

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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AccessAbility Week starts this Sunday

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Every year, starting on the last Sunday of May, is national AccessAbility Week, a week to celebrate and promote the contributions of people with disabilities, the work of accomplices in removing barriers and the ongoing efforts to become a barrier-free nation where all members of society can participate equally.

Speaking to Stratford city council on May 26, Roger Koert, chair of the City of Stratford's accessibility advisory committee (AAC), took the time to single out one attendee for her stalwart support.

"I'd like to bring attention to another thoughtful group of citizens," Koert said. "The first person in this group is Bonnie Henderson. Bonnie, you have been an accessibility accomplice for decades. The first time I see your name in the AAC minutes is from 2006. For 20 years, you have spoken up for the disabled community, questioned decision making and continuously kept accessibility in the conversation."

As Koert alluded to, Coun. Henderson has often challenged planners when presenting new developments at council on its accessibility – whether its steps leading up to the front doors of townhomes or accessible parking spaces and units in apartment complexes. She has often exasperated that there should be more stipulations addressing accessibility concerns for new builds, pointing out that it isn't just home buyers that are affected.

As Henderson has said in the past, everyone knows someone with accessibility needs.

As the gallery applauded Henderson's work, Koert thanked Mayor Martin Ritsma, city council, city staff

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Spencer O'Donovan handles a coiling snake during a reptile presentation by Scales Nature Park, one of the many features during the Perth Children's Water Festival at Lower Queen's Park on May 24.

Franklin Drive garden to continue through 2026 growing season

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The community garden located in the green space at the end of Franklin Drive will still be operating this year, despite being terminated by the City of Stratford just last week.

The Green Thumb Community Garden, which has been running for 57 years, is led by an executive by the same name, managing a number of garden plots on the city-owned parcel of land. Many community

members and organizations participate in the garden, growing vegetables for personal consumption or for donations to local foodbanks and programs.

Last week, members of the garden's executive received word that the garden will cease to operate and a new lease would not be signed, flooring them.

"We were putting out 100 stakes, and with string, and it took us three members ... four hours to do so," said Jim Westman, spokesperson for the gardening club. "... We got the email saying that we had to be

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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Franklin Drive garden to continue through 2026 growing season

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

evicted, all sheds had to be taken down, tools that have been in there since 1969, all perennials, blueberry trees, currant trees, garlic had to be removed. ... Even the city, three days ago or a week ago, actually delivered soil from the compost, so one arm of the city's not talking to the other."

In a statement released by the city and posted on its Facebook page, it stated that due to "significant and escalating conflict" among some garden members over the past year, and the failure to reach a resolution, the decision was made to terminate the lease. The statement referred to multiple instances and multiple individuals, including an incident last week when escalation resulted in emergency services being called to the site.

"I don't want to get into details, because again, I feel like individuals have been centered out, and that's not really the case," said City of Stratford chief administrative officer André Morin. "We were receiving numerous conversations about concerns, which is why we've addressed or tried to address those with the club, and now kind of moving things forward, so that there's a better governance and oversight model in place, so that we can ensure that there's fair and equitable use of the community garden there."

According to Westman, however, the executive was aware of one incident earlier this year which resulted in a member of the community being evicted last year, an incident he was not able to speak to much further.

"They were told there was too much conflict in the garden," Westman said. "We had a meeting yesterday, and there was absolutely zero conflict in the garden. There was applause when someone

said they were evicted, but that happened back in September. There's no conflict ... We get along and there's no conflict in the garden. These are some friends from all walks of life. There's affluent people ... there's artists, there's people from housing, there's people on welfare, and it costs the city nothing, zero, to have these people garden and have a purpose."

Furthermore, Westman said the city was informed of the long eviction process by the executive team from the outset and was in the loop for every development. No issues were flagged prior to the recent lease-termination, according to him.

Since speaking with the Times about the disruption, Westman was informed that the 2026 planting season will still be underway and a meeting with Morin and city staff is scheduled. Morin disclosed the meeting is to discuss a more long-term solution.

"Meet with the gardeners, understand what their needs are for the 2026 season," Morin said about the city's goals. "They understand what our needs are from the long-term governance structure and vision for what a community garden is, and I think now let's figure out that temporary arrangement. ... Hopefully we can within the next few days wrap that up ... And then for the future we'll now do some public engagement, engagement with members in council around what are our needs for a community garden? What does that look like? What are the requirements? All of the details."

Westman reiterated to the Times that the club's sole goal is to move forward and have the gardeners be able to garden peacefully with everyone involved and moving forward constructively.

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AccessAbility Week starts this Sunday

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

and committee members for their collective action to prioritize accessibility in Stratford.

"Accessibility is not just the work of one committee, it is embedded in council's long-term planning, implemented daily by city staff, shaped by advisory committees and volunteers, and strengthened by public participation. Together we are creating the community we want to live in today, and what we are fiercely proud of to leave for those who come after us."

On June 1, nominations open for the city's

annual accessibility award, which brings attention to one business organization or individual in Stratford that has worked hard to make their space or service more accessible.

June 3 is Red Shirt Day. By wearing red on Red Shirt Day, we show a visible display of solidarity and our support for people with disabilities, and the shared commitment to building a community where everyone can participate and thrive.

On June 4, during the lunch hour in Market Square, members of the AAC will be present to interact with the community, answer questions, hear concerns and give out swag.

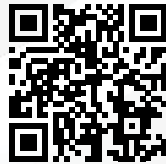
On behalf of the AAC, Koert encouraged

the community to come out and celebrate national AccessAbility Week.

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Stratford Festival grand opening



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTOS)

Cast members from Stratford Festival celebrate the opening of the 74th season on May 25 by popping champagne on the red carpet ahead of the premiere of *The Tempest* at the Festival Theatre.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Members of the Stratford Police Pipes and Drums parade toward the Festival Theatre marking the opening of the 74th season of the Stratford Festival on May 25.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Theatre-goers dressed to impress for opening night make their way toward the Festival Theatre as Stratford celebrated the launch of the 74th season.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Opening-night energy filled downtown Stratford as elegantly dressed attendees and vintage vehicles made their way toward the Festival Theatre for the launch of the Stratford Festival's 74th season.



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

Company members smile for the camera. The weekend rain held off for the season's opening, which was a picturesque day.

Queen's Inn gets heritage adjustment in time for hopeful 2026 reopening

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Queen's Inn – the stately Waterloo Street centrepiece in downtown Stratford – may soon re-open as the Queen's Cue, after getting a timely heritage adjustment at the most recent city council meeting on May 26.

In its renovation process, BMI Group, the developer, was halted due to a disagreement with the Heritage Stratford permit review sub-committee, specifically due to a few features that included the renovation of the tower and the removal of the second-storey balcony overlooking Ontario Street.

The subcommittee wanted the tower to be fully “restored” back to brick, instead of BMI's intention of restoring the brick of the street-facing walls and using metal cladding for the walls not visible on the street.

As Evan Sugden, senior associate of the Biglieri Group and agent on behalf of BMI Group, explained, “restored” is a misnomer.

“So the dome is not a solid brick structure,” Sugden explained. “This is a wood structure with a brick veneer on several of the sides, so the sides that are street facing are again a brick veneer on top of a wood structure, and the back of the dome is this, it's kind of tar paper, so this is an old layer of tar paper.”

“...The balcony that the Heritage (Stratford) permit subcommittee has asked to be reinstated on the building, is actually a newer iteration of an old balcony that has long since been removed. In addition, the cladding that they're asking to do -- they've asked to shroud the entire dome walls with



(STRATFORD TIMES FILE PHOTO)

The Queen's Inn – soon to be reimagined as the Queen's Cue hotel – may re-open this year, after Stratford city council approved a heritage adjustment at its regular meeting May 26.

a brick wall, rather than maintaining the original and current establishment, which is street-facing walls as brick with the back of different material. So what's being proposed today is more in keeping with the current arrangements, save the fact that we're using a more robust cladding rather than tar paper on the back.”

Furthermore, the original heritage designation was less detailed than modern heritage designations and doesn't specify features of the building or façade to be preserved, just that the façade should be preserved. As Sugden said, the façade has had numerous facelifts and renovations,

some minor and some major, over the years, arguing that the heritage requirements are up to interpretation.

“In the grand scheme of things, this entire building is being kept,” Sugden said. “It's an entity adaptive reuse, which means its the entire structure being reused, rather than the façade or the shell of the building, and everything being hollowed out, and they're continuing to keep the use. This is a really rare proposal for modern development standards.”

Sugden said that the proponent is intending to have the Queen's Cue opened and operational this year, as soon as possible.

In addition to unanimously voting to make the heritage alteration as requested, council also approved an encroachment for new front steps to the hotel and pub entrances, two existing curbed landscaped areas on either side of the entrance to the parking lot, a covered entrance on the Ontario Street entrance and lighting at 161 Ontario St., with a yearly CPI-adjusted bill of \$1,223.09.

Only Coun. Cody Sebben and Coun. Brad Beatty were absent from the vote.

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The Things We Never Say

@SPL: FIC Strout

The Things We Never Say by Elizabeth Strout

Artie Dam is a beloved Grade 11 history teacher in Massachusetts and a past recipient of The Teacher of the Year award. While deeply invested in his students' lives, Artie carries heavy, private burdens. He struggles with loneliness and quietly thinks about suicide, even wondering how he might end his life without his wife and adult son knowing. At one point, he reflects, “I am lonely enough I could die.” Yet, when confronted with his own mortality, he ultimately chooses to live, revealing a fragile but persistent will to endure.

Set against the backdrop of the 2024 U.S. election, *The Things We Never Say* explores Artie's growing uncertainty about his life and the values he once believed defined his

country. The political climate subtly mirrors his internal unrest, deepening the novel's emotional resonance. The story invites readers to consider how external events shape private fears and doubts. The novel also delves into the hidden inner worlds we all carry—not only Artie's, but also those of the richly drawn supporting characters. Elizabeth Strout has a remarkable ability to sketch even minor figures with such precision that they feel instantly real and likable.

This is a quiet, deeply human character study about the thoughts we suppress and the truths we hesitate to share. When a long-held secret is finally revealed—one that will profoundly affect Artie's life—he responds with a grace that underscores his gentle nature and capacity for empathy.

Though it touches on difficult themes, the novel is ultimately moving rather than bleak, offering a compassionate reflection on vulnerability, connection, and resilience, and reminding readers of the quiet courage required to continue.



Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. The Appalachian mountains span across what two countries?
2. What three-day music festival took place in upstate New York 1969?
3. Who wrote the novel *To kill a Mockingbird*?
4. What planet in our solar system is known for its rings?
5. What country was the first to adopt bitcoin as legal tender?
6. A Permanent Resident Card is also commonly known as a what?
7. What year was Wikipedia founded?
8. What company owns YouTube?
9. Who was the first actor to play James Bond?
10. What does AIPAC stand for?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

Perth County council approves further changes to proposed tree-injury bylaw

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

Perth County council has approved another round of revisions to its proposed tree-injury bylaw as debate continues over how best to balance environmental protection with the practical realities faced by farmers and rural landowners.

At its May 20 regular meeting, council reviewed an updated draft of the proposed bylaw – formerly known as the forest-conservation bylaw – alongside a presentation from West Perth farmer Gerald Kolkman, who has been one of the leading voices advocating for changes to the county’s proposed regulations.

