phone and reading your blood pressure and your weight and your different health elements.

"... We got to look for home care for everybody. And that's the thing I think more and more seniors are relating to, is helping seniors, but also having a responsibility for caring for all people, home care, caring for all."

This year, Brown and his organizing body Healthnext have scheduled eight guest speakers, including:

- Robert Claiborne, architect and partner at DIALOG Design.
- Karen Cochrane, human-computer interaction professor at the Stratford School of Interaction Design and Business.
- Dr. Kim Glimour, primary care lead with the Ontario Health Team, Huron Perth and Area.
- Roger Koert, chair of the City of Stratford's accessibility advisory committee.
- John Lord, author of Pathways to Inclusion: Building a New Story with People and Communities.
- Plinio Morita, director of the Network for Aging Research at the University of Waterloo.
- Doug Morton, vice president of government relations with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Group.
- Neha Oberoi, the health and wellness lead with CSA Group.

The home care symposium takes place April 15 at the Stratford Country Club from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Those interested can register for free at <https://tinyurl.com/2ba994zk>.

Shakespeare's Presbyterian Church comes alive at Easter, with miraculous play *The Table*

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

For two nights last weekend, the church pews at Shakespeare's Presbyterian Church were filled to capacity – not because the church's much loved minister Rev. Rob Congram was preaching, but because of an Easter Play called *The Table – Bread, Wine and Betrayal*.

The 70-minute play, written and directed by Stratford's Rev. Gail Fricker, lived up to its local hype and did not disappoint.

This play was committed to celebrating Easter, as told in the Bible, and was very creative in building community spirit at the same time.

From start to finish, those who were lucky enough to get a ticket, could not believe how a local group of volunteers could put together such a show, appropriately at the time of Easter Celebrations.

As local organizers Richard and Jean Smelski related, the play started as a small idea, but with the efforts and support of over 50 participants, it became a reality.

They also said they would be remiss if they didn't acknowledge the endless hours and days of the volunteering cast supporting members of the church congregation.

They especially thanked Gail Fricker for her writing and directing and Shakespeare's Shelley Jeary (Gingerich), stage director, to make this well-received play happen. They also wanted to acknowledge Congram and parishioners for their tremendous endorsement of the idea.

They said through the generous support for *The Table*, the outreach of the Shakespeare Presbyterian Church congregation and community has been very motivating.

Entrance to the play was by donation only, and any extra funds collected will be presented to the Stratford General Hospital Foundation.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The cast and crew of *The Table* received a resounding standing ovation from the church's audience, following the two nights the performance was held.

Thoughts on Deswanization

(a swan reflects on the cancellation of Stratford's annual swan parade)

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to see us wobble on our
winter-frosted platters
toward the Avon's rippled edge,
such ceremony in the camera's eye,
our asphalt carpet foot slog
to mark your seasons.

But our world is not
hinged like that.

It ferments and percolates
its perfect rhythms to the
swan clock of our private maps,
binds us to the water by the
tilt of thaw and shadow, instructs
our lovemaking like an edict.

Swan bones do not respond
to spectacle or tradition.
Instinct is not rehearsed.
You don't just book us in your
day timer, like a festival.

Know this, all you who seek
to deswanize our precious bevy:
we are in the river
as the river is in us.

Springtime chooses its hours

and we show up

when we show up.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What is the birthstone for April?
2. Who is the newly elected leader of the NDP?
3. The Cooper's Hill Cheese-Rolling and Wake takes place annually in which country?
4. Children born from 2025 to 2039 will belong to which generation?
5. What are the three main macronutrients?
6. Who stars as the lead role in *Shutter Island* (2010)?
7. Canada's federal minimum wage grew April 1, 2026. What is minimum wage?
8. Angkor Wat is the largest religious monument in the world found in what country?
9. How far is 1-light year in kilometres?
10. How many sides does a heptagon have?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

Panel raising marks major milestone for apartment buildings across from Agriplex

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Construction at the Hawthorne apartment buildings, located across from the Stratford Rotary Complex on McCarthy Road, reached a new milestone this week as project partners, trades and community leaders gathered on site for a panel-raising event.

The panel raising showcased Stubbe's FastTrack construction method – large, prefabricated wall panels placed via crane and pieced together. This approach is designed to significantly cut down on construction timelines and costs while maintaining high-quality standards.

"When we first stood on this site across from the Agriplex, across from the future Countryside Park, tucked into the north corner of Stratford, we didn't just see a building, we saw an opportunity – an opportunity to contribute to a city with such a strong identity and to create a place people would be proud to call home," said Jason Stubbe, managing director.

"We believe in small-town Ontario, and we love to see small towns continue to thrive," he continued.

The Hawthorne apartments plan to welcome new tenants as early as fall 2026. Current construction is on the first two buildings, which will include a total of 162 units. A third building will include an additional 103 units, with construction to begin at a later date.

"When we bought this property last year, we knew we wanted to build something more than just housing," said Stubbe. "We wanted to build a community within a community, and by working together with our consultants and the City of Stratford staff, we are very happy to be able to do that."

The apartment community intends to serve a wide range of residents, from downsizing seniors and empty nesters to young professionals and families. The spaces throughout the buildings are designed to support connection, wellness and everyday convenience.

"It's about creating a lifestyle, not just an apartment," said Stubbe. "We're also eager to see Stratford's community improvement plan to better understand how it will allow for partnerships on some attainable living options in the city of Stratford."

Residents will have access to a heated

pool, hot tub, sauna and outdoor lounges, shared dining areas, community gardens and gathering spaces. Amenities will also include fitness facilities, pickleball and basketball courts, games rooms, coworking spaces, bike storage and pet-friendly features, including a dog park and wash station.

Although aimed at feeling like a resort-inspired community, Stubbe noted their commitment to allowing for attainable living within the development.

"We wanted to further drive down construction costs, making attainable housing in Ontario a reality," he said. "So far, the trades that we've worked with have been amazing, and we look forward to continuing to work with them as the buildings take shape. Stratford, like everywhere else in Canada, needs housing, and they need it fast. The only way to do this is build, build, build."

The event brought together representatives from Muirstone Living and Stubbe's, members of Stratford city council, city staff, local trades and community members. Mayor Martin Ritsma spoke and offered his support for affordable options in Stratford.

"When I think about building in Stratford, I think about quality, speed and efficiency," said Ritsma during the panel-raising event. "In the end, if done right and if there's a working relationship, it should be affordable for our residents as well."

He continued to praise Stubbe's for being a long-standing supporter in the community, including its commitment to the agricultural sector, noting that the new buildings will not encroach on Stratford's agricultural land.

"Certainly, Stubbe's is not new to Stratford," he said. "I've known Stubbe's on the agricultural side for many, many years. They have been part of our Pork Congress and our agricultural society in Stratford for many years."

"The one thing that I'll say on behalf of our council is we have really embraced the idea of density; the importance of having homes that are not spread across our agricultural land. What you see today is 162 homes that occupy a much smaller footprint than if we spread them out as single-detached homes or townhouses," continued Ritsma.

To learn more or to register for updates, visit www.hawthornestratford.ca



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Mike Goor, managing director of land development and facilities, Jason Stubbe, managing director of precast sales, Andy Stubbe, president, Mayor Martin Ritsma, Coun. Larry McCabe, Coun. Mark Hunter and Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach stand beside the newly installed Stubbe's FastTrack panel at the construction site on McCarthy Road.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A rendering of the first two buildings, which are to be completed as early as fall 2026.



LOCAL MATTERS.



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Remember when **Facebook** bought a case of Girl Guide cookies to support your daughter?



Remember when **Google** provided free pizza to your child's soccer team when they won the championship?

Perth County continues discussion on invasive-species strategy

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth County council is continuing its discussion on how best to address the growing threat posed by invasive plant species, including whether funding set aside for giant hogweed eradication could support a broader, coordinated approach across the county.

After hearing from Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) forestry and restoration supervisor Rob Davies about the conservation authority's collaborative invasive-species program at its March 5 meeting, council revisited the topic during discussion of the county's 2025 weed report at its March 19 meeting.

Councillors considered whether some or all of the \$25,000 included in the 2026 budget to address giant hogweed could instead be used to support broader efforts to map, monitor and control invasive species across the county.

"This is probably an opportunity to address what was carried over from a few meetings ago with regards to the money we had set aside for invasive species," Coun. Walter McKenzie said, putting forward a motion proposing the funding be used, in whole or in part, to support invasive-species control on public lands and roadsides, particularly to address the spread of giant hogweed, phragmites and Japanese knotweed – three of the most concerning plants currently affecting Perth County.

"... There may be other invasive species, but those are the three that we talked about, and those are the three that seem to be an issue in, certainly, the southern part of the county. ... I'm not looking to spend the whole \$25,000; let's take what it needs and spend up to \$25,000, but if we don't need it, we wouldn't spend it. I think we still have to have a follow-up (report) at some point in time to make sure this pro-

gram is working."

According to public works director Bill Wilson, however, Perth County already has a roadside-vegetation management program that allows its weed-control contractor to identify and treat invasive species along county roads, including phragmites. Council heard this work could potentially be expanded to include local municipal roads in the future as mapping efforts improve.

The UTRCA program aims to create a coordinated strategy to identify, map, monitor and control invasive species across the watershed, with a focus on the three of most concerning weeds mentioned by McKenzie. These species are considered particularly problematic due to their environmental, economic and human-health impacts.

Giant hogweed, for example, produces a toxic sap that can cause severe skin irritation, blistering and long-term sensitivity to sunlight when it comes into contact with skin. The plant can also reduce biodiversity and limit recreational use of natural areas.

Japanese knotweed is known for its aggressive root system, which can damage infrastructure including foundations, bridges and drainage systems, while also crowding out native vegetation and reducing biodiversity.

Phragmites, an invasive grass species, spreads rapidly in wetlands and roadside ditches, forming dense stands that disrupt water flow, increase fire risk and create challenges for municipal infrastructure maintenance.

The county's weed report notes that complaints in 2025 included issues related to giant hogweed, sow-thistle and dog-strangling vine, as well as growing concern about invasive species not currently listed as noxious weeds under provincial legislation, including phragmites,

garlic mustard and Himalayan balsam.

The UTRCA's program is designed to address these concerns through a collaborative, multi-year effort involving municipalities, conservation authorities, industry groups and private landowners. The approach emphasizes early detection and rapid response, as well as prioritizing areas where coordinated treatment can produce long-term results.

"I think we do need to seek clarity ... on whether we're going to give some money to the conservation authority or whether we're going to essentially keep it for our own team's purposes and focus our efforts on our own land, leaving the ratepayers to pay their own bills on their land in terms of weed control," Coun. Todd Kasenberg said. "I do have vague concern about that notion that if we leave the ratepayer to handle it, those who don't actually do it exacerbate the problem."

"I think that we should take a serious look at education because I think there are a lot of ratepayers who really don't know how big the issue is with some of these weeds," added Coun. Bob Wilhelm. "Perhaps we need to educate them."

A key challenge in controlling invasive species is a significant portion of affected land is privately owned, making co-operation from landowners essential to any long-term strategy. According to the UTRCA presentation, fragmented efforts are often ineffective because invasive plants can quickly spread from untreated properties into neighbouring lands, undermining progress made elsewhere.

"Our new approach is a collaborative, coordinated approach to identify, map, monitor, prioritize and control invasives within the Upper Thames River watershed," Davies told county councillors at their March 5 meeting. "Specifically, we're going to target giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and phragmites be-

cause we know these species are significant issues across our watershed. The local awareness and local action will get efficient results. We're looking for partnership between private landowners, municipalities and (conservation authority) lands, and we're hoping for a sustained, multi-year program.

"The collaborative support of our partners with either access to lands, landowner contacts, identification, monitoring, mapping or control efforts will result in effective, efficient, informed decisions at both the local and regional levels, and it also gives us the ability to leverage those funds to make any investments go that much further."

Ultimately, council referred McKenzie's amended motion back to staff for further analysis on how much funding the county could or should contribute to the UTRCA's program, whether similar services are available through the county's other conservation authorities (Maitland Valley and Ausable Bayfield) and whether a portion of the \$25,000 should remain dedicated to internal control efforts on county and lower-tier land.

"We already pay into the conservation authorities through our lower tiers, so I have a problem if we're going to give them more money, especially if this program is not one that's mandated," Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz said during the discussion. "To me, it's over and above. Yeah, it might be a problem; it sounds like we're already addressing it here at the county. So, I'm not in favour. If Walter's motion only pertains to the county ... I can support that, but I cannot support giving more money to the conservation authority."

Staff are expected to report back to council with additional information to help guide future decisions about how the county will approach invasive-species management moving forward.

Over \$260K in drugs seized in Stratford, London

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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In 2025 the Stratford Police Service Street Crime Unit (SCU) partnered with the Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario to investigate the trafficking of cocaine within Stratford and surrounding municipalities, a partnership known as Project SAPHIRE

In March 2026, the project concluded with the execution of two search warrants in London and one in Stratford, with the assistance of local uniformed police, Woodstock Police Service SCU, Woodstock Police Emergency Response Unit, London Police Emergency Response Unit, London Police MSU and London Police Uniform Division.

During the course of the investigation, police seized 90 grams of crack cocaine, 167 grams of methamphetamine, 2,473 grams of cocaine and approximately \$91,000 in cash.

The drugs seized have a street value of over \$266,000.

The search warrants executed in December 2025, resulted in a 37-year-old male being charged twice with Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking. A 52-year-old female was also charged with Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking.

In March 2026, a 33-year-old male and a 29-year-old female were charged with Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking and Possession of Property Obtained by Crime.

A 32-year-old male was charged with 12 counts of Trafficking and Possession of Property Obtained by Crime.

A 48-year-old male was charged with Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking and weapons offences.

A warrant will be sought for a 30-year-old male who will be charged with four counts of Trafficking and Possession of Property Obtained by Crime.

Local police thanked its partners in the operation, including the Woodstock Police Service, the London Police Service, the Guelph Police Service and CISO.

Project SAPHIRE illustrates the effective collaboration and coordination of multiple Police Services to combat drug crime.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Over \$266,000 of drugs and \$91,000 in cash was seized in raids in London and Stratford this month.

Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre releases early concept drawings for future STEM-based learning centre

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

At the Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre's 2026 annual general meeting March 26, board chair Steve Dolson introduced the team from Moriyama Teshima Architects, which developed concept designs for the future 10-acre site in Listowel.

The Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre aims to become a place for learning and play that showcases the innovation and importance of the agriculture and agri-food sector across Ontario, while highlighting what Huron and Perth counties have to offer.

Although still in the conceptual phase, the centre is already drawing attention and praise from local politicians, including Matthew Rae.

"This centre will showcase the strength of Ontario's agri-food sector and the people behind it," he said. "It's an industry that drives our economy and puts food on our tables every day."

