

A COMMEMORATIVE EDITION RECAPPING 2025

STRATFORD TIMES

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2025 YEAR IN REVIEW



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OVERVIEW

2025: Is it possible to hold your breath for a whole year?



CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Editor

On the evening of Nov. 5, 2024, millions of Canadians across the country watched the U.S. presidential elections nervously. While some in this country were certainly sympathetic to Republican Donald Trump and JD Vance, I think it is safe to say that many more were concerned of what their rise to the White House meant for the Great White North.

Early that evening, those same Canadians began to hold their breath as it became clear that Trump would become the 47th president. They haven't breathed easily since.

The Stratford Times is first and foremost a local paper, and our

editions reflect that focus, but in reflecting on what happened in Stratford this year, I think one has to start with that moment in late 2024. In many ways, much of what happened this year in Stratford and Ontario and Canada revolves around that moment in the U.S. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau resigned, Pierre Poilievre, the frontrunner of who would be the next leader of this country, lost his own seat, and the growing friction between Canadians of different politics suddenly shifted. Trump's repeated threat of wide-ranging tariffs and his talk of Canada becoming the 51st state changed everything. For a time at least, it seemed that Canadians of all stripes linked arms and lifted their shoulders, sticking their elbows out to the south.

As a herald for things to come, when Stratford city council was about to pass its 2025 budget in January, Mayor Martin Ritsma warned of gray skies.

"We are in unprecedented times right now," Ritsma said. "And we can't ignore that. You turn on the radio or television, you will know the gravity of the situation.

"...We could say, 'You know what? Those won't impact the City of Stratford — our manufacturing, our auto sector, they won't. But I think it's easier for us to be prudent right now to make sure that we are aware of the economic impact."

In the months to follow, it's difficult to parse what kind of wide economic impact tariffs had on the region. As Joani Gerber, CEO of investStratford, told the Times, 4,000 local auto jobs stood to be affected by trade tariffs and many more were under threat indirectly. We know that many organizations paused capital expansion, as businesses waited to see what exactly would happen, but there were no large-scale closures in the region.

Municipally, a task force was created akin to the one put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Provincially and federally, millions of dollars were invested in local companies to help them in the wake of economic uncertainty.

Still, Stratforders continued to hold their breath.

Political parties capitalized on the growing nationalism that tariffs spurned. This year there were snap provincial and federal elections, and although the conversations and players changed, nationally and provincially it was much the same. Matthew Rae of the Progressive Conservative Party won back his provincial seat with 47 per cent of the vote, as did Conservative John Nater with 53 per cent of the vote. Premier Doug Ford returned to Queen's Park with a nearly identical majority government and Prime Minister Mark Carney entered Parliament Hill with a minority Liberal government.

In June, Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce general manager Aaron Martin attended a U.S. mission, relaying with the Times and chamber members that it was widely believed that tariffs will really affect prices in January 2026, as many major companies had moved to stockpile goods before tariffs were put in place.

Now, as 2026 roars its head, Stratforders still hold their breath.

Of course, 2025 was more than just tariffs and politics. People went about their lives, started businesses, retired, mourned loved ones lost too soon, and — especially in a monumental city like Stratford — celebrated achievements.



This year was a milestone year for many organizations in town, including (but not limited to): Soup's On (30 years), Soup Surreal (10 years), Sinclair Pharmacy (65 years), the Stratford Lion's Club (100 years), Gene's Restaurant (55 years), the Kinsmen Club of Stratford (80 years), Stratford Summer Music (25 years) and Ballinran Entertainment (30 years).

The most drastic change that occurred this year, at least in terms of the geography of the city, was the draining of Lake Victoria in the summer. For much of August, due to some technical issues with the RT Orr Dam, the lakebed was exposed. This water feature is a landmark for the city, one that local citizens feel duly proud of, and the response from the public exemplified what stewardship really is. Members of the business community started the Save the Avon Bucket Challenge, filling the lake one bucket at a time, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority saved over 1,000 mussels from the mud, and a group of citizens led by Robert Ritz made headway to pump and fill the lake by September. Lo and behold, they didn't need to worry. Mother Nature had filled it by the morning of when the pumps were set to start.

Stratford's keystone project, the Grand Trunk renewal (GTR) project made ... some headway. The ad hoc committee completed its mandate and disbanded in September, but evidently even many committee members were disappointed in what they accomplished. A high-level vision for the project was created, guiding principles and the like, and a consultancy firm is currently working on a more concrete path for the project, but a clear, concise vision has yet to materialize. Some city councillors have expressed that the process was flawed, but whatever opinion each councillor holds, all have expressed a desire for the project to move forward in some capacity.

Though, perhaps the largest development that occurred this year was the skyrocketing cost of living and a renewed public debate on homelessness.

Month to month, Times correspondents continued to check in with local food banks, who relayed in data what we were all noticing in our wallets: it was more expensive to live than ever and many had to turn to local charities for assistance. Many expressed on social media and within our pages that homeless-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3

2025 Year in Review Trivia

By Stewart Grant

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

This week's answers are found on pg. 23

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

ness was only a paycheque away, an accident away, a notice away.

From June to December, hundreds of Stratforders expressed frustration with the crisis prevalent on their streets, crystallizing in a lengthy city council meeting on a potential shelter at the Rotary Complex. Coun. Geza Wordofa pushed for the idea, though citing impossible costs and insurmountable logistics, the notion was defeated.

Through area organizations, a warming centre opened in December, though all agree that it is only a stop-gap measure. Area leaders are unified in supportive housing being the real solution.

With the city's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan being reviewed and set to be completed in 2026, the public debate on homelessness is far from over – Stratforders, like Canadians across the nation, continue to hold their breath.

For the Times, this year hasn't been one of waiting with bated breath. It's been one of monumental change. Amanda Modaragamage, our reporter who was with the Times on the ground when it started four years ago, returned as a reporter. Our regional editor Galen Simmons gave the reigns to me that same time, and the whole team worked behind the scenes to ensure that we could make the transition from a biweekly paper to a weekly one. We published our first weekly edition in August, on the anniversary of this paper's inception.

During this year's Better Newspapers Competition, put on by the Ontario

Community Newspapers Association, the Times had a good showing, with a podium result for Best Feature/News Series, but it was News Media Canada awarding us the general excellence award for our distribution size that was the real accomplishment.

In the judge's verdict, they said that our paper "does all the usual things you'd expect from a local newspaper – covering a broad range of news and feature stories – it excels at involving the community in co-creating the paper."

"The publication's guiding principles, displayed prominently on its op-ed page, declares that 'A Newspaper should be a community effort (contribute to your local paper!)' In that respect, the Times' success is demonstrated by the reams of feature stories written by local contributors and pages of high school track meet photos submitted by the students' coach and others. The collaborative approach is sure to build readers' trust in these Times. This newspaper is a platform not only for informing residents but, at its core, a vehicle for building community."

As we reflect on this past year, and we look towards next, that's what will be guiding this paper: striving to be a community-building vehicle.

On the next page, we have a survey for you to fill out, if you can. By scanning the code and filling out the form online, by dropping the pages off at the St. Marys Indy office, or by photographing the pages and emailing them to connor@granthaven.com, you can help better our paper – and your community, too.

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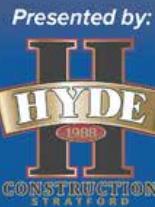
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READERS SURVEY

Take the Stratford Times 2025 survey and better improve your local paper

Over the years, the Stratford Times has received wonderful feedback from readers, praising it for its dedication to the community, to being economical, to focusing on the good over the bad (while still covering the bad) and for its hyper locality. That being said, there is always room for improvement – and that's where you come in.

To better serve our readers and grow editorially, we need to hear from you! Please scan the QR code, or visit <https://tinyurl.com/4j8y3cvy>, and fill out our 2025 survey online.

Alternatively, please feel free to complete the survey by hand. Forms can be submitted at the St. Marys Indy office during regular hours, by photographing the pages and emailing them to connor@granthaven.com or texting them to 519-282-5551, or by directly emailing the responses to the above email.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Where do you get your local news?

Choose all that apply.

- The Stratford Times
- The Beacon Herald
- CJCS/MyStratfordNow.com
- StratfordToday.ca
- Social media
- Other:

What news do you look for/read in the Stratford Times?

Choose all that apply.

