

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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FEBRUARY 13, 2026

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Woodstock woman launches petition to help the homeless

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

"I have seen some change, but it's just not enough."

That's how Tracey Reynolds Sherman described the current state of the system in place in Oxford County to support the homeless who often have mental health and addiction issues.

As a result, she has introduced a petition to see more housing and other supports for those in need. The petition will be sent to Warden Marcus Ryan, MPP Ernie Hardeman and MP Arpan Khanna.

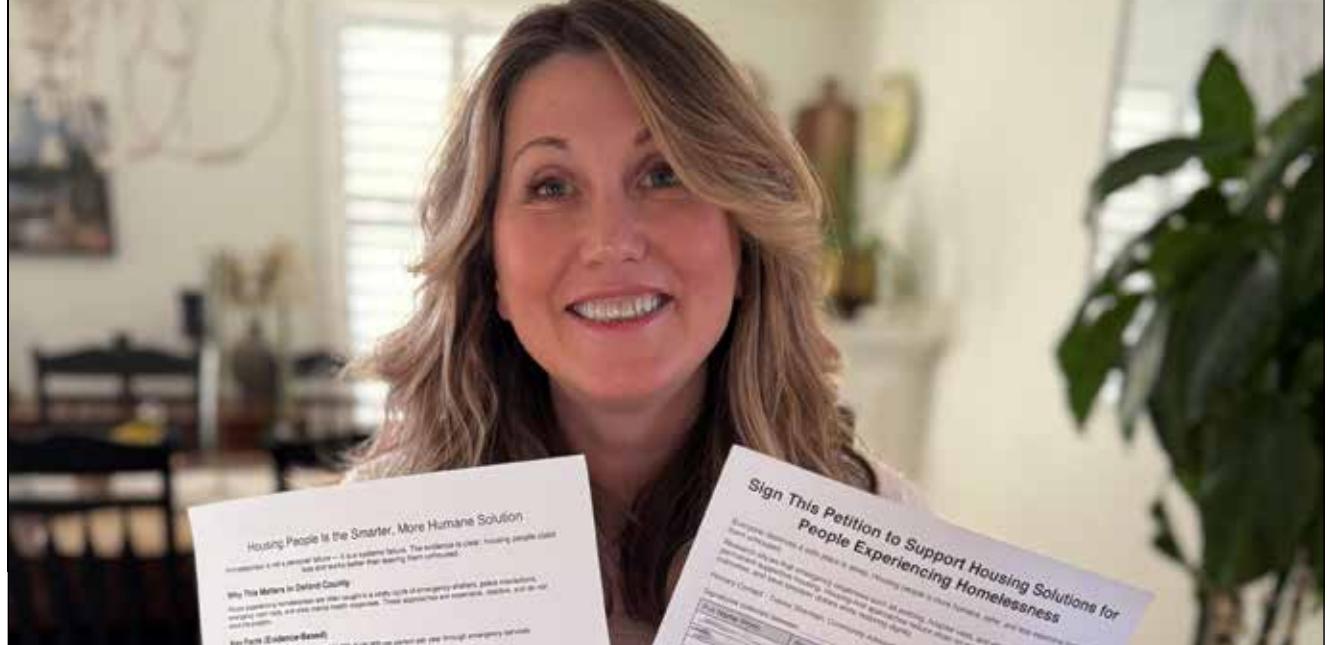
Sherman explained her motivation comes from the 20 years she has spent navigating the mental health system in dealing with her son's struggles, as he is often unhoused. She also recently teamed up with a friend to help a well-known man, Wes, who spends much of his time at the cow at the corner of Dundas and Springbank Streets.

"Wes is evidence that people with brain disabilities are falling through the cracks and he's out in the cold day after day alone."

Through community donations, Wes has been temporarily housed in a hotel while longer-term housing options are being explored.

"My friend Melanie Burns helped me get him into a hotel. We started a fundraiser and so far, we have raised \$4,200. People have also donated gift cards as well, and some hand warmers, which are much needed right now. I am very thankful for the residents of Woodstock stepping up to fill in the cracks from the failures of our system."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



RESIDENT CREATES PETITION TO HELP HOMELESSNESS

Woodstock resident Tracey Reynolds Sherman has started a petition to raise not only awareness about the plight of the homeless, but also to take action to come up with solutions to find housing options to get them off the streets.

(TRACEY REYNOLDS SHERMAN PHOTO)

City of Woodstock to take a deep dive into the garbage problem

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Woodstock staff have been directed to prepare a report for council that will look into the increasingly problematic issue of illegal dumping, particularly in the downtown core.

"We know that we have a problem. I've been hearing about this problem since I was first elected," explained Coun. Bernia Martin, who brought the motion forward.

"The problem isn't going away, and we are very much reacting as staff. We're spending a lot of time, energy and resources reacting to the problem. The motion is quite simply asking for a report on some options, what is our jurisdiction as a city, because it is a bit complex in a two-tier system," she added.

Oxford County is responsible for the garbage collection but no longer handles recycling as the province farmed it out to Circular Materials, a national non-profit organization.

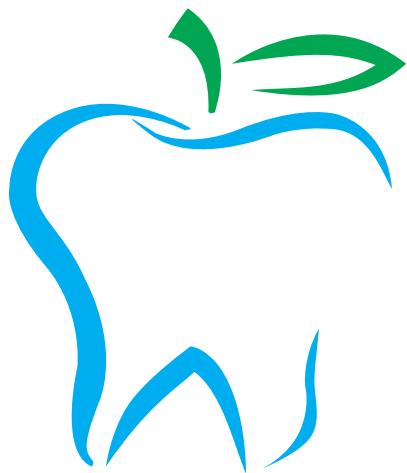
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Sherman looking at tiny homes as one solution

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Sherman explained everybody points a finger at one part of the system, saying it doesn't work, but that isn't helping.

"It's a system. Not one thing alone will solve this. The people in charge need to get together to implement the systems that are proven to work."

She pointed to several tiny home projects where the homeless have been successfully placed, including a temporary micro-modular shelter site in London designed to house people experiencing homelessness. The site has 60 private units with space to accommodate up to 70 individuals. Each unit includes basic comforts such as electricity, heating and cooling, lighting, and a lockable door. Sherman also alluded to a Toronto development that saves the taxpayer money.

"It's been proven to be cheaper. It's reducing the pressure on emergency rooms, it's reducing pressure on the front line, including paramedics and police, and it's taking stress off the people living on our streets."

Sherman said the response to her petition has been very positive and is also available at the Woodstock Farmer's Market and other locations across the city.

Many homeless people face stigmas, something she is well aware of, but ex-

plained those working with them have a very different attitude.

"What would I say to someone who says that some of the people on our streets are just lazy and drug users? That doesn't align with what front line workers say. Most of the people on the streets have serious mental health illnesses or trauma."

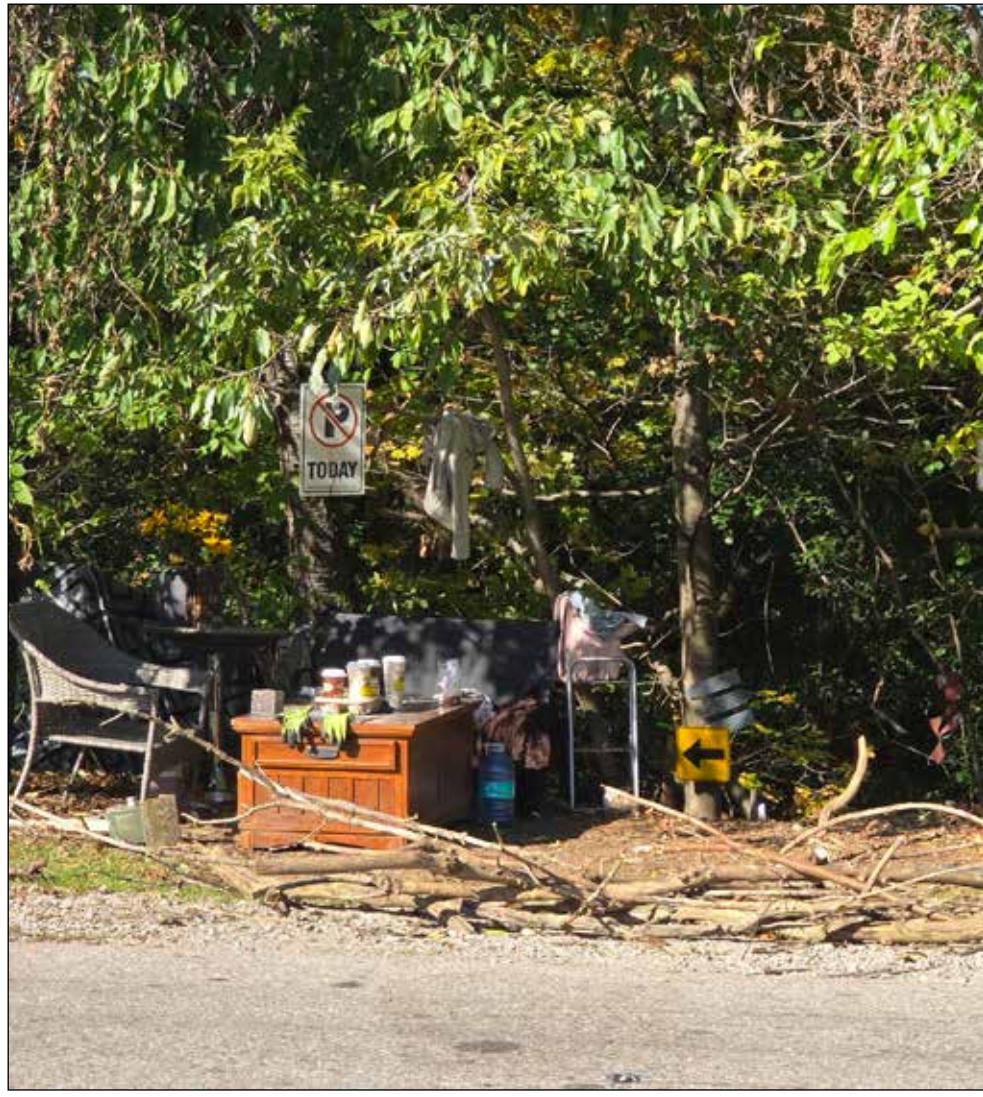
She added people need to focus on that population and find out what makes living on the street a better option.

"Would you want to live on the street? I know I wouldn't. What makes it a better option? Maybe they don't have mental health disabilities, but you have to ask yourself, what was happening in their life if that's the better option."

There are over 200 people unhoused in the area, and Sherman said it's only getting worse.

"Does it really matter why they are there? They need help. No one is choosing this lifestyle. They are in duress, sick and traumatized. Housing them is how we get them to safety. It benefits our businesses, our residents, our front line workers and the taxpayers because it's cheaper if we house them. It helps everybody."

Anyone interested in signing the petition can visit 463 Dundas St. East, message Tracey on Facebook or email her at tracey@theshermanteam.ca.



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTO)

Homeless encampments in Woodstock have become an all too familiar site as Oxford County struggles to get people off the street.

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Motion coming to county council to reduce bag tag price

CONTINUED FROM FRONT



(LEE GRIFFI PHOTOS)

These photos of piled-up and illegally dumped garbage have become almost a daily problem in downtown Woodstock. Woodstock Mayor Jerry Acchione and Coun. Deb Tait have brought forward a joint motion to Oxford County Council to lower the cost of a bag tag to \$1.

"I look forward to seeing what some recommendations might be so we can be a little more proactive in dealing with this problem rather than reactive," said Martin.

Coun. Deb Tait made it clear she would not be supporting the motion, saying any increase in illegal dumping is a direct result of the increase in the cost of garbage tags this year from \$2 up to \$3.

"I think it's pretty clear that it started as soon as we had the bag tags, we had illegal dumping. At county last year when (the cost) was raised, we all."

Coun. Martin interjected at that moment with a point of order, saying Tait's comments were contrary to the motion.

"This motion isn't about how the problem came about. The motion is about asking for a report."

Mayor Jerry Acchione allowed Tait to continue.

"The reason I'm not supporting is that I believe the report

won't show anything other than the bag tags. Until those tags are removed or lowered, it will be a never-ending issue."