The STEM-based centre is envisioned as a hub for science, education and community engagement, promoting curiosity and bridging the gap between consumers and agricultural practices. It will also highlight diverse career opportunities in the agri-food industry.

At the meeting, plans were discussed for an expanded facility, growing from 20,000 square feet to 34,000 square feet, with estimated costs increasing to \$38 million.

The board secured \$100,000 in grants from the Gay Lea Foundation and the Agricultural Adaptation Council, allowing the project to move forward with architectural proposals and the concept phase.

A total of 41 proposals were received



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Ehsan Naimpour, Diarmuid Nash and Olivia Keung from Moriyama Teshima Architects and Steve Dolson, board chair announce new concept designs of the Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre at the 2026 AGM in March.

before selecting Moriyama Teshima Architects. The overall project is expected to raise \$40 million to \$50 million, including \$100,000 for concept design, \$300,000 for planning and \$150,000 for fundraising support.

The firm has worked on a number of civic and cultural institutions, including the Canadian War Museum, the Aga Khan Museum, the Discovery Centre and the Honey Bee Research Centre. They are currently leading new design work at Science North, as well as the Rouge National Urban Park Visitor, Learning and Community Centre.

Their approach to the project focuses on helping the public better understand On-

tario agriculture and making food systems more visible.

"Food is everything. Food is national security. Food is economy. It's employment. It is energy, history. If we approached many of today's issues understanding the importance our food makes, we would be making much better decisions," said Diarmuid Nash, partner. "Food is infrastructure, its climate resilience, its economic strength and its community stability, and yet, for something so fundamental to our lives, much of this food system remains invisible to the public."

He reiterated that the centre is about making the agri-food system visible to everyone, including those in urban centres, like Toronto.

"It's a place for agriculture, technology, sustainability and education to come together — a place where Ontarians can better understand the land that sustains them, the systems that support it and the innovation shaping its future," he said. "While the building is about agriculture, it's also a civic institution about stewardship. It reflects resilience, and it's about the future of food in Ontario."

Olivia Keung, director of sustainability, said the concept will focus not only on the agri-food sector but also on sustainability and land use.

"Our projects focus on public engagement, learning and connections to the landscape," she said. "We were inspired by the conversations during the tour and throughout the months we have been working together with the board, and we are deeply committed to sustainability and innovation."

Keung said sustainability is a top priority for the concept.

"Architecture must embody environmental sustainability. That same belief — that buildings can actively demonstrate stewardship, innovation and responsibility to the land — is central to how we approach the Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre," she said.

The project began in 2020 with a feasibility study conducted for the Municipality of North Perth. A non-profit organization was formed in 2021, gained charitable status in 2022 and developed a strategic plan in 2023. In 2024, the Municipality of North Perth committed 10 acres of serviced land as the project expanded to a provincial scope.

The board plans to launch a capital campaign next year.

More information is available at oafdc.ca.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

As every homeowner knows, maintenance is an ongoing job — and the Stratford General Hospital is no different. Workers were out on March 30 installing new windows aimed to give a new look and greater airflow efficiency.



(BRUCE WHITAKER PHOTO)

Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) students Maeve Thornrose and Cindy Yuan stand in front of their new mural at the Perth County Inn on the corner of Huron and Tork Streets.

Community invited to support a new library through “Izzy’s Inch-by-Inch Readathon”

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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A new community literacy initiative is inviting readers of all ages to turn pages into progress. Izzy’s Inch-by-Inch Readathon has officially launched, encouraging participants to read and fundraise in support of a new library for the community.

Hosted through the peer-to-peer fundraising platform Zeffy, the campaign enables participants to raise donations from friends and family while they read. Supporters can contribute directly to the campaign online or drop off cash or cheques at the Stratford Public Library.

Funds raised through the readathon will help support the development of a new library space, expanding access to books, learning resources and community programming for residents. The campaign combines the joy of reading with community fundraising to help bring this important project to life.

“Every page read brings us one step closer to building a library that will

serve our community for generations,” said Izzy’s mom, Lindsey Martchenko. “Whether someone reads a few pages or a whole stack of books, every inch counts.”

Nine-year-old Izzy, the inspiration behind the readathon, says supporting the library was an easy decision.

“I love reading so much, and libraries have so many amazing books,” said Izzy. “When I heard about the chance to help build our library, I wanted to help right away. I want everyone to have a place where they can find books they love.”

How to participate

Register as a reader through the campaign page.

Track your reading progress.

Share your fundraising page with friends and family.

Help support the creation of a new library for the community.

Community members can learn more, sign up or donate by visiting the official campaign page at <https://tinyurl.com/n82z3k28>.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Join Izzy the Bookworm in a readathon in support of the Stratford Public Library. Hosted through the peer-to-peer fundraising platform Zeffy, the campaign enables participants to raise donations from friends and family while they read. Supporters can contribute directly to the campaign online or drop off cash or cheques at the Stratford Public Library.

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Iris Collective highlights accomplishments of Stratford women who received Order of Canada

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

It was a heartfelt afternoon filled with sharing life stories, laughs and tears.

The Iris Collective held the Voices of Distinction event at the Stratford Public Library auditorium to highlight women living in Stratford who received the Order of Canada. The event featured journalist and author Diane Sims, accountant Tricia O'Malley, singer-songwriter and philanthropist Loreena McKennitt, long-time Stratford Festival actor Seana McKenna, and Medical Mission Depot operator Jean Aitcheson.

The women shared their stories of resiliency, reaching their goals, building connections and making an impact on the community. A panel discussion led by Judy Maddren followed the storytelling and the group discussed overcoming

tough times, what makes a good mentor, and if their life now is what their younger self imagined.

"I'm inspired. I want to do more events like this and I think it showcases what an amazing community we have and what amazing women we have living in this community who are just quietly doing their thing and are incredibly successful and incredible contributors to the community," said Jo-Dee Burbach, Iris Collective co-founder.

The Order of Canada honours those who made significant contributions to Canada and recognizes professional excellence.

The Iris Collective is a non-profit organization led by women of Stratford, for women in Stratford that values connectivity and community. More information about the Iris Collective can be found online by visiting <https://www.iriscollective.ca>.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Tricia O'Malley, Jean Aitcheson, Loreena McKennitt, Seana McKenna and Judy Maddren, with Diane Sims in the centre. Maddren led a panel discussion with the women after they shared their life stories during the Iris Collective Voices of Distinction event on March 28.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Jean Aitcheson describes her journey from Dundas to Perth County — from nurse to Order of Canada member.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Seana McKenna tells how she became an actor with the Stratford Festival.

Local legion celebrating 100th anniversary

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

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Stratford's Royal Canadian Legion Branch 008 turns 100 this fall and is planning a trip down memory lane and a weekend-long Centennial Celebration that hopes to draw in the community at large.

Branch 008 was chartered on Oct. 13, 1926 and is one of the 10 original legions in Ontario. There are now 139 of them in the province and 1,350 across Canada. At one time, the local branch had over 900 members, but over the years the numbers have dwindled down to the current 321 members.

This year is also the centenary of the member-based non-profit Royal Canadian Legion organization, which turns 100 this summer. On July 17, 1926, the Royal Canadian Legion was officially incorporated by a special Act of Parliament. The centenary represents "a century of standing with veterans, strengthening communities, and honouring the memory of those who served," according to the national organization's website. There will be celebrations at legions all across the

country and new members will be able to join for free.

Over the past century the local Stratford branch has operated from three different locations. It was first at 42 Wellington St. on the third floor, then in 1930 it moved to a building on St. Patrick Street which has since been demolished. It's now located at 804 Ontario St.

Not only has the physical location of the local legion changed over the years, so has its focus evolved.

"The original intention of the legion was to honour those who were in the war — to help bring them back together and form a brotherhood for those who came home," said Branch 008 president Frank Mathieson in a media release, who has been a member since 1979. "Today, anyone 18 or older may join. Now we really just want to show pride in our veterans and honour those who came before us and those who continue to serve us. So many people think they can't join because they're not vets, but that is not the case."

The centennial activities all take place at the legion, beginning Friday Oct. 16 with a Tombola, a type of casino night

with spin wheels and other old-fashioned games of chance. It runs from 7-10 p.m. with admission by donation.

On Saturday Oct. 17 things get under way at 9 a.m. with an open house that runs until 10 p.m. There's also a barbecue and a centennial cake cutting from noon to 2 p.m. (by donation), as well as the presentation of letters of recognition from various dignitaries, including his majesty King Charles III, the prime minister, governor general, the premier, MP, MPP and the mayor.

Also on the Saturday, from 2-6 p.m., is a meat draw. Tickets are \$15 and entitle their holders to 15 chances to win assorted packages of meat (an increasingly valuable commodity in today's economy). Tickets are also entered into a 50-50 draw, along with a special draw for a basket of ingredients for a complete meal, or a restaurant gift certificate.

Saturday night, people are invited to kick up their heels at the 7-10 p.m. dance, featuring the local band Strings 'n Traps, which plays a mix of music (admission by donation).

The centennial celebrations conclude Sunday Oct. 18 with a roast beef dinner

(\$30 per person). Reception begins at 5 p.m. with dinner served at 6 p.m.

A committee of 15 people has been working on the legion celebrations since June 2025. A commemorative booklet is also being assembled with help from the Stratford-Perth Archives and the Stratford-Perth Museum.

Mathieson hopes the community will join in the celebration and that the festivities may even attract some new younger members.

"As we age, one of our biggest challenges is to attract the younger generation and dispel the myth that the legion is an old man's club."

The Royal Canadian Legion includes in its mission to serve veterans who fought in the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, on peacekeeping missions and in more recent conflicts like Afghanistan. It also supports and honours current members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP, police officers, military families, first responders and paramedics.

For more information, please contact Mathieson at 519-271-9669.

Stratford Poet Profiles: Melissa Walker

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As Melissa Walker told the Times, her poem “Sestina for a Canada Coming of Age” was born from the harsh political climate of today but hopes it speaks to the sunnier days of tomorrow as well.

“I wanted to speak to some of the polarizing viewpoints out there right now and some of the realities of poverty, homelessness, things like that that we see in our communities a little bit more now that inflation is so high and a lot of people are struggling,” Walker said. “But you know, there is so much talent here, and hopefully this too shall pass. And you know, the U.S. administration will not be forever, and hopefully some things will begin to recuperate and repair themselves after a period of harsh economic and political and cultural reality for Canadians.”

Walker’s poem was submitted to local poet Heidi Sander’s Canada Is Our Poem contest, a national contest that asked poets from coast to coast to write what Canada meant to them. Walker, a teacher at Nancy Campbell Academy, has been writing all her life. Having gotten a master’s degree in creative writing, Walker toyed with the idea of going into academia, before pivoting into teaching and freelance journalism. Just recently she has gotten back into creative writing and has had some successes, even aside from the Canada Is Our Poem contest. “Sestina for a Canada Coming of Age” is also Walker’s



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Melissa Walker is one of the Stratford-based poets who are included in local poet Heidi Sander’s Canada Is Our Poem anthology, shortlisted in the contest of the same name. first sestina, a rigid form of six stanzas of six lines where

the final word of each line in the first stanza are used as ends for each of the following stanzas. Walker’s uses the words due, cuts, cities, wind, heads and snow as her ending words. Walker said that the constraints of having to write in such a rigid structure lent itself to thinking about the issues modern Canadians face at this present time. She started by thinking of imagery local to southwestern Ontario, but didn’t pick those ending words ahead of time.

“I just wrote some lines,” Walker said. “Those were the words that just came up for me.”

For any aspiring poets or writers, for any of her students at Nancy Campbell who want to write in any medium, Walker said the most important thing is quelling the inner critic.

“That voice that is saying, ‘Who do you think you are? You can’t do this. What do you have to say that’s special.’” Walker said. “... I always like that quote from Shakespeare: ‘Our doubts are traitors that make us lose what we oft might win by fearing to attempt.’ ... Set aside these doubts. You have to make lots of mistakes and you have to try a lot of times before you might create something that you’re happy with.”

Stratford Poet Profiles is an ongoing series by the Stratford Times, casting a spotlight on some of the Stratford poets who submitted to Heidi Sander’s Canada Is Our Poem contest. An upcoming anthology with selected works from the contest will be out in spring.

Sestina for a Canada Coming of Age

Frothy apple blossoms, undulating rows of corn, crimson maples, swaths of snow,
This is my “where” in this “here,” and your “there,” though it may be different from
mine, deserves its due.

No matter how weather-beaten or salt-eaten a sidewalk, the dandelions and asters
raise their determined heads,

No matter how utilitarian a back alley with metal bins and a broom on a stoop,
fragrances of gumbo or stew or baked goods find glorious short cuts,

No matter how ill-sealed a portable classroom or modest home, laughter bursts
its confines and mingles with the northerly wind.

Our True North strong and free is not constrained to our sparkling mountains,
oceans, freshwater, forests, farmland, or capital cities.

Our Tourism Campaigns and national parades might steer clear of our tent cities,
The hard-won path of a shopping cart at the first light of dawn through freshly
fallen snow,

The footprints foraging for fuel, a single match to strike with fingers numbed by
the wind,

The rubbed-out ledgers of numbers, the figures rationed for bread and milk after
the utilities or mortgage payment or rent come due.

Why ruin a good celebration with running headlong into the blockades, the demon-
strations

on the streets of the squeeze of tariffs, more cuts,

The rundown tenements with tightened quarters for temporary foreign workers or
immigrants awaiting papers, shaking the dreams from their tired heads?

No matter how we might tokenize our spotless wilderness and cultural traditions,
our most brilliant heads,

Our people are struggling to eke out a survival in the deserts of our townships
and our cities,

And more than just a survival — better choices for our children other than just
smarter technology and bigger cuts,

The freedom to play and celebrate our nation’s skills in multiple fields beyond our
mastery of manicured surfaces of ice and snow,

The freedom to measure their learning outside of the usual relationships of supply
and demands coming due,

To know there is a future that can withstand the storms and fires and whims of a
political wind.

Blowing up from the south, pitting neighbour against neighbour, east against west,

how could a powerful southern gale ever subdue the north wind?

With its refreshing insistence towards a freer tomorrow, prevailing where stronger
hearts unite with discerning heads,

With its breath of certainty that in any neighbourhood, in any family could reside
the ideas and expertise to create solutions long overdue.

We need only look at our history to know we have the potential from sea to sea to
sea to create ecosystems and cities

The like of which the world has never imagined. The first peoples knew the power
of the north wind as they imprinted the snow

Of a new world with technologies and relationships of reciprocity between nature
and humans, made even cuts.