“The crafting of a proposed forest bylaw should incentivize rather than penalize landowners and farmers to plant more trees,” Kolkman told council. “Tree planting will not occur through overly restrictive regulation. This proposed bylaw affects privately owned land; it is not Crown land. Trust and cooperation need to be developed.”

The revised draft follows months of consultation, council debate and public feedback surrounding how the county should regulate the destruction or injury of trees within woodlands while maintaining flexibility for agricultural operations.

Among the most significant changes approved during the latest review was the addition of a formalized appeal process tied to newly created compliance and non-compliance certificates.

Under the revised framework, landowners submitting a notice of intent (NOI) to injure or remove trees would receive either a compliance certificate confirming the proposed work meets the bylaw requirements or a non-compliance certificate if it does not. Those decisions could then be appealed through a peer-review process involving a regis-

tered professional forester.

Council also approved a timeline requiring appeal decisions to be issued within 90 calendar days from the date an appeal is deemed complete and received.

The appeal process has remained one of the most heavily debated aspects of the bylaw review over recent months. During his presentation to council, Kolkman argued a structured appeal system involving a committee comprising a registered forester, an agronomist and three members of council, similar to the system several neighbouring counties operate under, would provide greater fairness, transparency and trust for landowners affected by enforcement decisions.

Stefan Zhelev, the county’s executive director of legal/corporate services, told councillors the county could be on legally shaky ground if councillors were seen to be enforcing the bylaw they themselves drafted by serving on such an appeals committee.

“It’s not a good idea to put councillors on that committee, so I guess I can’t look at that favourably,” Coun. Matt Duncan said. “I’m hung up on this whole needing to have a committee at this point because we’ve got five per cent of the applications (that would go to appeal); we’re willing to go to a third party that’s independent of this council that has a code of conduct and has to adhere to that. His job at that point is to look at the bylaw and see if (a notice of intent application) is in compliance with the bylaw. That’s it.

“... He has no mechanism to say, ‘I’m going to make a different decision contrary to the bylaw.’”

Council also approved updated definitions exempting both windbreaks and tree plantations from the bylaw.

The approved changes define windbreaks as one to three linear rows of planted trees and exempt them regard-

less of size as long as there is 20 metres of separation from the boundary of any woodland, while tree plantations and tree nurseries will also be excluded from regulation under the bylaw, once it is approved by council.

The distinction between woodlands, windbreaks and plantations has been a major focus throughout the consultation process, particularly among members of the agricultural community concerned productive farmland or managed tree plantings could inadvertently fall under stricter regulations.

Council further approved revised language clarifying woodland boundaries on agricultural properties can be determined either ecologically or by the tillage line bordering actively farmed land.

Kolkman and other agricultural stakeholders have repeatedly argued throughout the consultation process that ecological boundaries alone could create uncertainty for farmers dealing with naturally spreading tree growth and seedlings along field edges.

Additional amendments approved May 20 include adding a schedule listing invasive species within the bylaw appendix and refining how biosecurity concerns involving bylaw officers entering private farmland will be handled.

While council agreed biosecurity concerns raised by farmers are legitimate, councillors ultimately decided those procedures would be addressed through internal standard operating procedures for bylaw officers rather than being written directly into the bylaw itself. Staff noted including overly prescriptive restrictions in the bylaw could conflict with provincial legislation governing municipal enforcement powers.

“Part of the challenge with the biosecurity piece (and) council trying to limit the powers of the provincial offences officer or the municipal bylaw enforce-

ment officer is those powers are already laid out in the Provincial Offences Act and the Municipal Act, and acts like the Biosecurity Act already have exemptions for those powers,” Zhelev said.

“To me, the best way to address those concerns in terms of having, let’s say, notification to owners (before a bylaw officer enters their property), for example, or making sure there is some sort of protection gear that they’re wearing so they don’t affect cultivated plants or any other property; the better way to realize that is through standard operating procedure and further instructions to the bylaw enforcement official.”

Council was ultimately satisfied with that response and instructed Zhelev to include reference to standard operating procedures for bylaw enforcement officers within the draft bylaw.

The proposed bylaw continues to focus on regulating the destruction or injury of trees within defined woodlands while encouraging communication between landowners and the county before major tree-cutting activities occur. County staff have repeatedly described the revised framework as an effort to promote stewardship and responsible forestry practices while simplifying the process for most landowners.

The review process began in 2024 after county council directed staff to examine Perth County’s existing forestry bylaw and compare it with regulations in neighbouring municipalities. Since then, the process has generated extensive feedback from conservation authorities, agricultural organizations, municipal councils and residents across the county.

The proposed bylaw is expected to return to county council for further consideration and potential approval at a future meeting following incorporation of the latest amendments approved during the May 20 discussion.

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Shelterlink calls for funding stabilization amid youth homelessness challenges

AMANDA NELSON
Times Reporter

At the May 11 council meeting, Cate Trudeau, Shelterlink executive director, and Cambria Ravenhill, board director, spoke to council to request immediate and medium-term actions to address youth homelessness in Stratford and Perth County.

Last winter, Shelterlink experienced significant staffing challenges after several employees left to work at the city-funded warming centre. While unintended, the staffing losses placed considerable strain on Shelterlink’s operations and nearly resulted in a temporary closure of the organization during a time when demand for services was especially high.

“Shelterlink has had financial challenges over its 35-year existence, but we have some very specific challenges that came to light this past winter, and we are looking to fill a rather urgent need for stabilization measures as we go into this winter,” said Ravenhill. “Last winter, there were changes in local services, which increased competition for frontline staff.”

Ravenhill said the introduction of the warming centre greatly affected staffing because the warming centre was able to offer staff \$5 more per hour, and Shelterlink could not compete with its current available funding.

“In short, Shelterlink lost four staff members in about one week in early December, and that’s four out of 12 staff,” said Ravenhill. “So a third went, and they were most of our night staff and all of our maintenance staff. This created a huge operational challenge. It was very hard for remaining staffers who had to fill in. We came very close to forcing a temporary closure of the shelter.”

Shelterlink, which has been operating for 35 years, has evolved from a youth homeless shelter to an organization that helps prevent youth homelessness and provide faster housing transitions through community supports.

“Today, Shelterlink’s work extends well beyond shelter,” said Trudeau. “We help youth avoid entering shelter

through prevention or diversion, support faster transitions into stable housing, and provide follow-up supports to help youth remain housed and connected to their community.”

She continued to tell council that this approach matters because youth require a specialized response, one that recognizes their stage of development, their heightened vulnerability and the importance of early intervention for homelessness.

Last fiscal year, Shelterlink supported 33 youth in the community and diverted an additional third to alternative housing. However, the organization faces financial challenges, including a \$142,100 shortfall and a broader structural funding issue.

Council was asked to help stabilize operations and review the funding model to better reflect actual costs and best practices.

Funding models from the province are also an issue, as financial assistance is tied to per diem payments for occupied shelter beds. Because Shelterlink has been successful in keeping youth out of the shelter by increasing community support, its provincial funding has also decreased, meaning the bulk of its funding is municipal and donation-based.

“When Shelterlink was created 35 years ago, it was a shelter; it was just emergency beds,” said Ravenhill. “But now, it’s an entirely programmatic approach to youth homelessness that offers upfront prevention to help youth move into successful adulthood.”

According to the Everyone Counts 2024 Highlights Report, 46 per cent of chronically homeless adults first experienced homelessness before the age of 25. This highlights the long-term consequences when youth homelessness is not prevented or resolved quickly. The longer a young person remains homeless, the greater the risks of school disruption, exploitation and lasting negative outcomes.

To learn more or support Shelterlink, visit www.shelterlink.org



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

On the 10th anniversary of the Local Community Access Market there was a celebration with cake and music supplied by Tim Elliott on piano, Dean Carr on guitar and vocals, with special guest vocalist Garth Logan singing Stormy Mondays. Logan is a longtime volunteer who believes in giving back.

Call for Submissions (on the occasion of Words Defeat Bullets event, May 2026)

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the way things seep

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of a button just
an insult away,

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and their little misses
snorting coke and caviar
while our planet burns
and children roam the
village bloated, wearing
smoke for clothing in
this depleted world where
peace is now commoditized
and sold to the knee bend
bidder with the most
convincing grovel.

We edit the corrosion
out of history now,
remove the blood with
our creative blotters
of reinvention and will
our world into what works
for us, while behind the
curtain the needles whisper
love into tattooed arms
and the one percenters
back slap the victory bulge
of the closing bell.
Purchases are now
our Gods, though Canada’s
most famous stripes writhe
upon the discount table.
We’re click counters now,
hashtag whores who measure
friends by user profile,
cliché cuties whacking words
like weeds into mindless memes
and condensations, not seeing
that love with a “u” is
not close to the same thing.

Yeh, this call for submissions
stings my chords, I guess.
An eight-year-old recently
told me that poetry is the
simple act of writing down
what you care about.
I suppose that’s what
I’ve done here:
darkened the page with
the bruises and truths
I wish I saw no
reason to write.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

Off the Wall summer workshops now available for artists of every level

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Since 2015, Off the Wall has served as a bridge between the professional artistry of the Stratford Festival and the next generation of theatre creators. The organization is an alliance of backstage artists, including prop builders, scenic painters, designers and wardrobe specialists, who are passionate about sharing their skills with students.

Off the Wall is once again offering its intensive summer workshops, with courses running one week in length. Programs include artistic welding, theatrical carpentry, stage makeup, specialty makeup, costume design, set design, puppet making and more.

Students interested in earning a certificate can do so by completing five summer courses throughout July and August 2026. The certificate offers participants a broad range of backstage theatre training, along with discounts on courses and the opportunity to apply for the Desmond Heeley Scholarship, which could significantly reduce overall costs.

Each course is designed to encourage the development of versatile skills in backstage theatre production and is taught



Carly Morrison Hart, a student in the Off the Wall artistic welding program, works on a project during a summer workshop. Registration is now open for Off the Wall's summer courses.

in small class sizes.

"I suppose one of the unique characteristics of our courses is that we have a very small student to teacher ratio," said

Michele Boniface, volunteer. "This allows the teacher to do a lot of mentorship, which is where they help inspire students, give them ideas and respect their ideas,

which helps them work at their own level of ability and experience."

Led by some of North America's top backstage theatre artists, the workshops give students the opportunity to learn how to construct and paint elaborate sets, build props ranging from faux food to flickering candles and create masks, scenic art drops and special-effects makeup.

The workshops are intensive and hands-on, taking place in a working studio environment with one-on-one mentorship from professional artist instructors. Although the classes are designed as immersive learning experiences, Michele Boniface, an Off the Wall volunteer, said the courses are open to people of all experience levels.

"They can come in as beginners, they can come in with some experience working backstage in community theatre. Sometimes we have teachers, community theatre volunteers, university students and hobbyists sign up," said Boniface. "For the courses that use industrial equipment, like carpentry and welding, we require they be 16, but otherwise, we like to say anyone can sign up."

For more information or to sign up for upcoming classes, visit www.stratfordoffthewall.com

Avondale hoping for lots of attendance at second community conversation on resiliency

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Avondale United Church is encouraging adults to join a community conversation to learn how they can evaluate what affects their own resiliency.

In partnership with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Huron-Perth, the Huron-Perth Centre for Children and Youth, and the Kiwanis Club of Stratford, Avondale will host their second virtual Community Conversation on Resilience on June 9 from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. via Zoom.