Martin's motion was passed by a 5-1 vote, with Tait the lone objector.

Tait has escalated her opposition by introducing a notice of motion with Acchione at the county level to lower the cost of a bag tag to \$1. He told the Echo the reasoning behind the move is straightforward.

"It is clear that bag tags are a huge reason why municipalities in Oxford County, especially our urban towns and the City of Woodstock, are needing to deal with all this illegal garbage dumping. Our residents are stretched to their limits, and some are refusing to pay the \$3 for every bag of garbage. It is their way of saying enough is enough."

Acchione explained the county collects the proceeds from bag tag sales and when residents refuse to buy them and dump their garbage, it comes at a cost.

"City of Woodstock residents are paying twice as their levy is paying to discard that waste in dumping fees charged after we need to send clean up crews to clean it all up. I am personally tired of putting the cost of this on our residents when it is clear what the problem is and how we can prevent it from even happening."

He also wanted to know where the savings are from the province taking over responsibility for recycling.

"Why can't we give this back to our tax-burdened citizens of Oxford County? I already made a motion that failed to remove

garbage bag tags, so having them at \$1.00 is a small way I am hoping my fellow councillors can help us save costs at every household."

Tait explained nothing can be done to prevent illegal dumping and the only alternative is to lower the cost of tags.

"Honestly, with the amount of money people are paying in taxes to the county and the city, here's another user fee on top of it."

Tait is confident the county can find the money to offset the loss in revenue, particularly since half the cost of delivering the former recycling program was administrative. She added Tillsonburg and rural areas are having similar problems.

"I talked to Mayor Deb Gilvesy and they are having the same problem downtown. People are taking their garbage and dumping it. And from what I understand, bags of garbage are being dumped in rural areas."

The motion was tabled at Wednesday's county council meeting but won't be discussed until the Feb. 25 regular meeting. Should it be approved, the \$1 fee would kick in on Jan. 1, 2027.

Story Update

Acchione read his notice of motion at Wednesday's council meeting, but Warden Marcus Ryan immediately ruled it out of order. The Woodstock mayor challenged the ruling, but after some confusing debate the motion was not allowed. This is an ongoing story and will be updated in the next edition of the Echo.

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo

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Province to investigate police corruption in Ontario

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Ontario's most powerful police bureaucrat confirmed Monday he is conducting an independent inspection of police corruption in the province. The move comes after eight current and former Toronto police officers were charged in Project South, a massive corruption investigation.

The inspection will evaluate the effectiveness of police services, police service boards, and the Ontario Provincial Police in preventing, detecting, responding to, and fortifying their organizations from corruption.

"Anytime anything like this happens, it affects everybody. It's a strike at the heart of the public trust we have in the community," said Woodstock Police Chief Nick Novacich. "I think we are welcome to any type of review to ensure we maintain the public's trust. This is a transparent, open way for us to look locally at our policies and procedures to make sure nothing gets missed."

Despite the deflating news of the arrests, the chief said the men and women of the WPS continue to work hard for the residents of the city.

"They are out there 24 hours a day, still coming to work and doing the best they

can for the public. We do not get a lot of police complaints for the interactions our officers have. We had over 25,000 calls for service last year, and we may have had a dozen complaints."

Novacich pointed out there has been no corrective action taken as a result of any complaint against his officers.

"I have to support them. When something like that happens in the city, some people will paint us with the same brush. We need to earn people's trust every day and it is always a step back when something like this happens."

Ryan Teschner, inspector general of policing in Ontario, said corruption often spreads to other police forces.

"Effective policing depends on public confidence. Ontarians must have assurance that our policing system is able to maintain the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. Strong systems of vetting, oversight, accountability, and standards are essential—they enable police officers to earn and preserve public trust and are foundational to safe communities and effective policing in Ontario," said Teschner. "Protecting the public is at the core of policing. The results of this inspection will help the sector deliver safe, effective and trustworthy policing for the people of Ontario."

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Public Information Centre

Oxford Road 2 (Dundas Street) reconstruction, Woodstock – Spring 2026

Oxford County is beginning road reconstruction work on Oxford Road 2 (Dundas Street) between Oxford Road 30 (11th Line) and Oxford Road 12 (Mill Street) in Woodstock. Construction work is tentatively scheduled to begin in March 2026 and is expected to be completed by November 2026. Construction will take place in three phases:

Phase 1: Oxford Road 2 (Dundas Street) from Oxford Road 30 (11th Line) and Oxford Road 9 (Ingersoll Road). Phase 1 is expected to be completed in summer 2026.

Phase 2A: Oxford Road 2 from Oxford Road 9 to west of Oxford Road 12.

Phase 2B: Intersection of Oxford Road 2 and Oxford Road 12. The intersection will be subject to a temporary four-week closure. Both Phase 2A and 2B are expected to be completed by November 2026.

Public Information Centre

A Public Information Centre (PIC) will be held to allow the public to view plans and discuss the project with Public Works Engineering staff.

■ Thursday, February 26, 2026 | Drop in: 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.

■ Oxford County Administration Building, Main Lobby
21 Reeve Street, Woodstock

For information and updates follow Oxford County on social media or visit www.oxfordcounty.ca

Echo newspapers used in play with Woodstock connections



(MATHEW ALIVA PHOTO)

JOHN PAYNE

Echo Contributor

I'd like to thank Lee Griffi and Stewart Grant at the Woodstock Ingersoll Echo for providing a stack of expired Echo papers for the MIMPA (Magic In Moments Performing Arts) production of Newsies, a play based on the 1899 Newsboys Strike in New York City. The play was presented at New Roads Performing Arts Centre in Markham and featured my talented grandnieces, Bridget Erwin.

The newspapers, or "papes" as they were referred to in the show, were an integral part of the story and were used effectively

in many song-and-dance numbers and for dramatic effect as the newsboys fought back against publishers such as Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer.

The show ran for six performances in late January and was, by all accounts, a smash hit and terrific tribute to the talents of the performing artists of MIMPA on stage and behind the scenes, like my niece, Woodstock-born Jennifer McKinney. I really enjoyed the sold-out show that I attended, and as you can see in the photograph by Mathew Avila, some theatre goers went home with a souvenir Woodstock Ingersoll Echo! Many thanks, Lee and Stewart, for helping make the show a success.

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Oxford County Tourism Innovation grants available to local businesses and non-profits

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

New ideas to boost tourism in Oxford County could receive funding from the Oxford County Tourism Innovation grant.

Community Futures Oxford, in partnership with Tourism Oxford and Rural Oxford Economic Development, launched the Oxford County Tourism Innovation Grant in late January 2026. There are five grants available worth \$3,000 each. They will be awarded to three businesses and two non-profit organizations.

The grants will support initiatives that develop and/or expand tourism opportunities in Oxford County. The activity must be implemented within the 2026 calendar year, and the applicant must have been in business for two years in the county. Those who previously received a tourism innovation grant are ineligible to apply.

It will be awarded to those who can bring new perspectives to local tourism and meet the current customer demands. The application review team will prioritize grant applications having ideas related to cycling, sustainability and outdoors, culinary, experiences, and handcrafted/culture activities.

"If business and non-profits could use funds to execute a project, they've been planning that will bring more visitors to their business, they should consider applying for this grant," said Janet Wakutz, CED coordinator of Community Futures Oxford.

"We encourage all who are interested to ensure they meet eligibility requirements."

Wakutz added that although the region is known for Agri-tourism experiences, there's a variety of tourism opportunities in the county.

"While Oxford County is comprised of rural commu-

nities, it's also vibrant with many types of businesses. There is quite an emphasis on experiential tourism in Oxford County and we've seen some real creativity executed in previous years."

She added there is also an emphasis this year on the category of handcrafted/culture."

Applications will be scored by the three partner organizations after the March 31 deadline. Finalists will meet a panel of impartial judges via Zoom in early April, and the distribution of grants will be done shortly after.

"Collaborating with partners on this initiative is representative of the sense of community within Oxford County that we're proud to contribute to and thrive within," Wakutz said.

More information is available at <https://cfoxford.ca/tourismgrant>.

Oxford, Elgin and St. Thomas recognized as age-friendly communities

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

The Ontario government has recognized Elgin-St. Thomas and Oxford County as age-friendly communities for their contributions to more inclusive physical and social environments for aging adults.

The recognition was announced at the recent Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) conference in Toronto on Jan. 18, where the Honourable Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, acknowledged nearly 70 age-friendly communities across Ontario.

"We are honoured to recognize and celebrate Elgin-St. Thomas and Oxford County as age-friendly communities," said Cho. "Through community-led initiatives that promote social engagement and physical activity, you are helping to protect the health and well-being of seniors and demonstrating your commitment to continuing to build a province that is inclusive for Ontarians of all ages and abilities."

Local initiatives to support an aging population are led by the Oxford Age-Friendly and Elgin-St. Thomas Age-Friendly steering committees, comprised of local older adults, community organizations, and representatives from municipalities, counties, and public health.

"It's an incredible honour to be recognized by the province in this way," says Meagan Lichti, Chair of both committees. "This work reflects our belief that every resident deserves the opportunity to age safely and with dignity while engaged in community life. We are grateful for the commitment of our partners, who continue to champion this initiative locally to ensure aging-related priorities are woven into the fabric of our community."

According to data from Southwestern Public Health, adults aged 65 and older increased from 16.1 per cent to 20.2 per cent in the region between 2011 and 2021. The proportion of seniors living in low income is on the rise, and one in five seniors lives alone. The region also reports a significantly higher rate of emergency department visits for injuries related to falls compared to the provincial average.

Oxford County established its partnership for aging populations in 2024 and completed a local needs assessment in 2025. Revised age-friendly strategies from both committees are anticipated this spring.

"We used a survey, focus groups and interviews. We looked at the eight domains in the age-friendly framework and focused on the five we thought were most relevant. Those were health care, housing, social inclusion, outdoor spaces and buildings, and transportation."

Lichti said the biggest need to come through was transportation, something that was described as a key barrier across all the domains, as well as knowing what programs are available.

"Awareness of existing programs and services, how to access them, who to call and where to go. It's not like we don't have programs and offerings for our local older adults, but I would say there is a bit of a gap with some interests. There are programs not geared to everyone's interests."

She added a need for more intergenerational programs was also identified.

"Not everything that's geared for seniors at seniors, but more on how we can combine senior and youth programming."

Lichti, who is also a community member on the East Zorra-Tavistock Recreation Advisory Committee, felt there are enough programs in rural areas for older adults, but communication needs to improve.

"I don't know if they need more. I think we need better communication about what we have. There are programs out there but a lot of people don't know about them. A better communication strategy around what's available and better communication around the availability of space are needed."

She added there was a good response to the survey from East Zorra-Tavistock residents, whereas Zorra saw a very low rate. Zorra Township has a formal recreation program, and EZT does not, but that could change once the 2026 budget is released.

"Community vitality is a strategic focus for Oxford's municipalities, and the principles of age-friendly communities align with our vision for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future," said Oxford Warden Mar-

cus Ryan. "This designation is possible through the strength of our community partnerships, a commitment to inclusivity and accessibility at the highest levels, and the ongoing work and support of Southwestern Public Health," he added.

The Age-Friendly Committees are planning an Aging Well Road Show for 2026 with stops planned in each municipality.

"Likely some in the spring and some in the fall to try and increase our presence and share information about all the different programs and services that are out there."

More information about Age-Friendly communities at www.csah.ca/age-friendly-communities-ontario.

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Area municipalities dealing with road salt shortage

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

Oxford County municipalities continue to face high demand for the critical product, which remains in short supply.

Ontario is experiencing a province-wide road salt shortage during the 2025-26 winter season, which is affecting how municipalities, contractors, and residents manage winter road maintenance.

The province saw an unusually early start to winter with frequent snow events and prolonged cold periods, which have pushed supplies much faster than expected. Municipalities say they've already used far more salt than in a typical season by January. Road salt inventories were already low after heavy use in the 2024-25 season, leaving less on hand going into this winter.

Oxford County's Transportation, Frank Gross, said he first became aware of the issue when salt deliveries weren't being made on schedule and media reports surfaced.

"We did follow up with the supplier to get an official response, and they said the issue wasn't with the supply at the actual source (in Goderich), but more about a trucking issue of getting the material out to customers," he explained.

"They can only load so many trucks a day, so that was the bottleneck, the shipping of the salt."