- Breaking news
- Civic news
- Community news
- Business news
- Sports
- Arts
- Education
- Food
- History
- Editorial/Opinions
- Puzzles, etc.
- Other:

How do you typically obtain the Times?

- I pick up a copy at a pick-up location.
- I have a delivery subscription.
- I read it online.
- Other:

Where are you located?

- In the city.
- In the region.
- I'm from farther away.

Do you find it easy to access the Times? If not, how can we make it easier?

Are you satisfied by the Times' coverage week to week? If not, how can we improve?

If you were editor for a day, what would you change about the Times?

Everyone has a story and we would like to tell more of them. Who would make for an interesting profile, and why?

Do you have any other feedback?



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at a time!

STRATFORD TIMES

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YEAR IN LETTERS

Microaggressions??!! Oh, fuddle duddle

The unaccountable power-tripping bureaucrats at all government levels are getting to be worse than the self-aggrandizing, incompetent, narcissists in governments around the world.

Speaking of which, Dear Donald:

I see your “Canada as the 51st state,” and raise your bet to the following counter proposal.

We’ll offer you the job of premier of the 11th province of Canada. The province of USA. Now mind you, you’ll be very busy attempting to negotiate deals with 10 other premiers. But you’re a dealmaker, right?

And you’ll have to work out deals to bring your health care into line with Canada. And whoa, wait until you get a look at our gun laws! Busy, you will be. Negotiate you must do. Just think, no more northern border problems. Although there are these niggling interprovincial trade problems, I’m sure you can handle that, Mr. Deal Maker. Forget the Panama Canal.

Your bigly future is premier of the 11th province of Canada!

Happy holidays and a happy New Year!

*Ed Montgomery,
Published Jan. 10*

What a cynical ploy

The Trump tariffs imposed on Canada on Sunday are an outrage. Never in modern times has an American administration treated its northern friend and neighbour so badly. After continual insults about Canada becoming the 51st state, Trump has given all Canadians the middle finger by gravely threatening our economy and standard-of-living.

This harsh and bizarre behaviour by the American president is having a predictable effect: Canada’s leaders are fighting back — and we Canadians are uniting behind them. It needs to be all hands on deck for the next while as we try to mitigate the worst effects of the U.S. tariffs and take retaliatory actions. This will be an enormous challenge and there is no room for partisan squabbling.

But at this critical time for the country (which we all saw coming), up jumps Doug Ford and calls an early election in Canada’s largest province. He says he needs a strong mandate to take on Trump and his tariffs. Never mind that Ford heads a majority government with well over a year left in its mandate. Never mind that no other premier is doing this. Never mind that the response to a national crisis is being (and must be) captained by the prime minister and the federal government, not one of many premiers. And never mind that it is the middle of an old-time cold and snowy winter in most of the province (Ford doesn’t care — he lives in relatively snow-free Toronto).

So while all of Canada’s politicians should be keeping their eye on the ball and working together for the country’s future, Ontario’s four main political parties will be needlessly distracted, turning inward and training their sights on one another. We the electorate will have to endure precious weeks of partisan electioneering — wasting time and energy that should be used to develop national, provincial and local strategies to counter the looming tariff shocks.

What a cynical ploy on Ford’s part. Ontario deserves better.

*Dan Schneider,
Published Feb. 7*

Stratford council needs to revisit 2025 tax increase amid tariffs

We agree with Joani Gerber of investStratford (March 21) that while the full impact of the proposed U.S. tariffs are unclear, they will be significant and will be felt by not just the auto industry and its workers, but by virtually every business sector and their workers.

Like Ms. Gerber, we believe Stratford residents and our many employers recognize the seriousness of the potential impacts and are doing all they can to prepare for them, in part by reducing or eliminating activities and expenditures

that are “nice to do” and focusing on those that are “must do.”

We are very disappointed that at a time when people and businesses are examining their plans and budgets to identify the “need to do,” the City of Stratford has not stepped up to say it is reviewing the 2025 budget with a similar approach (according to the Feb. 21 edition of the Stratford Times the 2025 budget is \$86,038,828, an increase of \$5,948,452 or 7.4 per cent from the 2024 budget of \$80,090,376).

We believe council should focus on the “must do” and take steps to reduce or even eliminate that increase. These include, but are by no means limited to, a hiring freeze (the budget provides for more than a dozen new hires), a freeze on acquisition of new vehicles or equipment, no use of contractors or consultants to “temporarily fill” staff vacancies or undertake new projects, and travel restrictions for both council and staff.

Council could also decide not to make any additions to fiscal reserves (at a time when many individuals, families and businesses will be drawing upon their savings, and the city should not seek to increase its reserves), or to forego the 3 per-cent increase in remuneration approved for 2025.

We have written to the mayor and council to request that they urgently not just review, but to reduce the 2025 budget, and we encourage others to do the same. The email contact page for the mayor and council can be found at: <https://forms.stratford.ca/IT-Services/CAO-Mayor-Council/Email-City-Council>.

*Patrick and Mary O'Rourke,
Published April 4*

Make every vote matter

In times of crisis, Canadians have expressed EVERY CHILD MATTERS in support of our Indigenous peoples and BLACK LIVES MATTER in support of our Black brothers and sisters. Most recently and impressively, CANADIANS STAND TOGETHER is being displayed widely as a testament of our unity against threats to our sovereignty. All so very good.

Hopefully in the weeks to come, those of us who can will be ready and eager to show the world that together we mean every word — and more — and make EVERY VOTE MATTER demonstrate as forcefully just how strong Canada really is.

*James Colbeck,
Published April 18*

Ontario’s Bill 5 threatens the health of our children

I find it incredible that we are ignoring the enormous threat Bill 5 poses to children.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association calls Bill 5 a “power grab,” and it’s one that can directly hurt children. With the creation of “special economic zones” permitting the suspension of basic labour standards, including those relating to child labour, workplace safety, minimum wages, and hours of work, children may not only be drawn into harmful work, but they could also be harmed by the resulting toxins and pollution resulting from easing or removal of regulations.

The bill dismantles the Endangered Species Act and weakens habitat protections, impacting the clean air and water and green spaces critical for children’s physical and mental health. Children, especially infants, toddlers, and those in utero, are particularly susceptible to environmental toxins and disruptions. The bill also removes key enforcement powers and bypasses local and municipal oversight. How will our communities be able to advocate for the protection of their children?

Arguably, the Ford conservatives could turn entire cities into special economic zones, with weakened protections for all. What’s even worse, Bill 5 will make it easier to push forward large-scale high-emission projects, intensifying our climate change risks, from floods to heatwaves, to which

children are most vulnerable.

It’s no wonder Indigenous people are arguing strongly against this bill. Indigenous children face a particular threat from Bill 5. It undermines mandatory consultation with Indigenous Nations, infringes treaty rights and cultural heritage and threatens the clean land and water needed for cultural practices, food and recreation. They are standing up for their children.

Protecting our children should be our first priority. With all this at stake, how can we tolerate this bill?

*Sharon Collingwood,
Published July 25*

Disappointed

I was disappointed to see the Stratford Warriors exhume a team logo that draws upon Indigenous iconography for their merchandise and team jerseys. Many consider this practice cultural appropriation and feel it had been dealt with years ago.

In a 2015 Justice Murray Sinclair, chair and chief commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission commented that sports teams with offensive names such as Redskins and cartoonish aboriginal-looking mascots “have no place in a country trying to come to grips with racism in its past,” saying “it’s time to get rid of offensive Indigenous mascots which would never be tolerated if they targeted any other cultural group.”

A May 2019 letter from the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s to municipalities addressed the harmful impact of Indigenous-themed sports logos, and how sports are intended to be “drivers of social inclusion; bringing communities together and to help youth develop their self-esteem.”

It underscores one of the purposes of Ontario’s Human Rights Code the “creation of a climate of understanding and mutual respect for dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community.”

In a September 30 StratfordToday.ca article, local Anishinaabe knowledge carrier Christin Dennis (Aamjiwnaang First Nation) suggests there may be a better way to share the history of the jersey, by “putting a jersey in a glass case and write a story about that part of the team’s history.”

Dennis, also a member of a local community-based Indigenous collaborative Kaswenthwa-Two Row Now, proposed that the team include “a disclaimer that they didn’t know better at the time and that this is not the appropriate way now.”

In the spirit of respect and cultural harmony, I would encourage the Stratford Warriors management to reconsider its use of the Indigenous graphic. Many in the community would be grateful for this act of recognition and reconciliation.