The series incorporates Michael Ungar's teachings on building resiliency in children. Each session includes a short video covering one of his teachings and group discussions. The second out of three sessions will focus on how adults can look at what external factors contribute to their resiliency to help build resiliency in children.

"It's an important self-care skill that we all should have that if we have developed the things around us that help us during times of trouble, that any of us can navigate those challenges in life over a lifespan,

but we also know that when children are surrounded by strong adults, they do better because those strong adults become one of those nine things that they need, which is supportive relationships – so it's really a win-win," said Terri Sparling, congregation member and retired CEO of the Huron-Perth Centre for Children and Youth.

Avondale had their first Community Conversation on Resiliency on March 25. Sparling said it went well, but that attendance was lower than expected.

"We prepared for the masses, and we didn't have that, but the people that came seemed to get something out of it," she said.

Aleah Graff, Avondale's community engagement coordinator, said that anyone with or without children in their lives is welcome to attend the free virtual event.

"It doesn't have to be dependent on who we're supporting," Graff said. "You can come to this session even if you'd like to have some support yourself on assessing your own resilience factors."

Registration can be done online via <https://tinyurl.com/33c6z2rm> no later than June 8.

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Illume Wellness Spa blends pedicures and virtual reality for immersive beach escape

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Illume Wellness Spa at 35 York St. is shaking things up in the wellness industry with their new and innovative technology-based spa service.

The new restorative pedicure treatment combines traditional spa services with virtual reality (VR) technology, transporting clients to beach destinations around the world through a fully immersive 360-degree experience. It is the first offering of its kind at the spa.

“Even a few minutes of beach time can help calm the nervous system and create a sense of escape and reset,” said Nathalie Malette, founder of PraiaVR Inc.

Guests relax in a private treatment room at Illume Wellness Spa, where they receive a full pedicure from a treatment bed. Beforehand, they wear a VR headset and explore a peaceful beach environment or meditation experience through the Gratitui app, created by PraiaVR Inc., a Stratford-area developer.

“It’s just like travelling to any beach in the world, sitting there, enjoying the waves,” said Elsa Fahraeus, owner of Illume Wellness Spa. “While you sit on the beach, you’re soaking your feet in a warm bath and then proceed to receive a full spa treatment where you settle into a whole new element.”

The experience begins with either a guided meditation or calming ocean sounds while feet soak in a warm, infused bath. The treatment includes detailed foot care, callus removal and a sugar scrub. While a hydrating mask is applied to the feet and legs, guests can choose between a mini scalp massage or an arm massage.

The service concludes with nail polish

application and a relaxing foot massage. Clients are welcome to talk with their esthetician or rest quietly with an eye pillow.

PraiaVR Inc. worked with several local creators to bring the realistic beach experience to life.

“It has been especially meaningful to find so much creativity and expertise right here in our own community,” said Malette. “We’ve had the pleasure of collaborating with artist and designer Claire Scott, digital media specialist Kris von Kleist, yoga and wellness expert Joanie Chapple and marketing professional Shannon Landreth.”

Malette added the goal was to create an immersive experience that feels authentic and transportive.

“With the help of other local creators, the brand was able to bring real-life beaches from across the world to the VR experience, offering clients a realistic experience as if they themselves are sitting on the beach,” she said.

Fahraeus said no experience with VR is needed and the treatment is open to all clients seeking a more immersive spa experience.

“Anyone can experience it, even kids,” she said. “Any clients who are looking for that extra special treatment. I say give yourself a second to come and experience it; you will be so happy you did.”

“Working with Illume has been incredible,” said Malette. “Their commitment to creating meaningful, high-quality experiences for their clients is truly inspiring. We feel honoured to collaborate with such talented, enthusiastic and genuinely caring people to bring something unique to our community and its visitors.”

When asked about her favourite des-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Hannah Fahraeus, spa manager at Illume Wellness Spa, tries on a virtual reality headset during the new Restorative Pedicure experience, which transports clients to beach destinations around the world while receiving a full spa treatment.

tinuation featured in the VR experience, Fahraeus said Ireland stands out.

“The Mexico beach is wonderful, but I’d have to say Ireland,” she said. “I’ve been there before, so to be able to experience it over and over again in VR is amazing. It’s almost like you’re there in person. It’s so relaxing and truly breathtaking.”

The new Restorative Pedicure at Illume Wellness Spa is a head-to-toe sensory experience offered exclusively at Illume for \$105.

Those seeking more information can contact Illume Wellness Spa directly at 519- 271-7777. Gift cards for the Restorative Pedicure experience are also available.

Stratford-Perth Pride announces 2026 Perth County Pride March and Stratford Pride Festival

SYDNEY BOYLE

Stratford-Perth Pride

Stratford-Perth Pride is excited to announce the return of the annual Perth County Pride March and Stratford Pride Festival, taking place on Sunday, May 31. Community members, allies and visitors are invited to come together in celebration, solidarity and support of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

The day will begin with the Perth County Pride March at 1 p.m., starting at the Tom Patterson Theatre. Participants will march along Lakeside Drive in a vibrant show of pride and unity, making their way to Upper Queen's Park.

Following the march, festivities will continue at the

Stratford Pride Festival from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Upper Queen's Park. This year's festival promises an exciting and inclusive lineup of entertainment and activities for all ages. Attendees can enjoy live music from Gravity Junky and Trash Panda Brass, performances by Stratford Dance Co. and appearances from talented drag performers. The festival will also feature face painting, family-friendly activities, food trucks and a vibrant vendor market showcasing local businesses, community organizations and resources supporting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

To keep the celebration going, Stratford-Perth Pride will host an official afterparty later that evening. Trash Panda Brass will take the stage at Matilda Gallery and Art Bar, with doors opening at 7 p.m. and the

performance beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Pride celebrations will continue throughout the month of June, with a number of exciting events planned across Stratford and Perth County. These include a Pride fundraising dance, queer music bingo and a cabaret brunch at Starlight. These events offer additional opportunities for community connection, celebration and support.

For full details on all Pride Month events happening in Stratford and Perth County, visit www.stratfordpride.com.

All are welcome to attend and participate. Show your pride and come out to support the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

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History of the Everlasting Tribute™ Tree Planting Program



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Stratford Live Music and Food Festival returns as the festival to be at this spring

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

What started in 2009 as the Stratford Ribs and Blues Festival, and became what is now known the Stratford Live Music and Food Festival, will bring yet again a fantastic lineup of musicians and varied food offerings to the delight of locals and visitors alike.

This family friendly festival will encompass two days this year, Friday June 19 and Saturday June 20, offering something for almost every taste from roots/american, to blues, to folk, to rock and more. There will be local artists, Juno award-winning Canadian artists and emerging youth artists.

The mandate of the festival has always been to promote local and emerging artists, and musicians that work hard to put themselves out there in front of fans to share their music and keep the touring live music industry alive.

"We want to support the locals, that has always been a goal. The touring musicians on Friday night are people that have a couple of Juno Awards, like MonkeyJunk; the singer Steve (Marriner) just won a Juno two months ago," said organizer Stevie Toman.

Stratford Live Music and Food is a non-profit organization intent on promoting live music and providing a venue to introduce live music to all generations.



Stratford Live is the home of live music from locals and touring bands alike.

"This is something to support the community and we want young people to enjoy it to. We want it to be family friendly, that's always been part of the deal," said Toman.

Many families in other cities have raised their children going to local music festivals and Live Music and Food offers the same opportunity as an accessible

event. It is teaching the next generation to appreciate live music and to seek it out.

The committee of 2022 created the Stew Laing Fund. The money collected, by donation, helps to support new and emerging local talent with the opportunity to perform live at the festival in front of an audience.

"Stew was an educator, he was a principal in Stratford, always believed in getting youth involved and giving young people a stage to perform on. He had a great impact on the festival," Toman said.

This year, there are two youth acts. Opening on Saturday morning at 11 a.m. will be Supernaut followed by the teen sensation, singer/songwriter Nora Joy.

Of course, Live Music and Food is a food festival as much as a music festival. There will be great and varied options for food, encouraging people to try something that may be new to them or stick to familiar favourites like ribs, pulled pork, tacos, sausages or hotdogs and a water filling station located at the Boathouse.

"Over the years we've tried to have a good variety of food, different flavours and cuisines. There's the taco truck and Chris's Big BBQ, for example, but we really try to have many other flavours. There might be something there that people haven't tried before so that's part of the experience too," said Toman.

Returning are street vendors as well as a face painting station and special guests to capture the imagination of children.

For a full lineup of scheduled acts, visit the website www.stratfordlive.ca/2026 where tickets can be purchased in advance. Tickets are also available at the door.

Smile Cookie campaign raises \$51K for Stratford cancer clinic

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Stratford General Hospital Foundation has a big reason to smile, thanks to the Tim Hortons Smile Cookie fundraiser.

Those who bought smile cookies at Stratford Tim Hortons during Smile Cookie Week helped raised \$51,082.87 for the cancer and medical care clinic run by the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance (HPHA) – Stratford General Hospital.

"I can't stop smiling. It's so good that our community comes out and supports initiatives," said Cheryl Hunt, executive director of the Stratford General Hospital Foundation.

The Stratford General Hospital will use the funds to support the cancer clinic, which was a \$15 million project.

Smile cookies were bought between April 27 and May 3. More than 80 volunteers in Stratford dedicated a collective total of 172 hours of their time decorating the smile cookies.

"That's fantastic and that helps with the success our fundraiser," Hunt said.

The Tim Hortons website notes the Smile Cookie campaign began in 1996 as a fundraiser for the Hamilton Children's Hospital. Over time, the fundraiser raised more than \$150 million for community organizations and charities across Canada.



(STRATFORD GENERAL HOSPITAL FOUNDATION PHOTO)

Thanks to those who purchased smile cookies from local Tim Hortons, the Stratford General Hospital Foundation gets a boost of more than \$51,000 for the cancer and medical care clinic.

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BLACK AND GOLD *Edition*

OPINION: Learning what it means to be Canadian

NADINE EGGER

Black and Gold correspondent

What does it mean to be Canadian? Does it mean freedom? Opportunity? Or does it mean we automatically say "Sorry" in every situation? Being Canadian means something different for everyone, and I had the chance to experience the pride of being a Canadian during my unique opportunity as a selected delegate to attend the 4-H National Citizenship Congress in Ottawa in mid-May. I attended with 99 other 4-H delegates ages 15-21, from all over the country. I participated in multiple activities and events that opened my eyes to the privileges of calling myself a Canadian citizen.

One of the most heartwarming events I attended was watching a citizenship ceremony at the University of Ottawa, where we welcomed 100 new citizens to Canada. Since there were 100 participants and 100 Canadians-to-be, every delegate wrote a welcome card for each new citizen. In addition, several 4-Hers provided music and others spoke during the ceremony to make the new Canadians' day extra special. We all sat at the back of the room watching

every person get called up individually as they were given a mini Canadian Flag, their Canadian Citizenship Certificate and one of our handwritten cards. I sat there looking at each person, wondering what their story was, what brought them to Canada, and realizing that each person had a different story to tell. Some might have come for safety, for a job, to start a family, for a fresh start or some other reason. I was proud to know that out of every country in the world, they thought Canada would be the best for them; they chose us. Everyone couldn't help but smile every time a young child received their flag, and waved it in the air with a big grin. Each person stepped up, some of them fully wearing red and white clothing, and was welcomed to their new home. Then, raising their right hand, they all pledged the Oath of Citizenship, and then we all sang O Canada with them, their first time as Canadians.