Compass transports the salt as per the contract with Oxford, but Gross said the county offered to send its own trucks to expedite the process.

"We were told no, we would be in line with everybody else, so it was a matter of how many trucks they could load in a day."

Some media reports from the area show about 100 trucks lined up to receive salt for delivery to destinations across the province. Gross said he also asked Windsor Salt and Cargill, which brings in salt from the United States, if either could fill the void, but the answer was no.

Gross said county staff have been doing a solid job keeping up with the snow and have been working long hours as a result. He added there is a difference in utilizing sand versus salt on area roadways.

"Salt has melting properties, so it tends to create a layer of water between the road



(OXFORD COUNTY PHOTO)

Area municipalities have been kept busy this winter clearing roads after higher-than-normal snowfalls, and they've had to do it with a shortage of road salt as a Goderich mine struggles to keep up with demand.

and the snow, making it easier for the road to clear off when it's plowed, and it can be brought down to bare pavement. Sand is an abrasive and provides traction. It does prevent the snow from becoming hard-packed and still allows the plow to clear it off, but it doesn't clear off as well."

The Town of Ingersoll took to social media recently to inform residents of its challenges.

"We know this winter has been challenging, and we recognize there is still plenty of season ahead of us. We understand the frustration many of you are feeling, and your concerns are valid, especially given the relentless conditions," it stated, adding there is currently a province-wide salt shortage.

"While the town stocked up early, supply remains limited. Additionally, extreme cold significantly reduces the effectiveness of road salt."

The town said it is reducing salt use where possible, relying more on sand and sand-salt mixtures to provide essential traction.

The Goderich mine is owned by American-owned Compass Minerals who would not agree to an interview but did provide a statement.

"With the significant impact of winter weather compared to recent seasons, the entire road salt supply chain continues to experience high demand for de-icing salt. At Compass Minerals, we are actively working to fulfill all current orders, prioritizing shipments for our municipal clients."

They added production is increasing and they are working hard to meet the increased demand.

"We are focused on moving product as efficiently as possible, while also maximizing daily output from our Goderich mine to ensure optimal, full-season inventory availability across our network. We remain committed to serving all our valued customers in Ontario and all markets that we serve."

The City of Woodstock has not been affected by the shortage this winter as its ordering and stocking practices have main-

tained a consistent supply of salt.

Jeff Molenhuis, our Director of Public Works, said they may have been better prepared for the situation.

"Woodstock orders salt at the beginning of October that will carry us through most of the winter, and we restock as needed throughout the season. We also have a stockpile that remains from the winter that we keep on hand throughout the summer for any early fall events."

He added while the city hasn't been affected by the shortage, salt is less effective at colder temperatures.

"We will switch to a pre-treated salt that works at colder temperatures. We also use sand mixed with salt to treat the roads and prevent them from becoming slippery."

Woodstock uses salt as much as it can to clear roads from snow and ice buildup.

"If and when we get a heavier winter such as this one, streets that don't get heavy traffic will end up snow-packed, and we use sand to provide traction for cars," added Molenhuis.

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Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

- What is the highest mountain in Greece?
- What is a wallaby?
- The Tower of London is famously "guarded by" which kind of bird?
- What human organ can regenerate itself?
- Who won Album of the Year at the 2026 Grammy's?
- Who did Anne Hathaway
- marry in 1582?
- What three headed dog is guardian of the underworld?
- Which illegal CIA program from the 1950s-1970s secretly experimented with mind control and psychological manipulation?
- What does NATO stand for?
- What does the Latin phrase *caveat emptor* translate to?

This week's answers are found on pg. 31

Police identify human remains found in SWOX

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

At least part of a mystery has been solved after human remains were found in South-West Oxford Township, but one question remains – how did Cory Gigault's body wind up in the yard of a residence on Beachville Road?

The Oxford Detachment of the OPP has confirmed the identity of the human remains are those of 45-year-old Cory Gigault. The Woodstock had been missing since

Police responded to a re-

port of suspected human remains found on a property on Beachville Road on the afternoon of Monday, Sept. 1, 2025.

A postmortem examination at the Ontario Forensic Pathology Service (OFPS) identified the deceased as 45-year-old Cory Gigault of Woodstock. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

Woodstock Police issued a press release on Feb. 7 of 2023, asking for the public's assistance in finding the then 43-year-old. He was last seen in July of 2023.

"The ongoing investigation is being conducted by the Oxford OPP Crime Unit, under the direction of the OPP Criminal Investigation Branch, in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Coroner and the OFPS. Assistance is also being provided by OPP Forensic Identification Services," said an OPP media release.

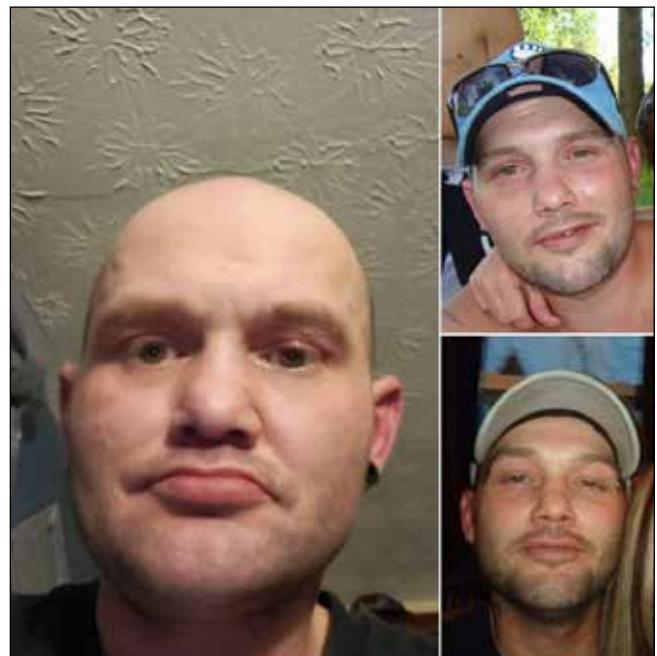
As the investigation continues, more information will be provided as it becomes available.

Police were called to the scene around 2:45 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 1 in 2025.

Constable Randi Crawford said there was no indication of a broader threat to public safety.

"Police continue to investigate and are monitoring the situation. Residents in the area can expect to see an increased police presence," Crawford said.

Investigators are appealing to the public for help. Anyone with information is asked to contact the Oxford OPP at 1-888-310-1122. Should you wish to remain anonymous, contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) or ontariocrimestoppers.ca.



(WOODSTOCK POLICE PHOTO)

Provincial Police have identified human remains found on Beachville Road in South-West Oxford Township. Cory Gigault, who would have been 45 years old, was reported missing by Woodstock Police two years ago but was last seen in 2023. Police are asking for help in their investigation.

Woodstock chief welcomes increased scrutiny

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

The Ontario Provincial Police would not grant the Echo an interview but did provide a statement.

"Police officers are not only subject to the same laws as the public, but they are also held to higher standards due to the authorities and responsibilities entrusted to them," said spokesperson Gosia Puzzio. "It is essential that all officers carry out their duties with integrity and professionalism. We support the inspector general's review and, if we receive any requests from his office, we will cooperate fully."

The inspection will look at five key areas:

- Supervision and span of control, including how officers are supervised and how effective that supervision is
- Screening and vetting of officers, both at recruitment and on an ongoing basis as they move through their careers
- Access to police databases and information systems
- Evidence and property management
- Substance abuse and fitness for duty

Teschner did not provide a timeline for

the report but promised that it would be transparent and released publicly when complete.

Novacich admitted he was surprised to see the substance abuse and fitness for duty part of the investigation.

"Were there people with addiction issues who were a part of this? Were they impaired on duty, or is there a mental health component? I'd like to know more context as to what they are looking for."

While the chief does not know any more than the general public, he remains committed to being proactive and examining processes through a quality improvement lens.

"We're going to look at our internal policies and procedures on all five of those areas and the vetting process for recruitment. We have policies in place as to what the steps are for what people have to go through to get hired."

He added there is always room for improvement when it comes to who has access to what databases and different authority levels to get into different areas.

"Our evidence and property manage-

ment is always under review by doing audits to make sure we are following best practices and guidelines.

The inspection will cover all 45 police forces in the province and will be conducted by an independent inspector appointed under the authority of Ontario's Community Safety and Policing Act. The person who will lead the investiga-

tion has not yet been appointed.

"I think that there are some very qualified people right here in Ontario, and so I'm giving some immediate thought to who that may be," Teschner said.

He was appointed in 2023 as Ontario's first Inspector General of Policing with duties and authorities under the Community Safety and Policing Act.



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Sold-out Jesus Christ Superstar brings unique features to Theatre Woodstock stage

EMILY STEWART

Echo Correspondent

Theatre Woodstock's take on beloved musical Jesus Christ Superstar is already a smash hit – and it's still in rehearsals.

The performance, which will run at the Market Centre Theatre between Feb. 19 and March 1, is virtually sold out of both its initial and extended runs. Only wheelchair and specifically designated seats are available, and inquiries can be made to the Theatre Woodstock box office by calling 519-537-2582.

The rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, loosely based on the Gospels of Matthew, examines the struggles in the relationships between Jesus, his followers and disciples, Judas, Mary Magdalene, and the Roman Empire. Jesus Christ Superstar has been watched and cel-

brated by many for more than 50 years.

"It's a big-name production and it's a big cast, so there's been a lot of word of mouth, which has filled the seats, and I'm excited that that many people will see it because I think it's going to be different," said Director Tanya Thompson.

The cast of 50 performers is split into two groups of singers and dancers. The 25-person chorus will sing in the bleachers on stage as the dancers perform.

When Thompson was part of her high school's production of Jesus Christ Superstar at 15-years-old, there were also separate groups of singers and dancers. She liked the approach and wanted to bring it to Theatre Woodstock.

"In order to give the vocals justice, not requiring that singer to also be in movement allows them

to give a really stellar vocal performance, and the fact that the dancer isn't required to sing means that they get to give a really stellar dance performance," she explained.

"So, I kind of see it as the best of both, but some people might consider this to be more of a rock ballet rather than a rock opera in the sense that the dancers are front and center."

The curtains have also been removed from the stage so the dancers could maximize the space. The upcoming production of Jesus Christ Superstar will take place in modern times, with characters struggling with issues such as addiction and houselessness, and a graffiti artist is creating set pieces for a back alley.

"We're making a few political statements as we go," said Thompson.

Jesus Christ Superstar has been a collaborative



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

The large cast of Theatre Woodstock's Jesus Christ Superstar is divided between a chorus of singers and an ensemble of dancers.

effort between on-stage and off-stage players, with Thompson crediting choreographer Lara Larmour for shaping the production.

"She really had her work cut out for her, and then we've had cast members have ideas. Even the graffiti artist had a great

idea yesterday for something that hadn't occurred to me, so we're going to work that into the show," she said.

"So, I do like a collaborative approach and I think we've really accomplished that here. I want to think that all of the performers here feel that

they have an investment and that they can make suggestions and that they can try them out, and everybody feels a little more invested that way."

More information about additional events at Theatre Woodstock can be found at <https://theatre-woodstock.com>.

The Salvation Army's Messy Church brought families together in Woodstock

ALEX HUNT

Echo Contributor

Local families gathered at The Salvation Army Community Church and Ministries for a monthly event that mixes crafts, music and worship in a relaxed, family-friendly setting.

The Woodstock Salvation Army's pastor, Major Kristen Adams, said Messy Church provides families with an opportunity to worship God in a

non-traditional setting and enjoy a meal.

"It happens on the first Friday of every month, except for January," she said. "There's no commitment to come every month, just join when you can. This is a place where people can feel comfortable without judgment."

The Feb. 6 Friday evening started with drop-in registration, followed by a taco-in-a-bag dinner, worship and Storytime, and finished with activity sta-

tions in the church's gymnasium.

"Not everyone is comfortable sitting quietly through a Sunday morning service. This gives people another opportunity to worship," said Adams. "It's a more approachable way for those who haven't really been to church. We want to serve people and bring them together in fellowship."

Messy Church attendee, Lindsay Lee, said that her favourite part of the program is the family connections that are established through activities and worship.