*Loreena McKennitt,
Published Oct. 10*

New recycling bins wrong on many levels

We lived in Toronto when wheeled recycling carts replaced blue recycling bins a couple decades ago. The responsible first step was a form where the residents could choose the size of cart that suited their circumstance.

Now, in Stratford and other Ontario communities, wheeled blue recycling carts are being deposited at our properties. Ginormous bins. One size fits all bins. Without consultation with residents or, it seems, with many or any municipal governments. That’s so wrong on many levels.

The new, privatized system that starts in January is an action of the province. So, the Ford government has the power to amend this rollout so a choice of bins occurs.

Our representative here in Perth County is a Progressive Conservative. Mr. Rae sits on the government side. I call on him to raise his voice so common sense prevails and the bin rollout is amended here and elsewhere.

*Ken Dodd,
Published Nov. 21*

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US!

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YEAR IN REAL ESTATE

Back to reality: Four things that changed in the Stratford real estate market in 2025

MAKLANE DEWEVER

Guest Contributor

2025 was a year of transition for the Stratford real estate market. With the frenzied COVID market firmly in the rear-view mirror and economic headwinds caused by the deteriorating trade relationship with the U.S., we entered a market more favourable to buyers.

This transition meant fewer bidding wars, almost as many sales but more sellers who tried and then unlisted, more conditional offers, and, finally, house prices starting to align with incomes.

Overall, this meant buyers had more leverage and sellers needed to be diligent in their approach to selling their home and base their expectations on the realities of now, and not the past.

Fewer bidding wars

In 2021, most houses sold in competition, with stories of houses receiving 50 offers and selling 50 per cent over asking price. This is no longer the case. In 2025, 22 per cent of homes sold over asking, the same percentage as in 2015, compared to 80 per cent in 2021. In fact, in February 2022, 100 per cent of houses sold over asking price.

During the market peak, a strategy was to list a home far below market value to spark a bidding frenzy. In 2025, that tactic backfired. Sellers who listed lower than they were willing to accept, expecting a windfall, often found themselves rejecting offers at the list price, alienating buyers and eventually re-listing at a higher price.

Almost as many sales, more who tried

Almost just as many houses were sold year over year. In 2025, 432 people sold their homes in Stratford, down from 451 in 2024 – a drop of just 19 homes.

In 2024, that period saw 559 new listings, whereas this year saw 724. About 282 listings expired, terminated or were suspended, compared to 165 in the previous year. Some of this reflects properties being re-listed, a strategy some realtors use to get listings at the top of the new

Month	Median Property Sale Price	Salary needed to afford the average home	Actual combined average pre-tax salaries for a couple in Stratford.
November-2000	\$ 139,500	\$ 36,818	\$ 67,222
November-2015	\$ 255,000	\$ 41,908	\$ 66,419
April-2022	\$ 777,000	\$ 145,167	\$ 103,726
November-2024	\$ 589,000	\$ 118,171	\$ 108,003
November-2025	\$ 552,500	\$ 92,036	\$ 109,659

listings on realtor.ca. But generally, and anecdotally, more sellers took their houses off the market this year than last year. But the number of sellers who sold their houses was about the same.

Inventory is much higher right now, reflecting levels last seen in 2016. At the time of publication, there are 134 properties on the market, compared to 108 last year. So, buyers have more options. For sellers, it also means that pricing and preparing a house competitively is more critical than ever since a home needs to stand out to sell.

While almost as many properties were sold this year as last year, more sellers than in previous years tried to sell without accepting any offers.

Listings either sold or sat

Average days-on-market-to-sale was 38 days in 2025, compared with 34 days in 2024, meaning houses took longer to sell. Zoom out, and homes are being sold in the

same amount of time as 10 years ago.

In 2025, 22 per cent of all houses that were listed sold in under four weeks, or 62 per cent of those that actually ended up selling; the rest either sat or were taken off the market. Meaning that if your home was well-priced, well-presented and well-promoted, it sold. Otherwise, you might be out of luck. Not pricing and preparing your house right off the bat can lead to your property being stigmatized, as buyers begin to question whether something is wrong with it as it sits on the market. Now is not a time to swing for the fences.

A significant factor increasing days on market is that people now have conditions such as home inspections, financing conditions and conditions on the sale of their home. Another is falling prices and expectations of home value not reflecting that.

Housing affordability increased

The table accompanying this article shows that lower prices, lower rates and

new 30-year mortgages have restored a time when median-income couples in Stratford can once again afford a median-priced home.

After years of being priced out, median-income households in Stratford can once again afford a median-priced home, thanks to lower prices, lower rates and 30-year mortgages for first-time buyers. That's encouraging news for buyers and points to an eventual healthier, more balanced market for sellers as well, since in the long run, incomes need to reflect house prices. With affordability improving, this could point to greater price stability heading into 2026.

Maklane deWever is a realtor with Stratford-based Home & Company Real Estate Corp. Brokerage, as well as the author of a Stratford and area market update newsletter. Stay up to date on Stratford's market by visiting <https://www.deweversreal-estate.ca>.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

The Avon Park development in Stratford's east end rises from the ground this past spring, as pictured in this photo from the Times' May 30 edition.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

On April 16, an excavator works at demolishing a row of buildings on Erie Street.



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Work continued on the steps leading to St. Joseph's Catholic Church on Huron Street last fall, as seen in this photo from the Times' Sept. 5 edition.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Lucas Tingle, garden educator at the Local Community Food Centre, cuts the ribbon for the new cold frame at Oak Street Farm with his daughter April and executive director Margaret Smart on Sept. 22.



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YEAR IN POLITICS

For all that changed, nothing really did ...

CONNOR LUCZKA

Times editor

2025 had two major snap elections, and for all the change prevalent on the global stage, domestically there was hardly any.

The first was the provincial election. In an op-ed published in the National Post on Jan. 28, the day his government announced the election, Premier Doug Ford said that the threat of trade tariffs would put 450,000 Ontario jobs on the line. Ford warned that the threat was not going away and argued his party needs a stronger mandate to properly fight a trade war. An election was called for Feb. 27.

There were three other major parties and leaders that election: Bonnie Crombie, leader of the Ontario Liberals, Marit Stiles of the Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP), and Mike Schreiner of the Ontario Green Party. Locally, the major four parties were represented by Matthew Rae for the PC Party of Ontario (the incumbent), Ashley Fox for the Liberals, Jason Davis for the NDP and Ian Morton for the Greens. James Montgomery of the New Blue Party, Sarah Zenuh of the Ontario Party and Rob Smink of the Freedom Party also ran in Perth-Wellington.

Ford was re-elected for a third majority government, the first time a party has done so in over 60 years, when "Old Man Ontario," Premier Leslie Frost, led the province for 12 years.

Although Ford wanted a stronger mandate, the PCs lost three seats. Locally, Rae marginally increased his performance from the last 2022 election, increasing his vote share from 19,468 (46.8 per cent) to 20,752 (47 per cent).

"The good people of Perth-Wellington and Ontario have made their voices heard," Rae said to supporters after being announced the winner on election night. "They've chosen to re-elect a strong, sta-



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma, pictured here during the unveiling of Stratford General Hospital's new cancer clinic on Jan. 24, was elected in 2022, and will face another election on Oct. 26, 2026.

ble, majority Conservative government in the Province of Ontario, a historic victory this evening for our Progressive Conservative Party ..."

His opposition was less than positive about the outcome, though all MPP-hopefuls vowed to continue as their respective parties' candidates.

"I don't know why there's so many people voting for this government and this Conservative party that are experiencing so many difficulties," Morton told the Times the morning after the loss. "I don't feel like our MPP really represented the people of the riding very well at all, and yet he's getting ... the same level of voting. So, it's pretty disappointing."

Perth-Wellington returned to the ballot on April 28, two months after the provincial election wrapped.

On March 23, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced he had asked Gov. Gen. Mary Simon to dissolve parliament, instituting a snap election scheduled for April 28. On the steps of Rideau Hall, Carney, who had only served as prime minister for 14 days at that point in time, alluded to his government's most recent actions before asking the Canadian people for a stronger mandate to deal with U.S. tariffs and President Donald Trump's threats to Canadian sovereignty – the exact same ask Premier Ford had when he called his own election.

"We are facing the most significant crisis of our lifetimes because of President Trump's unjustified trade actions and his threats to our sovereignty," Carney said. "Our response must be to build a strong economy and a more secure Canada."