For me, I was reminded that to be Canadian means to have a voice, even as a youth. During this congress, all delegates were split into groups and assigned one of 12 questions submitted by 4-H supporters, organizations and stakeholders. We

brainstormed and worked together in our groups to prepare answers for a youth consultation with a representative from the sponsor or organization. These questions were directed to youth, as they wished for our opinions as young people on how to solve issues that are affecting or will affect us, what support we feel we need in the future or other questions with a youth focus. During the consultations we communicated with the representative, shared our voice and they listened. I believe too often young people are underestimated or deemed careless, but this gave us a chance to speak up and prove that we do care. Here in Canada, we were given a voice.

During the week-long 4-H Congress in Ottawa, I was immersed in the democracy of Canada. My 4-H chaperone, the five other Ontario delegates and I were invited by Senator Rob Black for a private tour of his office and some other rooms in parliament. Having the chance to see inside the building where the decision makers of our nation work was truly incredible. He connected with us in his office and shared about what it is like being a senator, which is important for him as he is an advocate for youth, agriculture and rural communi-

ties. He also has strong ties with 4-H. Later in the week he toured the whole group through the Senate, and all the delegates participated in mock debates in the Senate that we spent the week preparing for. It was empowering to not only sit in chairs of those who decide the laws for Canada, but to also have an opportunity to participate in a proper Senate debate was a unique opportunity I will never forget. To be Canadian, means democracy and to understand it. It was inspiring to know that we have the chance to voice our opinions and our beliefs, and in the future we have the opportunity to become Senators too.

To be Canadian means many things, and 4-H Citizenship Congress enabled youth like me to experience Canada in an extraordinary way. Since attending this life-changing 4-H program, my view of Canada is clearer, and I have more gratitude towards the privileges that being Canadian grants me. To me, Canadian means opportunity, freedom of speech and empowerment of youth, as I experienced first-hand in Ottawa. What does being Canadian mean to you?

SDSS Student Swap and the legacy of Kerry McManus

NANAKO UENO AND SIVAN COURTNEY

Black and Gold correspondents

Nowadays, where fast fashion has been a big part of the clothing industry, Canadians need to take a moment to consider its effect. Although it provides abundant clothing at an affordable price, there are unsustainable production trends hiding behind the scenes. It uses clothes that do not last long, which damages the water quality by washing it in the washing machine and overall damages the eco-system. Something should be done and we are the next generation who can make changes.

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Student Swap has been an annual event since 2008 held by the student council at SDSS. Students bring in their clothes to school and exchange it, which basically is free thrifting. This is not only a fun school event to gather people together, but also provokes thrifting culture.

The Black and Gold edition interviewed

students at the event asking what they thought about the event. It was their first participation for many of the students interviewed but they all seemed to be enjoying the event. They found the event useful for getting clothes that are usually difficult to afford and fun to have an unusual experience during class.

The goal for this activity is to reduce consumerism by urging people to support thrifting culture. The acknowledgement of this new style of thrifting at school would lead to a new sustainable act youth could all conduct and a further commitment to the environment.

Many know the Student Swap has been held at SDSS almost every year since before the joining of Stratford Central Secondary School and Stratford North-western Secondary School; however, few know that the woman behind this event was the late Kerry McManus.

McManus, known as Mme. McManus and Ms. McManus by her students, was an

active and prominent figure in Stratford known for being an environmental advocate.

McManus led the development of many environmental-oriented projects in addition to the Student Swap. For example, she greatly valued air quality and therefore made the decision to purchase air filters for each classroom with her own money, donated after her passing on April 14, 2026. Additionally, some of her students can recall going outside during her classes to pick up garbage around the school yard. These were two of many things McManus did to contribute to the school's participation in combating the climate crises.

Some would say she was the environmental cornerstone of the community and will be very missed by her students, colleagues and anybody who had the opportunity of meeting her. Her legacy lives on through ideas that inspire students, such as the Student Swap.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The late Kerry McManus kickstarted the annual SDSS Student Swap, a lasting legacy for the teacher who passed away April 14.

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Our Stör(y) celebrates two great years of sharing creativity

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

It has been two years since Kevin September opened the doors of Our Stör(y) with the goal of showcasing the many diverse stories to be found in Stratford and Perth, Huron, Waterloo and Wellington counties. Through books, quilts, works of art and whimsies, September has curated an “Explorium Imporium.”

The evening of May 20 greeted guests to celebrate this milestone with September who collaborated with Pastoral Pond, a family run cidery and winery making their prized rhubarb wine. On hand were owners Aaron and Jacqueline Matin to share their four flavours of cider and rhubarb wine, with palate cleansing buffalo cheese made on their farm and the popular freeze-dried rhubarb candy.

“I think it’s important to not only mark the touchstones, as people say, but also to take a minute to thank those that it wouldn’t be without. Without those artists and makers that took a chance and entrusted not only their work, but their stories with me to share with the people that have come in and taken the time to listen to those stories and explore, we wouldn’t be talking about this,” said September.

Not only was it a celebration, it was also

a bit of a pop-up art show to showcase Pastoral Ponds’ beautiful graphic artwork on their bottles by artist Camilla Kipp, also in attendance, offering prints of her designs inspired by the likes of Beatrice Potter.

September finds every day an inspiration himself as he has become the keeper of stories to share in the oral tradition of days past.

“There’s those connections and stories, those layers I guess that I really appreciate. That’s why I love every day because there’s always a different story I come home with. My wife gets the whole burst of stories I’ve inherited from people I have met in the day,” said September. “It keeps me wanting more and wanting to learn more, wanting to meet more folks.”

All good qualities for the average person, but for a self-proclaimed introvert, it is life changing.

“When I’m in an environment that I’ve curated and talking to like-minded folks, whether that’s the artist that brings me their work or the customer that’s come in to admire or purchase something, you can drop all the masking and pretense and just share a laugh,” September said.

After two years, the impact of owning and operating his own store has been positively affecting his own approach to art



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

Kevin September shares some bestselling freeze-dried rhubarb with guests from Toronto that will be sure to return to visit.

and his abilities as well. His curiosity has led to new challenges and he’s learning to apply discipline to pursuits.

“My whole life I’ve wanted an art practice and I’m still not there but I’m definitely creating more and more regularly. And thinking about it more, not just winging it

in the moment; working on certain things, being more passionate about things that I had thought about but hadn’t tried before,” he said.

Our Stör(y) is located at 7 George St. W. Expect the unexpected. And a good story.

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STRATFORD *TIMES* SPORTS

U15 Nationals compete at the Cardinal Classic, held on to beat Brantford

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

A weekend-long rainstorm shortened the Stratford U15 Nationals' participation at the Cardinal Classic in St. Thomas, and they held off a late rally by the Brantford Red Sox to win 6-4 on May 25.

The Stratford U15 Nationals participated in the annual Cardinal Classic at Emile Field in St. Thomas from May 22 to 24.

Stratford started their round robin games with an afternoon match against the Clarington Orioles, delivering a precise offensive performance as they scored 11 runs on eight hits and five Clarington errors en route to an 11-0 victory in six innings.

Cole Morris excelled both offensively, with two hits and three RBIs, and pitching, completing three innings without allowing a hit and striking out two batters. Reid Musselman finished off the Orioles with three scoreless innings of his own. Jake Price and Will Molenhuis each led the Nationals with three runs.

Nationals coach Rick Boon liked the team's performance in the tournament opener, citing the near-perfect execution on all three phases.

"Cole (Morris) pitched a heck of a game.

He did really well to start the game, and Reid came in, and Reid Musselman did a really good job of picking up after that, and just keeping the ball on the ground. They didn't swing the bats very well because we put the pitches in the right spot, so overall we did well," Boon said.

"We missed a few opportunities with the bases loaded, runners in position. We have to work on that to make sure we get a score."

The Nationals were supposed to play against Newmarket and Quinte on the last day of the round-robin on May 23. However, the rest of the tournament was called off because of heavy rain that persisted throughout most of the weekend.

Stratford resumed their Intercounty Baseball Association regular-season play on May 25 when they faced the Brantford Red Sox at the Arnold Anderson Stadium in Brantford.

Landen McCann and James Antonio each drove in two runs for the Nationals, with McCann also leading the team with three hits. Starting pitcher Price pitched five innings, gave up two earned runs, allowed four walks and seven hits, and had two strikeouts. Carter Cook secured the win for the Nationals by pitching two scoreless innings in relief.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

Pitcher Cole Morris prepares to deliver the pitch against the Clarington Orioles at the Cardinal Classic in St. Thomas on May 22.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)

First baseman James Antonio signals the catch with his glove for an out in the third inning against the Clarington Orioles at the Cardinal Classic in St. Thomas on May 22.



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U15 Nationals compete at the Cardinal Classic, held on to beat Brantford



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)
Quintin Parr prepares to make contact during the top of the fourth inning against the Clarington Orioles at the Cardinal Classic in St. Thomas on May 22.



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)
Quintin Parr looks to advance from second base against the Clarington Orioles at the Cardinal Classic in St. Thomas on May 22.

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18U Nationals competed in the Brampton tournament, sputters at home

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

This past week, the Stratford 18U Nationals experienced highs and lows both on the field and in the weather, winning one of their three games while also suffering

a defeat at a rain-shortened tournament in Brampton and Mississauga.

Stratford was scheduled to play the Kitchener-Diemert Panthers in the second of their three games in three days on May 19 in Kitchener, but inclement weather forced the cancellation of the game.

The Nationals eventually played the Hassan Panthers in Kitchener the next day on May 20, putting on an offensive downpour of their own in a 10-4 win in the final game of the Inter-county Baseball Association (ICBA) regular season before the 18U Brampton/Mississauga tournament later in the week.

Alex Everett and Dawson Davidson each led the Nationals with three



(MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY PHOTO)
Colin Priestap (16) hits a single against the Caledonia Bears at Stratford National Stadium on May 25.

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18U Nationals competed in the Brampton tournament, sputters at home

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

RBI, while James Robinson contributed two RBIs for the visitors. Finley Newton scored a team-high three runs during the game. Starting pitcher Owen Brooks pitched four innings of no earned runs, allowing six hits and recording one strikeout, and Caden Diehl picked up the win in relief with five innings of no earned runs and six strikeouts.

Stratford travelled to Mississauga on May 22 for a weekend tournament, facing off with the Halton Hills Eagles in the opening game.

After the Eagles opened the scoring with two runs in the first inning, the Nationals responded with three in the second and two more in the third to lead 5-2. But Halton Hills answered with five in the bottom of the third, two in the fourth and one more in the fifth before the game was officially called after five innings, with the Nationals losing 10-5.

Nationals starting pitcher Robinson pitched five innings, giving up six unearned runs on five hits, five walks and

striking out three. Ethan Priestap pitched an inning in relief, giving up one run. Newton and Colin Priestap had one RBI each for Stratford, while Robinson led the team with two runs.

Like their 15U counterparts, the 18U Nationals had their tournament cancelled due to rain throughout the weekend.

The team returned home to resume their ICBA regular-season play, facing the Caledonia Bears at Stratford National Stadium on May 25.

Stratford's shortcomings continued as they were unable to cash in runs at the key times, most notably in the third inning when they had the bases loaded with two outs before Robinson's groundout ended the inning. Caledonia retook the lead in the following inning with three runs, including a back-breaking two-run home run.