No matter how this southerly wind fans the flames, leaves us feeling whiplashed
and burnt out, nothing cuts

Through the swirling dust and gases like a promise that rises from the ashes, a wind
Pushing the weathervane, and scattering countless diamonds across an as-yet
trodden path of snow

Like the refractions of the brightest star, uniting all colours of the spectrum, all
heads

Towards “Our True North,” what nobody else can upturn from the position of
lowered states and power-hungry cities.

From our vantage, the people living below the 49th parallel feel the tug of the
compass as we do, know which way is Due

North — and indeed all the directions in between — South, East, West, Woman,
Man, Trans, Gay, Straight, Bi, Latino/a, African, Asian, and on — is due

A slice of the pie at the party, not the token snatches doled out during civic holidays
and celebrations, to keep spirits light, but real cuts

That go this way and that way and beyond the boundaries of the cities.

We are ready to navigate our future with the power of a refreshing, invigorating
wind.

Tired of a journey that has become reliant on GPS, our maturing nation heads
Off with a new compass and map across the soft and blurred contours of snow.

Charting passages between cities and farmland for the birth of something even
greater coming due,

A citizenry emerging out of snow, sharpened and glistening from over a century
and half of crystalline cuts,

The blood of our coming caught in the wind and flying proudly over our heads.

— Melissa Walker, for Heidi Sander’s Canada Is Our Poem contest

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WWW.STRATFORDTIMES.COM

Business LeadHERship Summit returns to St. Marys with sold-out event

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

The sold-out 2026 Business LeadHERship Summit will take place Monday, April 27, at the St. Marys Golf and Country Club.

Fresh Idea Collective will bring more than 150 business owners and community leaders together for a full-day leadership experience designed by women for women.

The event aims to connect, reflect and strengthen women in leadership while promoting a sense of community throughout the region.

"I like to say it's not just a one-and-done event," said Kerry Ramsay, founder of Fresh Idea Collective. "It really is the beginning of meaningful connections. One exciting fact is that of the attendees who have already signed up for this year's business leadership summit, 45 per cent have never attended a Fresh Idea Collective event before, so we're very excited for those women to get to know each other."

This year's Business LeadHERship Summit will once again welcome eight student leaders – four from Stratford District Secondary School and four from St. Marys DCVI – made possible by local sponsorship.



(SELENA JONES, FRESH BY SELENA PHOTO)
Fresh Idea Collective once again brings together women in leadership and business at the 2026 Business LeadHERship Summit. Pictured are local business owners, from left, Lesley Spencer-Cooper of MALT Staging and Design, Camille Fortin Bensler of At Home with Camille, and Natalie Moore of Moore Creative Consulting.

"Our goal is not only to celebrate our local women in business leadership, but also to inspire the next generation of female entrepreneurs as they begin to explore their own potential, build confidence and envision what's possible for

their future," said Ramsay.

The keynote speaker at this year's event is Cheryl Himburg, owner of Key Element Solutions. She will speak about her journey, leading with vision and creating the life of your dreams.

Later in the day, workshop leader Aileen Edwards of AME Consulting will discuss how business owners can lead with confidence and build executive presence.

"This is really going to be a power-packed day," said Ramsay.

A highlight of this year's event will be an interview with Kristine Hayes and Kelly Heleniak, owners of Shaw's Ice Cream, including their experiences with the ups and downs of owning the ice-cream business.

Throughout the day, attendees will have opportunities to connect with other like-minded business owners, listen to live music by Evangelina Kambites of the Stratford Festival, take part in movement breaks hosted by local wellness businesses and watch real-time graphic recording by Emma Richard, who will bring the day's ideas to life visually.

"The Fresh Idea Collective community just continues to grow, and it's not anything magical," said Ramsay. "It's simply that a lot of women are tired of doing business on their own. It's the right moment. It's the right time, and I believe it's having an incredible impact, which is why it's continuing to grow."

For more information on Fresh Idea Collective and its events, visit www.freshideacollective.com

Stratford Film Festival celebrates National Canadian Film Day with triple-bill of Canadian films

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The Stratford Film Festival and Monthly Film Series invites audiences to celebrate National Canadian Film Day on Wednesday, April 15 with a full day of exceptional Canadian cinema at the Stratford City Hall auditorium. Presented in partnership with REEL Canada and the City of Stratford, all screenings are free to attend (reservations highly recommended), with a pay-what-you-wish donation option in support of future programming.

The curated triple-bill showcases three distinct and powerful Canadian voices – from intimate, award-winning documentary storytelling to a moving northern drama inspired by true events.

"National Canadian Film Day is a celebration of who we are – our stories, our voices, and the extraordinary talent we have right here at home," said festival director Megan Smith-Harris. "This year's lineup reflects the depth and diversity of Canadian filmmaking, and we're thrilled to share these films with our community – completely free of charge."

11 a.m. – *Stories We Tell*, directed by Sarah Polley

An extraordinary and deeply personal documentary, *Stories We Tell* explores memory, family and the elusive nature of truth. Blending interviews, archival footage and reenactments, Polley crafts a layered portrait of her own family that becomes something universal.

Winner of over 20 international awards and widely regarded as one of Canada's most celebrated documentaries, the film earned the Toronto Film Critics Association Award for Best Canadian Film and was named to numerous year-end "best of" lists.

3 p.m. – *The Art of Adventure*, directed by Alison Reid

This visually stunning and inspiring documentary follows legendary Canadian wildlife artist Robert Bateman, exploring a life driven by creativity, conservation and a profound connection to the natural world.

A beautifully crafted portrait of an iconic Canadian figure, the film has been praised for its lyrical storytelling and environmental resonance.

There will be a post-screening Zoom conversation with director Alison Reid and Smith-Harris.

7 p.m. – *The Grizzlies*, directed by Miranda de Pencier

Based on a remarkable true story, *The*

Grizzlies follows a group of Inuit youth in Nunavut who find purpose and hope through lacrosse, guided by an unconventional coach. Set against the backdrop of a community facing profound challenges, the film is both heart-wrenching and uplifting.

The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and received widespread acclaim for its authentic performances and powerful storytelling.

There will be a post-screening Zoom conversation with director/producer Miranda de Pencier and Smith-Harris.

All screenings take place at the auditorium of Stratford City Hall (1 Wellington St., Stratford).

Reservations are highly recommended and can be made at stratfordfilmfestival.com. Admission is free; donations are welcome.

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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 - Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

Off The Wall puts fun in Fundraiser with “Here Comes the Sun” a Celebration of Spring

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Country Club will come alive when Off The Wall hosts its spring fundraiser party this year, titled “Here Comes the Sun” a Celebration of Spring. This highly anticipated event takes place April 17 at 7 p.m.

Off The Wall is a registered charity that provides training to the next generation of backstage production artists through workshops in many different aspects such as prop making, stage direction, artistic welding and carpentry, to name a few.

“At Off The Wall, our goal is to pass theatre production skills along to the next generation of backstage artists. Up to 33 workshops each season are administered by a volunteer board whose members oversee the program and raise funds to support it,” said Michele Boniface, Off The Wall board director.

Technical expertise for the workshops comes from those that are the best of the best in their field and are passionate about what they do and seeing others learn what they do. The goal of the evening is to raise awareness of these background skills that create the world of inspiration for directors and actors.

Fundraising is the major source of capital for Off The Wall, and it has become known for its wonderful fundraising concerts and parties. This night will be no exception.

“Off The Wall parties are well-known for their great fun. We don’t sell tables, we don’t want people to sit in their isolated groups. We like that everybody mixes with everybody else and that includes the dance floor. Everyone feels comfortable

coming to our parties and that’s something that sets us apart,” said Boniface.

Musical entertainment is provided by the well-known local group Strings and Traps who play old rock, country, Celtic and folk songs to keep people on the dance floor. Special guest and emcee for the night is none other than Dayna Manning offering a rare opportunity to experience music and stories from recent and upcoming projects.

“She will be singing our theme song, ‘Here Comes the Sun’, but she’ll also be performing a couple of her own pieces from her upcoming musical, Curveball: The Fast-Pitch Ladies from the Factory Floor premiering at Blyth. From her new album Field Notes she will perform ‘A Dream Lives in Your Heart’ and ‘Diamonds are for Everyone,’” said Boniface.

There will be food stations positioned around catered by the country club as well as a silent auction that features some outstanding items open for bidding. Some examples include a year of Special Occasion Desserts by Elizabeth Kerr, the wonderful chef and graduate of the chef school. Kimberley Mackenzie and Rob McGreachy have generously donated bottles of wine from the new shop on St Patrick Street, Ripy & Vine. There are donations in hospitality, personal services as well as entertainment, including season passes for Here For Now Theatre, a private group screening from Little Prince Cinema and annual passes to the Stratford Film Festival monthly screenings.

Tickets to the fundraiser are available online at www.offthewall.com/courses/here-comes-the-sun-dance-party, and are \$50 per person. The Stratford Country Club is located at 53 Romeo St N.



(JAYLYN TODD PHOTO)

Surprise guest at the Off The Wall fundraiser will be none other than Stratford’s own Dayna Manning, who will both perform and emcee the evening of dance, food and silent auction.

Local author publishes 20th book

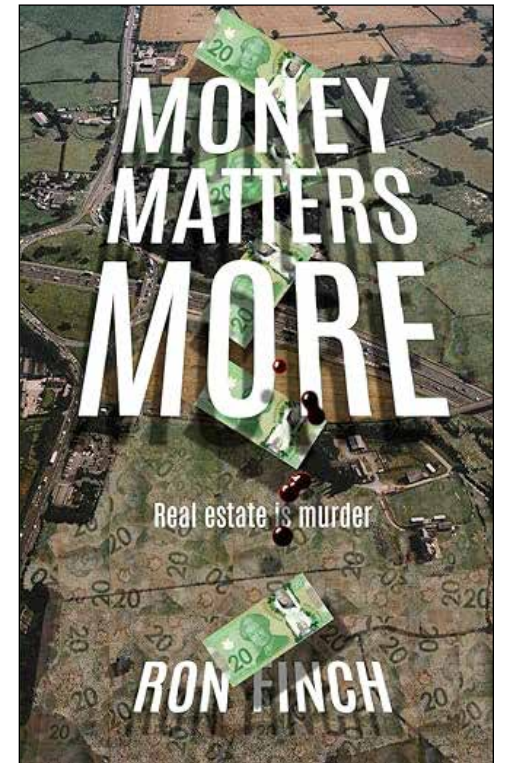
SYDNEY BOYLE

Times Correspondent

Ron Finch’s newest book, *Money Matters More* brings about a world consumed by greed, ruthlessness and bad decisions; a nail biting mystery that makes the reader question every character.

Taking place in a post-COVID-19 pandemic Stratford, Ont., land and housing have become hot topics of conversation. From quiet meetings, provincial officials have decided that thousands of acres of the Greenbelt must go back on the market so that new homes can be built. No one is meant to know about these changes until they take effect. But when Dr. Fred Sullivan, a brilliant neurologist with dreams of opening his own research centre, finds out about this plan, he wants to get the jump on it. With the help of a landlord named Alan Morgan, Sullivan plans to do everything in his power to make his dream come true, no matter what happens along the way. What slowly begins with a seed of “harmless” insider real estate fraud quickly turns into criminal activities as more and more people are ploughed beneath Sullivan’s ambitions. Shots are fired. People begin disappearing, and the citizens of Stratford are getting nervous, it’s only a matter of time before things turn deadly.

Ron Finch has been writing since 2017 and has now published 20 novels with *Money Matters More*’s release. Finch has dedicated every day since he started to writing, world building and character development. With these 20 published novels, along with the 50 other written manuscripts, Finch is prepared to continue his writing career and has no plans of slowing down any time soon.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Ron Finch’s newest book, *Money Matters More* brings about a world consumed by greed, ruthlessness and bad decisions; a nail-biting mystery that makes the reader question every character.

“Many of my books connect to one another, the different series will reference characters from each other, creating almost this world within worlds effect, these adventures happen within the same universe, but decades apart,” Finch explained.

Money Matters More is now available for purchase on amazon.com.

Retired teachers celebrating 70 years of advocacy

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Founded in 1956, the Retired Women Teachers of Ontario / Organisation des enseignantes retraitées de l’Ontario (RWTO/OERO) is celebrating a huge milestone this year.

The RWTO/OERO is celebrating 70 years on April 9, as proclaimed by Stratford City Council at its last meeting. The city recognizes that day as RWTO/ERTO 70th Anniversary Day

in Stratford, recognizing the organization’s decades of advocacy for retired women educators and support for issues affecting senior women, education, and community well-being.

The organization has 46 branches across the province and continues to contribute through advocacy, research support and community philanthropy, including support for Stratford organizations such as the House of Blessing, Stratford General Hospital and the Emily Murphy Centre.

WWW.GRANTHAVEN.COM

Celebrating 10 years of Mercer Kitchen and Beer Hall

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A celebration is underway as Mercer Kitchen and Beer Hall commemorates 10 years of the current concept under Windsor Hospitality Group. In honour of this milestone, Mercer will be bringing back old menu favourites and specials after 9 p.m. pricing from April 1-3.

The Windsor Hospitality Group is comprised of owner Bill Windsor, owner Shelley Windsor and owner and operating partner Ryan O'Donnell, who are all dedicated to both their business and the city they thrive in.

Under their guidance a new concept was incorporated as they implemented craft beers which were becoming hot in the marketplace in 2016.

"One of the early philosophical changes we made was to try to do something that services Stratford 365 days of the year and was designed for the locals, then the theatre would become that extra bump in the summertime," said O'Donnell.

When they made the change to the kitchen and beer hall concept, it was with 100 craft beers on the menu capitalizing on the emerging trend in the marketplace. Both the staff and ownership were passionate about the product offering and thought it would resonate with the people of Stratford. It did.

"Having something for everyone, an accessible menu that people could bring diverse groups of friends and family, co-workers, and everybody would find something they enjoy was made with really an eye to quality and care," said O'Donnell.

The kitchen menu influences are inspired by Japanese/Asian gastropub



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Celebrate the 10th anniversary of Mercer Kitchen and Beer Hall with staff and friends, located at 108 Ontario St.

dishes, or Izakaya style, which is like a Japanese style of restaurant where food is shared.

"We will change the menu a couple times a year and try to do things that will keep the staff interested and keep the guests interested in, but are kind of within our world," explained O'Donnell.

"The diversity of the city of Stratford, in general, allows us to have a very diverse menu," added Shelley.

Being part of the downtown core and the city of Stratford means a great deal to the group. With the quality of life of a small town, but the opportunities of a much larger place, Stratford is a great place to live and work.

"The industry itself has a real community, and we compete with other restau-

rants downtown, but we also cooperate with them to bring guests," began O'Donnell.

"We work together to make (downtown) a destination, and it is a destination," finished Bill.