President Trump claims that Canada isn't a real country. He wants to break us so that America can own us. We will not let that happen."

And like the provincial election, the prospects for the federal party didn't much change.

Carney faced Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre, New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, Bloc Québécois Party leader Yves-François Blanchet and Green Party co-leaders Jonathan Pedneault and Elizabeth May, in addition to the People's Party of Canada (PPC) leader Maxime Bernier. Locally, the parties were represented by John Nater of the Conservative Party (incumbent), David Mackey of the Liberal Party, Kevin Kruchkywich of the NDP and Wayne Baker of the PPC.

Carney was elected to a minority government, raising the Liberals seat count from 152 (at dissolution) to 169.

In Perth-Wellington, Nater won his fourth consecutive term as opposition MP. With a 70 per cent voter turnout rate (marginally better than the nation's 69.5 per cent turnout rate), Nater received a decisive 33,972 votes (53 per cent of the vote).

"It is my great honour and with great humility that I thank the people of Perth-Wellington for re-electing me to serve as your member of parliament and voice in Ottawa," Nater said after national news outlets called his victory in the riding. "It is a responsibility that I do not take lightly and one that I will cherish for as long as I have the honour of serving in this office."

"I believe we ran a very successful campaign in Perth-Wellington," Mackey said at his election night party in Stratford at a similar time. "We started only five weeks ago, and the goal was to build a stronger community in Perth-Wellington. My



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

MPP Matthew Rae, pictured here at a provincial announcement on Dec. 5, was re-elected in the provincial election on Feb. 27.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

MP John Nater, pictured here at the opening of the NextStratf esports hub in Stratford on July 15, was re-elected in the federal election on April 28.

YEAR IN POLITICS

For all that changed, nothing really did ...

campaign and my team have done well, and I feel good that we did our best.

"John's service to Perth-Wellington has been validated with another mandate by the voters of Perth-Wellington, and that deserves congratulations," Mackey went on to say. "It deserves support from me as a resident of Perth-Wellington. I wish him well and future success representing Perth-Wellington's residents."

Stratford is not finished at the ballot. Municipal elections are planned for 2026, and they may be one of the most consequential local elections in the city's history. This is the first mayoral election where strong mayor powers are on the line.

Endowed to Stratford and 169 other municipalities in May of last year to increasing housing stock, the powers have rebalanced the relationship between mayors and municipal councils. They allow mayors to appoint a municipality's chief administrative officer (CAO), hire certain municipal department heads and reorganize departments themselves, create committees of council, propose the municipal budget, propose certain bylaws they say advances "provincial priorities," veto certain bylaws they say could interfere with provincial priorities and bring for-

ward matters for discussion by council.

In response to the recent announcement of the expansion from the province, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO), which has been tracking the use of strong mayor powers since they were first introduced in Toronto and Ottawa in 2022, said there is no evidence to suggest this legislation has any impact on the number of housing starts in municipalities that have been granted the powers.

Instead, AMCTO says its research suggests strong mayor powers have blurred the political-administrative authority between the roles of heads of council and CAOs, threatening the neutrality of the public service and politicizing local government leadership.

"Looking at Ontario's Housing Supply Tracker, there is no evidence to suggest that the use of strong mayor powers is helping to build housing," said AMCTO spokesperson Jacquelyn Folville. "For example, of the 11 municipalities where mayors used powers in relation to staff and organizational structure, only three were on track to meet or exceed their 10-year target. We have more so been hearing about instances where the pow-

ers have created confusion by blurring the distinction of mayor and CAO roles or responsibilities, and where there's been operational issues – for example, affecting a recent council decision at the Town of Orillia."

Zack Taylor, an associate professor of political science at Western University and a fellow at the Institute of Municipal Finance and Governance, has been among those sounding alarm bells about strong mayor powers since their introduction in Ontario in 2022.

"If we buy the argument that these powers can be used to expand housing in rapidly growing areas, it's the larger municipalities in rapidly growing areas that already have these powers," Taylor said. "So, bringing this to much smaller places, many of them slower-growth places, I'm not sure if it's something that would move the needle."

Taylor said the expansion of these powers is based on the premise that councils across Ontario are "gridlocked" when it comes to dealing with issues deemed as priorities by the province, something the associate professor doesn't see a lot of evidence to support. He says the idea that giving "soft-dictatorial authority" to

heads of council to move the needle on housing doesn't really make a lot of sense.

"Ontario has a very elaborate planning system that has generally served the province well for decades going back to the Second World War," he said. "As a result, we have fairly efficient housing production that's fully serviced by water and sewer and that kind of thing. And if you look at other parts of North America, that isn't necessarily a given. But I think there is a legitimate argument there is a housing shortage, it's just is this the right way to address it and will this kind of thing make it happen? What we've seen so far is it's really hard to find any kind of evidence that strong mayor powers have created any more housing than would have been created otherwise."

"... I think a cynical perspective on it is this is a way for the province to transfer blame for the housing crisis onto mayors."

Numerous local councillors – as well as municipal politicians across the province – have decried the powers, calling them "undemocratic, upsetting, offensive, broken and scary," among other things.

The municipal election will be held on Oct. 26, 2026.

2025 Ontario General Election Results - February 27, 2025

ONTARIO RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Votes	% of Votes	Seats
Conservative	Doug Ford	2,158,452	43.0%	80
New Democratic	Marit Stiles	931,796	18.6%	27
Liberal	Bonnie Crombie	1,504,688	30.0%	14
Green	Mike Schreiner	242,822	4.8%	2

PERTH-WELLINGTON RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Votes	% of Votes
Conservative	Matthew Rae	20,752	47.0%
Liberal	Ashley Fox	12,547	28.4%
New Democratic	Jason Davis	5,580	12.6%
Green	Ian Morton	3,299	7.5%
New Blue Party	James Montgomery	1,284	2.9%
Ontario Party	Sarah Zenuh	458	1.0%
Freedom	Rob Smink	229	0.5%

2025 Canadian Federal Election Results - April 28, 2025

FEDERAL RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Votes	% of Votes	Seats
Liberal	Mark Carney	8,595,488	43.8%	169
Conservative	Pierre Poilievre	8,113,484	41.3%	144
Bloc Québécois	Yves-Francois Blanchet	1,236,349	6.3%	22
New Democratic	Jagmeet Singh	1,234,673	6.3%	7
Green	Jonathan Pedneault	238,892	1.2%	1
People's	Maxime Bernier	840,993	4.9%	0

PERTH-WELLINGTON RESULTS:

Party	Leader	Votes	% of Votes
Conservative	John Nater	33,972	53.0%
Liberal	David Mackey	26,142	40.8%
New Democratic	Kevin Kruchkywich	2,909	4.5%
People's	Wayne Baker	1,069	1.7%

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MONTH BY MONTH

2025 Year in Review By Month

January:

Budget deliberations for the 2025 City of Stratford budget wrapped on Jan. 16. Going into a final council meeting to fully approve the budget, residential tax rates were set to rise by 5.41 per cent. With trade-threats from the south looming, Mayor Martin Ritsma warned of “gray skies” for Stratford that year.

The Stratford Festival publicly petitioned to purchase the former Normal School from the City of Stratford for \$1, after council held a special meeting to discuss divesting the property. Artistic director Antoni Cimolino said that while the festival could not invest more money to purchase the property, it could be a responsible custodian for the historic landmark.

David Tokley, a victim of the 2024 Bradshaw Drive shooting that was shot in the head and survived, reflected on a Christmas that was harder than ever. His recovery was slow

and the bureaucracy of health care was difficult to manage. Ever the optimist, Tokley was looking forward to a pivotal surgery and “not having a repeat of last year.”

Accomplished Stratford author Andrew Pyper passed away due to complications with cancer. Longtime friend Larry McCabe reflected on his passing and called him “one of the most important writers of the last 20 years in Canadian literature.”

The 2024/25 Lights On Stratford festival wrapped on Jan. 19. Festival director, and executive director of Destination Stratford, Zac Gribble called it a tremendous success with the highest attendance to date.

The 30th annual Soup’s On event ushered in 2,000 guests, 31 soup vendors and what must have been thousands of quarts of handmade soups.

Hundreds of residents and visitors packed Upper Queen’s Park for a snowy Winterfest

celebration.

Dozens gathered at Stratford General Hospital’s new cancer clinic to cut the ribbon and celebrate the “jaw-dropping” community achievement.