The visitors scored another three runs in the sixth to put the game out of reach, handing the Nationals a 7-1 loss.

Ethan Priestap produced the lone RBI for the Nationals in the third inning, scoring his brother Colin.

Starting pitcher Daniel Hovius threw over three innings, giving up two earned runs on three hits, one walk and striking out three. Everett relieved in the fourth, allowing one earned run over three innings with three strikeouts. Nolan Miller then shut down the Caledonia offence, pitching three scoreless innings with eight strikeouts.

In addition to their offensive woes, the defence hasn't provided much reliability for their pitchers as they committed eight errors in the two defeats.

Assistant coach Carter Koch says that although the team started strong in both games, in-game mental woes were the primary reason for the team's struggles.

"We've been playing pretty well, especially through the first four innings of the game. Friday night, kind of the same deal happened. We just started making errors at the wrong time, booting the ball around. Pitchers are getting ground balls and weak contact, but we just can't capitalize on them. Then it just spirals from there," Koch said.

"Tonight, they (Caledonia) threw a good pitcher. We just didn't really hit the ball, you know, can't score runs. We didn't have many base runners. We had to run on second to get picked off, just a little mental, tiny little mistakes kind of just ruin the whole game."

For Koch, looking ahead, the focus is on maintaining focus throughout the game, supporting one another, and ensuring every player makes defensive plays. Koch also believes that if the team stays mentally engaged and performs consistently, improvements will follow.

"Just being locked into the whole game the whole time. So you just got to stay locked in the whole game, whether on the bench, got to come in after the next guy up just got to do his job, and they'll get better, but then being in the field, locked in every pitch, making sure to make plays for your pitcher, little stuff like that," Koch said.

The Nationals will look to get back to their winning ways when they travel to Guelph for a matchup with the Royals on June 1.

Stratford Festival review: Cimolino's *The Tempest* a strange, magical start to the season

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Stratford Festival and outgoing artistic director Antoni Cimolino's season-opening production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* proved once again that good theatre is "such stuff as dreams are made on."

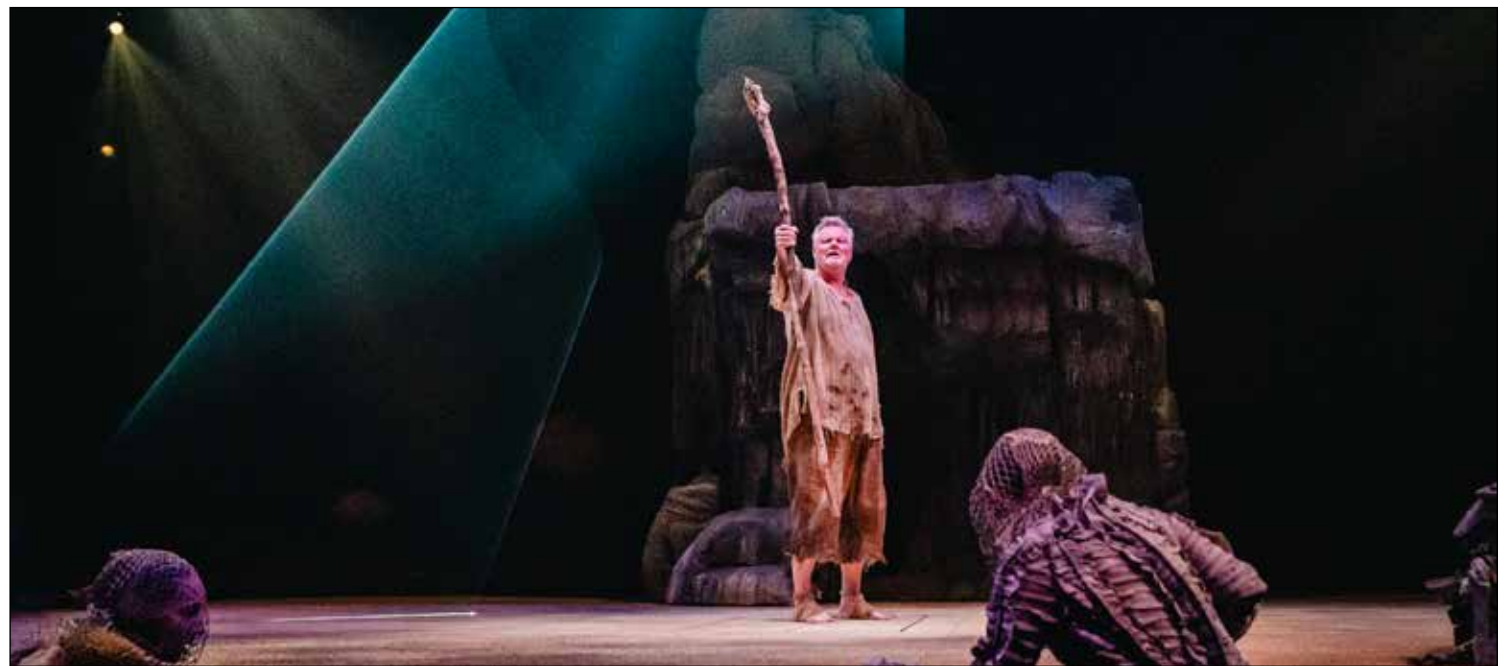
Just as Prospero, played in this production by the venerable Geraint Wyn Davies, comments on the fleeting, dream-like nature of human existence and how our lives and achievements ultimately fade into nothingness, the magical island created by this production's design team and all its terrifying and beautiful inhabitants have begun to fade from my memory, almost like the whole thing was a bizarrely fantastical dream.

But what a dream it was!

Frighteningly dramatic storms and a ship's sail that transform into the sea itself give way to horrifying island sea creatures – anamorphic mutations of seashells, mollusks, coral and seabirds – and a spritely spirit, Ariel (Marissa Orjalo), who fulfills her debt of servitude to Davies' magical protagonist by mischievously punishing those shipwrecked usurpers who stole his former life and thought him dead.

Elsewhere on the island, Caliban (Jonathan Goad) – a grotesque rat-man hybrid enslaved by Prospero – forms an unlikely alliance with two shipwrecked royal servants, chef Trinculo (Josue Laboucane) and butler Stephano (Ben Carlson), and plot to kill Prospero and take the island as their kingdom.

Unlike some of Shakespeare's other no-



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

From left, Katarina Fiallos as Spirit, Geraint Wyn Davies as Prospero and Allison Lynch as Spirit in *The Tempest*. Stratford Festival 2026.

table protagonists, Prospero and Ariel are always two steps ahead of any planned treachery, including that of Prospero's brother, Antonio (Gordon S. Miller), and the brother of Neapolitan King Alonso (David Collins), Sebastian (Micah Woods), as they plot to kill the king and take his title.

Instead, treachery is turned to comedy as Prospero and Ariel's magical hijinks undermine those antagonistic efforts at every turn. A particular highlight of this production for me is the considerable slapstick-comedy chops of Goad, Laboucane and Carlson as their characters, drunk from mysterious island wine, try and fail

to kill Prospero in his cavern while he sleeps.

Davies' performance as Prospero, who is introduced with vengeance in his heart but ultimately finds forgiveness for those who wronged him by way of the love between his daughter, Miranda (Ashley Dingwell), and Ferdinand (Dakota Jamal Wellman), King Alonso's son, grounds the story in a rewarding and believable emotional journey. Though Prospero is a character without limits to his power, Davies' performance makes that journey and Prospero's decision to relinquish his power feel earned.

Start to finish, this production of *The*

Tempest is a masterclass in bringing to life that ethereal quality that places this among my favourite of Shakespeare's works.

From gigantic-yet-graceful puppets, dramatic lighting and an epic soundscape punctuated by Shakespearean songs put to new and exciting music, to fantastical costumes and the other-worldly performances of the actors who inhabited them, Cimolino and his artistic team have made sure the artistic director's final Shakespearean production on the Festival Theatre stage is one to remember.

The Tempest plays at the Festival Theatre until Oct. 24.

Muse meets music in *Curveball: The Fast Pitch Ladies from the Factory Floor*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The captivating story of the Kroehler Girls softball team of 1953 comes to life in the new original musical *Curveball: The Fast Pitch Ladies from the Factory Floor* appearing at Blyth Festival Theatre this summer. The play is co-written by Kelly McIntosh, Andy Pogson, Stacy Smith and Severn Thompson with music by Dayna Manning.

Before being developed into a musical, the story was successfully produced with Here For Now Theatre as *The Kroehler Girls* in 2021 to sold out audiences, then further explored in the Kray-ler Trailers events at the Stratford Perth Museum.

The true story of the women's softball team that won the Professional Women's Softball Union Intermediate A and Junior A championships in 1953 has captivated McIntosh since she uncovered a photograph.

"I had an idea of this play from looking at a photograph from the museum of some women with ball gloves, short hair, they just look like something was happening. I was looking for another project because I'd done a play about women who worked in the Stratford CNR shops. We went through this experience of researching and that play and



(ANN BAGGLEY PHOTO)

The creatives behind the new musical 'Curveball: The Fast Pitch Ladies from the Factory floor. Pictured are Andy Pogson, Kelly MacIntosh, Dayna Manning and Severn Thompson.

finding the one woman alive who was there who could talk about it, and a few other women who did war work helped us," said McIntosh.

This was a lesson learned for her, that there is an expiry on oral history, live research with people who were there. Looking at that picture from the 1950s

she felt an urgency to learn more about it and in talking with Stacy Smith and Andy Pogson, a close connection was discovered through Pogson's aunt who played third base on the 1953 championship team. Excited at the prospect of working together again, they began work to develop the highly successful Here For Now production of *The Kroehler Girls*.

It was there that Dayna Manning first experienced the story and was so inspired that she wrote some music for which the play was her muse.

"I saw that play at that time and what really struck me about it was the local people that came. I was in a group called Trent Severn and (in) my own writing ... I was really intrigued by this. When Kelly asked me to come give it a try as a musical, we started writing and we did what we called the Kray-ler Trailers in front of the community last year and received feedback," said Manning.

Recall that 1953 was also the beginning of the Stratford Festival that used a tent outdoors for performances. The ball diamond where the Kroehler Girls played was directly behind, exuding excitement. There had to have been some conflict there, an idea that Manning loved.

"It's the story of the 1953 women's championship ball team that is ongoing as the town experiences this major shift where this tent shows up and gets erected and you could see how this could possibly have affected each other. So, everything is based on history. What do we say? Historically inaccurate and narratively true," laughed Manning.

"What we're doing is laying out an invitation of a red carpet for people whose lives are built on manufacturing and sports and going 'This one is for you. If you're going to try something, come and try this,' and that does a couple of things. It tells a community story, which is always great and it lays the path to embrace more people, to get more people to embrace live theatre," McIntosh said.

The setting will be outdoors on the Blyth Festival Harvest Stage and will give the feel of being at a game. Come dressed in your favourite jersey, wear your favourite ballcap and bring the next generation of theatre lovers to this family friendly musical with fourteen original Dayna Manning songs.

Curveball: The Fast Pitch Ladies from the Factory Floor begins July 8. Opening night is July 10 and runs until Aug. 22. For more information or to buy tickets, visit www.blythfestival.com.