With a boutique hotel of 14 rooms, they often offer out suggestions for places to go for a meal or a beverage to their guests, giving them information and sharing the story of Stratford which only serves to enrich their experience.

"If they live here, there may be gems that they are not aware of because sometimes you can live in a place a long time and not be aware of everything," said O'Donnell.

The largest change since the beginning is with Mercer At Home. The amount of people that

take out food has grown. It was never on the radar within their industry until 2020.

"I've been in the industry for 40 years and it was never on any restaurant's radar, and it was the one thing we learned through COVID is people like to stay home and still want to enjoy food," said Bill. The support from the community has not stopped since.

With the 10th anniversary celebration running to April 3, the Windsor Hospitality Group is taking the opportunity to thank the community for their support and patronage over the last decade with retro pricing on original menu items like spider dogs after 9 p.m. The menu will run all day long.

"We will be talking about 10 years and thanking people. There will be returning staff that are treating it as a reunion and excuse to come back and catch up with friends. After 9 p.m. we'll do 2016 pricing and on April 2 there will be live music with John Powers," said O'Donnell.

"We are incredibly lucky and fortunate to have the staff that we do, so many of our staff have been with us a long time. We don't have a lot of turnover. I would especially like to give a shout out to Teresa Riehl, she's been an important part of our success in Stratford. She's that smiling face when people come in through the door," said Shelley.

They pride themselves as employers that like to help elevate people to wherever they want to go and make sure they have the most opportunity they can possibly provide. Mercer is a place where people want to work and it doesn't feel like a chore to come to work everyday.

"Stratford is the reason that Mercer exists and Mercer serves Stratford, so it's in this cyclical nature of it is a big reason we're celebrating 10 years and saying thank-you" concluded O'Donnell.

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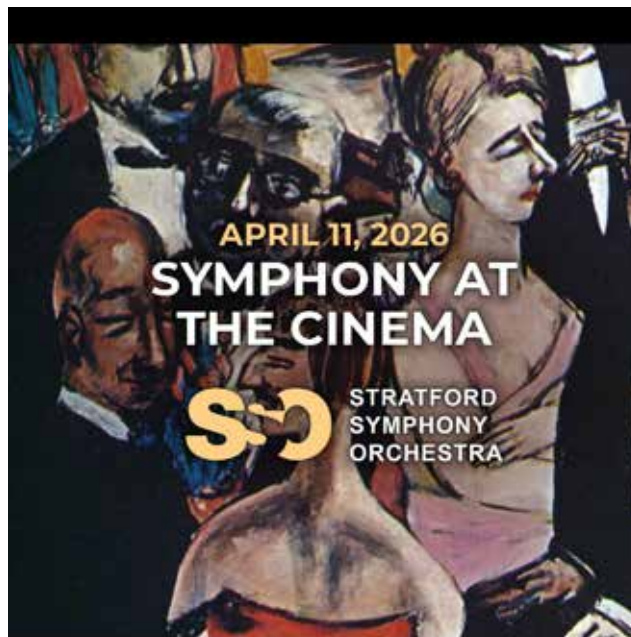
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A Passion for People

Stratford Film Festival presents *Peak Everything*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Film Festival (SFF) welcomes spring with the April screening of the bilingual Quebecois film *Peak Everything*, the latest film by acclaimed filmmaker Anne Émond. The screening takes place April 11 at 4 and 7 p.m. at the Stratford City Hall auditorium.

The film stars Piper Perabo as an Anglophone help-line operator and Patrick Hivon as a francophone kennel operator who, grappling with eco-anxiety, falls in love over the phone with Perabo's character.

Peak Everything premiered as the closing film of the 2025 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), a prestigious position. Megan Smith-Harris, SFF festival director, was drawn to bring it to the local audience.

"Stratford audiences are incredibly curious and open – they really embrace films that are a little offbeat but emotionally grounded. *Peak Everything* is exactly that kind of film. It's thought-provoking, but also deeply human, and I feel it will spark great conversation," said Smith-Harris.

Set in a not-so-distant future shaped by ecological collapse, *Peak Everything* follows an unlikely connection between an Anglophone help line operator and a francophone dog sitter. What unfolds is a surprising and deeply human story; at once unsettling, funny and quietly moving. Émond brings her singular perspective to



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Filmmaker Anne Émond, pictured, will appear via Zoom in a post screening Q-and-A moderated by Stratford Film Festival director Megan Smith-Harris.

a world that feels both heightened and eerily familiar, balancing stark realities with moments of absurdity and grace.

"People are carrying a quiet sense of unease about the world these days and *Peak Everything* taps into that in a way that feels honest, scary, and unexpectedly funny. Human beings will continue to mess up the world but will also keep trying

to fix it in our own imperfect way," said Smith-Harris.

Following each screening, audiences will enjoy a special post-screening Zoom conversation with Émond, moderated by Smith-Harris. The pre-recorded conversation offers exclusive behind-the-scenes insight into the making of the film and Émond's creative process.

When asked about what she hoped the audience would take away from the film, Smith-Harris had this to say, "*Peak Everything* holds both a sense of looming cri-

sis and a thread of hope, and I think that duality will resonate. If it prompts even a deeper reflection on our relationship with the environment, and the fact that this is no longer abstract, but immediate – then it's done something meaningful. Plus, love is important for survival."

Screenings are April 11th at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. at the Stratford City Hall auditorium. Tickets are available online at www.stratfordfilmfestival.com/tickets-and-passes or at the door unless sold out in advance.

STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

Warriors derail Nationals in Game 7, set up rematch with Chatham

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Western Conference Quarterfinals went the distance, but the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors prevailed in a 6-3 win over the London Nationals in Game 7 on March 25, setting up the rematch from last year's semifinal series with the Chatham Maroons.

A near-capacity crowd of 1,212 fans braved the weather to the William Allman Memorial Arena for the winner-take-all contest.

At 4:20 of the first period, Coen Galbraith fired the crowd into a frenzy with his fourth playoff goal, assisted by Dominic Marshall and Drew Hodge, giving the Warriors the lead. With just over two minutes remaining in the opening frame, the Nationals evened the score. Stratford goaltender Noah Bender made the initial save on Austen Pomerleau, but the clearing attempt ricocheted off a defender and went over the 6'4" Bender for the game-tying goal.

The second period was the Warriors' most offensively productive of the series. During the power play at 2:12, Jaxon Broda took advantage of a mistake by London goalie Dante Bertolin deep in the London zone, giving the Warriors a 2-1 lead.

Less than two minutes later, Marshall received the pass from Galbraith and managed to shoot the puck between the pads of Bertolin for his fourth of the postseason and take a 3-1 lead. After Dax Vader was hit on centre ice, resulting in a five-minute powerplay, the Warriors seized the opportunity once more as Max Wildfong tipped the shot from Will Coward past Bertolin, giving the home side a commanding 4-1 lead.

In the rough and tumble middle frame, a total of 37 penalty minutes were accumulated by both teams, 25 of those by the Nationals.

Luke Minard scored his second of the playoffs early in the third period to make it 5-1 for the Warriors. Nathaniel Adams and Brody Dunbar put the Nationals within striking distance, but their efforts fell short as Bender and the Stratford defence contained the London offensive for the duration of the final frame. Stratford team captain Haden Frayne cemented the series win with the empty netter in the final minute of play in the game.

Bender recorded 26 saves in the series-clinching victory and credits the win to a strong team effort. He highlights the importance of remaining focused and present during crucial moments, particularly in the third period.

"I was just trying to stay focused, stay in the moment, not worry about what the score was or how much time was left.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Stratford Warriors forward Evan Arnold scores the opening goal past Chatham Maroons goalie Samuel DiBlasi in Game 2 of the Western Conference Semifinals at Allman Arena on March 30.

Just play my game and not worry about anything else," Bender said.

Grady Murphy, Frayne, Marshall and Galbraith explained how the team felt pressure to close the series.

"It was pretty good. I mean, we just, we got in our groove there in the second period, and just putting the puck in the net seemed pretty easy at that time," Murphy said.

"I thought the room was great all night long. The guys were prepared before the game, and we just stayed up all game long. Yeah, that was a long second period, a lot of penalties, but we did a good job staying level-headed and just working," Frayne said.

"It was so huge. We love our fans so much. When it's a packed barn in here, there's nothing better that we'd like to see. So it was awesome," Marshall said.

"Just stay calm, play our games, and rally behind our fans. We had a great fan base tonight, which was great to see. The Allman was buzzing tonight," Galbraith said.

Head coach Dave Williams was satisfied with the team's performance and their progression to the next round.

"Feels great. I'm really proud of the group. You know, I thought we played a pretty solid game here after losing the last couple, so kudos to the group for coming tonight and battling the way they did and playing the type of game that they did," Williams said.

"I thought we played a decent first period. You know, I think both teams kind of traded some chances in the first, but we're happy with our work ethic. I think we just needed to manage the puck a little bit. We were turning pucks over. Too

many pucks were coming out of our zone and through the neutral zone, but we were able to get some into the offensive zone. We probably could have scored a few more goals, and we did credit to their goaltender. I thought he was really good in the second and probably kept the score a little bit closer than it might have."

With the Nationals behind them, the focus shifts to the Chatham Maroons in the rematch of last year's thrilling seven-game series, where the Maroons narrowly defeated the Warriors in Game 7.

Williams shared his thoughts on their second-round opponent, mentioning that the Maroons are no different from last year.

"Well, I mean, their team is kind of very similar to their team from last year, and I think we're also very similar to the team we had last year. So obviously, there's a lot of offensive firepower in Chatham, so we're going to have to defend really, really well, and be really mindful with our discipline and not give some of their skill guys that extra time and space on the power play. So we'll enjoy it tonight," Williams said.

On March 29, Stratford travelled to Chatham for a matchup with the Maroons in Game 1 of the Western Conference Semifinals.

The Maroons opened the scoring with 2:40 remaining in the first period with the goal from Trevor Zanutto. Forty-one seconds into the second period, the Warriors tied the game on a goal by former Maroon Cruz Ferguson from Wildfong. Bo Doxtator gave the Maroons back the lead, but Kipfer from Haylock and Will Coward responded for the Warriors with

a late goal in the middle frame.

Despite the strong effort by the Warriors, it was Chatham that ultimately prevailed in the series opener after a goal scored by Xandre Aitken with 2:03 left put the Maroons ahead in the series. Bender stopped 37 of 40 shots in the loss.

Game 2 was held at the Allman Arena on March 30, with the Warriors looking to even the series.

Stratford opened the scoring at 3:19 with Arnold scoring his second of the playoffs from Galbraith. Midway through the first period, Drew Hodge scored his first of the playoffs from Kipfer and Schmidt to put the Warriors ahead 2-0. Chatham closed the Stratford lead in half on a late-period goal from Santiago Jimenes with 58 seconds left.

An unassisted goal from Haylock put the home side up 3-1 with 6:04 left in the second period, but the Maroons responded with another late-period marker on a goal from Max Skinner with 1:51 left in the middle frame.

The Warriors poured on the offence in the third period, courtesy of goals from Haylock (second of the game), Kipfer and a powerplay goal from Ferguson to put the game out of reach by the midway point of the final frame, en route to a 6-2 win to even the series at one apiece. Bender stopped 28 of 30 shots in the Game 2 win. A total of eleven different Warriors players recorded a point.

Game 3 returns to the Chatham Memorial Arena on April 2 (after press time), while Game 4 is at the Allman Arena on April 3 at 7:30 p.m.

GOHL Western Conference Quarterfinals (#4 Stratford Warriors vs. #5 London Nationals

Game 1 – London 5 Stratford 2
Game 2 – Stratford 4 London 1
Game 3 – London 1 Stratford 5
Game 4 – Stratford 4 London 3
Game 5 – London 5 Stratford 4
Game 6 – Stratford 2 London 4
Game 7 - London 3 Stratford 6
Stratford wins series 4-3

GOHL Western Conference Semifinals (#1 Chatham Maroons vs. #4 Stratford Warriors

Game 1 – Stratford 2 Chatham 3
Game 2 – Chatham 2 Stratford 6
Game 3 – Stratford vs. Chatham (Chatham Memorial Arena) April 2, 7 p.m.
Game 4 – Chatham vs. Stratford (William Allman Memorial Arena) April 3, 7:30 p.m.

Game 5 – Stratford vs. Chatham (Chatham Memorial Arena) April 5, 7 p.m.

Game 6 – Chatham vs. Stratford (William Allman Memorial Arena) April 6, 7:30 p.m. (if needed)

Game 7 - Stratford vs. Chatham (Chatham Memorial Arena) April 9, 7 p.m. (if needed)

Aces fell short in Oakville, set for provincials

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

Luck has run out for the Stratford U18 AA Humphrey Fleet Service Aces as they lost Game 3 of the OWSA-Southern Tier-II Championship semi-final to the Oakville Hornets on March 27.

With the berth in the championship game against the Markham-Stouffville Stars at stake, the two teams were tied at two points each after both settling for a draw in the first two games (both 3-3).

Oakville opened the scoring 5:33 into the first period after a scramble in front of the Aces' net. Stratford tried to find an equalizer late in the first period but couldn't beat Oakville netminder Jasmine Morelli during the power play.

The Hornets doubled their lead with 46.1 remaining in the period when the shot slid past Stratford netminder Sloan Cameron's pads. During the carryover from a late-period powerplay, the Hornets capitalized 20 seconds into the second period to make it 3-0. Following the

goal, Cameron was replaced in net by Callie Aldridge.

Stratford finally solved Morelli at 5:44 thanks to the goal from Myla Macey, reducing the deficit to 3-1. However, the Aces' momentum was short-lived as the Hornets delivered the decisive blow with 6:31 remaining in the second period.

As the game progressed, the Aces continued to create scoring chances but were thwarted by Morelli's performance. The Hornets added another goal late in the third period with an empty-net goal, securing their spot in the OWSA-Southern Tier-II Championship on March 28. Oakville ultimately defeated the Stars 2-1 to claim the championship at Westwood Arena in Toronto.

Postgame, Aces head coach Sean Cameron expressed pride in the team's effort and progress during the season, emphasizing their surprising playoff run despite the outcome.

"Yeah, all the credit to Oakville. They played a really good game, and you know what, we were just talking in the

dressing room, and the hockey gods just weren't on our side today. But I'm proud of that crew," Cameron said.

"They battled all year long ... Jan. 1, if we had told you we would have taken Saugeen to three games to win, taking Kitchener three games to win, and taken Oakville to three games, none of us probably would have believed it. So I'm proud of the effort. Not the result we wanted, but overall, incredibly proud."

Next up for the Aces is taking part in the OWSA U18 Provincials in Etobicoke's Westwood Arena and Mississauga's Iceland Arena from April 9-12. In the round robin, the Aces will compete in Pool E with the Durham West Lightning, Ancaster Avalanche and the Sudbury Lady Wolves.