February

U.S. President Donald Trump’s blanket 25 per cent trade tariffs were announced, putting Canadians, Ontarians and Stratforders on edge. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave an address to the nation, and locally Mayor Martin Ritsma urged citizens to “remain calm, support one another and be united.”

Perth-Wellington headed to the ballot on Feb. 27 for the provincial election. Incumbent Matthew Rae of the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party won back his seat with 47 per cent of the vote, beating out the Liberal Ashley Fox, NDP Jason Davis, Green Ian Morton, New Blue James Montgomery, Ontario Party Sarah Zenuh and Freedom Party Rob Smink. Rae joined his PC colleagues to form a major-

ity government.

With a few last-minute additions, Stratford city council finally passed the 2025 budget with a 5.46 per cent property tax hike.

The Stratford Public Library announced two of its librarians won prestigious awards. Library technicians Sherri Bennewies and Lorraine Gordon were honoured with the technical services award at the Ontario Library Association (OLA)’s Library Awards Gala.

Stratford police were on the lookout for suspects in a late-January shooting on Railway Avenue.

Revel, one of the many staple cafés in the Festival City, received new ownership. Founder Anne Campion passed the torch to new owners and longtime customers Stephanie and Colin Schmidt.

Derek Denny of Soup Surreal celebrated his award-winning restaurant’s 10th anniversary.

Chief administrative officer (CAO) Joan Thomson announced her retirement, starting



(JULIA PAUL PHOTO)

Hilary Sullivan poses with the chefs from Connection Chiropractic as she samples their “adjust-a-chicken delight” soup at the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth’s annual Soup’s On fundraiser Jan. 11.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Janine and Thomas skid through the snow during last year’s Winterfest in Upper Queen’s Park on Jan. 25.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

SHROOMS was one of the highlights of last year’s Lights On Stratford – and returns for this year’s festival as well.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Community stakeholders and project leaders gather at Stratford General Hospital’s new cancer clinic for a ribbon cutting on Jan. 24.

MONTH BY MONTH

2025 Year in Review By Month

a months-long selection process for the City of Stratford's top staffer. Adam Betteridge, director of building and planning, was promptly named interim CAO in her place.

March

Joani Gerber, CEO of investStratford, warned that over 4,000 local auto jobs stood to be affected by U.S. trade tariffs – and many more stood to be indirectly affected as well. In light of the tariffs, investStratford and the City of Stratford partnered with the Town of St. Marys and Perth County to launch the Stratford Perth Tariff Task Force. The initiative was a resource hub that provided businesses and citizens with timely information, strategies and support programs to navigate the evolving trade landscape.

Likewise, the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) announced the Shop Main Street Canada, Support Local campaign to encourage consumers to consider local businesses first and support businesses

in the city's downtown core when shopping.

Stratford residents, angered by tariffs and U.S. President Donald Trump's repeated calls for Canada to become the "51st state," packed Market Square with Canadian Flags and "shop local" signs, organized by local advocacy group Wise Communities.

Coldest Night of the Year surpassed its \$200,000 fundraising goal by over \$20,000, preceding the United Way Perth-Huron announcement of a record-setting \$2,356,497 raised in the annual campaign. Executive director Ryan Erb was surprised with the King Charles III's Coronation Medal, one of the greatest awards for community advancement in Canada, that evening.

The Canadian Federation of University Women packed the Arden Park Hotel for International Women's Day on March 8, the 50th anniversary of the global celebration.

Accumetal Manufacturing netted \$1.5 million in federal funding, as announced on

March 3, that will go to implementing new technology. Ruby Sahota, Minister of Democratic Institutions and the minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (otherwise known as FedDev Ontario), told reporters that the federal government has "an appropriate response prepared that is well calibrated" to U.S. tariffs.

Stratford city council and the Stratford Public Library created the Poet Laureate and Youth Poet Laureate roles, with David Stones and Quinn Mayer taking on the inaugural roles, respectively.

Sinclair Pharmacy, having survived pandemics, recessions and everything in between, celebrated 65 years of operation.

April

In a snap federal election, John Nater won a decisive victory in Perth-Wellington, returning to Ottawa for his fourth consecutive term as opposition MP. With a more than 70

per cent voter turnout in the riding – 63,683 of 90,016 registered electors – Nater received 33,850 votes or roughly 53 per cent. Liberal candidate David Mackey trailed with 25,892 votes or nearly 41 per cent of the total turnout, and the NDP's Kevin Kruchkywich had 2,875 votes or 4.5 per cent of the vote. People's Party of Canada candidate Wayne Baker rounded out the pack with 1,066 votes or 1.7 per cent of the vote.

Locally, St. Michael Catholic Secondary School held a mock election that same day, participating with 5,000 schools across Canada to show a "what could have been." In the mock exercise, students elected a Conservative Party minority government, with the Liberal Party forming the Official Opposition.

The City of Stratford announced that Ward & Uptigrove Human Resources Solutions would be providing its human resources services. Staff were tight-lipped about what happened to the HR department, other than it was



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)
A resident holds up a "Buy Local" sign during a rally on March 1 in opposition to U.S. protectionism and U.S. President Donald Trump's "51st state" rhetoric.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)
Joanne Ferguson, Rosemary Hall and Lisa Van Osch at last year's Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser on Feb. 22.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)
Despite the winter weather in April, about 17,400 dairy producers came to the 2025 Canadian Dairy XPO, taking over the Stratford Rotary Complex and the WeCover Cow Coliseum on April 2 and 3.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)
A huge group of Stratford residents and visitors gathered along the water for the annual Swan Release on April 6, corralling 10 swans into the Avon River that crisp spring morning.

MONTH BY MONTH

2025 Year in Review By Month

going through a “transition”; however, Coun. Cody Sebben claimed in an open council meeting that the CAO removed the department. He did not further explain his comment when asked to clarify.

The provincial government announced an expansion of strong mayor powers to 169 municipalities in a widely criticized announcement (including from a number of city councillors who called the powers undemocratic and troubling, among other things). Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma received the powers and had a mixed reaction after consulting with peers. Although some abilities were not of interest to him, the prospect of leading the city’s annual budget process was.

On the subject of annual budget processes, Perth County passed its 2025 budget with a 11.3 per cent tax increase.

The Stratford Festival announced a \$1.1 million deficit, lower revenue and less than expected attendance for its 2024 season.

The annual Canadian Dairy XPO had an-

other successful year, despite the freak ice storm which hit the region. Over 350 companies from around the globe, representing 30 different countries, came to the XPO – as did a total of 17,600 dairy producers.

Earth Day celebrations were held across the city – and across the Avon River, where cleanups were organized by various area institutions and companies. The annual Climate Momentum Street Party also kicked off, which organizers said was a fantastic event.

Hundreds of Stratford residents lined Lake Victoria for its annual Swan Release.

May

After nearly 20 years of petitions and reports, the Stratford Police Service (SPS)’s headquarters were finally barrier-free accessible. Along with the City of Stratford’s accessibility advisory committee, Police Chief Greg Skinner and Mayor Martin Ritsma cut the ribbon on the new ramp and entrance.

While the ramp was a huge win, accessibility advocates like Diane Sims and Roger Koert

reminded the public that there is still much work to do – and Stratford is behind on its homework. Public spaces were mandated to be accessible by the start of 2025 and there are still places that need to get up to code.

In a summer-long contest, Stratford was named one of Canada’s top 10 travel destinations by CBC’s The Current.

The Stratford Lions Club celebrated 100 years of uplifting the community on May 3.

Gene’s Restaurant celebrated 55 years of serving old-school Chinese-Canadian cuisine.

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Robotics Club jet-setted to Dallas, Texas for a world championship. They finished in the top three per cent.

After being devastated by a fire in October 2024, Bijou reopened in the basement of Braai House on May 6. Owners Mark and Linda Simone were elated at the support they and the team received from the community. About 90 per cent of its staff returned.

The Stratford General Hospital Founda-

tion’s ambitious \$30 million capital goal was exceeded by over \$1.4 million after 10 years of fundraising.

Consulting firm Svec Group advised the ad hoc Grand Trunk renewal committee that its keystone project rejuvenating the historic old shops building downtown will come with a hefty price-tag. It suggested two possible bookends: between \$43 million and \$126 million. Mayor Martin Ritsma called it “sobbing.”