"For a while now, my kids have been able to interact with other children and learn about God. The friendships they've made and the love that's shared here mean so much to us. The crafts and activities keep them engaged and excited to come back each time. It's really helped



Major Kristen Adams, Pastor of The Woodstock Salvation Army Community Church and Ministries, holds a baby during the Feb. 6 Messy Church, which welcomes participants of all ages.

them grow in their faith and confidence."

Messy Church has no age restrictions, welcoming everyone from infants to grandparents to take

part in the experience. The next event will be held on March 6.

"I think this works for us, and it can work in any church or setting," ex-

plained Adams. "There are so many opportunities for other churches to do something like this. It's another night for families to come together."

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Local groundhog makes its 2026 winter prediction

South Gate Centre was buzzing with excitement on Monday, Feb. 2, as Chilly Charlie, Woodstock's beloved groundhog, delivered his annual weather prediction. The event kicked off at 8:15 a.m., drawing families, local leaders, and early morning enthusiasts eager to witness the tradition. Mayor Jerry Accione joined the crowd as Charlie emerged to reveal whether the community should brace for

six more weeks of winter or look forward to an early spring. Laughter, cheers, and plenty of cameras filled the chilly morning air. After the prediction of six more weeks of winter, attendees made their way inside for a warm and welcoming buffet breakfast, served from 8:30 a.m. to noon. The event once again showcased Woodstock's strong sense of community, blending local tradition with family-friendly fun.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Dan, Amelia, and Rob fueled up before heading into the cold to see Chilly Charlie.



Cheers and applause filled the air as Chilly Charlie arrived.

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Woodstock**

We are writing this letter to express our sincerest gratitude for everyone's incredible support in our 2025 Poppy Campaign at the Woodstock Royal Canadian Legion Branch 55.

Thanks to all of our Volunteers our Army Cadets, Navy Cadets, The Woodstock Fire Department your willingness to donate your time and energy has made a significant impact on our community, as well as the Navy Club along side with the Legion each and every year helping with the Poppy Campaign thank you.

We also would like to thank Upper Thames, Sobeys, Foodland, Dee Lights, Pizza Depot, and the Community for your donations this past year your generosity and dedication do not go unnoticed.

We were able to raise \$35,117.93 for our Veteran's and their families.

We are truly proud to work alongside with wonderful people in this community and hope to keep this support going for years to come.

We cannot thank you enough for your commitment to making a difference.

Sincerely,
Woodstock Royal Canadian
Legion Branch 55

Ladies Night in Woodstock

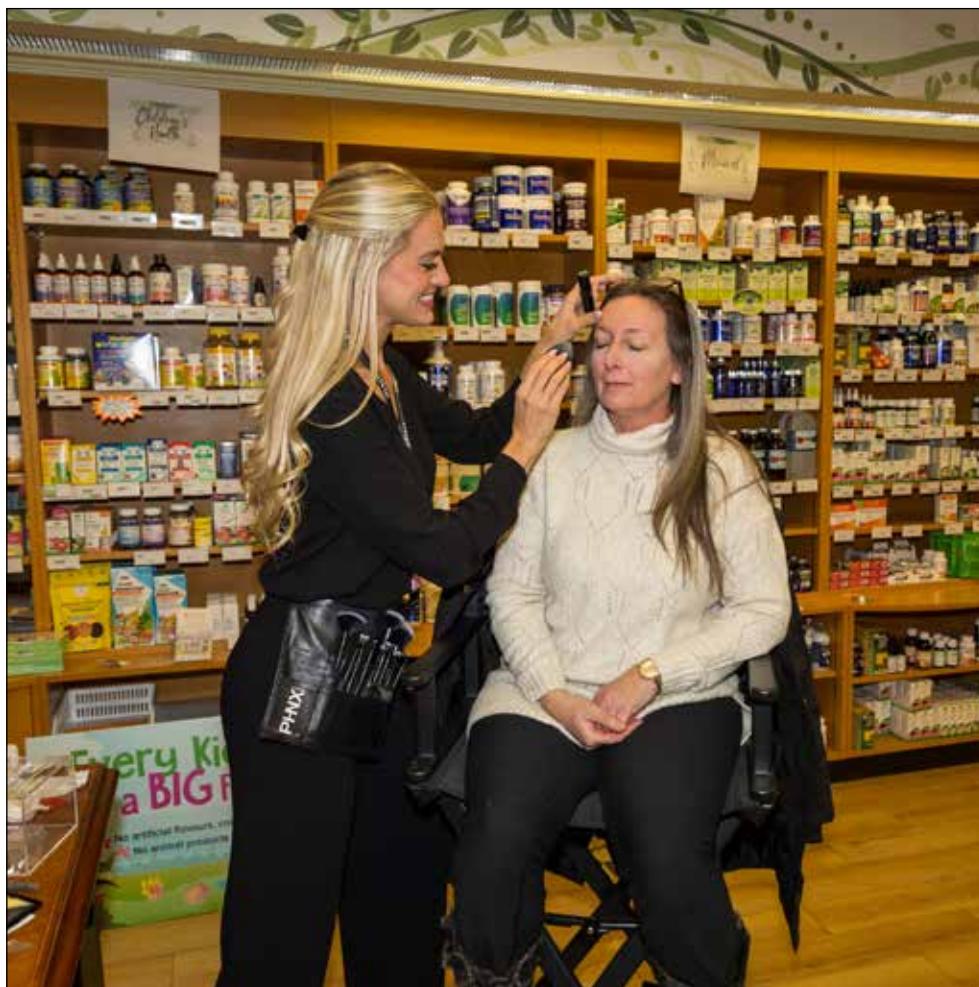
Maya Health Food Centre welcomed a full house on Friday, Jan. 30, as women from across the area gathered for an unforgettable Ladies Night filled with creativity, self-care, and connection. The one-hour event, hosted at the long-standing community hub at 55 Ingersoll Road, featured a lively lineup of interactive stations and hands-on experiences. Guests created personalized charm bracelets with Do Good Oxford, enjoyed professional makeup tutorials and colour matching featuring the Centre's new PHNX cosmetics line, and received fresh hair styling courtesy of the newly launched Justice Hair-

care products. Attendees also indulged in handcrafted mocktails by Superbelly, a curated charcuterie spread and left with a complimentary goodie bag valued at \$40. "We were thrilled to bring women together for a night that celebrated beauty, wellness, and community spirit," said the team at Maya Health Food Centre. "Events like this reflect our commitment to offering meaningful experiences beyond the shelves." Established in 1961, Maya Health Food Centre continues to serve as a trusted destination for natural health products, education, and community engagement.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Under the guidance of stylist Lucie, Chelsee, Brittany, and Alison explored the latest offerings and learned about the newest additions.



As guests moved through the beauty stations, Tamara from PHNX applied a subtle touch of makeup to Lisa, showcasing the brand's new products.



As attendees stepped inside, they were greeted by Caprice and her mother, Tammy, the heart and owner of Maya Health Food Centre, who welcomed everyone into an evening celebrating beauty, wellness, and community connection.



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Handbags for Hospice turns disco

The Oxford Auditorium in Woodstock was transformed into a lively disco-themed celebration on Feb. 6, as Handbags for Hospice welcomed guests back for an unforgettable night in support of VON Sakura House Hospice.

Presented by Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada, the event marked another milestone in a fundraising initiative that had raised more than \$1.9 million over the past 11 years.

Handbags for Hospice had become one of the region's most anticipated signature events, uniting residents, businesses, and volunteers in support of compassionate hospice care. VON Sakura House, the only residential hospice in Oxford County, provided specialized end-of-life care to patients and their families from across the county and beyond, ensuring services were delivered at no cost.

In 2024, VON Sakura House supported

344 patients and their families, offering comfort, dignity, and emotional support during life's most challenging moments. The organization's ability to deliver this level of care had relied heavily on community fundraising, donor generosity, and corporate sponsorships.

The 2026 event drew more than 500 attendees and was made possible by the efforts of over 100 volunteers. Attendees contribut-

ed through purse donations, raffle prizes, and financial gifts. Donations of new handbags with tags and receipts, as well as raffle items valued at \$50 or more, helped ensure the event's continued success, with many donations qualifying for tax receipts. The evening highlighted not only the financial impact of Handbags for Hospice but also the strength of community support behind VON Sakura House.

(RON YUZARK PHOTOS)



Two Angelas and Heather explored the handbag collection available through the evening's auction.



Contributing to the positive energy of the night were Theresa, Megan, Janine, and Danielle from Sakura House, who helped ensure guests enjoyed every moment.



Layne, The Auctionista, took a moment to join Casandra, Sarah, and Sue for a photo opportunity.

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Historic Tug-of-War Team Inspires New Stage Production “The Mighty Men of Zorra”

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

Rehearsals are officially underway for The Mighty Men of Zorra, the third installment in a series of plays highlighting notable local historical events. Previous productions explored stories ranging from a missionary from Embro, to Bob Hayward, famed for running the world's fastest boat.

“The play is about the Mighty Men of Zorra,” said producer Donald Hilborn. “They were a tug-of-war team, a group of five farmers, all over 50 years old, who won a series of local competitions.”

Written by William Butt, the play follows the team's journey as they rose to prominence, ultimately winning a tournament in Chicago in 1893. Butt, now retired from Western University, worked closely with historians to preserve the integrity of the historical events depicted in the production.

Fittingly, the performance will take place at Little Thistle Theatre, a venue built in the 1890s. Hilborn believes the historic setting helps immerse audiences in the era. The cast features 15 local performers, and the production will incorporate projected photographs of the real events to complement the storytelling.

“We'll have projectors overhead, and we'll show pictures of what the cast is talking about,” Hilborn explained.

He noted the theatre's previous productions drew strong community support.

“I think we had 1,200 people come to our last show,” he said. “People are curious. They wonder what we could possibly do to spend two hours on a play about tug-of-war or boat races.”

According to Hilborn, the production blends music,



(DONALD HILBORN PHOTO)

Mighty Men of Zorra rehearsals are underway. (From left to right) Barb Kirwin, Paul Brekelmans, Brain Jackson, Peter Johnson and Joyce Jackson.

comedy, fourth wall breaking moments (when actors acknowledge the audience directly, instead of pretending they don't exist), and, of course, historical storytelling.

“It's more than just a play about tug-of-war,” he added. “It's about community. What made the community strong

and how it evolved.”

The Mighty Men of Zorra runs at Little Thistle Theatre from March 20 to 29. If you're interested in seeing this show, tickets are available at www.thistle-theatre.com or by calling 226-785-3353.

Home sales, prices, down slightly in 2025

JEFF HELSDON

Echo Contributor

Housing sales in the Woodstock Ingersoll and Tillsonburg Area Association of Realtors (WITAAR) area were down slightly in 2025, as were prices.

Derrek de Jonge, a realtor with Royal LePage R.E. Wood Realty in Tillsonburg, took over the group's presidency in December.

Home sales across the board in 2025 were 1,631 units, which was down only three units from 2024's total, according to CREA (The Canadian Real Estate Association) statistics.

“The sales activity was definitely steady,” he said. “With headwinds to the economy, it may have dampened sales.”

de Jonge said steady was a positive.

“It was steady and resilient compared to some of the worst-case scenarios,” he said.

Total sales volume in dollars was down 12 per cent in 2025, as compared to 2024, but residential was only down 3.6 per cent.

“The housing sector was more resilient than the commercial or farming sector,” he said.

Within the housing sector, de Jonge pointed to condos as a weakness. Single detached homes are still coming in with a higher price point.

Farms are still in demand with steady pricing.

“When farms come up, there's still multiple bids,” he said.

de Jonge said the story of 2025 was more houses coming on the market, which put downward pressure on price. Across the board, there were 533 units on the market at the end of December, which was a 12.7 per cent increase from a year earlier and the highest number for end of December in a decade. This number is an incredible 44.8 per cent above the five-year average.

“A lot more homes were available, and that gives buyers more choice,” he said.

The median number of days on the market increased from 27 in 2024 to 32 last year.

Although there are no official stats, de Jonge said buyers get good value for the dollar in Tillsonburg. Building has slowed in Tillsonburg with more inventory on the market, and single detached homes are remaining in demand.

“Tillsonburg has more approved homes, more active developments in progress,” he said.

Woodstock's prices are generally a little higher and Ingersoll hasn't seen a huge change since the wind down of CAMI.