"We've got exactly 13 days to get ready for it. So we start on Thursday (April 9) and got a good draw. So we're really looking forward to it, and that's our next move is to go on to provincials. So 13 days to prepare, and we start first thing tomorrow afternoon, practice, and get

ready to go," Cameron said.

Stratford begins its round-robin games on April 9, facing Durham at the Westwood Arena. If they move forward, the subsequent rounds – including the bronze and gold medal matches – will take place at the Iceland Arena in Mississauga on April 11 for the quarter and semi-finals, and on April 12 for the finals.

Stratford Aces vs. Oakville Hornets (OWSA-Southern Tier II Consolation Championship Semifinals)

Game 1 – Aces 3 Hornets 3

Game 2 – Hornets 3 Aces 3

Game 3 – Aces 1 Hornets 5

Oakville wins series 1-0-2

Stratford Aces OWSA U18AA Provincials Round Robin Pool E Schedule

April 9 - Stratford s. Durham West (Westwood Arena - Etobicoke) 5:45 p.m.

April 10 - Sudbury vs. Stratford (Westwood Arena - Etobicoke) 12 p.m.

April 10 - Ancaster vs. Stratford (Westwood Arena - Etobicoke) 8:15 p.m.

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Stratford

U16 Lakers set their sights on the OHL Cup

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

This week, the Huron-Perth U16 AAA Lakers prepared for their trip to the OHL Cup in Toronto.

The Lakers are in the Shanahan Division for round-robin play, competing against notable teams like the OMHA's York-Simcoe Express, the GTHL's Toronto Marlboros, Michigan State Champions Detroit Honey-Baked and the winner of the March 30 Wild Card game between Hill Academy and Biosteel Sports Academy.

For additional context, the Ontario Hockey League has announced its final OHL Cup Top-10 rankings for the season. HoneyBaked is placed first, with potential group opponent York Hill ranked eighth, York-Simcoe ninth and both the Lakers and Toronto earning honourable mentions.

Head coach Jason Brooks recognizes the challenge but is enthusiastic about the opportunity to play the underdog role, having done their homework for the tournament.

"It's a great opportunity for them. They've

earned the right to play against the best teams in the province and North America, and with some of those American teams coming up, private schools being there, and there being a lot of high-quality teams, they've earned the right to be a part of it. It's going to be a really tough challenge, but a challenge that I know as a coaching staff we are looking forward to, and I know in that dressing room they're looking forward to it as well," Brooks said.

"We've already sort of done some prep work on or with video. York-Simcoe Express, Toronto Marlies, Detroit Honey-Baked, and then we'll get the winner of either the Hill Academy or BioSteel. All of them are great teams. It's going to be a tough tournament, but it's exciting to be there, to be able to play against those quality teams, and to show that we can compete."

Second-time OHL Cup participant, team playoff scoring leader and alternate captain Callum Brooks commented on the pre-tournament practice, saying he offered advice to the first-year players.

"The practices have been going well.

We've been working hard, getting ready ... making sure we're physically and mentally prepared in practice," Brooks said.

"Yeah, just enjoy it. You know it'll be the last time you play together in minor hockey. So just have a good time."

Team captain Sullivan Kipfer is excited to play in his first OHL Cup, a tournament he has longed to participate in throughout his career as a Laker.

"It's honestly a really special feeling, like I think it's something that I've looked forward to playing in my whole Huron-Perth career. It's a really exciting tournament, obviously, the biggest tournament that you're gonna play in. It's the best on best. It's what everybody dreams of playing in," Kipfer said.

Leading the team with 30 goals and 72 points in the 2025-2026 ALLIANCE season, Declan McCotter feels optimistic about the team's chances at the OHL Cup.

"It feels good. We're a good team. We worked all year for this, and it's just something we've been wanting to get to all year," McCotter said. "Our expectation is to win,

but really, we just want to showcase what we've worked for all year and show that we're a team that can compete with the best teams."

The Lakers start their 2026 OHL Cup campaign on March 30, facing the winner of the Wildcard game between Hill Academy and Biosteel Sports Academy. For more information about the tournament and to track the Lakers' progress, visit the OHL Cup website at ohlcup.ca.

Huron-Perth Lakers 2026 OHL Cup Schedule

Round Robin Game 1 - OHL Cup Wild Card Winner (Hill Academy/Biosteel) vs. Huron-Perth (Scotiabank Pond Rink 1) March 30, 5:15 p.m.

Round Robin Game 2 - Huron-Perth vs. York-Simcoe (Scotiabank Pond Rink 1) March 31, 9:45 a.m.

Round Robin Game 3 - Huron-Perth vs. Toronto (Scotiabank Pond Rink 1) March 31, 5:15 p.m.

Round Robin Game 4 - Detroit vs. Huron-Perth (Scotiabank Pond Rink 2) April 1, 3:45 p.m.

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(JESSIE JACOB PHOTO)

The Stratford Aces U9C girls hockey team won the WOGHL Year-End Championship that took place during the weekend of March 27 to 29. The tournament was held at the Pyramid Recreation Centre in St. Marys.

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- Sunday, April 19 Chicken Divan Supper. Served with potatoes, vegetables and dessert. \$25 per person Take out 4:30 - 5:00 p.m., Dine in 5:00 p.m. Call Frank 519-271-9669 or Pearl 519-305-2757 for reservations
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SDSS Girls Curling wins historic OFSAA Gold

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Girls Curling team achieved their goal by winning the school's first-ever team medal in Curling at the OFSAA Girls Curling Provincial Championship in Thunder Bay on March 28.

The team, consisting of skip Addison Hyatt, vice-skip Brooklyn Hyatt, second Deanna Halls and lead Hailey Peters, remained undefeated in all seven games at the championship.

The SDSS squad outscored its opponents 42-8 during round-robin play, defeating Sault Ste. Marie's St. Mary's College Knights, Toronto's Bishop Allen Academy Cardinals, Milton DHS Mustangs and Norwell DSS Redmen from Palmerston. They entered the quarter-finals as the top-ranked team.

The quarter-final match was against Nantyr Shores Secondary School Tritons from Innisfil. The team was behind until the seventh end, when they stole three points with an incredible double by skip Addison Hyatt to tie the game going into the last end. The eighth end boiled down to the final shot, and Nantyr Shores fell

short, allowing SDSS to score five and win the game 11-6.

Semi-Final Saturday featured a contest against the Frontenac SS Falcons from Kingston. These two teams have faced each other twice before at OFSAA, with Frontenac winning both times, but that was not the case today.

This was a back-and-forth game. Tied at four in the sixth end, SDSS scored one in the seventh, heading into the final end of play. SDSS was sitting on two rocks when Frontenac threw a draw on their final shot, which hit a guard and rolled into the rings. The rocks came down to a measure, and SDSS avoided an extra end and secured the win by less than a centimetre.

SDSS faced a very strong École Secondaire Catholique Theriault Flames from Timmins in the finals. It was another back-and-forth game, with ties after the second, fifth and seventh ends. The SDSS team had the last rock in the eighth end, and it ultimately came down to the final shot. ESCT had two rocks in the house. Skip Addison Hyatt needed to throw a light-weight takeout, roll and stick to score their point. With excellent line calls from vice Brooklyn Hyatt and sweeping by lead



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Head coach Brian Anderson, second Deanna Halls, lead Hailey Peters, vice-skip Brooklyn Hyatt, skip Addison Hyatt and teacher coach Shane Restall.

Hailey Peters and second Deanna Halls, rock just far enough to score their one point and win the game.

Bowling League High Scores

Men's

Mike Palmby 337-852 & 333-834

Dan Clark 825 triple

Jon Gagan 833 triple

Jim Kayle 845 triple

Tim Gagan 346

Shayne Reipert 848 triple

Nathan Smitjes 824 triple

Monday Seniors

Marlene Crerar 238

Steve Van Klooster 260, 203-660 triple

V-Ettes

Shirley Campbell 222

Linda Zettel 223

Tuesday Morning Ladies

Ann Boerson 208

United League

Steven Walker 264,240-694 triple

Paul Boyd 200

Stratford Pin Pals

Thomas Holland 140

YBC Scores

Bowlasaurus

Evangeline Butcher-Bontrup 115

Pee-Wee

Lincoln Butcher-Cassidy 114, 143-257 series

Addi Kollman 210 series

Bantam

Coen Everitt 133, 174-407 series

Grey Davidson 110-288 series

Scarlett Illman 110-290 series

Annika Klomp 100

Cole Casey 115

Sierra Stevenson 151-405 series

Emmett Martin 152

Caleb Luckhardt 173

Kayleigh Heegsma 150

Patrick Adair 150, 160-456 series

Roland Rains 150

Junior

Ruby Parker 155, 217-486 series

Mckenna Morris 171, 248-535 series

Anna Ward 251, 225, 205-681 series

Brianne Bauer 191, 224, 247-662 series

Charlee Kayle 1 57

Lauren Furtney 167,170, 198-535 series

Hayden Martin 154

Ryan Scheerer 189, 194, 219-602 series

Abby Smith 182, 236

Brent Louwagie 205, 236-571 series

Sydney Shillolo 153

Austin Janmaat 157

Hugo Black 161, 163-468 series

Senior

Austin Bauer 165, 174,

Peyton Boyles Keating 178, 164, 261

Zachary Clarke 205, 230, 268-703 series

Alex Ward 220, 212, 218-650 series

Sydney Smith 155, 179, 197

Wiatt Robinson 211

Jocelyn Gethke 254-581 series

Owen Martin 189, 207-569 series

Dominic Boyles Keating 217, 258-663 series

Claire Turner 190

Issac Kroesbergen 186

Payton Petrie 194, 215, 279-688 series

Payton Kainz 202

Special Olympics

Luke Patterson 168

Tiffany Keller 152, 206

Derek Wray 176, 180-356 series

Fanny Hitchcock 158

Leah Akroyd Snider 170

Courtney Moore 166, 178

Michael Hitchcock 162, 160

Jacob Kaufman 165, 192

Norm Schenck 166

Meghan O Donovan 171

Mike Kelemen 196

Michael Ambrozic 152

Andy Van Schaik 155

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Stratford-made documentary, *Exclusion: Beyond the Silence*, earns Canada Screen Award nomination

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

A Stratford-produced documentary that brought an overlooked chapter of Canadian history to both local and international audiences is now receiving national recognition.

Exclusion: Beyond the Silence, produced by Stratford-based Ballinran Entertainment and directed by Stratford's Keira Loughran, has been nominated for a 2026 Canadian Screen Award for best photography, documentary or factual, recognizing cinematographer Iris Ng.

For Loughran, the nomination is especially meaningful because of how collaborative the film was from the start.

"This is the Canadian Screen Awards. This is the highest honour from the Canadian film community," Loughran said. "To be included and know that your film's been seen enough for people to nominate anything from our film, for me, is just remarkable."

The documentary explores the lasting impacts of the Chinese Exclusion Act, the racist federal law that all but halted Chinese immigration to Canada between 1923 and 1947 and separated families for generations. The project grew out of Ballinran executive producer Craig Thompson's discovery of the story of Foon Hay Lum, whose life reflected the devastating effects of the act, and Loughran's own family connection through her grandmother, activist Jean Lumb.

Since premiering in late 2024, including at a home-community screening in Stratford, the film has found audiences in a

wide range of settings, from festivals and Cineplex screenings to seniors' homes and international screenings in China.

"I'm just kind of constantly amazed at how it ripples," Loughran said. "One screening leads to another screening."

Thompson said the film has resonated not only with Chinese Canadians reconnecting with difficult family histories, but with broader immigrant communities as well.

"People see their own story in the film," Craig said. "This is something about the overall immigrant experience in Canada."

That ripple effect was visible even at the Stratford premiere, Craig said, recalling an audience member who left the screening wanting to dig deeper into her own family history.

The nomination for cinematography is particularly fitting, Loughran said, because the film's visual language was central to how the story was told. Rather than relying on a conventional documentary approach, the team worked to create something more layered and personal, drawing on archival materials, family objects and emotionally driven imagery to help audiences connect more deeply with the story.

Part of that work took shape during a demanding 10-day shoot in China, where Ng worked closely with a local Chinese film crew assembled to help bring the story to screen. Executive producer Koi Thompson said that teamwork was essential, particularly given the language barriers, tight schedule and logistical demands of filming overseas.



(BALLINRAN ENTERTAINMENT PHOTO)

Cinematographer Iris Ng, now nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for her work on *Exclusion: Beyond the Silence*, films a Lion Dance during production in China.

"It's teamwork, really, for that," Koi said. "Everybody said they were so happy to work with her."

Koi said the China-based crew, including camera assistants, drone operators and translators, remained deeply invested in the project even after filming wrapped and were thrilled to hear about the nomination.

"They worked together 10 days. It became like a family," she said.

Craig said the recognition also highlights the strength of Stratford's film community.

"Projects like this reflect the fact that Stratford is a unique place, that we have the talent, not just on stage but on screen," he said. "You don't have to be in Toronto ... to make a film."

The team is also continuing to build on the film's momentum by developing a study guide and promoting school screenings, particularly as Asian Heritage Month approaches in May.

The Canadian Screen Awards' Unscripted Television Awards will take place at the CBC Broadcast Centre in Toronto on May 29.

Call for artists opens for Stratford Artist Takeover at Matilda Gallery and Art Bar

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Now in its' fourth year, the Stratford Artist Takeover call for artists is now open until April 30 for artwork from local artists that will be, if accepted, displayed at Matilda Gallery and Art Bar. This is a great opportunity for emerging and established artists alike to have their pieces on display in the gallery located within steps of the Avon Theatre.

The opening for the Stratford Artist Takeover is planned for June 5.

"We do this show strictly annually; we have done a lot of different shows that aren't repeated but this is one that we faithfully keep doing. It means a lot to us and to the creative community as well," said owner Sarah Filion.

Anyone who has been to Matilda Gallery and Art Bar knows that it is dedicated to housing many pieces art, primarily paintings and photographs, anywhere space can be found. With the Stratford Artist Takeover the two white walls upon entering will feature the curated

works of local artists.

"It can be anywhere from 30 to 50 artists on display. Throughout the three years we have done this I think we have had over a hundred different artists showcased in the gallery so it's a significant number. I was blown away the first year how much talent is in Stratford and every year since I'm blown away by the new applications. We do get some repeat applications, but we get equally the amount in new applications," said Filion.

The application process is not arduous and can be completed online by visiting the website matildaswansongallery.com and clicking on the Artist Takeover image to complete the form. Each artist can submit no more than five pieces in .jpg format. There is no submission fee to apply. Information required is the dimension, the pricing, the media used. Artists are notified if they are accepted or not between May 3 and 5.