The Stratford Festival’s 73rd season started with a red carpet rollout on May 26.

The Kinsmen Club of Stratford celebrated its 80th anniversary on May 31.

June

Another successful Pride parade kicked off at the Tom Patterson Theatre and rolled up Lakeside Drive to Upper Queen’s Park. Organizers said that the day was a huge success.

L’Arche Stratford broke ground on its new home at 426 Britannia St. on June 2. The \$6.5 million, 15,000 square foot building will



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The City of Stratford’s accessibility advisory committee (AAC) poses on the accessibility ramp to the Stratford Police HQ, when it was unveiled on May 7.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

The Stratford Festival’s 73rd season started with a red carpet rollout on May 26.



(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

The 2025 Pride parade heads to Upper Queen’s Park on June 1.



(VICTOR EMMANUEL GUTIERREZ PHOTO)

High school students in Stratford unite for a historic United Nations simulation on May 30.

MONTH BY MONTH

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house offices, living suites and activity rooms when completed.

All three Stratford high schools participated in a model United Nations simulation. Hundreds of high school students gathered at Stratford City Hall for the event.

Former city councillor Dave Gaffney passed away, with family, friends and colleagues remembering him as a diligent public servant and devoted Stratford native.

With an eye on this coming winter, many Stratford residents began to seriously question what efforts can be made for the city's homeless. Many took to social media to voice their concerns, others went to city council for answers.

Hike for Hospice raised \$125,000 during its annual event at the Stratford Perth Museum, later achieving its goal of \$130,000.

Stratford's Diane Sims was officially named a member of the Order of Canada in a late-June investiture ceremony at Rideau Hall.

Sims was inducted due to her staunch advocacy work and said about the ceremony and honour: "It was so humbling, but I felt like this was out of this world."

July

Canada Day was celebrated with a huge turnout on July 1, with thousands lining the streets for the annual parade. Despite worsening U.S.-Canada tensions, a Wisconsin-based marching band joined the parade, waving their own flag and the Canadian Flag side by side.

The Stratford Festival got \$250,000 in provincial funding. During the announcement both artistic director Antoni Cimolino and executive director Anita Gaffney told reporters that the new season was going strong.

A new esports hub had its grand opening at the Burnside Agriplex. Featuring 15 high-end gaming computers, NextStrat offers free gaming time for area youth in exchange for community hours (homework completion, volunteering or participation in community-based

activities).

A new 288-bed peopleCare long-term care home broke ground. The facility is expected to open its doors in 2027.

Local food bank usage continued to soar. Eva Hayes, executive director of the Stratford House of Blessing, told reporters that demand has tripled over the last five years.

During a torrential storm in late July a sluice gate at the RT Orr Dam had gotten stuck due to debris, prompting Lake Victoria in downtown Stratford to drastically drain and leave much of the river barren. Local businesses and neighbours launched the Save the Avon Bucket Challenge (#AvonBuckets), going on social media with buckets of water and tossing them in to refill the river. The local conservation authority applauded locals' stewardship.

August

The Stratford Festival announced its 74th season lineup – and that it would be Antoni Cimolino's last as artistic director. With the

theme "This Rough Magic," the 2026 season promises to be a culmination of a 40-year career, 14 of those years at the helm.

The 51st Stratford vs. Shaw cricket match was on a brand-new pitch, informally named after festival-favourite Mervyn "Butch Blake" as the Butch Blake Memorial Cricket Ground. The festival won in a nail-biter, 158-157.

The Stratford Public Library released its fifth anthology of local youth writers, with a special reading at Fanfare Books.

Stratford Summer Music wrapped its 25th season. With water levels still low at Lake Victoria, the barge had to be docked on land (along with other water-based shows/events like Razzmajazz and Light Up the Night Kayaking), but organizers said the response from audience members was positive.

Ballinran Entertainment celebrated 30 years of film production.

In preparation for the 28th Rotary Dragon Boat Festival, chair of the organizing com-



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The annual Stratford Canada Day parade kicked off on Lakeside Drive, wended through local streets, before ending at the Stratford Rotary Complex.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Terence McCallum, who just celebrated his 100th birthday, was this year's Canada Day parade marshal.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Stratford Festival cricketer Evan Mercer sits with his teammates as they take in the words of the annual Stratford-Shaw game's opening ceremony on Aug. 25.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

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

MONTH BY MONTH

mittee Robert Ritz began work to fill Lake Victoria, a monumental task that involved pumping water from a nearby quarry into the river-network. His work was ultimately not needed. The same day pumps were set to start, higher-than-expected precipitation filled the lake back up – a month after it drained.

September

With the water levels high, the Stratford Rotary Dragon Boat Festival was a huge success on Sept. 13, with more than 40 teams from across the nation competing in the Hong Kong-style races. Organized by the Rotary Club of Stratford, the festival is the city's largest Rotary fundraiser, with proceeds supporting local charities and community projects.

The public debate on homelessness continued. Former radio personality Rob Wreford took to social media with a video that got thousands of hits and reignited a long-had conversation. Martine Lee set up a tent in front of city hall in a protest calling for more action. Coun. Geza Wordofa put forward a motion at city council to include a temporary homeless shelter at the Stratford Rotary

Complex, a motion that no other councillor supported.

After a long search, André Morin took over as CAO for the city. Coming to Stratford as the director of corporate services and treasurer with the Town of St. Marys, he held a similar position in Stratford from 2012-2017.

The ad hoc Grand Trunk renewal committee disbanded after meeting its two-year mandate, to varied reviews. In an informal survey presented by Ray Harsant, a member of one of the committee's working groups, many committee members expressed mixed opinions about the group's work.

Graham Greene passed away. He was known globally for his role of Kicking Bird in *Dances with Wolves* (for which he was nominated for an Academy Award), and for his roles in *Thunderheart*, *Maverick* and *The Green Mile*, but he was known locally here in Stratford as a neighbour and friend. Ballinran Entertainment announced Greene will be the namesake for its sound stage at the planned Stageview Studios, an honour that was in the works before Greene passed.

The Stratford Perth Museum announced a

new and evolving Black history exhibit, with local storytellers Garvia Bailey and HAU1 assisting in its creation.

Alliance North launched its Volunteer Emergency Response Air Corps at the Air Bridge 2025 event at the Stratford Municipal Airport. Dozens of volunteer citizen pilots came to Stratford for mock emergency exercises as a proof of concept – in the event of emergency, there are willing pilots able to help first responders at the drop of a hat.

The 184th Stratford Fall Fair packed the Rotary Complex grounds from Sept. 18-21.

October

The Stratford Festival announced that Jonathan Church will be the next artistic director, taking over from Antoni Cimolino in 2027. Speaking with the Times, Church said that he is "excited to revisit his Canadian roots and carry forward the Stratford Festival's mission of creating worldclass theatre for both Canadian and international audiences."

The local GOHL hockey team received pushback from the public for bringing old jerseys with an Indigenous logo out of retirement.

After his unsuccessful bid for a winter homeless shelter, Geza Wordofa and the Multicultural Association of Perth Huron began to collect sleeping bags and blankets for area homeless. Despite his idea for a shelter being shot down the month prior, through public discussion and work behind the scenes by city staff, area churches and other concerned parties, a new warming centre was approved for the winter.

Two citizens, Jodi Nakluski and Linda Scammell, had often wondered why Stratford didn't have a veterans memorial crosswalk – and after working with the city and local artist Nancy Groenestegge for a year and change, a final design was approved to be installed just before Remembrance Day.

The Stratford 5K Run/Walk stormed through the Festival City, raising more than \$56,000 for the Local Community Food Centre.

At the annual Mayor's Breakfast, the Stratford House of Blessing was honoured for its commitment to the city. In turn, the organization honoured its longest serving volunteers, Norman Kehl – the widow of House of Bless-



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Martine Lee sits outside Stratford city hall beside the tent she set up as part of a protest in September calling for more action on homelessness.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Melissa, Millie, Holly and Beau speed through the corner of the Orient Express ride at the 2025 Stratford Fall Fair on Sept. 20.



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

Avalyn, Sophie, Ella and Harrison celebrated Halloween in downtown Stratford on Oct. 25.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Amiera Black was recognized during the annual Community Recognition Awards on Oct. 28 for her outstanding performance in swimming.

MONTH BY MONTH

ing founder Florence Kehl.

The 31st Communities in Bloom National Symposium took place in Stratford from Oct. 16-18. The annual event brought in delegates from across the world to admire Stratford and its heritage.