“That's always a concern if we have a number of job losses in an area, it's not good for the local economy,” he said.

With the average price for WITAAR listings in December at \$627,496, which was down 3.6 per cent from a year earlier, de Jonge more first-time buyers, who may have been sitting on the sidelines for two or three years, are now getting in.

“We've definitely seen quite a bit of activity from first-time

home buyers as prices came down and interest rates held steady,” he said.

Asked about the negatives for the 2025 market, de Jonge answered, “Economic headwinds are definitely holding the market back. It just keeps people from investing when there is uncertainty. The uncertainty creates pause.”

Looking ahead to the coming year, De Jonge said stability in prices the past couple of years will hopefully get more buyers looking to move up.

“I don't think there will be major fluctuations either way, but it will depend on the economic situation and confidence,” he said. “If we get a trade deal with the U.S., it will help with confidence.”

Speaking of prices in 2026, de Jonge said some models are predicting moderate growth, but again, it depends on the economy.

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Woodstock Ingersoll Echo SPORTS

Heavy metal note highlights Fab Four series of close calls and IDCI girls hockey victory

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

A heavy metallic note highlighted a stretch run in which Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers goalie Charlotte Docherty got by with a fab four series of close calls, and a little help from her friends.

A musical metal fan by nature, Avenged Sevenfold in particular, Docherty was prepared to accept the Beatles reference following a tight 2-1 Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast girls hockey victory over the visiting St. Thomas St. Joe's Rams Tuesday, Feb. 3, inside the Ingersoll District Memorial Centre Arena.

"A pretty even game," summed up IDCI's Cameron Adkins. "Both teams had a lot of chances but our goalie held us in."

The Blue Bombers came out of the first period with a 2-0 lead. Ainsley McCartney opened the scoring in the first minute of play, finding the back of the net with a low shot from the face-off dot. Brooklyn Janzen scored what would stand as the game-winner midway through the frame, burying a shot from the slot from a Charlotte Baker pass.

The Rams' Allie Rickwood pulled the visitors back within one early in the second period, assisted by Emma Bovin. That score would stand up for the duration, although not without serious challenges in its waning minutes.

Bovin rang the puck off the post to Docherty's left with 6:33 remaining, a goalie's best friend, as the saying goes. Blue Bomber teammate Reese Ellery picked up a nomination for at least a close second-best pal with 2:53 left on the clock, alertly clearing a puck from her goaltender's crease after it trickled through her pads.

"When it slipped through your legs, I was like 'Oh no!'" Ellery recalled.

Having benefitted from the help of two



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Blue Bombers goalie Charlotte Docherty covers up the puck as teammates Ainsley McCartney (left) and Reese Ellery (right) strive to cover St. Joe's Rams forward Jane Hewitt.

friends, Docherty stood tall on her own down the stretch, denying the Rams' Taylor Willemse on a penalty shot attempt awarded with 1:12 remaining. Docherty came well out of her crease to her left to challenge, retreating and denying a high, hard shot directed toward the top, left corner. To be honest, Docherty wasn't

sure if she'd gotten a piece of Willemse's shot or just had her angle covered.

And finally, the Blue Bombers netminder made one last game-saving stop with 22.3 seconds left, pushing laterally across her crease to deny a one-time attempt at its lip.

"I knew if I was a player, I'd go back



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Ingersoll's Brooklyn Janzen drives to the St. Joe's goal during third-period action.

door," said Docherty, who read the play all the way, but still needed an athletic extension to make it happen.

"It was like we were a little worried at the end, but we secured it," said IDCI defender Liv Paterson, also standing tall as a tight, intense game became more physical in its closing minutes.

"A gritty win," added coach Chris Adkins hurriedly, before returning to coach the Blue Bomber boys' hockey squad later that day. "But we have to play smarter."

The victory was the third-place Blue Bombers' second in a row and fourth overall on a TVRA Southeast regular season featuring a single one-goal loss to second-place Aylmer East Elgin and a 1-1 tie with Lord Dorchester. IDCI was scheduled to finish off its regular campaign with a Monday, Feb. 9 date against winless Tillsonburg Glendale, going back-to-back early the following afternoon against the undefeated Woodstock CI Red Devils.

Post-season goals include a TVRA Southeast title before heading to the Western Ontario Secondary Schools Association championships.

"I'd like to win a medal," Docherty concluded.

"A gold medal this time," interjected trainer Jo-Ann Thibideau, who has two silvers and a bronze on her resume. "Higher expectations."

The Blue Bombers are heading into the playoffs as something of an underdog, Ellery conceded.

"But I think we have a lot of good girls on the team, excited to play a good team game."

TVRA SOUTHEAST GIRLS HOCKEY	
THURSDAY, FEB. 5	
WOODSTOCK CI	8
WOODSTOCK ST. MARY'S	1
TUESDAY, FEB. 3	
INGERSOLL DCI	7
ST. MARY'S	1
INGERSOLL DCI	2
ST. JOE'S	1
WOODSTOCK CI	3
TILLSONBURG	0

TVRA SOUTHEAST BOYS HOCKEY	
MONDAY, FEB. 9	
ST. MARY'S	5
HURON PARK	2
THURSDAY, FEB. 5	
INGERSOLL DCI	2
ST. MARY'S	1
EAST ELGIN	7
WOODSTOCK COLLEGE AVENUE	3
WEDNESDAY, FEB. 4	
ST. MARY'S	4
EAST ELGIN	2
TUESDAY, FEB. 3	
INGERSOLL DCI	2
ST. JOE'S	1

Knights celebrate victory, homecourt playoff opener with win over Aylmer East Elgin

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

Junior girls volleyball can be a high-energy, high-octane sport.

And that was just the coach.

“Social conditioning I think a little bit,” laughed Woodstock College Avenue Knights junior bench boss Mike Gyssels, who may have let out a bit of a whoop after Kat Pye’s left-side kill closed out a 25-22, 25-20, 25-23 Thames Valley Regional Athletics (TVRA) Southeast victory over the visiting Aylmer East Elgin Eagles Tuesday, February 3 at CASS. “Their energy is infectious, they’re a lot of fun.”

“I think he gets excited when we get excited,” said College Avenue’s Katie Hofstetter, earning the Knights’ ‘heart and hustle’ belt for the match. “Energy is a very big thing in women’s sports,” Hofstetter continued. “You need to uplift each other through everything, good points and bad points.”

To be fair to Gyssels, each set had been hard-fought and closely contested, a 3-0 match sweep decided by a point differential of just 10. The victory squared the Knights’ regular season



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)
Katie Hofstetter focuses on the perfect set during the Knights’ match against Aylmer East Elgin.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)
Woodstock College Avenue Knight Brianna Nevill twists to make a solid first pass.

record at 4-4, locking up an 11 versus 6 seed post-season date with the St. Thomas Central Elgin Titans on Tuesday, Feb. 10.

“That was a big point for us,” Gyssels explained. “Got us homecourt advantage.”

“It’s like a good way to end it,” added Pye. “You see everyone put in the good work and when you finish it off, it’s a team effort.”

The match was one of two scheduled TVRA Southeast-closing outings on the day, marking junior girls’ volleyball’s return to action following the exam break. In the other, the Woodstock CI Red Devils finished off their regular campaign with a perfect 8-0 record, earning a four-set 25-10, 25-19, 23-25, 25-18 road victory over the St. Thomas St. Joe’s Rams.

The Red Devils will open quarter-final playoffs Thursday, Feb. 12, at home to the winner of a 9 versus 8 preliminary match between Woodstock Huron Park and St. Joe’s. The Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers and Woodstock St. Mary’s Warriors finished with identical 6-2 records, but the Bombers were

awarded second place on the strength of a five-set win over the Warriors on Tuesday, Dec. 9. The Bombers will host the winner of the 10 versus 7 Lord Dorchester preliminary on Thursday, Feb. 12 at IDCI. The Warriors will welcome the victor between the Titans and Knights.

“I hope we can win our next game and keep on going,” said College Avenue’s Hannah Ryksen. “This game was probably one of our best.”

“If we keep playing like this, we can go far,” she added.

TVRA Southeast semi-finals and the final are slated for Wednesday, Feb. 18.

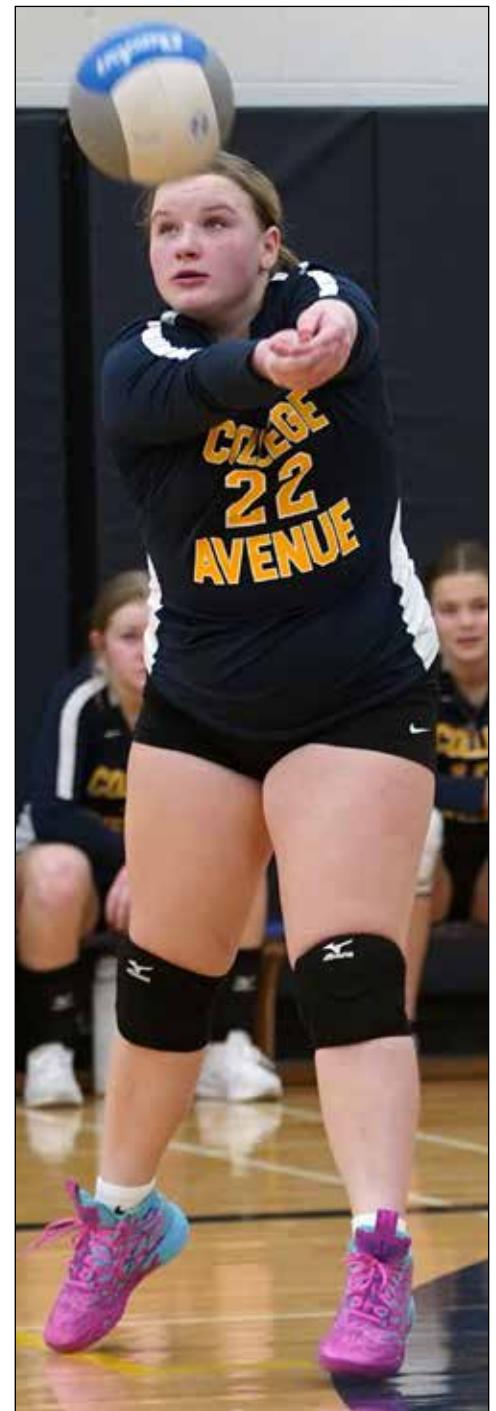
The CASS senior Knights also closed out their regular season Tuesday, Feb. 3, dropping a tough 25-22, 17-25, 25-19, 18-25, 14-16 match to the visiting East Elgin Eagles. They finished in seventh spot with a 4-4 record and were scheduled to open a 10 versus 7 playoff matchup at home to the Huron Park Huskies on Tuesday, Feb. 10.

“Lower end, so we have to work our way up,” said the Knights’ Julia Baer. “But we can do it. We can do it.”

The WCI Red Devil senior girls rounded their TVRA Southeast regular campaign with a come-from-behind 25-13, 23-25, 19-25, 25-18, 15-8 victory over the St. Joe’s Rams, locking up second place in the process. The Red Devils open quarter-final playoffs at 1:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 12, at home to the winner between the Knights and Huskies.

The Woodstock St. Mary’s Warriors were scheduled to travel to Tillsonburg Glendale on Tuesday, Feb. 10, for a 9 versus 8 preliminary game. The winner heads to St. Thomas Parkside to take on the undefeated Stampeders that Thursday. The 5-3 Ingersoll DCI senior Blue Bombers finished the regular season as the fifth seed and open playoffs with a 5 versus 4 quarter-final on Thursday, Feb. 12, at Aylmer East Elgin.

TVRA AA semi-finals and the final are scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 18.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)
Aaliyah Thompson keeps her eyes on the prize while passing the ball up.

TVRA Southeast boys basketball teams primed for playoffs

JEFF TRIBE

Echo Correspondent

Will Halward competing in the Thames Valley Regional Athletics Southeast division rather than the bright lights and big money of the National Collegiate Athletics Association meant his incentive package to return for a fifth year of high school basketball was comparatively modest.

There was no six-figure contract, no shiny new convertible parked at the end of the Halward family driveway.

"Umm, woodshop," he said following a Woodstock CI Red Devils 67-55 victory over the London Westminster Wildcats in the Friendly City Winter Classic senior boys' consolation championship game Saturday, Jan. 31, at Woodstock College Avenue.