The curated pieces will be showcased between June 5, the opening, and July 12.

"This show we have opened it to all



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Imagine the draw of local artists when Matilda Gallery and Art Bar showcases the Stratford Artist Takeover. The call for artists is now open.

mediums, so if it is sculpture, ceramics, photography, painting, it is open to all styles. We do accept a lot of emerging artists for the show and have kept a lot of artists throughout the years because their work has married well with the gallery and we've been able to sell the work and support those artists. So, it is open to anyone and everyone, as long as they are a resident of Stratford," said Filion.

Only pieces that are for sale are accepted because the goal is to support the artists financially and creating exposure for their art. "It's a great show, a lot of people know about it and are excited for it. It's right at the beginning of theatre season which is great as we get a lot of exposure to tourists and one of the first questions people ask is, 'Do you have any local artists?' so it's a great time to say, actually we have a lot of local artists being represented in this show," Filion said.

Matilda Gallery and Art Bar is located at 85 Downie St. and is open Wednesday through Sunday.



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

As a packed crowd dines on a delicious dinner, Velvet and Ivory perform tunes featuring many that will be showcased April 18 at their upcoming concert 'Jazz In the Parlour, A Swing Era Soiree' at the Stratford Perth Museum.



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Tim Elliott and Beverley Maranger volunteer at the Local playing their music as Velvet and Ivory. They see this as an opportunity to give to the community through uplifting and joyful music while bringing together people for a shared meal.

KingDom Theatre presents PRISMA – a bold, imaginative performance at Stratford Intermediate School

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

After international success on stages in Germany, Japan, Italy, Spain and Finland, Ottawa-based KingDom Theatre's youth ensemble returns to Stratford with a new non-verbal performance: PRISMA, an original and visually striking one act production that explores identity, perspective and the vibrant spectrum of human experience.

The performance will take place at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 14 at Stratford Intermediate School, promising an engaging and thought-provoking evening for audiences of all ages. Inspired by the acclaimed 2024 children's book *The Gray City* by German author and illustrator Torben Kuhlmann, PRISMA plays with light, colour and transformation to bring this incredible story to life.

The story follows Robin, a girl who discovers her new city has lost all its colour – buildings, people, even flowers – due to a scheme by the Gray Works factory. Robin's journey to restore colour is an attempt to return joy, creativity and hope.

At the heart of the story is a simple, yet profound metaphor: a prism separates



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Performers with KingDom Theatre rehearse PRISMA, a non-verbal performance set to take stage in Stratford on May 14.

white light into a spectrum of vibrant colours. But when certain colours blend, their brilliance can fade into gray. Through this poetic image, the performance reflects on

individuality, collaboration and what happens when creativity is suppressed.

"This production is about shifting perspectives," said director Ekaterina Vetrov

in a media release. "Like light through a prism, we all carry multiple facets – and PRISMA brings those to life in unexpected and inspiring ways."

Told entirely without words, PRISMA uses physical theatre, shadow theatre and puppetry to create a visually striking and emotionally resonant experience.

In July 2016, KingDom Theatre performed in Stratford as part of the 14th World Festival of Children's Theatre, an international event that brought 200 children from all continents to Stratford for 10 days of performances, workshops, sight-seeing and socializing.

"Their performance of 'The Legend of Parvana Lake' was among the most artistically interesting of the festival", said WFCT artistic director Ron Dodson. "After 10 years, it's wonderful to welcome them back to Stratford to perform and to work with students at Stratford Intermediate School. In those 10 years, KingDom Theatre performed internationally (Spain, Germany, Italy, Finland, Japan, USA), in Montreal, Toronto and in its home city of Ottawa, to thousands of very appreciative children and adults."

For more information, and to purchase tickets, visit kingdomtheatre.ca.

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Richard Lee, Tim Campbell take on timeless characters on stage for this year's *The Hobbit*

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Actors with the Stratford Festival are no strangers to stepping into the shoes of beloved roles previously played by beloved actors. However, in what may be a first for the festival, this year at least one actor is preparing to step into a beloved character's rubber feet.

Richard Lee and Tim Campbell are taking on the roles of Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf, respectively, for this year's production of *The Hobbit*, a theatrical re-telling of the beloved story by J. R.R. Tolkien, a precursor to his classic *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Adapted for the stage by Kim Selody and directed by Pablo Felices-Luna, the play tells the story of mild-mannered Baggins as he is reluctantly swept into a world of adventure across Middle-earth by the wizard Gandalf – facing dwarves, trolls, dragons and all creatures between.

Sitting down with the Times, Lee and Campbell shared their experiences with the characters, the journey in developing the play so far and what the play, the book and the expanded world mean to them.

"Stepping into those feet, it's been really lovely," Lee said. "... It's daunting for me in particular, I think, because it's this face on top of a character that's so iconic, and I'm mindful of that ... It's about the work at the end of the day and if we do our jobs right, and if we do our jobs with the commitment and bravery that we have, there are these burning, tingling moments – it's Tolkien brought to life right in front of you. It's different than the films. It's different than the cartoons. We take you on goofy adventures, yes, but like sporting events, there's an electricity in the room when you're watching things unfold between us."

"I feel a personal responsibility to the



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Richard Lee (Bilbo Baggins) and Tim Campbell (Gandalf, Smaug) sit down with the Times to discuss this year's Stratford Festival production of *The Hobbit*.

people for whom these characters are so beloved, because they are beloved to me," Campbell shared. "... This is something Pablo is really, really clever about. I heard him say that we want it to be a kind of big tent. So for people whom it is their very first experience with this story, (they) will not feel alienated. They'll get everything. At the same time, we are servicing the fans who know every detail, because there's lots of those fans in our rehearsal room."

While Lee was first introduced to the world of high fantasy through the role-playing tabletop game *Dungeons and Dragons* and the accompanying *Forgotten Realms* novels by R.A. Salvatore, he discovered Middle-earth through Peter Jackson's film trilogy, falling in love with the

grandeur and vision. For Campbell, as he alluded to, Middle-earth is an old haunt, having first read the book when he was 12 years old. Since then, not unlike his dwarven counter-parts, he has delved deep into Middle-earth lore.

"I've been a Tolkien super-geek for many decades," Campbell said. "... I didn't know they were doing *The Hobbit* until the audition, and I was thrilled. For me, being asked to play Gandalf is a little bit like my version of being asked to play King Lear."

The play is being further developed through the rehearsal stage, with Lee and Campbell praising Felices-Luna for the space he provides for actors to explore their characters and the arc of the story. Compared to other family plays, which are quite short, this version is told in two

acts with a full runtime, meaning the story will have room to breathe and the characters space to grow.

Another quirk of this version is the small cast size. There are nine core actors along with six understudies in the production, with most actors taking on multiple roles. Only Lee and Aaron Krohn, who plays the dwarf would-be-king Thorin Oakenshield, play one character.

In fact, in addition to Gandalf, Campbell is also playing the dragon Smaug, the antagonist of the story. Campbell will be voicing the dragon as well as operating the gargantuan puppet created by Matthew Burges with two other puppeteers from the props department – an experience he is personally relishing.

Both Campbell and Lee were eager for audiences to see the production design, calling the costumes by Ting - Huan Christine Urquhart, the lighting by Michael Walton and the set by Lorenzo Savoini an "all-star assortment of designers," but they are most excited for audiences to really take in the world and the lessons on stage.

"Life reflects art and art reflects life," Lee said. "Why this play? Why now? Why is it important? I think the world needs reminding how much what we do matters everywhere, and in this world, the smallest, most unexpected individual gets set on a journey with really only one person who believes in who he is and what he could be. Nobody else believes in him. And I think that's an important lesson for today, in this society, at this moment – to be reminded that your decisions, your choice, your actions matter."

The Hobbit takes the stage at the Avon Theatre from April 21 to Oct. 23 (opening May 30). For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit <https://tinyurl.com/efzrh6p>.



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

Tim Campbell snaps a selfie with the Smaug puppet during a first-look meeting. Campbell shared that the puppeteering and portrayal of Smaug is one of the most interesting parts of this year's production. Campbell will be voicing the dragon as well as operating the gargantuan puppet created by Matthew Burges with two other puppeteers from the props department.



(DARIANE SANCHE PHOTO)

Richard Lee and Tim Campbell as Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf, respectively, in their costumes for this year's Stratford Festival production of *The Hobbit*.

Editorial

A farm girl at heart: Getting to write about rural Ontario



AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Recently, with my change in title to director of community engagement for Grant Haven Media, I've had the opportunity to connect with more of our local papers than ever before, including our rural publications and farming papers. It's something I don't take for granted – in fact, I feel incredibly lucky to now be writing about rural Ontario and the agricultural communities that shaped me.

Although people often look at me and assume I'm a city girl, I actually grew up on a small beef farm in Chesley, Ont. The only thing Chesley is really known

for is Chesley Lake – which, ironically, isn't even in Chesley and is actually located about a half-hour northwest of the town.

We had about 30 head of Simmental cattle, and at one point I even had six of my own cows and calves. Raising them gave me a head start on saving for college, but it also opened the door to countless pets along the way, including a pot-bellied pig named Jamie, a donkey named Francis and even a peacock named Iago. My sisters and I loved living on the farm, but I think I was the most animal-loving out of all of us.

Growing up, I showed calves in 4-H and even went to The Royal a few times. I also generally came home from livestock sales with at least a few rabbits or chickens. At one point, my dad blocked off an entire pen just for my animals. Through one winter, I kept Jake, Iago, several ducks and chickens, and a few guinea hens together before letting them roam free around the farm – including up by the house – in the spring.

One of my favourite things

about being the local animal-loving farm kid was that whenever someone had a newborn animal whose mother died, I was usually the first person they called. At one point, I had a pet sheep named Oscar that I raised from birth. He sucked on a soother, knew how to unlatch gates and sometimes slept outside with my dog. He even tried to sit in my lap when he was fully grown.

I loved living on the farm. I loved the scratches down my legs every summer from unloading hay, and I loved connecting with the land in a way few people ever get to experience. Beyond all the pets, farm life grounded me and I feel blessed to have grown up that way.

Now, through journalism, I've been able to reconnect with those roots in a completely unexpected way. Writing for our rural community newspapers and farming publications has allowed me to re-establish that connection more every day. Recently, I attended the annual general meeting for the Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre concept – a future STEM-based learning cen-

tre designed to teach kids where their food comes from. I've written about soybeans and the challenges farmers across Ontario face, as well as issues affecting dry bean producers. I've spoken with local representatives and community leaders who care deeply about supporting rural communities and agriculture.

In a roundabout way, I've come back to farming – not by working the land, but by telling the stories of those who do. And I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to connect with farmers and those in the agri-food industry after leaving that life so many years ago.

Through my work, I've also been reminded of the emotional connection farmers have with their land and livestock. Recently, there was a fire on a local farm, and I felt deeply for the family. I know the pain of losing livestock. I think the first time I ever saw my dad cry was when we lost a cow during a difficult birth. While animals provide income, they also become part of the family, no matter the size of the operation. It's something

people who haven't lived it don't always understand.

The same goes for the land. Yes, crops represent livelihood, but farmers also care deeply about their growth. They prepare the soil, plant the seeds and watch them grow. They wake up at night hoping frost won't damage early crops and pray rain holds off after hay is cut. Farmers know their land, their crops and their livestock better than anyone. Now, I'm privileged to write about them from a new perspective – someone who no longer lives on a farm but still appreciates it deeply and wants to share their stories.

While farming isn't the path I see for myself now, I still dream of owning a home with a bit of land – maybe a few chickens and perhaps another pot-bellied pig someday. My parents no longer have livestock and now focus on soybeans and grain, but they still own more than 200 acres. When I return, my shoulders drop and I finally relax. That's the feeling of going home, I suppose.

And for me, home will always be the farm.

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STRATFORDTIMES

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Quote of the Week

"U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has demonstrated through their actions in Minnesota and across the U.S. that they bring fear and disorder, not safety and security. Any presence of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Toronto is liable to create fear during a time when we want to welcome the world and ensure that everyone feels safe."

– Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow on ICE being present during the World Cup.

STRATFORDTIMES

Guiding Principles

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

Opinions

MUSINGS: Unbelievable?



MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Columnist

On the second morning of our Alberta visit with the grandkids, I felt a presence. It was well past the witching hour, 5:30 am to be exact, when I realized a small entity with very cold feet had materialized in my bed. “Grandpa,” Ryker said, “I had bad dreams.” Still struggling to wake up and find my bearings, such as where and who I was, I managed to mumble,

“Ohh... what were they about?”

“Tornados, wolves, and our

house burning down,” he replied in a sad little voice.”

His mother had doubts that all these dreams had occurred at once and was suspicious this might have been designed to circumvent the “early rising limits” in the household. Nonetheless, for young children, this sort of dream can seem like solid reality. I remember some of my own childhood nightmares. I grew up among uncles who were hunters and their trophies were everywhere: bearskin rugs, deer heads on the wall, and a particularly disturbing fox pelt with claws that would periodically rise up over my bed.

Later that morning, as we were driving the kids to daycare, my son-in-law tried to point out the morning moon to our three year old granddaughter. When she finally spotted it, she cried out, “Somebody ate the moon!”

“NOBODY ate the moon, Seryn!” her brother said, exasperated.

But then I realized what she

was saying. It was a half moon, resembling a cookie that someone had taken a substantial bite out of.

Reality can be quite subjective but not necessarily right or wrong. We’ve all seen examples of events directly witnessed by numerous people. All of their accounts have different takes, sometimes wildly different.

Now cue the *Twilight Zone* theme, please; this next part gets a little “woo-woo.” Donald D. Hoffman, a cognitive psychologist and professor emeritus at the University of California, theorizes that our consciousness operates as an interface with reality, designed by evolution to filter out the cacophony of sensory input we experience in our daily lives. Without this filter, we would all go quite mad.

Furthermore, he holds that consciousness is the primary reality and the physical world emerges from that, which has implications for the concept of life after death. This idea, of course, is at

odds with a realist who maintains that the world exists independently of our perception of it. When you’re dust, you’re toast so to speak. There are 22 theories of consciousness, none of which has the science that can really tell us how to reconcile the physical with the mental.

My own take on all this is a bit of a mixed bag. I happen to belong to a religion (the Bahai Faith) that encourages the individual search for truth and the harmony of science and religion. This is a good thing because I am annoyingly curious and have great fun imagining possibilities. I spend a lot of time down rabbit holes.

They say each of us has approximately 86 billion neurons. I haven’t counted mine but the feedback I receive suggests I have substantially less than average. I certainly don’t use them all. So let’s just say, “lots and lots of neurons.” It is amazing to me that these tiny cells organize themselves into beings who can

perceive, experience, and even reflect on the universe. Even Einstein was confounded by the implications of quantum physics – what he called “spooky action at a distance.”