The annual Community Recognition Awards were held on Oct. 28, recognizing hundreds of Stratford residents for representing the city with excellence.

November

Like every year, Stratford showed up in spades for its Remembrance Day ceremonies at the cenotaph. Wreaths were laid, veterans were honoured and residents from across the county paid their respects.

In a sobering report, the social services department revealed that only about 16 per cent of children up to the age of five will have access to licensed, full-time childcare. Although plans are in place to improve that statistic, it is unlikely the need will fully be met in the near future.

Paris Jewellers was robbed for the fifth time in recent years. Although there has been discussion online about whether the perpetrators were caught in the most recent smash-and-gr

ab on Nov. 13, as of press time no area arrests have been linked to the robbery.

Marian deWever of Home & Company Real Estate Corp. Brokerage was honoured at this year's Business Excellence Awards as the Business Leader of the Year, presented by the Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce in the Tom Patterson Theatre. Along with deWever, dozens of businesses and business leaders were recognized for their contributions to the local economy.

For the first time in Stratford's history, the theatre-world didn't hibernate during the winter months. Along with the Stratford Festival announcing they would extend a few anchor shows into the holiday season, Here For Now theatre began to stage a winter season at its St. Andrew Street location.

Local architect Robert Ritz presented an alternate plan for the Grand Trunk superstructure, presenting his vision to a packed hall at the Army Navy building on Lorne Avenue. That same week, certain city councillors expressed frustration with the status of the project.

The 2026 City of Stratford budget, the first budget put together by Mayor Martin Rits-

ma as a city with strong mayor powers, was presented, debated and effectively approved in November. Property taxes are expected to rise by 3.19 per cent next year, the lowest rise in recent years.

December

After some back and forth between the public, city council and the administrator for the new recycling program set to begin in 2026, more recycling bin options were granted to Stratford residents. Large carts were distributed in November, but smaller sizes for those with mobility or space issues were made available the following month.

Aisin Canada Inc. received \$2.2 million from the Province in Ontario in response to U.S. tariffs. The money will be invested in the plant's transition to produce a new sunroof for Lexus and Toyota vehicles (the only plant in North America to produce the sunroofs) but it also will protect 530 jobs and create 30 new ones.

After the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA)'s board of directors nearly unanimously opposed a provincial bid to consolidate all 36 conservation authorities into just seven large regional authorities, the

UTRCA continued in December to get the public to join them in decrying the idea, posting on social media and its website about how the change will hinder their operations.

The deputy mayor of West Perth was named Perth County warden for 2026, accepting the warden's gavel and chain.

Six local police officers – Consts. Jeff Serf, Brady Simpson, Brent Poppe, Scott Parkinson, Amy Knechtel and Nick Feltz – as well as communicators Nikki Smids and Heather Forsyth were honoured by the Stratford Police Service for their exemplary work during the 2024 Bradshaw Drive shooting.

After getting approval from city council, numerous area agencies created a new warming centre at the Stratford Connection Centre for those living unsheltered during the winter.

Lights On Stratford opened for its sixth annual season. Festival director Zac Gribble called it an ambitious year that rests on the shoulders of staff and volunteers. Due to a few "winter events," organizers had to push through the worst conditions since the festival started to get the light features ready in time.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Corporal Sumner, Master Corporal McConkey and Cadet Weaver light up the pumpkins in Market Square for Stratford's 13th Pumpkin Parade on Nov. 1.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The 2025 Remembrance Day parade passes Stratford city hall on Nov. 11.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Chris Mejaki performs a grass dance, helping to open the 2025/26 Lights On Stratford festival on Dec. 12.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Santa waves from his parade float to conclude the Santa's Parade of Lights in Stratford on Dec. 7.

YEAR IN SPORTS



(MCGINN PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO)

Jack McGurn positions himself to defend his net during the Stratford Hunter Steel Ltd. Warriors' game against the St. Marys Lincolns on Jan. 18.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Stratford Skating Club (SSC) had 11 skaters take part in the Star One-Four Competition in Aylmer on Jan. 24-26. Pictured from left to right are Tessa Bell, Reese Manzer and Danika Lingard. Bell, competing in Star-Three Group Seven, and Manzer, in StarThree Group-11, each captured the Bronze medal. Meanwhile, Lingard won the Silver in Star-Three Group Eight. Not pictured was Emmy Ford, who claimed the Silver in Star-One Group One, and Jaida Ford, who earned the Silver in Star-Three Group Six.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

The U12 Stratford Warriors won the gold medal at the Rock Cup tournament Feb. 7-9 in St. Marys. Pictured in the front row are Bentley Rekker and Karsten Shore. In the second row, from left, are Kyle Finnie, Liam Chessell, Gray Parkhouse, Jaxon Schmidt, Matthew Adair, Myles Havens, Cale Klumper and Blake Weber. In the third row, from left, are Randell Everett, Harper Bickell, Liam Uniak, Kohen McLeod, Gus Wood-Zippel, Hendrick Cheney, Stefan de Wit and Cam Gibson. In the back row, from left, are Dan Adair, Eric Schmidt, Tim Bickell and Mike Gibson.



(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

Winning goalie Zach Weir #60 hoists the Cup over his head in triumph after the then Stratford Fighting Irish won in the championship game on April 26 against the Strathroy Jets.



(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

An ecstatic Jaden Peca #25 celebrates his go-ahead goal, which would turn out to be the winner, with teammates Matt Henderson #25 and Cole Thiessen #18 during the April 26 championship game between the Stratford Fighting Irish and Strathroy Jets.

YEAR IN SPORTS



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

With two full draws and a strong contingent from Stratford, the Wellington Brewery Bonspiel was a smashing success at the St. Marys Curling Club. The winners of Draw 1 were Team Aitcheson. Pictured, skip Evan Aitcheson intensely surveys the stone thrown by Trevor Caven as sweepers Brian Aitcheson and Taylor Yantzi are poised with their brushes.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

The Stratford Hunter Steel Ltd. Warriors salute their fans after one of their Western Conference semi-final games against the Chatham Maroons. The Warriors fell in seven games to the Maroons last year, ending their season with a hard-fought second-round series.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Quinn Appel of the Stratford U22 Nationals delivers the pitch against the Brantford Red Sox on May 25.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The U15 Stratford Flames (Himburg) went undefeated to win the Innerkip Minor Softball Tournament on June 20-22. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Ayva Culligan, Aubrey Schenk, Serina Proctor, and assistant coach Rachel Horan. In the back row, from left, are coach Casey Himburg, Isla Ritchie, Madison McKenzie, Abby Hurley, Lyla Roth, Hailey Oswald, Mya Thomson, Lydia Dam, and assistant coach Simone Proctor.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Neil Cave and Liam Cave won the men's 'B' Consolation final at the Stratford Tennis Club's Super Set Doubles tournament on June 7, making the 11-year-old Liam the youngest-ever Super Set champion in the Stratford tournament's history.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Richard Matthews, #17 with the Toronto Football Club (FC)'s unified exchange team, is back on home soil after travelling to the U.S. to represent Stratford and area on the pitch this past summer.

YEAR IN SPORTS



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured are members of the Stratford Tennis Club's morning group, who celebrated Canada Day with a one-day tennis tournament on the morning of July 1.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Mike Hitchcock with the silver medal he won at the Special Olympics Ontario (SOO) Provincial Summer Games' golf competition, hosted July 11-12 at the Wayne Gretzky Municipal Golf Course in Brantford.

Team Canada dragon boaters Everett Weaver, Daniel McArthur, Daniel Bean, Devion Keane, Alexandra Stephens, Avery deWitt, Grace VanZandwijk and Laynee McIlwain return from the world championships with some impressive hardware. They collectively won 33 medals for the country. Local coach Ken Gene sang the paddlers' praises on their return. He said their success was a reflection of their skill and Stratford's dominance in the sport.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

from left to right, are Angela Martin and Merlin Leis. Martin, a member of the Stratford Pickleball Club, teamed up with Leis to win the gold medal in the mixed 3.5 skill level doubles competition at the Sudbury Senior Provincial Pickleball Championship on Aug. 5-7.



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

The annual Stratford-Shaw cricket match was held on the Butch Blake Memorial Cricket Ground this year on Aug. 25, the inaugural match for the new pitch.