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The Story Behind the Poem: “Cerebral Palsy” by Aleah Graff

MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Correspondent

Aleah Graff and a friend were at a local restaurant. When it came time to order their meals, the server took her friend's order, then nodded toward Graff as she asked her friend: “And what would she like?” As always, Graff took the high road and politely ignored the unintentional slight. As someone with cerebral palsy, this was not new to her. She says, “My physical disability is quite visible but I am naturally quiet and introverted so it leads people to assume things about my cognitive ability. But I also need to evaluate my own assumptions if I start thinking that my needs are too much for people. In reality, most of the time they are more than happy to help and include me.”

Graff's first prize winning poem, “Cerebral Palsy,” is a testament to the challenges she overcomes on a daily basis as she navigates a social morass that others simply skim over. In her poem, she personifies her disability. It is as though CP is a dance partner she has been arbitrarily paired with, a partner who can be clumsy, cruel and unpredictable.

Graff is the community engagement coordinator at Avondale United Church in Stratford and uses poetry and writing as a medium for education about her disability.

“I want to help people be seen when they are not so easily represented,” she says. As she grew up, she wasn't seeing people with disabilities represented in books and media as other minority groups were. “It is important that young people see people who are like them.”

Her first memories of reading poems come from Grade 2 English class: “I had a wonderful teacher who sat us in a circle,



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Aleah Graff is the author of “Cerebral Palsy,” a poem featured in the Every Voice poetry contest.

read poems to us and encouraged us to write our own. I started writing that same year at age seven or eight. I needed surgery so wrote short poems for fun while I recovered. I based them on children's books but rewrote the endings, not necessarily happier ones!”

Graff studied English and creative writing at Brock University and now writes poetry or fiction whenever she has time. She often listens to music while she writes which she says helps to inspire her: “In my poem, I want to emulate how the song makes me feel.”

Graff further explained:

“I've learned to let my poems sit for a while before I show them to other people.

Often, when I write a poem, I'm so excited to say what I have to say that I just let the words explode onto the page and it's a bit of a jumble. When I go back to the poem a few days later, I'm able to think about it more structurally, and play around with the lines to make sure that I feel like they fit the tone I want to evoke.

“My experiences with cerebral palsy have shaped me into the person I am today. That's not a good or bad thing; it just is. Cerebral palsy is as much a part of me as my brown eyes. My experiences, worldviews, my life and the things that comprise who I am do not exist separately from my diagnosis but rather alongside it.

“I wanted to write a poem that personified cerebral palsy. I felt like this was a

healthy, cathartic way to deal with my frustrations and thoughts. As a 20-something, I sometimes feel frustrated and angry that my body doesn't work the way that I want it to. It was important to personify the thing that I am frustrated or angry with. That made it easier to convey the emotional toll that a congenital physical disability can create. Still, cerebral palsy is a spectrum. No two people experience it exactly the same way. I wanted to show someone who may be dealing with similar circumstances to mine that they are not alone.

“With this poem, I tried to show what having a disability means for me as a young person, particularly in social situations. It does not stop one from dreaming, having goals, achieving great things or being loved. Although I may experience frustration, anger, sadness and disappointment, my life is in no way whatsoever tragic. My life isn't always easy, but nobody's is.

“I have a fantastic mother, father and brother who go above and beyond to support me. They too have had to be resilient. I have great friends and great community support. I have a job I love, working alongside people who couldn't be any kinder. It's really important to me that people know one can be lucky in unlucky circumstances. And I really am lucky; I've never had to go through anything alone.”

The Story Behind the Poem is an ongoing series by Mark Hertzberger featuring conversations with poets recognized in this year's Every Voice Poetry Contest and published in the anthology, Roots Through Stone: Poems of Strength and Resilience. Copies of the anthology are available for purchase at Fanfare Books in Stratford.

Cerebral Palsy

New facets of you present themselves
Just when I thought I had you all figured out.
I know I can never get over you, but
you trick me into trying.

And then you show up, when I want to
go to a party,
When I want to squeeze into something
slimming, you knot up my fingers,
And the necklace I want to put on can't
take it anymore, clattering to the floor.

When I'm walking in, wanting, wanting...
To dance,
To run,
To kiss,
To not have you with me.

But you just snicker,

Because you and I, we're ride or die.
So you wrap your knotting fingers
around my legs,
And tighten your grip,
Just as I walk forward,

Thinking I've finally left you behind.

But you're a child; you cannot be without me,
And I do not exist without you.

And your slithering breath makes my
knees turn in until,
I collapse into you,

And as I come tumbling down...

“Surprise,” you say, “I'm still here, I
can't leave you. Nobody will want you.
You only have me.”

And so, I let myself become
lost in you,

Because you are mine, and mine

alone,
And I don't want to make you anyone
else's.

You only broke me once,
I thought you could never break me
again.

But what if you can?
What if you do?

Everyone tells me to deal with you; to
make the best of you,
To feel lucky,
Because you're good to me; you let
me push your boundaries.

Most of the time,
I am lucky.

Sometimes I ask you why you chose
me,
Why you promised,
That you'd let me have my own life,

Yet, you're feeding off every aspect.

Still, you haven't stolen my thoughts,
Or ideas,
Or dreams.

They come out quietly, guarded by the
heart you haven't handled.

Though you invade them,
You inspire them too.

You force me to be resourceful,
So now, I want to be a resource.

Your visibility threatens mine,
So now, I fight for others to be seen.

You show me that I will never break
free of you,
So now, I'm breaking through.

Aleah Graff

Editorial

Happy almost-80th UTRCA!



CONNOR LUCZKA

Times Editor

If the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) makes it to 2027, it will officially be 80 years old – though that milestone is looking more distant than ever nowadays.

As previously reported by the Times and near every media organization in the province, the UTRCA is set to consolidate with the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA), the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRC) and the Essex Region Conservation Author-

ity (ERCA) to form the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA). Instead of being one of 36 provincial conservation authorities (CA), the UTRCA will become a component of one of nine total regional CAs.

At the most recent Stratford city council meeting on May 26, Ingersoll mayor and UTRCA board of directors chair Brian Petrie spoke about the impact the upcoming conservation authority merger will have on our local CA and the City of Stratford.

With an already full paper and a few other pressing topics, I didn't write about his presentation in this week's edition. Not only did we already have a full paper with a few other pressing topics, but I have previously covered most of what he said in the published articles: "This is just chaos": UTRCA board opposes consolidation of conservation authorities" and "UTRCA expects significant costs for consolidation." Both articles can be found



(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Brian Petrie, Ingersoll mayor and UTRCA board of directors chair, speaks to Stratford city council on the upcoming consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities at its May 26 meeting.

on our website granthaven.com with a quick search of "UTRCA" in the search bar.

As mentioned, Petrie didn't add much to what has previously been covered, though he did have a few choice words for the process. Among them were:

"Your influence is going to be diluted. There's no doubt about that, and some of the bigger issues is that you know UTRCA as a whole, in the 1990s when they

were made smaller, the effort was to balance that rural and urban voice, and so that local voice really does matter... There's large urban centres and there's large rural centres within the watershed, and balancing out both those priorities, so they're both listened to, is very important. We just don't want that to be drowned out, but that is a risk that we will see."

And:

"They (the Ontario Provin-

cial Conservation Agency) have full control, they can direct everybody to do what they want. In fact ... as far as the strategic planning process, it has to align with the provincial objectives. There's nothing in there about any local objectives. The provincial government has said they do not want to see any frontline positions affected, especially after the day before the transition, the

CONTINUED TO PAGE 22

CORRECTION: In the article "Hog Jog fundraiser for Emily Murphy Centre nourishing community," published on page 7 of the May 22 edition of the Stratford Times, it was incorrectly stated the organization expanded its shelter space two years ago. EMC is a transitional housing support complex and has not expanded recently. It is currently fundraising for a tiny home expansion on its property now. The Times regrets any confusion this error caused.

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Quote of the Week

"We get along and there's no conflict in the garden. These are some friends from all walks of life. There's affluent people ... there's artists, there's people from housing, there's people on welfare, and it costs the city nothing, zero, to have these people garden and have a purpose."

- Jim Westman on the Franklin Drive community garden's impact.

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Opinions

As I See It From America: Welcome home



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Contributor

Well, the time has come. By the time you read this, my wife and I will be experiencing opening week at the theatre. It will be incredible to walk the streets, visit all our normal shops and look for more interesting and incredible places to explore. I admit that I am a creature of habit, but it is always wonderful to look for new things, see what has changed in your fair city and partake in the many things that are offered by Stratford.

Today, which is our Memorial Day – our day of remembrance for those that have served our country – and tomorrow we will be discussing our agenda, packing our clothes and deciding what we are going to be doing

during our stay. I am not a big planner of things, I prefer to let the cards fall where they may, but we do have a plethora of theatre planned so we must work around all of that. One of the biggest priorities we have is to spend some time with our wonderful friends, make some new ones and discover more about Stratford. Over the past 51 years of visiting, we always find something new that gives us more to look forward to each time we stay. That is exciting!

Our visit is coming at a suitable time as we are seeing more crumbling, bumbling and confusion in our own country. It is unbearable to watch the news and to see what is happening and the level of insanity that we must deal with on a regular basis. At least in Stratford we can be awed by the likes of A Midsummer Night's Dream and riotously amused by Something Rotten! as well as all the other wonderful productions and parties that we are going to partake in. This time it is going to be a whirlwind of fun and a magical journey of theatre. I know it will be incredible.

I do wonder what the discussions will be like with our friends. After the exchange of greetings

and such, it often morphs into some reference of what we are dealing with in the states. Is that what the coffee shop chatter will be about? It's not that I mind or find that a displeasure, but it is interesting how we are constantly asked about what is happening and how we are coping with it all. It is almost like we live in a third-world country that is somehow different than the country where I grew up on a farm and had faith with the political system. Even if I did not agree with a particular politician or elected official, I still felt that most of them were doing what they were doing out of community and country service. Today, I am not so sure.

We are barraged with talk about ballrooms, reflecting pools and triumphant archways while experiencing a total meltdown of normalcy and responsible governance. We also are experiencing actual attacks on those that do not agree with the current MAGA faction and increasing violence towards those that are serving our country. Threats and recrimination have become the norm, and fear is all around. Perhaps we are turning into a third-world country after all, just one that has a lot of influence and

power and a warped ideology.

It would be nice to think that all the power we do have would be directed towards bettering the lives of our citizens and sharing and caring about people. Instead, the direction is slanted towards establishing and obtaining more power through violence and forced interaction with other countries. We are obliterating the people of Iran, have taken over the government of Venezuela and now are posing more threats on the people of Cuba. While I understand the need to promote democracy and encourage the removal of dangerous dictators, I am certain that there really is no concern about what happens to regular people. It seems that we are inflicting more suffering and less compassion towards them.

I have always had a feeling of kindness from our neighbours in Canada, which is why I feel so at home there. I have experienced helpfulness and caring in your city. It is one of the charms that are on display on a regular basis. I see shopkeepers and employees interested in being of service. I read about public servants who want to address problems and solve issues for your citizens. I am constantly awed at how the discourse is mostly addressed

towards the task at hand, not an attack on an individual. I am not oblivious of the challenges and disagreements that do come about from time to time. In fact, I am always aware of some of the issues that you must solve in Stratford. I believe that you put people first. That is the way it should be.