The Red Devils consolation was not in the B title, but rather that the Classic offered a competitive tune-up for what they hope is an extended postseason run. Halward was a crucial component on last year's Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OSSAA) A silver medal squad for WCI and will need to be again this year as the Red Devils step up to AA competition.

"A bigger world," said Halward. "But we're all a year older."

"All seniors," added WCI's Derek Gravel. "No excuses this year."

"Hopefully make a run at AA OSSAA," he added.

Halward's victory lap gives a significant boost to the possibility of his potential return, the source of modest speculation, although never in doubt in his mind. He did take kinesiology during his first semester, a course related to what he plans on taking at university. But following in his elder brother's footsteps for a fifth year of school and basketball was always Halward's incentive plan.

"Give me another year to prepare for post-secondary."

The Red Devils' collective preparation for the



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Woodstock CI's Jack Carnegie cuts to the hoop against the defensive attention of Westminster's Jordan Pelley (right) and Deo Dixon.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

WCI's Zack Molinaro (right) D's up on Westminster's Jordan Pelley, watched by WCI's Will Halward (left) and Westminster's Ryan Langford (right).

post-season started more slowly than they would have preferred, coach Eric Molinaro encouraging a more inspired approach. WCI was pushed to the consolation side via a tough loss to a AAA team from Stratford, responding with a solid finish against the Wildcats, a potential Western Ontario Secondary Schools Athletics Association (WOSSAA) AA opponent.

The Red Devils came out strong in the first quarter, exiting with a 23-5 lead on ten points from Halward and a pair of three-point field goals from Zack Molinaro. WCI led 40-22 at the half and 54-35 heading



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

WCI's Preston Hilderley goes strong to the basket against a trio of Westminster defenders.

home, with the Wildcats making a game out of it with a late run, cutting the deficit to ten with 2:15 remaining.

Halward answered, knocking down a six-foot runner and then took the ball to the hoop, draining both free throws after being fouled to restore a 14-point lead and decide the issue. Halward finished with a game-high 29 points, Molinaro added 16, Preston Hilderley 12, and Jack Carnegie 10.

"I think we should have come out hotter to start the tournament," said Zack Molinaro of a slow start and difficulty scoring. "But we ended with a couple of quality wins with the offence flowing."

The Red Devils were moving the ball around better, Gravel agreed, more players contributing.

"Everyone is getting involved."

The TVRA Southeast senior boys basketball post-season was scheduled to open Tuesday, Feb. 10 with the Woodstock St. Mary's Warriors at home to Aylmer East Elgin and Woodstock College Avenue Knights travelling to Ingersoll DCI Blue Bombers for preliminary games and Woodstock Huron Park Huskies in Tillsonburg for a AA quarterfinal. As the second seed, WCI will host the winner of the Warriors/East Elgin game on Thursday, Feb. 12, at 3 p.m. The winner of the Knights/Blue Bombers tilt heads to St. Thomas St. Joe's and the Huskies/Tillsonburg winner to St. Thomas Parkside. Semi-finals are slated for Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 3 p.m., the final that Thursday also tipping off at 3 p.m.

TVRA Southeast junior boys playoffs are also scheduled to begin Tuesday, Feb. 10, with Ingersoll DCI at East Elgin and Huron Park at Tillsonburg for a pair of preliminary games. The winners of those contests will face the top-seeded Woodstock College Avenue Knights and second-seeded St. Thomas Parkside Colts on Thursday, Feb. 12. Third-seeded St. Mary's will host a TVRA quarter-final that day with the WCI Red Devils heading to St. Thomas St. Joe's for their quarter-final matchup. Semis are scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 17, and the final for Thursday, Feb. 19.



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

WCI's Will Halward heads to the hoop against Westminster Wildcat Jordan Pelley.

Navy Vets inch closer to clinching PJHL division title

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

The Woodstock Navy Vets are in the driver's seat as they look to earn top spot in the Provincial Junior Hockey League's Doherty Division.

The team came one step closer following a rare Tuesday night affair in Hespeler, which resulted in a 5-1 victory over the Shamrocks. The Vets now have a five-point lead over second-place Tavistock. The Braves have a game in hand, but Woodstock's final two regular season games are against Hespeler and Paris, two of the division's weaker teams. The Braves have a much tougher end to the season with games at home to Norwich and on the road in Hespeler and New Hamburg.

Brett Nolan scored twice for the Navy Vets with single markers from Charley Barnes, Carsen Littlejohn and Cooper Vickerman. Barnes also had three assists. Tyler Bouck stopped 43 shots as the Navy Vets were outshot 44-36.

Tavistock tightened the race for first with a 3-2 win in Woodstock on home ice Saturday night. The Navy Vets led 2-1 after 40 minutes on goals from Ethan Markle and Tavio Kauzlaric, but the Braves scored the third period's only markers as they outshot the Navy Vets 11-7 in the final frame.

Woodstock hosted New Hamburg on Friday and blanked the Firebirds 4-0 as Kobe Nadalin stopped all 34 shots he faced for his twelfth win of the season.

The 16-year-old Friendly City standout has a minuscule 2.04 goals against average with a .945 save percentage. Kingston McPherson, Liam Gorman and Owen Ireton led the offence with two points each.



(WOODSTOCK NAVY VETS PHOTO)

Kobe Nadalin earned his first shutout of the season with a 4-0 win over New Hamburg as Woodstock comes closer to clinching top spot in the PJHL's Doherty Division.

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Ingersoll's new Ninja Program attracts attention from neighbouring communities

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

The Town of Ingersoll has received a strong wave of positive feedback following the launch of its newest youth offering, Ninja Warrior Training.

"It's new," says Brooke Gornik, the town's programs supervisor. First introduced in September 2025, the program was designed to get children moving while having fun in a safe and inclusive

environment, but with a ninja-inspired twist.

"We're still learning and adapting the program itself. It's very new to the community," Gornik explains. Despite its recent introduction, the program's success has already caught the attention of neighbouring municipalities."

She added a few municipalities are curious about the program.

"Other cities want to replicate it."

According to Gornik, the focus of Nin-

ja Warrior Training goes beyond physical activity, emphasizing friendship, confidence-building, and, most importantly, fun.

Each week features different ninja-inspired challenges, including balance exercises, landing drills, and themed obstacle courses. Originally created for children aged six to twelve, staff have adjusted the upcoming sessions to serve participants aged five to ten.

Following the enthusiastic response to

the initial launch, the program has inspired the development of additional offerings, including Little Ninjas and Ninja Fit. Sessions are held at a variety of locations, including Harrisfield Public School and the Victoria Park Community Centre.

If you're interested in learning more or registering for the upcoming spring session, you can visit the Town of Ingersoll's recreation portal online at <https://app.univerusrec.com/ingersollcspub/courses/index.asp>.



(INGERSOLL NINJA FIT STAFF PHOTO)

Shea Grevers at Victoria Community Centre's Ninja Fit program.

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(INGERSOLL NINJA FIT STAFF PHOTO)

(from left to right) Brielle Harder & Shae Grevers participating in Ingersoll's new Ninja Fit program.

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Pan-African flag raised in Ingersoll in honour of Black History Month

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

Members of the Ingersoll community gathered on Feb. 3 at Dewan Park for the Pan-African Flag raising ceremony in recognition of Black History Month.

Heather Rennalls, a member of the Black Heritage Month Committee, opened the ceremony by

welcoming attendees and sharing the significance of the moment.

"This is our second time raising the flag throughout Oxford County," Rennalls explained, "but the first time the flag will be up in Ingersoll for the month of February."

Rennalls also noted 2026 marks the 30th anniversary of Black History in Canada. In December

1995, the House of Commons formally designated it following a motion introduced by Dr. Jean Augustine, the first Black woman elected to Parliament.

Mayor Brian Petrie addressed the crowd, emphasizing the importance of visibility and remembrance.

"Ingersoll has a history, and it's important that during February we have

a visual reminder to tell all of our history, and what that means."

Petrie also referenced the town's involvement with the Potter's Field Project, speaking to the importance of acknowledging the past.

"It's not always what we hope it is, but the stories that come out are truly amazing, and that's what we celebrate."

Council Member Khadijah Haliru also shared remarks, reflecting on the responsibility of the current moment.

"The present is the history of tomorrow."

Haliru expressed pride in being the first Black elected member of Ingersoll Town Council, while acknowledging that bias and the fight for equality remain ongoing challenges. She stressed the importance of listening and understanding one another.

"Canada is a wonderfully diverse community. I implore the next generation to learn that the world is vast and diverse."

Following the speeches, the Pan-African Flag was raised as attendees looked on. Community members



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

Pan African Flag Raised for Month of February in Ingersoll.

were then invited to continue the conversation at the Ingersoll Public Library, where a display highlighting Black history in Oxford County was available, featuring articles and literature for further learning.

Woodstock native Duane Kumala Thomas, the artist behind the Underground Railroad-inspired sculpture located outside the Ingersoll Library, also

addressed the gathering. Thomas shared reflections on community and history, including a reading of his poem, "This Town of Ours."

The flag will remain raised throughout February, serving as a visible reminder of Black history, resilience, and the ongoing importance of learning, reflection, and inclusion within the community.



Heather Rennalls and Khadijah Haliru speaking at Pan African Flag Raising at Dewan Park in Ingersoll.

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ROUTE TO THE PAST

HISTORY

Day Duke Drove to Ingerkip

SCOTT GILLIES

Echo Contributor

Over the years several different members, or representatives of the Royal Family have visited Oxford County. As early as the 1860s, Edward the Prince of Wales made a trip to this part of his mother's empire and hobnobbed with some of Woodstock and Ingersoll's finest folk.

His younger brother Arthur then made a similar trip in 1869 and would return during the early days of World War One, as the Duke of Connaught, the Governor-General of Canada.

Arthur's nephew, the Duke of York and future King George V and his wife Princess Mary of Teck passed through the region in 1901 by rail. They made a brief stop in Ingersoll, perhaps to pick up some good Oxford County cheddar cheese!

His son and heir, the future King Edward VIII while he was still the Prince of Wales also made a brief appearance in Oxford County in 1919 to promote the sale of Victory Bonds to help the Canadian government pay for their part in the Great War.

Famously, George and Mary's other son Bertie and his wife Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon made a cross Canada tour by train in 1939 as King George VI and Queen Elizabeth – the first reigning monarch to do so. Their daughter

Elizabeth II passed through the region several times during Her 70 years on the throne.

However, in the final years of the First World War, the Crown was represented in Canada by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. He served as Governor-General from the eleventh of November 1916 until August 11, 1921. In that time, he made several excursions to varied parts of the country, including Oxford County.

On Tuesday June 11, 1918, the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire visited Woodstock. They arrived on the Grand Trunk train at 10:00am and were met at the station by Mayor West, members of Woodstock Council, and an honour guard made up of the local branch of the Great War Veterans Association.

They travelled to the County Court House where a formal reception took place. While in the Friendly City, they toured the Woodstock Baptist College. Originally opened in 1860 as the Canadian Literary Institute under the direction of Robert Alexander Fyfe, the school had evolved into a prep school for McMaster University and was equally famous for the fine observatory erected there. The Vice Regal party may have been intrigued to see the place where people could study heavenly as well as celestial bodies at the same time!

From the College, they moved to Victoria School where additional scholars



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Duke of Devonshire.

were assembled and cadets were reviewed.

In his public comments, the Duke praised the progressive appearance of the countryside and contrasted that to what was happening in France and Belgium. He took that opportunity to urge everyone to continue to 'do their bit' by supporting the troops on the front lines. Recognizing the future challenges of a new world order fraught with challeng-

es, he urged all Canadians to stand together with confidence; to adapt to the new economic realities, to accept the returning soldiers with open, compassionate understanding arms.

The party of dignitaries then retired to the Oxford Hotel for a sumptuous luncheon, following which they were given a tour of where some of that local produce originated including the fine farms of the Baird Brothers of Bright, and the exemplary herd of purebred Holsteins on the farm of former Oxford County MP, Malcolm Schell.

The day was capped off with a trip to Ingerkip where an afternoon tea was taken.