As we discover more and more about reality, what was once magic or science fiction becomes explorable and explainable. Will we ever be able explain everything? Not a chance in 86 billion. But life is for learning, isn’t it? Regardless of what we discover, it seems a miracle, in and of itself that we are even here. Sweet dreams, everyone.

Mark Hertzberger is a former social services supervisor, human resources manager, conflict mediator, and literacy practitioner. He has since freed his mind and now writes poetry and occasional opinionated columns. Mark has lived in Perth County for 27 years, the last 12 of which have been in Stratford where he resides with his wife, novelist Yvonne Hertzberger.

As I See It From America: April is not only for fools, it is for hope



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Columnist

One of the things that I look forward to each year is April. For me it is the start of spring and the month that brings out all that is incredibly beautiful with our world. Considering its beginning day is celebrated by hijinks and pranks, one could look at the month of April as also the start of the month that still likes to pull a joke or two on us with weather, rain and, many times, a reminder that the snow is not quite done. I have seen days of sun and 80° Fahrenheit temperatures in April as well as days close to zero.

April is the month that begins the joy of the warmer weather season and starts getting us out

into our gardens and walking amongst our neighbourhoods. Trips to local green spaces pick up and playgrounds start to be the centre of local parks. We see babies in strollers and school children running back and forth to their homes. It is a joyous beginning. It is what we dream will be a wonderful outdoor escapade of events that will bring great and lasting memories from 2026. It is the month of hope.

This year my wife and I will be travelling to your fair city of Stratford at least four times. I have told you many times about how we just love it there and that we have come up with quite a bunch of wonderful theatre people and locals who have become very great friends. One thing I can always say about Stratford is the people are wonderful and vibrant. They care about the community and even though there may be differences of opinions on some things, they are handled with civility and deference to kindness. It is a mainstay of your community.

I have had to reflect a lot on being in Stratford and how comforting that will be, as things have not been going all that well

down here. Each day brings a new event, message or proclamation that increases my worry. Often, I wonder how these things would be handled in Canada and then realize that these things would not happen in Canada. Don’t get me wrong. I am certain that you all have politicians and government people that you have issues with, either personally or as a nation. That is inevitable wherever people are involved. People will be people and personalities will be personalities. You can’t expect it to be any different. There is a realm of idiocy no matter where we live. We just seem to have the “trump” card of it in America.

In the states, it is a daily way of life. The idiocratic branch of government is in power with a troupe of sycophants propping them up like no time before in our history. There is open grafting, thieving, profiteering and self-promoting going on at all levels of the government right before our eyes. Our beautiful White House was purposely defaced and now the “People’s House” is an eyesore of a construction site that may never be the same again. Our beautiful

Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts now has a new name and soon may face the same fate. It is remarkably horrifying the things that we are dealing with daily.

Funding for food, emergency assistance and education are being cut so that we can wage war on a country that most Americans did not want to be involved with. Reasons for said war are fictionalized and manufactured to attempt to obtain support for sending our armed forces into harms way. It is all being done for the sense of someone’s ego. Our Department of Defense was renamed the Department of War. Many wondered why this was so important. Now we know. We have become a nation that does not promote peace and diplomacy but only promotes force, fear and ammunitions. These are the days of our lives.

We have often thought that we are the lucky ones. We have a place to go and stay where we are comfortable and nurtured, educated and welcomed. We have fantastic places like Balzac’s and Features for great community meetups and coffee and big, beautiful breakfast plates

and sweets that are out of this world. We always go into Watson’s and remember the days of the cats and kittens as we look for some treasure to bring back home to our kitchen. You can’t beat Fanfare Books as we look for the current bestsellers, book series and plays that we love. How wonderful that we do have all that.

April is the first month of this year that we travel to your fair community. In the past we have made a winter trip, but this year that became almost impossible. So as we begin the month that starts with jokes, hijinks and frivolity, we are reminded that we live in a world where the reality is perhaps not all that wonderful and then we remember, we have our place, that special place where the stage calls us and the people make us smile and feel warm. We know that is the natural way the human condition should feel and we thank you. April is not only for the foolish, it is for the hopeful. See you all in a few weeks.

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

Opinions

WEB-CRAWLING ANKOSÉ



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

I had gone to see Maman, the huge spider statue outside the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. The idea of the spider protecting her egg sac is nature, fitting right into our Web of Life in the last column. I found far more of a fit when I was in the gallery – a design, with the word Ankosé – and a line – Everything is Connected. Could I say it any better?

The gallery has a great tape of the story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHaOSEM5eaU>

It turns out Ankosé is a word from the Algonquin culture that lived around Ottawa, and on the unceded land where the national gallery stands. It does mean everything is connected. Last time we learned that Leonardo da Vinci knew that, as did Jane Goodall. The Algonquin tribes did too. We might be onto something here ...

If everything is connected, what does that do to our actions? I've had three wake-up calls this month. The first two looked at community energy generation. Climate Momentum hosted Peter Love, addressing district energy. It is an idea whose time has come, superseding the forced grid of natural gas and nuclear energy. In use in many communities throughout the world, there are options for local sustainable energy generation and storage that would be far more efficient than long transmission lines fighting resistance, and the network of methane-leaking natural gas lines (a major source of greenhouse gases).

Arcadian Projects, based in Baden and covering most of southwestern Ontario (and beyond) offered an evening's overview of what could be done with solar panels, available as a resource now by feeding power into the grid and developing a balance sheet with some local hydro companies. Battery storage is also an option and even setting up EV cars that have both-way options for accessing hydro and also utilizing it during high expense or low power periods. You may remember the Climate Conversation that highlighted West 5, a solar district energy experimental community in London, Ont. Developed by Sifton Properties, it includes EV capability, multiple solar panels

and battery storage for generated power.

In most cases for now, Arcadia works primarily with industrial/agricultural sites that have broad roof expanses for solar panels and technology developed to address local delivery, but the potential is there for developing district energy in community districts and with individual residential sites, with government support. The result could be increased efficiency of energy delivery, lower costs for end users and reduced fossil fuel emissions. Considering the rate of growth of the Earth's heat blanket, especially recently, that's a real plus.

The other wake-up call I had was to pop my balloon thinking that Stratford was ahead of the game with the new monster blue boxes (I opted for a smaller one ... define "smaller"). I thought it was going rather well in our community – very efficiently at any rate – until a friend reminded me that not everything that is acceptable in the new plan is actually returned to producers for mandatory recycling. This is a "phased in" program, to give producers time to find their way with the new system, and to give everyone time to get up to speed by 2032 – and that does not mean 100 per cent. What does that mean for my impact? Quite a lot, it turns out. For the complete story, look up "proposed amendments to the blue box reg-

ulations."

Recovery targets vary by material category. Current targets for core materials (paper, glass, metal, rigid plastic) will remain at their existing levels until 2031, with a mandatory increase scheduled for 2032. Because flexible plastics are historically more difficult to recycle, their targets are being phased in more slowly than other materials: 2026-2027: 10 per cent target, 2028-2031: 15 per cent target and 2032 and beyond: 25 per cent target. Although all plastics eventually degrade to microplastics, flexible plastics are the ones we should try and step sideways from if we can; they quickly degrade and can be avoided (no plastic bags).

There are important compliance rules. For the years 2026 and 2027, the program will proceed under "best efforts." Strict enforcement and potential penalties for failing to meet targets will begin in 2028. Starting in 2026, producers can count "energy from waste" (incineration for electricity or fuel) toward up to 15 per cent of their recovery target for any category, provided the material cannot practically be recycled. Finally, every producer must ensure that all collected blue box material is sent to a registered processor within three months of collection to ensure it does not go directly to a landfill.

In the spirit of Ankosé, ev-

erything is connected, let's try in whatever way we can to lessen our impact. I think of Pogo, picking his way through the Okenfenokee Swamp with Porkypine, saying "We have met the enemy – and he is us."

UPDATES:

1.) Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of March 30, 2026: 431.59 ppm.

2.) The Xerces Society, promoting invertebrates (insects) has come up with a list of New Year's resolutions. I'll be sharing them in UPDATES in 2026.

Reduce your carbon footprint by 5 per cent. Climate change is a threat to the environment and all the creatures that live on earth. Calculate your carbon footprint and make adjustments to lessen it by the end of the year. You can choose to adjust your thermostat, find alternative transportation, change your purchasing or eating habits, recycle and more.

Catch and release home invaders. Change your response to a creature that has made its way indoors. Catch and release rather than killing these unwanted visitors.

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

The jury is in. Social media is killing our kids

LOREENA MCKENNITT

Guest Contributor

Last week's verdicts in two U.S. court cases (New Mexico and California) must have been bittersweet wins for the parents whose children took their own lives as a result of some connection to social media. The cases showed Meta and YouTube to be gravely negligent, and are now being considered this era's "tobacco moment": the day the world finally woke up to the fact that they are harming and killing our children.

In the New Mexico case, jurors found that Meta (parent company to Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Threads) had misled consumers about the safety of its platform, enabling sexual exploitation of young users, fining them \$375 million USD. In California, the court found Meta and YouTube (parent company Google) deliberately designed their platforms to be as addictive as cigarettes or online gambling, fining Meta \$4.2 million USD and YouTube \$1.8 million. Snapchat and

TikTok apparently settled out of court, unconvinced they could win.

And yet, these dark interactions occur not only through social media sites where bullying, suicide, image manipulation and human trafficking occur, but through pornography channels and gaming portals, which are implicated in loss of privacy, radicalization or inducing psychosis as a result of spending more time in virtual worlds than the real one. All before the introduction of AI.

Unwittingly, and perhaps through our own addictions to devices, we've allowed our children to be exposed to content in ways we would never have dreamed of in an analogue setting. Which one of us would leave our doors wide open for the world to come in and engage with our children without our knowledge, permission, protection or approval, hour after hour, day after day, for nearly two decades?

The digital parental controls which have been sold to us as our responsibility have proven to be patchy and insufficient.

The verdicts of these court cases are saying it is the tech companies' responsibility to make products safe, not ours.

When new consumer products enter the market without adequate research and testing – as happened here – problems can arise, and it often takes a long time for the full effects to become clear.

But this has been the long-held strategy adopted by tech, what Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg spoke of in the early days of Facebook: "Move fast and break things." Well, they've broken our kids in the process, while moving faster than our democratically elected representatives could table and ratify legislation to protect our children and families from their predatory behaviour.

While we wait for the Canadian government to retable its long-awaited online harms bill, we can take some comfort in knowing that many other countries and states are well on the path of legislation. Too, there are more than 1,500 court cases yet to come, including four put forward by Ontario schoolboards.

The trend is confirming what most parents, teachers and doctors have long seen with their own eyes. Childhood has changed drastically since the advent of smartphones and social media in the past 15 years, and it has not been good.

Clearly, our children are in a medical and mental health emergency, and we want to see every level of government – federal, provincial, municipal and even down to school boards – adopting the posture of urgency and duty of care while we await legislation to address the threats. Just as we would no longer send our children into a room full of tobacco smokers and wait for the law to step in, our children need rescuing now.

Each and every family has their own unique experience, and I welcome hearing from anyone who wishes to share or reach out to info@wisecommunities.org.

Loreena McKennitt is a member of the Order of Canada, director of the Falstaff Family Centre (Stratford) and founder of the Stolen Child Project and Wise Communities.

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathaway Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford
Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games.
Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

CROKINOLE

Every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1-4 p.m. Ladies and gentlemen, fingers or sticks. For more information call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford

Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

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

OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Tuesday, April 7, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

93 Morgan St., Stratford

Speaker – Denise Strasser from Action Health Care.

She will update us on assistive devices, mobility aids, other home health products, and the Assistive Devices Program, (ADP) Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome. 519-273-4327

SWING INTO SPRING - CRAFT SALE

April 11; 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Morningside Adult Community

Off Hwy 8 At Bleams & Bergy

New Hamburg behind McDonalds

Free Admission

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday April 13, 2026, 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.

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

Featured Presentation: "How to Grow and Care For Hydrangeas", Stephanie Fletcher, Grey County Master Gardener

Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

BEER/LIQUOR TASTING AND CHILI NIGHT

Thursday April 16; 6:30 p.m.

Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

We have lined up 3 local producers, Black Swan Brewing

Co., Junction 56 Distillery and Madmash Brewery to come and display their beers and spirits. This is a ticketed event. You will receive 6 vouchers that you can use to sample any of these 3 businesses products plus enjoy a bowl of home-made chili and a Cobs roll, all for \$20 per person. Get you tickets now by calling Dave at 519-703-6544 or the Legion at 519-271-4540 or online.

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from 2-4pm at Infinity Dance 451 Erie St. Next meeting April 19. Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/person, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. www.mckinnamangement.com

EUCHRE NIGHT

Friday, April 24; 6 p.m.

Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

Enter your 2-person team for \$20 by calling Anne at 519-301-0914, Dave at 519-703-6544, or the Legion at 519-271-4540. Prizes for 1st to 3rd place. Registration is brisk, so call now.

STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.

Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

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

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with communities of
LOVE, JOY, HOPE & PEACE

Worship with us
Sunday 10:00 a.m.
11:00 a.m. – Fellowship and
Coffee Hour

We are a Welcoming Community

STRATFORD TIMES

Pick Up Locations

Erie Street Esso
Strickland's Toyota
Fix Auto
Stratford KIA
Expressway Ford
McDonald's - Erie St
Tim Hortons - Erie St
Stratford Mazda
7-Eleven - Erie St
Joe's Diner
The Urban Barber
Erie Convenience
Mr. Sub
Balzacs Coffee
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario
New Orleans Pizza

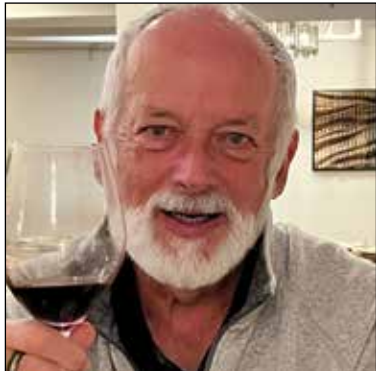
Zehrs
Food Basics
Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier
Festival Marketplace
Stratford Nissan
Stratford Subaru
Stratford Honda
Quality Festival Inn
McDonald's - Ontario St.
Papa Johns
Fore Everyone Golf
WalMart
Stratford Motor Products
A&W
Toner & Ink Shop
Rutherford Funeral Home

Athens Greek Restaurant
Stratford Legion
Gino's Pizza
Rosso's
Buzz Stop
Union Barber
Mornington Variety
Split Rail
Stratford Rotary Complex
Agriplex
No Frills
Cozyn's
Sebringville Esso
Dave's Diner - Sebringville
Stratford-Perth Museum
Sobey's

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron
Circle K - Huron
West End Pharmacy
Tim Hortons - Huron
Stratford Hospital
Video 99 - Erie St
Jenny Trout
Stratford Medical Pharmacy
Stratford Chamber of Commerce
A.N.A.F.
Stratford Hyundai
Daisy Mart
Foodland
Stratford Variety
Brch & Wyn
Stratford Place

Stratford Chefs School
HH Delea
AJ's Hair
United Way Perth Huron
Sinclair Pharmacy
Blowes Stationery
Stratford Tourism
Coffee Culture
Stratford Public Library
The Parlour Restaurant & Inn
Dick's Barber Shop
The Livery Yard
Town Crier Marketing
North End Pharmacy
Annie's Seafood Restaurant
Avon Pharmacy

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: A tasty Perth County craft brewery day trip



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

The beer was very good, but what I was really interested in was the story behind the brand.