And so, we get ready. It will certainly be a wonderful excursion. It is truly a blessing to me that we have somewhere in this world that feels like a reprieve from our fears and worries. We are looking forward to a wonderful stay at the Suburban Motel and enjoying all the beautiful theatres and all the magic that they put on the stage. As usual, we are seeing every single show that is part of this season, some more than once. We will see our friends perform, eat in fantastic restaurants and feel like we are home. Because we are home. As the old saying goes, "Home is where the heart is." It is great that for one week at the end of May we can say to ourselves, "Welcome Home."

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

WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH THE PITS



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Freelance Columnist

I read today about significant heat waves in France, Spain and western Canada, with more to come this summer. I thought about those whose only home is a tent – not by choice – and how we might approach them. It's called compassion. It's called providing adequate public education opportunities, adequate public medical and mental health support, affordable housing and the end of readily available poverty creators in the form of gambling and addiction. Compassion is being able to walk in another person's moccasins, to empa-

thize, to feel what the other individual is feeling – and to treat those who have fallen into a pit with respect. That respect should also be extended to those who weigh the values of our society, the traditions and the laws – our judges.

We seem to be falling into a pit ourselves. The Ontario Auditor General has stated that the province's special education system is failing to meet students' needs due to chronic underfunding, staff shortages and inconsistent oversight. We have only to look at the horror stories emerging from understaffed public hospitals and closed emergency rooms to see the state of public medical services. Most importantly we find a barrage of new laws that remove our ability to determine the shape of our communities, our regions, our energy choices and our freedom from massive carbon levels in our atmosphere.

Even our highly trained conservation authorities are being centralized under the control of a cabinet minister, losing the ability to make local determinations to protect our waterways, wet-

lands and biodiversity. Our governmental systems haven't been perfect. You've probably heard the Churchill quote: "Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." It's sobering to see the individual and community self-determination further eroded with every new bill. It's sobering to see centuries of voting and consultation processes diminished and lost. We elect our regional and city councils to speak for us, not for a cabinet in Queen's Park.

It's called compassion, caring for each other. Creating livable communities is part of caring for each other. Caring for nature in a world beset by climate change is part of caring for each other. Creating a world that will be liveable for our children and for the creatures who share our planet is part of caring for each other. We are such busy people. We are overloaded with worry, with fear, with confusion, with the mists of greed and cruelty while we try to cope with inflation and job, food and housing

security in our daily lives.

It was so heartening to read about the UN resolution passed this month. The General Assembly gave political force to last year's landmark climate ruling from the International Court of Justice, voting 141-8 to adopt a resolution urging countries to comply with legal obligations to curb greenhouse gas emissions and protect the climate. Canada was one of the sponsors! The journey started when AVAAZ helped to fund a student group from the island country of Vanuatu to take the fight of climate justice to the International Court in the Hague. If those young folk have the courage to stand up and speak for laws that protect and apply to us all, surely we can. It is also heartening to see Stratford speaking to the importance of democratic voting as determined for all our municipalities. It is a principle of governance that we have long upheld, respect for the law with the right to speak for our community. It's called caring for others – compassion.

P.s. I have never met anyone

who actually prefers a precarious existence year 'round in a tent to a secure home, with a shower, a bed and a kitchen.

UPDATES:

Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of May 25, 2026: 432.25 ppm. The 350 ppm safe level was passed in 1988.

Increasing native gardens is a wonderful way to moderate climate change. Be sure to come to the Tri-County Master Gardeners Native Plant Sale on Saturday June 13 at Avondale Church! A bonanza of native plants for pollinators and birds!

Dinna forget to save birds from window and glass railing collisions. Dotted tape is available at the Split Rail Country Store, and an oil-based white marker to make your own dots (one-and-a-half inches apart) is at Blowes Stationery.

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.

Opinions

Lost in France

PAUL MITCHELL

Guest Contributor

It is a part of life, I believe, that as you get older, you become more reflective – I don't mean easier to see at night, or having a strange desire to wear "Hi-Vis" clothing – I mean it becomes more common to think back to childhood memories, school friends, etc. Quite often, it is hearing an "old" song on the TV or car radio or hearing a headline about a familiar artist from the past that triggers a memory.

It was the latter trigger mechanism that caught me this past week. There I was, minding my own business listening to the BBC, merrily driving along an unusually rare bit of smooth roadway in Stratford, when, at the end of the BBC news, came the last story of the news report – you know, the kind of story they tell at the end of the news bulletin in an attempt to lift our spirits somewhat and to distract us from the lunacy going on all around the world.

In perfect BBC tones came the news "Bonnie Tyler is undergoing emergency intestinal surgery in Portugal ..." My immediate reaction was that this was clearly a very slow day for "good news," as typically we get delightful whimsical tales of a new recipe for prize-winning Victoria sponge from a Mrs. Barnstable in Kent, or similar stories. I tried to get my brain in gear ... Bonnie Tyler ... who was that again? Was that her that sang my favourite song at the time back in 1976? The BBC had deemed this story to be of great importance – Mrs. Barnstable's revolutionary Victoria sponge would have to wait.

That short BBC headline was all it took, and within seconds, thoughts of my 1970s and '80s childhood in Scotland filled my head. Bonnie Tyler, born in Wales, was a bit of a U.K. pop phenomena back then, but what was that song called ... the one that was on Top of The Pops ... the one I could play on the guitar my parents had given me that Christmas ... Another fact of aging – the memory is not as sharp. But, with the jolt of a well-placed pothole, I finally remembered the song Bonnie sang: "Lost in France."

When I got home, I immediately did whatever it is we do these days to get songs and music on to our devices and found "Lost in France." I picked up my guitar – and there it was again – the song I had loved and played aged 11. Within mere minutes, my mind was racing to think of all the times I had indeed literally been lost in France, perhaps the most classic of all those was taking a break from university, just for a week, to go on a bus tour to the world famous Le Mans 24-hour car race, held each year in Le Mans in northwestern France.

Another friend had talked myself and my best buddy Charlie in to going. It was all so easy, he said. Train from Inverness to Edinburgh, supper in Edinburgh, then catch the overnight sleeper train to London, walk over to the bus station, and join the bus tour. What could possibly go wrong?

As it turned out, quite a lot. My buddy and me had a sleepless night in the sleeper compartment, and just as we both struggled to get some kind of rest, a happy British Rail attendant stuck his

head around the compartment door and announced, "Here's your tea and custard creams lads." Being on the lower bunk, I took the tray and asked the gent, "So are we in London now?"

"No mate," came the reply. "Just doing some shunting in Peterborough."

I was about to ask why he had awoken us at 4 a.m. to tell us this news, but consoled myself with tea, my own custard cream and the custard cream meant for Charlie, who was now snoring loudly. Clearly, not safe to shove a custard cream in his direction, and it seemed a shame to waste a freshly opened (yet strangely stale) biscuit.

Once in London, we found the bus terminus and our coach. We sat at the back and dozed our way through the London traffic and on through Kent to Dover, on to the ferry, and over to France. Keep in mind, our bus was filled with a bunch of 22-year-olds, most of whom had no idea where France was, let alone Le Mans. Sadly, that seemed also to be the case for our own coach driver, Neil. Neil's favorite pastime, whilst in France, was to turn off the highway, in to one of the many beautiful rest-stops the French are so good at, and whilst driving his large coach past picnicking French families, he would wave and smile at them, and then, without either stopping, or warning, would release the contents of the bus chemical toilet, and keep driving.

"I just don't like the French," said Neil, before careering back on to the main road, back on our way to, well, he was not sure, but he was certain there had been a sign. A sign that had perhaps said "Lost in

France."

The day before the big race was spent sightseeing in the region, during which Neil and French roads continued their battle. Bonnie Tyler would have been proud of us lads as we would frequently burst in to song "We are lost in France," our own rendition of her 1976 hit, much to Neil's embarrassment. I am sure we were the worst tour group he had ever had.

When we eventually did find Le Mans, we all ended up enjoying the race, but strangely, none of us ever went back to do it again. I don't think Neil ever drove his bus in France again either.

Neil had been a keen music fan too, even having one of those new CD player things installed in the bus. Sadly, Neil did not have any Bonnie Tyler CDs – in fact, Neil only had one CD, namely the latest album from fellow Newcastle native, Chris Rea. Neil and Chris had gone to school together, so he said, and this gave him the right to play "Stainsby Girls" almost non-stop for the entire tour. Even today, when I hear that song, I can't help but think of chemical toilets.

Sadly, Chris Rea passed away in December 2025. As far as I can tell, Neil retired from coach driving, and this can only mean good things for the picnicking French.

You will be pleased to learn Bonnie Tyler is expected to make a full recovery. I am not sure the same can be said for those poor French families, enjoying their outdoor picnic at rest stops in north-west France in 1988. Meanwhile, I'm off to find my guitar, and get "Lost in France" again.

Happy almost-80th UTRCA!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

day before will look extremely similar, but they've also said that they want to see different service levels change, so it's hard to tell exactly where that'll go till we get the information."

And, of course:

"Any lower tier municipality ... will receive a bill for the 2027 budget, but they will have no representation directly on the

board."

As noted by the province, there are some key shortcomings associated with the current system that should be addressed. More than half of municipalities fall under the jurisdiction of two or more CAs, each with different policies, standards, fees, staffing levels and technical capabilities, meaning there is unpredictable and inconsistent turnaround times for approvals, uncertain-

ty and delays for builders, property owners and municipalities seeking permits, a risk of undermining the ability to protect communities from floods and natural hazards, unnecessary administrative duplication that diverts resources from front-line conservation work and disparities in size of resources and access to the latest tools and technology, according to the province's website.

As Petrie said, there is still so much information to be shared until consolidation comes, and this is not the final piece I will write about it, no doubt, but Petrie also began his presentation by telling council, the gallery and the wider public that they will need to be good communicators. By my estimation, that is certainly true – though the province will also have to be good listeners.



LOCAL MATTERS.



Remember that time when **Amazon** sponsored your church fundraiser?



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?

Opinions

The quiet power of small goals and grateful noticing



IRENE ROTH

Times Columnist

We live in a world that celebrates big milestones. The finished manuscript. The promotion. The transformed life. These moments deserve recognition, of course – but they are not where most of life is actually lived. Most of our days unfold in the quiet, unremarkable spaces between those milestones. And

it is here, in these ordinary moments, that something powerful is waiting for our attention: the small goal, gently met, and the quiet act of noticing it with gratitude.

Small goals are often dismissed as insignificant. Drink more water. Step outside for five minutes. Write a paragraph. Rest when your body asks you to. These are not the kinds of achievements that make headlines or draw applause. Yet, they are the very acts that sustain us. They are the building blocks of a life that is not only productive, but also humane and deeply lived.

There is a subtle shift that happens when we begin to honour small goals. Instead of measuring our worth by how much we accomplish in grand terms, we begin to root ourselves in what is possible right now. This is es-

pecially important in seasons of limitation – when energy is low, when life feels overwhelming, or when circumstances are beyond our control. In these moments, small goals are not “less than.” They are everything.

But the true power of small goals is only fully realized when paired with gratitude.

Gratitude is not merely a polite response to good fortune. It is a way of seeing. It is the deliberate act of noticing what is already present and already enough. When we complete a small goal and pause to acknowledge it – I did that. I showed up. I took one step – we reinforce a sense of capability and care within ourselves. We begin to trust that even small movements matter.

This practice changes the tone of our inner lives. Instead of a constant refrain of “not enough,” we begin to hear a quieter, kind-

er voice: “This counts.” And it does count. Every small act of intention is a vote for the kind of life we are trying to build.