This day's visit, as well as previous and subsequent ones by other representatives of the Royal Family, have been marked by the naming of neighbourhood streets including Devonshire, Dufferin, Cathcart, Lansdowne, and Athlone.

The Duke of Devonshire returned to Great Britain in 1921 and held other positions. He passed away in 1938. In reporting his death, the Ingersoll Tribune noted that he had been born Victor Christian William Cavendish. One of his ancestors was a crony of Oliver Cromwell, but the family had made its fortune by developing a new product first introduced from the British colony of Virginia – tobacco.

Route2thepast@gmail.com

Woodstock celebrates Black History Month



Mayor Jerry Accchione joined other officials in raising the Pan-African flag at Woodstock's Museum Square.

A spirit of unity filled Museum Square and the Oxford County Administration Building as community members and others gathered to raise the Pan-African flag in honour of Black History Month. The ceremony brought together residents, local officials, and cultural leaders for a powerful moment of recognition and celebration.

Warden Marcus Ryan shared reflections on the importance of acknowledging Black history as a vital part of the county's collective story. Historian Heather Rennalls offered insight into the experiences and achievements of Black residents throughout Oxford County's past, grounding the event in local history and lived experience.

(RON YUZARK PHOTO)

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Two-vehicle collision claims life of teen driver

LEE GRIFFI

Editor

The Oxford County OPP is investigating a two-vehicle collision which resulted in a fatality on Road 92 in Zorra Township.

On Saturday, Jan. 31, shortly after 10:30 a.m., police and emergency services responded to reports of a two-vehicle collision involving a snowmobile and a pickup truck.

The snowmobile operator, a 14-year-old, was transported to hospital and later pronounced deceased. No other injuries were reported as a result of the collision.

Road 92 was closed between the 19th Line and 23rd Line for several hours as police investigated.

The deceased has been identified as In-

gersoll resident Dominic Cross.

“Dominic’s passing has left an unimaginable void in the lives of his family, friends, and everyone who had the privilege of knowing him,” according to a GoFundMe page set up by family friends.

“Dominic was deeply loved and will be remembered for his spirit, his kindness, and the impact he made on those around him. His life was full of promise, and his absence is felt more than words can express,” it added.

This GoFundMe has been created to help support Dominic’s family during this incredibly difficult time.

“Funds raised will go toward funeral and memorial expenses, as well as any unforeseen costs the family is facing as they navigate this sudden loss. Every donation—no

matter the size—helps ease the financial burden and allows the family to focus on grieving and honouring Dominic’s life.”

To date, just under \$60,000 of the \$80,000 goal has been raised. Cross was a member of the U15 LL team with Thamesford Minor Hockey. Area associations have stepped in to lend their support.

“The Embro Minor Hockey community is mourning alongside Thamesford Minor Hockey following the devastating loss of U15 player Dominic Cross. Our hearts are with Dominic’s family, his teammates, and everyone who loved him. During times like this, words feel small. Please know that our entire association — players, families, coaches, and volunteers — stands with you, offering our deepest sympathy and support. The hockey world is tightly knit, and mo-

ments like this remind us how deeply connected we all are. No one grieves alone.”

The Thamesford association also took to social media.

“Our U15 family is hurting deeply. It is with heavy hearts that we share the tragic passing of Dominic Cross, who lost his life in an accident. There are no words that can ease this kind of loss. Our thoughts, prayers, and love are with Dominic’s family, friends, and all those who knew and loved him during this incredibly painful time. Thank you for your compassion, kindness, and support as we come together for one of our own.”

Several minor hockey associations have donated to the GoFundMe campaign, which can be found at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/erbm8-dominic-cross>.

Winter Skin Care: Why Your Skin Needs Support All Year Round



REBECCA KITCHEN, RMT

Echo Contributor

When we think about skin care, many of us picture summer — sunscreen, beach days, and sunburn prevention. But in Canada, winter may be just as demanding on your skin, if not more so. Cold temperatures, dry air, wind, indoor heating, snow reflection, and seasonal travel all place extra stress on the skin. Caring for your skin during winter isn’t about vanity — it’s about protecting your skin’s health, comfort, and long-term function. Skin health isn’t just on the outside it has ways of showing you what may be going on inside your body as well.

Winter Weather and the Skin Barrier

Your skin acts as a protective barrier, keeping moisture in and irritants out. During winter, this barrier is challenged daily. Cold outdoor air holds less moisture, and indoor heat-

ing further dries the air, pulling hydration from the skin. According to the Canadian Dermatology Association, this can lead to dryness, flaking, irritation, redness, eczema flare-ups, and increased sensitivity. Make sure you’re using quality products, check the ingredients and try for a more natural approach. Salves with honey and/or calendula, or even dandelion in them, as well as thicker creams and beef tallow, have great benefits and lock in moisture. Don’t forget about your lips!

Wind and frequent temperature changes further weaken the skin’s natural defenses. Without proper care, skin becomes more vulnerable to inflammation, cracking, and premature aging. Prevention is always better than treating the skin once it has been compromised.

SPF Is Not Seasonal

One of the biggest misconceptions about skin care is that sunscreen is only necessary in summer. In reality, UV radiation is present year-round, even on cloudy days. Snow can reflect up to 80 per cent of UV rays, increasing exposure to the face and eyes during winter activities such as walking, skiing, or even driving.

Health Canada and the Canadian Dermatology Association recommend using a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher daily, regardless of the season. UVA rays — responsible for skin aging and long-term damage — penetrate clouds and windows,

meaning exposure still occurs while commuting or sitting near natural light indoors.

Winter Travel and Skin Stress

Winter travel, especially flying or visiting warmer climates, can take a toll on skin. Airplane cabins have extremely low humidity, which can rapidly dehydrate the skin. Climate changes, water quality differences, disrupted routines, and increased sun exposure during travel can all contribute to breakouts, sensitivity, or dryness.

Nourishing Skin from the Inside Out

Healthy skin isn’t just about what you apply topically. Nutrition plays a critical role in maintaining skin hydration, elasticity, and repair. Especially during the winter months, when we don’t think as much about staying hydrated.

Vitamin D is particularly important in Canada, where reduced daylight limits sun exposure. It supports skin cell growth, repair, and immune function. Food sources include fatty fish, fortified dairy or plant-based beverages, and eggs. You can also find great supplements in sprays, gummies and drops.

Vitamin C supports collagen production and acts as an antioxidant, helping protect skin from environmental stressors like cold air and pollution. Citrus fruits, bell peppers, broc-

coli, and berries are excellent winter options.

Vitamin A, especially from beta-carotene-rich foods, supports skin cell turnover and barrier function. Sweet potatoes, carrots, squash, and dark leafy greens are nutrient-dense winter staples.

Vitamin E helps protect the skin barrier and supports moisture retention. Nuts, seeds, avocado, and olive oil are simple ways to include it daily. This is also great for scar tissue in the body or on the skin to help repair and soften.

Zinc plays a role in wound healing, inflammation control, and immune support and break outs, all important for maintaining calm, resilient skin. Pumpkin seeds, legumes, whole grains, and eggs are reliable sources. There are also great supplements for zinc that you can increase in the winter months to help avoid getting sick or reduce the intensity of the sickness you may pick up.

Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty fish, flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts, help reduce inflammation and support the skin’s moisture barrier, making them especially valuable during dry winter months. These are also great for your brain as an added bonus to staying healthy and you can find high quality supplements from a health food store. You can ask for guidance as some can contain different oils and can be fishy (those are sometimes the best ones for you.)

Practical Winter Skin Care Through Food

Eating seasonally supports both overall health and skin vitality. Root vegetables, legumes, whole grains, winter greens, and healthy fats provide steady nourishment when skin needs extra support. Warm soups, stews, herbal teas, and broths contribute to hydration while being easier to maintain in colder weather.

The gut-skin connection also matters. Fibre-rich foods and fermented options like yogurt or kefir support digestion and may help reduce inflammation that shows up on the skin.

Limiting excess sugar, alcohol, and ultra-processed foods can further support hydration and reduce skin flare-ups during winter. Adding a high-quality electrolyte in addition to drinking more water can help to counteract having a fun night out.

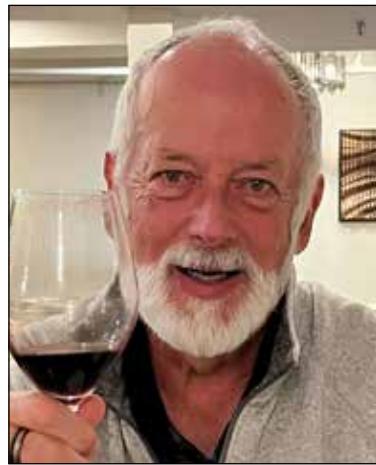
The Takeaway

Skin care is not a seasonal habit — it’s a year-round commitment to health. Winter conditions in Canada can be harsh, but with daily SPF, barrier-supporting skin care, nourishing foods, and hydration, your skin can stay comfortable, resilient, and protected. Whether you’re navigating snowy sidewalks or escaping to warmer destinations, caring for your skin consistently helps preserve its health now and for years to come.

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO!

TRAVEL

Two lesser-known features of Lyon, France



PAUL KNOWLES

Echo Contributor

There are plenty of reasons to enjoy a visit to the French city of Lyon. It's the third-largest city in France, known for its unique "Bouchon" gastronomy, for its history dating back to Roman times and before, and for its once-important role as a centre of the silk trade.

All of these things are still in evidence, today, but I found two other features of Lyon to be equally fascinating – the incredible mosaic murals in the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourviere, and the historic importance of Lyon as a centre for the French Resistance in World War II.

We were in Lyon as a stop on our Viking Rhone River Cruise; Lyon sits at the junction of the Rhone and Saone rivers. Our walking tour showed us a bustling city with a deep and rich history.

But when we visited the Basilica, I was tempted to skip the rest of the tour, and simply stay and savour the incredible mosaics that line the walls. They're not ancient – the gilded mosaics were created from 1872 all the way up to 1964. There are six mosaics, covering a vast, 6,000 square meters,

and portraying two over-arching themes arising from the life of Mary the mother of Jesus: Mary and the Church, and Mary and the History of France.

The Basilica itself is awe-inspiring; like its mosaics, the building is not ancient – it was completed in 1896. But it is magnificent.

That cannot be said for the narrow passageways between buildings that honeycomb the old part of Lyon. As our group wandered through some of these passageways, we found little to be impressed with – until we heard to stories told by historian Boris Klein, who presented a lecture on board our Viking longship. His talk was entitled "Lyon and the Resistance," and the first thing I learned was that those impressive hidden passageways were, in fact, absolutely vital to the underground resistance to the Nazis.

Why? The key reason was a feature we had spotted on our tour – inside these covered passageways were what today we would call community mail boxes. In the days of the Underground, they were perfect drop boxes for clandestine communication – hidden from view of the streets, or anything overhead, they were an ideal place for a member of the Resistance to leave a message, to be collected in secret by a colleague at a later time.

Klein gave us a thumbnail sketch of the circumstances that created the French Resistance. Although in 1939, the French were believed to have the best army in the world, clever German strategy saw France completely conquered in a mere 42 days. The Germans divided France into several parts. Alsace and Moselle were declared to be part of Germany. Northern France was occupied by the Germans; the south,

including Lyon were initially occupied, but then became the "Free Zone" or "Vichy Zone" under Marshall Petain, a First World War hero who, by the time of the occupation, had become a collaborator with the Nazi regime.