YEAR IN SPORTS



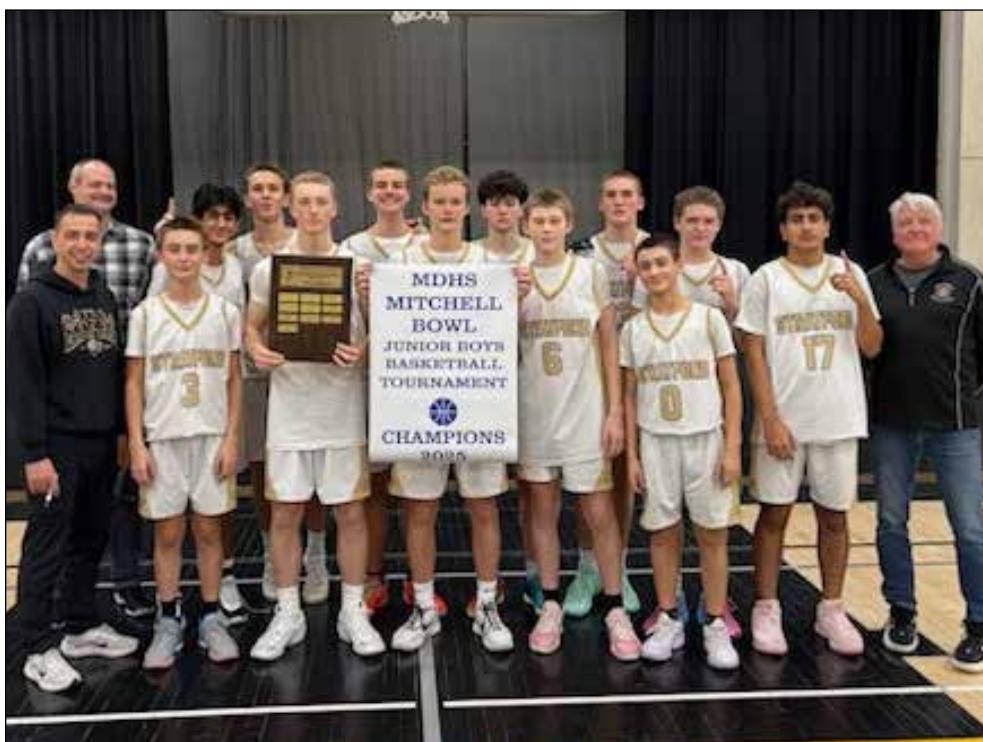
(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

Paddlers push forward at the Stratford Rotary Dragon Boat Festival on Sept. 13.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Paddlers, performers and community members came together at Lake Victoria on Sept. 13 for the 28th annual Stratford Rotary Dragon Boat Festival. The event featured Hong Kong-style races with more than 40 teams, live music, children's activities, food vendors and a vendor village. Organized by the Rotary Club of Stratford, the festival is the city's largest Rotary fundraiser, with proceeds supporting local charities and community projects.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Members of the Stratford District Junior Bears basketball team pose with their Mitchell Bowl Tournament banner on Dec. 6.



Franklin & Donna Hinz

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Friday, Jan 30	Poutine and Draft Night - 5:00 - 9:00 p.m. \$20 per person Call Dave 519-703-6544 or the Legion 519-271-4540 for tickets.
Sunday, Feb 8	Sweetheart Dinner - 3 course served Dinner. \$25 per person Take out 4:30 p.m., Dine in 5:00 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb 11	Ladies Auxiliary Luncheon, to be determined. \$16 Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservation

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YEAR IN SPORTS



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Kane Courtney loads up a heavy shot on target during Nov. 3's U12 Stratford Warriors game.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The U11 A Stratford Aces captured the gold medal at the Stratford Festival Cup Challenge on Nov. 14-16.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Max Wildfong scores the game-winning goal in the Stratford Warriors' 3-2 overtime win over the Strathroy Rockets on Nov. 23. Wildfong scored a pair of goals in the game.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Stratford's Jonas Schmidt watches his shot go past the Chatham netminder Blake Verberne for the winning goal in overtime at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Nov. 7.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Brayson Binkle plays the puck down the wall from the point during the Dec. 6 U16 BB Stratford Warriors game.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Stratford Warriors goalie Gage Hurst makes the save in the shootout against the Listowel Cyclones on Dec. 14.

Revisiting 2025's predictions



STEWART GRANT

Publisher

The reason why I do predictions each year is because it reminds me of the evolving nature of life and it's a way of taking me back to a prior point in time, wondering what the future year might have in store. In reflecting upon predictions gone wrong, it's a demonstration that the future is unwritten.

One year ago, the Liberal Party appeared destined for a major defeat in the upcoming federal election, but we all know how that turned out.

Here's how I fared on all my 2025 predictions:

1. Justin Trudeau would resign as prime minister this year. **(CORRECT)**

2. The ensuing leadership vote results in Mark Carney becoming Canada's 24th prime minister. **(CORRECT)**

3. The Conservative Party will cruise to a majority win in the 2025 federal election, and Pierre Poilievre will take the reins as prime minister. **(WRONG – Poilievre didn't even win his own riding)**

4. Echoing the results of the 1993 federal election where the incumbent party lost most of its seats, the Bloc Québécois emerge to form the

Official Opposition. **(WRONG – the Conservatives formed the opposition while the Bloc finished with the third most seats)**

5. For this first time in 32 years, a Canadian team will host the Stanley Cup. **(WRONG – the Edmonton Oilers lost in six games to the Florida Panthers)**

6. Alex Ovechkin will pass Wayne Gretzky to become the NHL's all-time regular season goal scoring leader. **(CORRECT)**

7. The Detroit Lions will win the Super Bowl. **(WRONG – the Philadelphia Eagles won the Super Bowl, while Detroit lost in the divisional playoffs)**

8. U.S. President Donald Trump will assist in ending the war between Russia and Ukraine, but the terms favour the Russian side. **(WRONG – While things are trending in this direction, the**

war is currently ongoing.)

9. A ceasefire is negotiated in the Middle East. **(CORRECT)**

10. The 25 per cent tariff on Canadian goods entering the U.S. fails to materialize. Relations between the U.S. and Canadian governments improve following the 2025 Canadian election. **(WRONG – The U.S. has continued to enforce tariffs though the situation is ever-evolving.)**

11. Despite certain achievements, general uncertainty and chaos during the first year of the Trump administration is reflected in a down year for the stock market. **(WRONG – the S&P 500 is up about 16 per cent this year, as of press time.)**

12. Just as the 1999 Columbine massacre produced a noted increase in school shootings in the U.S., the 2024 killing of UnitedHealthcare

CEO Brian Thompson will produce copycat crimes in 2025 by troubled individuals inspired by social or political causes. **(MIXED – see shootings of Charlie Kirk, and Minnesota legislators Melissa Hortman and John Hoffman)**

13. Chinese-owned TikTok will avoid being shutdown in the United States, with Elon Musk assisting by purchasing a significant ownership share of the social media app. **(MIXED – TikTok carries on, and a deal to sell its U.S. operation to an American-controlled joint venture was announced Dec. 18)**

14. The Trump-Musk bromance will have its up and downs, but the working relationship will continue to last throughout the year. **(MIXED – they broke up for awhile but appear to be getting back together)**

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Solutions on page 23



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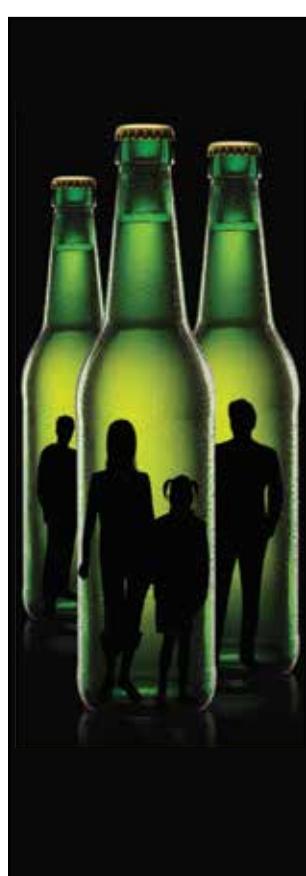
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SOURCES

¹ Annual Report on Government of Canada Advertising Activities 2023-2024, combined with proprietary industry data.

² Totum Research Canada, January 2025. Canadians 18+, n=2418.; Pollara for the Dais. 2025 Survey of Online Harms, Canadians 16+, n=2502.

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