There is also a cumulative effect to this way of living. Small goals, met consistently and gratefully, gather into something larger over time. A paragraph becomes a chapter. A short walk becomes a habit of movement. A moment of rest becomes a deeper relationship with one’s own body. We often underestimate this quiet accumulation because it does not announce itself. It simply grows, steadily and faithfully.

Grateful noticing also anchors us in the present. It draws our attention away from the endless horizon of what still needs to be done and brings us back to what has already been given. The cup of tea you remembered to savour. The message you sent.

The boundary you honoured. These moments are easy to overlook, but they are rich with meaning when we choose to see them.

In a culture that often equates value with scale, there is something quietly radical about embracing the small. It requires patience. It asks us to slow down. It invites us to redefine success – not as a distant, shining outcome, but as a series of small, intentional acts, lived with awareness.

So today, consider this: What is one small goal you can set? And when you meet it, will you allow yourself to notice it – not rush past it, not diminish it, but truly see it?

Because a life is not built in leaps. It is built in steps. And each small, grateful step is already a form of arrival.



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Neighbour Jennifer McCann and Tavistock Men’s Club member Steve Cahill enjoy watching the local paving experts from Stratford’s Fraser Paving last week at the men’s club lane-way leading to their Kraut-Club House. The work is done in time for the club’s annual fish fry Wednesday June 3, from 4-7 p.m.

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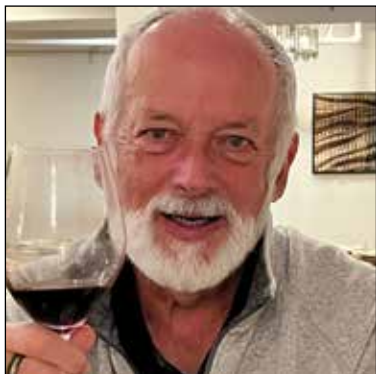
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*11:00 a.m. – Fellowship and
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Music and more on Cape Breton's Ceilidh Trail



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Columnist

Almost everyone has heard of the Cabot Trail. That's not surprising; Nova Scotia's Cabot Trail is one of the most breathtaking drives you can take in Canada, or anywhere in the world, for that matter.

Fewer, perhaps, know of the other Cape Breton Island "trail" that connects with the Cabot Trail. Known as the "Ceilidh Trail," it begins at the Canso Causeway – the entry point to Cape Breton Island. The Ceildih Trail then follows the western coast of the island for 107 kilometres to Margaree Harbour, where it connects with the Cabot Trail.

As you may know, "ceilidh," pronounced kay-lee, is a Gaelic word that originally meant "a visit." Today, it has come to include the idea of an informal gathering with music, dance, storytelling and, very probably, beverages. There are ceilidhs all over Canada's four eastern provinces, some simply kitchen parties, others ticketed events in rented halls. Every one of them is fun.

And there is no lack of east coast music on Cape Breton Island. This, after all, is the home of Ashley MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, The Rankin Family, the Barra Mac-



The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre is a must-stop on your tour of the Ceilidh Trail.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Neils, John Allan Cameron, J.P. Cormier and the late and dearly missed Rita MacNeil. So, it's not surprising that the powers that be have dubbed this route "The Ceilidh Trail."

And you're not far along the trail, coming from the south, before you encounter physical evidence of the importance of music in this region. The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre is on the route, only 29 kilometres from the Canso Parkway. It's in Judique, not to be confused with the other small communities in the immediate area named Judique South, Rear Judique South, Rear Judique Chapel, Judique North, Judique Intervale, Little Judique and Little Judique Ponds. No, I am not making this up. I think it is charming, if a tad confusing.

The Celtic Music Interpretive Centre offers three distinct oppor-

tunities to visitors. You can dine in the restaurant. You can take in a concert of Celtic music played on a stage in the dining room, so you'll probably want to eat and listen. And you can visit the museum section of the centre.

The museum has a lot of information about Cape Breton musical history and if my experience is anything to go by, it's best to carry earplugs because visitors have the chance to try their hands at playing a violin – with a video introduction to the art of the instrument. Trust me, the lesson didn't help. I was screech-worthy terrible.

The only problem with having lunch at the interpretive centre is that you will also want to have lunch at the Red Shoe Pub in Mabou, only 30 kilometres north. This is a special place; the restaurant features live music seven days a

week, and that's not surprising because it's owned by Heather, Cookie and Raylene Rankin of the famed Rankin Family.

In truth, there is music almost everywhere in this part of Nova Scotia. We stayed at the Glenora Inn (arranged very kindly by our hosts at Tourism Nova Scotia), which is in this district as well (I wrote about it in a previous feature). At the inn, there was a wonderful duo playing Celtic music in the dining room in the evening, and in true spirit of the ceilidh, they called up a young man from the audience, a pianist friend of theirs, to join them for several songs.

There are plenty of arts-and-crafts stops along the trail as well. In one shop, a woman was proudly declaring herself to be a hooker as she produced hooked rugs, pot holders and other items for

sale in the shop. I asked about her work, and she stopped for a moment to give me a very thoughtful, well-spoken answer.

I realized a few minutes later the reason for her articulate response when she gave the same spiel, word for word, to another shopper.

I admit that everything I have mentioned so far takes place indoors, which is rather ridiculous when you are talking about travel on Cape Breton Island. Inevitably, the star of the show will be the sea-coast, and the innumerable panoramas that inspire you to pull off the road and savour the scenery.

One perfect stop is at Inverness, where you can walk the beautiful beach or stroll on the trail that runs along the very prestigious Cabot Links Golf Course. A note of caution: playing 18 on this lovely course will cost you between \$400 and \$600, but walking the trail, enjoying the view and not worrying about a missed putt is free.

There are many places to stay along the Ceilidh Trail, and it would appear that none of them are big, typical, cookie-cutter hotels. Here, the options range from beach-front villas to geodomes to distilleries to country inns to RV sites. For more information about accommodations, see <https://capebretonisland.com/ceilidh-trail/>.

Of course, if you are visiting Cape Breton Island, you will want to travel the Cabot Trail, but leave a few days for its little sister, the lovely Ceilidh Trail.

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.



Live music at the Celtic Museum Interpretive Centre.



A mural at the Centre depicts a typical ceilidh.

Crossword

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Comedic actor Rogen
- 5. Bits per inch
- 8. Tire pressure measurement
- 11. Angels great Mike
- 13. Own (Scottish)
- 14. Notable FI racing team
- 15. Upper bract of grass
- 16. Tax collector
- 17. Electronic counter-countermeasures
- 18. Informal loan clubs
- 20. Skeletal muscle
- 21. Popular fish type
- 22. Salts of acetic acid
- 25. Arriving early
- 30. Worded
- 31. Single Lens Reflex
- 32. Amphibians
- 33. Warm greeting
- 38. Belonging to a thing
- 41. Segmented worm
- 43. Concerns
- 45. Audacious
- 47. Wings
- 49. Type of drug
- 50. Wind chill formula scientist Charles
- 55. Island close to the U.S.
- 56. "To the ___ degree"
- 57. Daniel ___, French composer
- 59. A way to march
- 60. Where golfers begin
- 61. Spiritual leader
- 62. Of she
- 63. Mental disorder concerning body odor (abbr.)
- 64. Tall, slender-leaved plant

- 2. Amounts of time
- 3. Fragrant brown balsam used in perfume
- 4. Color properties
- 5. One who hands over
- 6. Thieves of the sea
- 7. Put in
- 8. Nocturnal rodents
- 9. Pouches
- 10. Systems, doctrines, theories
- 12. Greek alphabet letter
- 14. Greek goddess of youth
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. Partly digested food
- 24. Dictator
- 25. Parts per thousand (abbr.)
- 26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
- 27. A major division of geological time
- 28. Angry
- 29. St. Francis of ___
- 34. Romanian monetary unit
- 35. Stale
- 36. Go quickly
- 37. Commercials
- 39. Canadian city
- 40. One who slices
- 41. Perform perfectly
- 42. Nest of pheasants
- 44. Tactile sensations
- 45. Sword
- 46. Climactic
- 47. Adrenocorticotrophin
- 48. Fisherman's tool
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Plant that makes gum
- 53. A French abbot
- 54. One point east of northeast
- 58. Get free of

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Pet of the week



MILA

Mila is a gentle, affectionate cat with beautiful long grey and buff fur. She may be a little shy at first, but she warms up quickly and loves being close to her people! She enjoys relaxing by a window, curling up on the couch or bed, and gentle playtime when encouraged.

Mila does have special dietary needs, so she's looking for a dedicated adopter who can support her care. Her adoption fee has been reduced to help her find the loving home she deserves.

If you're looking for a calm, talkative, and loving companion, Mila could be the perfect match. She is available from our Stratford Centre: <https://kwsphumane.ca/adopt/cats>



Sudoku

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

COMING EVENTS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

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

HOLY TRINITY VARIETY SALE

St. James Anglican Church, 41 Mornington St, Stratford

Friday May 29th 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Toonie a Tote Hour

Friday May 29th 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Drop Off Items Accepted

May 12-13-14

May 19-20-21

9:00 am – 12:00 noon

If you can help - call Karen: 273-5398

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 1; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Ish n Chips, SWAT, Siggis, Pablos Street of India

Donations to Tavistock Health Clinic

YARD SALE

Saturday, June 6

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Dishes, books, jewelry, games, toys, knick-knacks, silverware, craft supplies, lamps, materials, china, decorations, small furniture, vintage and collectibles table, electrical appliances, plants and garden décor items

OLD MEETS NEW

Saturday, June 6; 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Brocksden Country School Museum 2719 Line 37 (Vivian Street) between Road 110 and Road 109 just northeast of Stratford

Free event for all ages! Come to the OLD Schoolhouse and see some NEW things! We are partnering with the Stratford Public Library's MakerSpace to showcase 3-D printing and fun NEW ways to use OLD toys!

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 8; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Los Rolling Tacos, Born2Eat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to Camp Bimini

JESUS IS COMING SOON! COME AND LEARN THE TRUTH FROM THE BIBLE

June 9th to June 13; 7:30 p.m.

June 16 to 20; 7:30 p.m.

St. Marys Gospel Hall, 632 Jones Street East, St. Marys

Speaker: Scott MacLeod

These meetings are hosted by Christians gathered in His Name at St. Marys Gospel Hall.

For more information email fullerglenj@gmail.com or mobile: 519 703 9453

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 15; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Wild Boar, El Milagro, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

Donations to Grace United Church

TEDDY BEAR PICNIC

Saturday, June 20; 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Brocksden Country School Museum 2719 Line 37 (Vivian Street) between Road 110 and Road 109 just northeast of Stratford

Free event ideal for families with young children! Today's the day when the teddy bears have their picnic! Grab your teddy bear, blanket and snack and head down to the Old

Schoolhouse for face painting, scavenger hunt, Grandma's Storytime and more! Brocksden Country School Museum 2719 Line 37 (Vivian Street) between Road 110 and Road 109 just northeast of Stratford.

LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from 2-4pm at Infinity Dance 451 Erie St. Next meeting June 21 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.mckinnamanagement.com

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 22; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Berlin 95, Born2Eat, El Milagro, Ish n Chips

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, June 29; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Pablas Street of India, Swat, Fo Cheezy

Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program

FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, July 6; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

Siggis, Los Rolling Tacos, Berlin 95

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FOOD TRUCKS

Monday, July 13; 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Grace United Church Tavistock

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SWAT, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails

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