Let's face it, the life of a travel writer is hard, slogging work. Take this day for example. I had decided to write a feature about a day trip to two Perth County craft breweries. I asked three buddies if they would like to come along as I visited Black Donnellys Brewing Company in Russeldale and Black Swan Brewing in Stratford. They were understandably reluctant – it took up to 15 seconds for them to agree – and off we went. As I said, I have a very demanding job.

I've been interested in the Black Donnellys brand for quite a while. Having grown up in southern Ontario, I knew the story. Early in my life, I read the harrowing accounts (some more or less true) about this family, their reportedly nefarious deeds and the massacre that occurred when their neighbours attacked them in their Lucan area home. There are now books, plays, songs, a TV program and a museum about the Donnellys.

I'm not going to go into all the controversy about the Donnellys, their alleged crimes, the conspiracy against them and the Feb. 3, 1880,



The Black Donnellys' Neil Douglas preparing a flight of beer.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

night when their Biddulph township neighbours slaughtered five Donnelly family members. What interested me is how craft brewer Neil Douglas was able to use the brand, "Black Donnellys," and various terms associated with the story when he opened his brewery on Highway 23, 10 minutes south of Mitchell.

Turns out, he simply did it! Nobody owned rights to the names. He told me, "I wondered if there would be push-back," because of the gruesome nature of the story, but that didn't happen. People were more intrigued than concerned.

So, after naming the brewery, he followed up by naming the various beers after details of the story: Roman Line Lager (from the road where the Donnellys lived); Dark Horse Ale; 1880 Mile Stout; Biddulph Township Haze IPA; Shil-

lelagh Law Belgian Quad; Seven Sons Amber Lager; and Vigilante IPA, to name a few.

Some of those names – like "Seven Sons" – actually arose from contests Douglas conducted with his customers.

My friends and I sampled flights of Douglas' beer, and the consensus was this is good stuff. Personally, I tried the Seven Sons, Roman Line, Dark Horse and Shillelagh Law, and would be hard pressed to choose one over the other – although the eight per-cent Shillelagh was really tasty. The four of us chose four different beers as our favourites, but agreed they were all excellent brews.

Douglas buys hops and grain from western Canada, England, Germany, Austria and some hops from the Tavistock area, but he says the real key to the taste of his

beers is the pure well water from his property.

"That makes the beer," he told us.

In total, Douglas and brewmaster Scott Jacobs produce 10 beers. They are served at the brewery (with a comfortable interior, a patio in the warm months, live music every couple of weeks and pizza and snacks available), and at 10 pubs across an area stretching from the Scran and Dram pub in New Hamburg to the shores of Lake Huron.

Our flights consumed, and information gathered, we headed east to Stratford to visit Black Swan Brewing on Downie Street. It was mid-afternoon on a Wednesday in March, so there were few customers, but within an hour or two, the place was full.

The Black Swan is owned by Ryan Stokes, a teacher by day. We were enthusiastically greeted by

one of his former students, Sierra Sauvé, who provided us with lots of information and some really fine flights of beer.

The Black Swan opened almost 12 years ago, and in an era where some craft breweries are struggling, both it and the Donnellys seem to be thriving, building on excellent products, friendly service and a loyal customer base.

Sauvé told us that while the warmer months bring lots of Stratford visitors to the brewery, the key to year-round success lies with their regular, local clients.

And here's a tasting tip from those regulars: it's common for those in the know to order a blended beer, combining a couple of the brews on tap to make their own special beer.

It's an interesting idea, but after tasting the beers in our flights, we all agreed it would not be difficult to choose a favourite straight from the taps. But as usual, we couldn't agree as to what that favourite would be. Votes were cast for Road Trip Golden Ale, English Pale Ale and New Vienna Lager. And our cast of enthusiastic amateurs also liked the Wild Child Sour (the sour beers are changed seasonally). The list of beers not enjoyed was blank.

The seating area in the brewery is not enormous, but the Black Swan has a patio out front (in typical Stratford style) in the warm months. But if you opt to sit outdoors, be sure to pop in and see the large Black Swan painting by Drew Simpson, an impressive adaptation of the 17th century work by Jan Asselijn called "The Threatened Swan." Cheers!

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



The Black Donnellys brewery on Highway 23, south of Mitchell.



The Black Swan Brewing Company is on Downie Street in Stratford.

Crossword

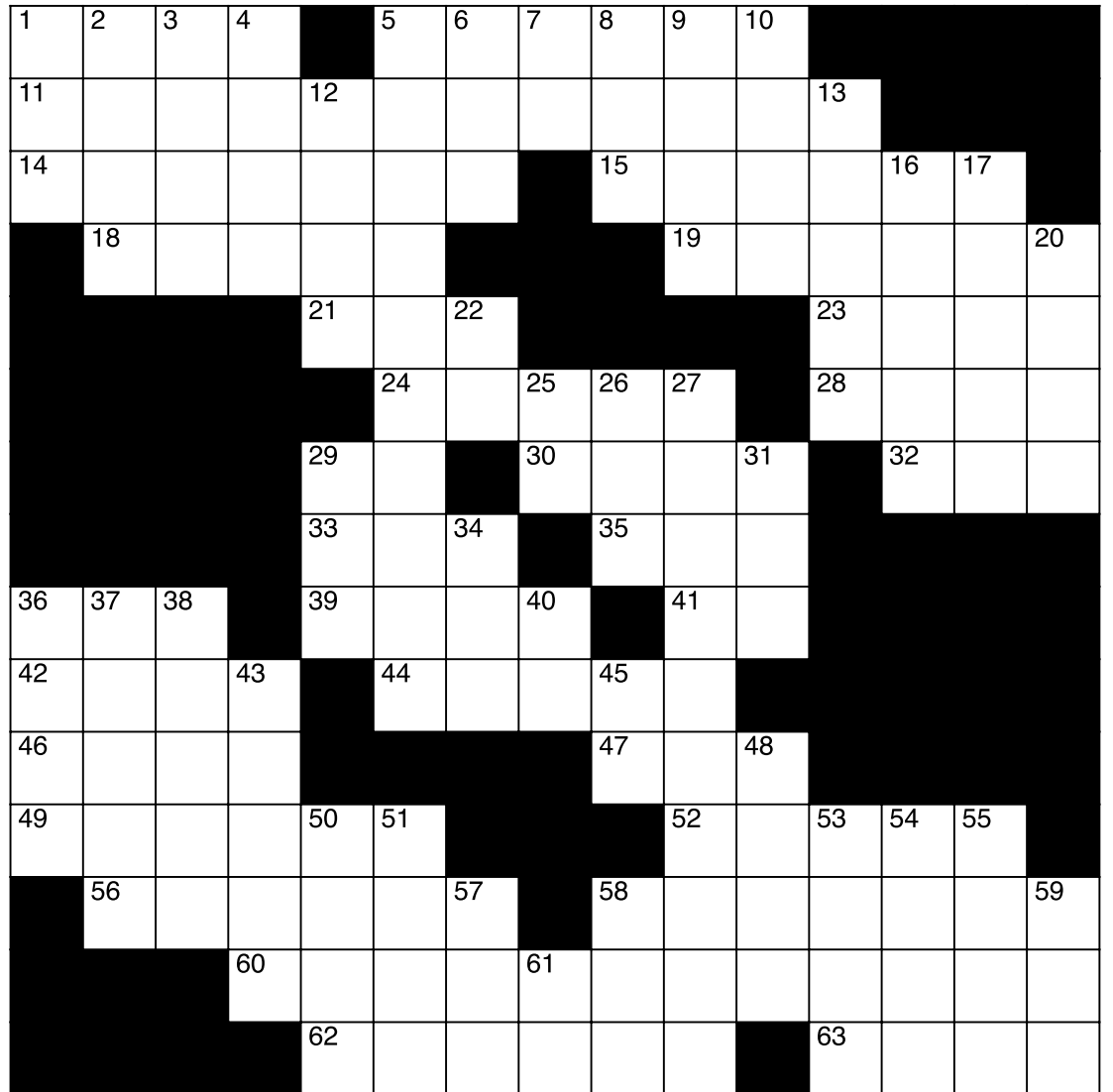
CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Absence of difficulty
- 5. Preserve a dead body
- 11. Gratitude
- 14. The act of coming together again
- 15. More cushy
- 18. Visionaries
- 19. Large fish-eating bird
- 21. Indicates near
- 23. Former CIA and CIA critic
- 24. Icelandic poems
- 28. Pop
- 29. Hammer is one
- 30. Selfs
- 32. Thyroid-stimulating hormone
- 33. Nowhere to be found
- 35. Electronic data processing
- 36. Drivers' licenses and passports are two
- 39. Snake-like fishes
- 41. Air Force
- 42. Popular personal computers
- 44. Stages in ecological succession
- 46. Wings
- 47. In the center
- 49. Pleasantly smooth
- 52. Jeweled headdress
- 56. In slow tempo
- 58. ___ Falls
- 60. Reiterations
- 62. Eras
- 63. Hyphen

- 3. Expel or eject (variant sp.)
- 4. Sea eagle
- 5. Taxonomic category
- 6. Chinese languages
- 7. Mr. T's "A-Team" character
- 8. Consumed
- 9. Chinese dynasty
- 10. NFL legend Randy
- 12. Ireland
- 13. Palm trees with creeping roots
- 16. Fungal disease
- 17. Tall, slender-leaved plants
- 20. Affirmative! (slang)
- 22. It says who you are
- 25. Atlantic coast state
- 26. Grow older
- 27. Associations
- 29. Woman (French)
- 31. Sunscreen rating
- 34. Brew
- 36. Leader
- 37. Indigo bush genus
- 38. Burn with a hot liquid
- 40. Junior's father
- 43. Mackerel genus
- 45. Morning
- 48. Straight line from side to side (abbr.)
- 50. Type of molding
- 51. Small, thin or twisted bunch
- 53. Worn by exposure to the weather
- 54. Mars crater
- 55. Humanities
- 57. Relating to the ears
- 58. "To the ___ degree"
- 59. Residue when something is burned
- 61. It cools a home

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Body part
- 2. Mimics



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Pet of the week



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Once Sky feels safe, she shows her loving side with soft purrs, slow blinks, and the quiet comfort of simply being near her person. She would thrive in a peaceful environment where she can decompress, build trust at her own pace, and enjoy the simple joys of being loved.

If you have a quiet home and a warm heart, Sky just might be the perfect companion to fill it. Sky is currently at our Stratford centre. Learn more about Sky at kwsphumane.ca



Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 27

Shakespeare's Carter Kuchma gets support from his classmates

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

If those living in and around Shakespeare notice a group of boys who attend Sprucedale Public School all with the same haircut, you are seeing the results of those classmates wanting to support seven-year-old (soon to be eight) Carter Kuchma in his battle with cancer.

Kuchma and his family were so proud of his friends, who showed up with their parents on March 27 last Friday, during March Break, to have their heads shaved to show support for him.

Kuchma's parents, Tyler and Diane, said their son was just beginning to lose his thick head of hair, due to ongoing chemotherapy treatments. They thanked everyone from their hearts, and knew that even as their son was having a tough week, he was able to feel happier, once he was able to get together with his friends.

Kuchma hasn't been able to go to school and play with his friends, since he was diagnosed in September last year. Like all his friends said, they would do anything for their close friend.

They were all there a couple weeks ago, when the Sprucedale home and school parents held a very successful spaghetti dinner when hundreds turned out for this very successful fundraiser.

As they said, and as it is written on their t-shirts, "We Fight Together – Team Carter."



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Carter Kuchma's classmates from Sprucedale Public School supported their friend when they all shaved their heads on March 27. Kuchma (wearing green, third from the left) was diagnosed with cancer and is currently undergoing chemotherapy.

CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

OBITUARY



ROBERT (BOB) RUSSELL CASSELS

Robert (Bob) Russell Cassels, age 85, of Stratford passed away peacefully at the Stratford General Hospital with family by his side.

Born in Scarborough January 19, 1941, he was the son of the late Francis and Margaret (Hale) Cassels. Bob is survived by his wife Lise of 31 years. Loving father to Christine, Amanda and stepson Lee (Janelle). Grandfather to Morgan, Dylan, Brett, Reece (Alexia) and Kashyc. Great-grandfather to Aubree. Dear Brother of Frank (Linda), nephew Robert, niece Vanessa and great nieces and nephews: Hailey, Amaliya, Kristopher, Matthew, Christina. Great-Great Niece Juliette.

Friends are invited to celebrate Bob's life at the Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans Hall, 151 Lorne Avenue East, Stratford on Sunday, May 3, 2026 from 1 p.m. to 5p.m. with an Army, Navy service and words of remembrance at 2 p.m. Memorial donations in Bob's memory may be made to Rotary Hospice, Stratford General Hospital or the Army, Navy Unit #261, Stratford. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

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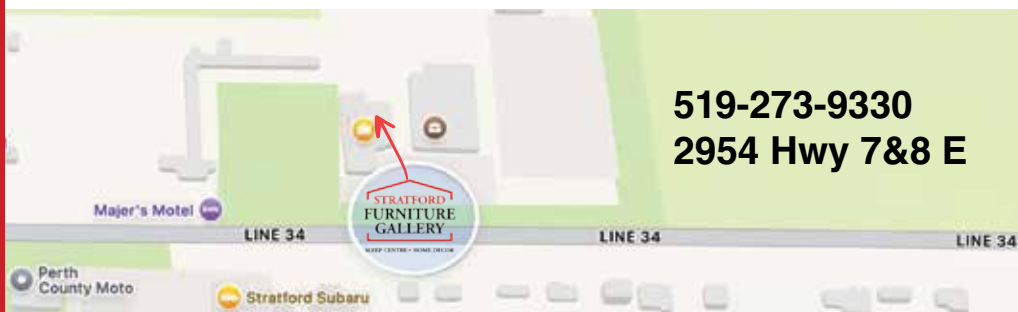
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