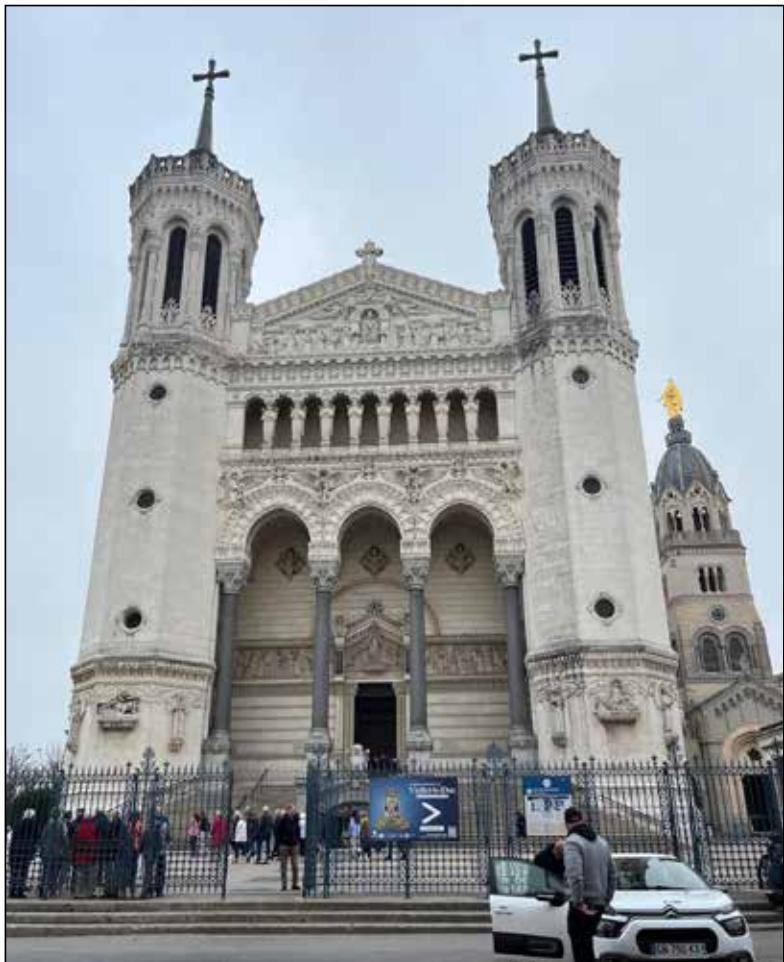
The French Resistance arose in opposition to the Nazis and their puppets, and Lyon became the centre of the Resistance. And yes, those mailboxes and enclosed passages played a role, but there were lots of other factors, too. Lyon is located relatively close to Switzerland, a neutral country.

Lyon was a centre for trade unions, who joined with anti-Nazi political and religious organizations to oppose the Vichy regime. A common cause united unusual allies: "Jews, Catholic priests, communists, patriots all sat at the same table," said Klein. Of course, they could not operate openly – Petain had set up a French militia that was essentially an arm of the Gestapo.

So, opposition to the Nazis went underground – or more precisely, in Lyon, into the multitude of passageways throughout the old city. By the end of 1940, Lyon was recognized as the centre of the French Resistance.

According to Klein, the Resistance produced anti-Nazi leaflets, provided Jews and others who needed such with fake ID papers, printed underground newspapers and organized clandestine meetings.

Charles DeGaulle, who was leading the fight against the Nazis from exile in England, sent a man named Jean Moulin to Lyon, where he played the key role in uniting the Resistance as "The Secret Army". Moulin was eventually captured and tortured to death, in 1943. By then, Germany had taken over direct control of the south of France, but at the



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

Lyon's Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourviere, home to 6,000 square meters of gilded mosaics.

same time, the Secret Army had taken a more active role in guerrilla-style warfare against the occupiers.

On September 3, 1944, Lyon was liberated by Allied forces.

The story of the Resistance movement is in certainly heroic, but Klein noted that after the fact, DeGaulle created a less-than-accurate myth. He told the people of France, "You are a great people who never accepted defeat." In fact, said Klein, a great many French people accepted the presence of the German occupiers, and frequently collaborated with

them. Perhaps the most shocking example is that the Vichy police – French officers, not German – sent 75,000 Jews to die in concentration camps.

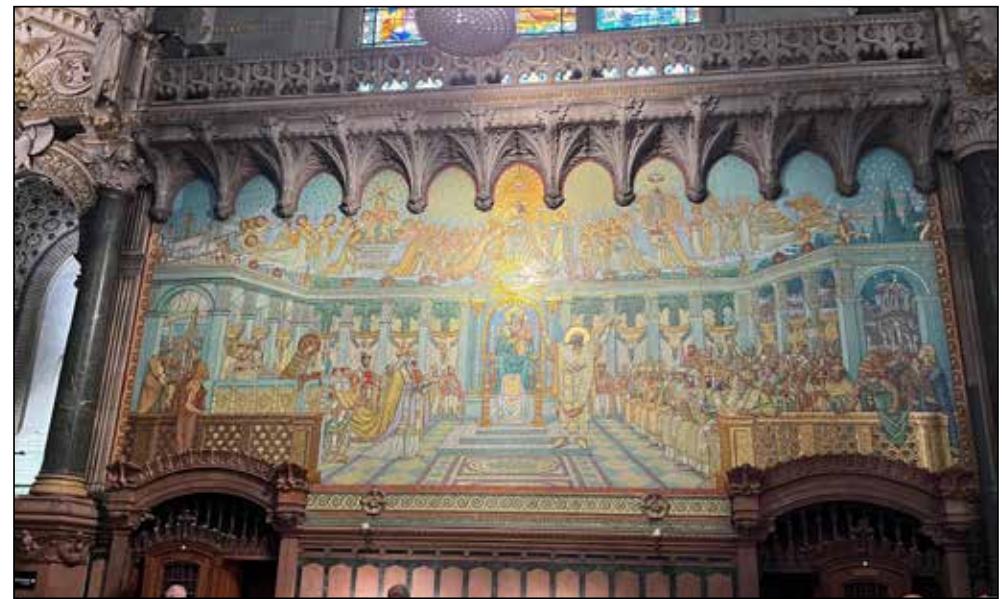
Klein noted that only in the 1970's or 80's did it become possible to discuss the complicated reality of the Nazi occupation of France.

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.



A mosaic commemorating Joan of Arc.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)



One of six astonishing mosaic murals in the basilica.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

Hot cocoa and family Fun at Ingersoll's Winter Fest 2026

KYRAH SMITH

Echo Correspondent

On Saturday, Feb. 7, the winter sun shone brightly as the Town of Ingersoll hosted its second annual Winter Fest, sponsored by the Lions Club. Despite the frigid temperatures, the arena parking lot quickly filled with eager families bundled in scarves and mittens, ready to enjoy a morning of seasonal fun.

From 10 a.m. to noon, the Ingersoll Arena buzzed with activity as residents took advantage of free public skating, warm cups of hot chocolate, face painting, and balloon animals. The event, offered completely free of charge, welcomed families of all ages and provided a cheerful escape from the winter chill.

"It's just a nice cozy vibe," said Brooke Gornik, Programs Supervisor for the Town of Ingersoll. "A way to beat the winter blues."

She explained that after the busy holiday season, community events tend to

slow down, which inspired organizers to introduce Winter Fest. The goal is to bring residents together and create excitement in the colder months.

One of the most popular attractions of the morning was the face painting and balloon twisting station, where a steady line of children waited to be transformed by Mrs. Sarah and Yvette, two talented local artists from nearby Woodstock.

Attendees were treated to hot chocolate and snacks served by members of the Lions Club. The warm refreshments and friendly conversations added to the welcoming, community-centred atmosphere.

For those who missed Winter Fest, another family-friendly event is just around the corner. The Town of Ingersoll will host a Family Day celebration on February 16 at the Victoria Park Community Centre, featuring swimming, entertainment, and more activities for all ages. Additional information can be found on the town's website at www.ingersoll.ca.



Attendees of Winter Fest 2026 enjoying some ice skating at Ingersoll District Memorial Centre. (KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

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Ingersoll Masonic Centre
190 Thames Street South
Ingersoll, Ontario

Contact: ingersollhallrentals@gmail.com



(KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)
Ingersoll Lions Club volunteers at Winter Fest 2026, (From left to right) Judy Semple, Parker Williams, Dawn Mills.



Kids waiting to have their faces painted at the 2nd annual Winter Fest. (KYRAH SMITH PHOTO)

With over 30 years of industry experience, my goal is to work together with you to develop a successful marketing strategy for your business needs.

Contact Lisa Roberts

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CEDARVIEW

COMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 17 / 5 - 7 PM PANCAKE DAY (SHROVE TUESDAY)

Old St Paul's Church,
723 Dundas St Woodstock, ON

Old St Paul's Church is flippin' out again with Woodstock's best pancakes. Supper includes pancakes and syrup, sausages, fruit salad and beverages. All are welcome. Free will offering. (Give only what you can.)

FEBRUARY 18 / 7 PM INNERKIP CEMETERY CO. ANNUAL MEETING

Innerkip Masonic Hall

FEBRUARY 18 / 3RD WED. OF MONTH COLOURING THROUGH GRIEF

Caring Hearts Support Network: St. David's United Church, 190 Springbank Ave., Woodstock ON

One time fee of \$15. Registration is required.
Call 519-536-3370. Check out website
www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

FEBRUARY 18 / 3RD WED. OF MONTH | 6:30 - 8:30 PM PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

21 Wellington St., Woodstock
(Virtual options available)

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

FEBRUARY 21 | 9 AM MEN'S BREAKFAST

Huron Park Baptist Church - 199 Berwick St, Woodstock, ON

FEBRUARY 24 | 10 AM - 12 PM

MONTHLY VON BLOOD PRESSURE CLINIC

Ingersoll Pharmasave, 19 King St. E., Ingersoll
Last Tuesday of every Month.

FEBRUARY 25 / 4TH WED. OF MONTH | 1 - 2:30 PM GRIEF SUPPORT FOR MAID RELATED LOSS

Thamesford Library, 165 Dundas St., Thamesford
This monthly in-person grief support group for loss related to

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Saturday & Sunday: 7:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Mondays: Breakfast Closed

❤ VALENTINE'S WEEK SPECIAL ❤

February 14 - February 16

2 Crispy's Famous Fish Dinners ONLY \$25

❤ VALENTINE'S DAY RAFFLE CONTEST ❤

One raffle ticket per order over \$30

Winners announced Sunday on Facebook & Instagram

Ticket must be presented to claim prize

3 WINNERS:

1st Prize - 2 Fish & Chips Meals FREE

2nd Prize - \$25 Gift Card

3rd Prize - 1 Fish & Chips Meal FREE



Follow us on
Facebook & Instagram
Crispy's Fish and Chips
to see if you're a winner!

WE ARE OPEN ON FAMILY DAY
11:30 AM - 7:00 PM

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) offers a compassionate, safe space to explore this unique loss. The group is free of charge and pre-registration is requested. To register or inquire about an evening group, contact 519-866-3016 or email faye@compassionategriefsupport.ca.

FEBRUARY 25 | 6:30 PM OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINTER 2026 SPEAKER SERIES: HOW DO I LOVE THEE - VALENTINES THROUGH TIME

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave.,
Woodstock

Special Guest Speaker - Scott Gillies, Chair OxHS - Bring your sweetheart and come curl up in the big comfy chairs at Chartwell Oxford Gardens and listen to the history of Valentines Day. Free Admission, Donations Welcome! For more information, please email us at info@oxhs.ca

FEBRUARY 26 / 5:30 - 7:30 PM OLIVER STEPHENS PUBLIC SCHOOL INVITES YOU TO... FLAVOURS OF THE WORLD PLAYGROUND FUNDRAISING DINNER

College Avenue Secondary School -
700 College Ave., Woodstock

\$25/ticket - Door price entry with purchase. CASH ONLY.

Tickets available for purchase at:

The Pub at Norwich Ave - 305 Norwich Ave.

Friendly City Tire - 344 Norwich Ave.

Romance Jewellers - 514 Dundas Street

Woodstock Tire & Towing - 701 Norwich Ave

Contact the school for more information (519) 539-2068.

Raffle prizes and many food options! In support of our playground fundraising.

FEBRUARY 26 | 12 PM YOUNG AT HEART LUNCHEON

Huron Park Baptist Church - 199 Berwick St,
Woodstock, ON

MARCH

MARCH 7 | 5 PM MURDER MYSTERY DINNER THEATRE

South Gate Centre, 191 Old Wellington St. S.
Woodstock, 519-539-9817

Murder on the High Seas when a pirate ship collides with a cruise ship. 5 PM Show starts with appetizers | 6 PM Buffet Dinner. Members \$50 | Non-Members \$55

MARCH 14 | 11 AM - 3 PM BEST U HEALTH EXPO 2026

South Gate Centre, 191 Old Wellington St. S.
Woodstock, 519-539-9817

Exhibitors, vendors, presentations on Health, Wellness and Safety. FREE ADMISSION. Thank you to the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario and the Province of Ontario for supporting this health fair.

MARCH 21 | 9:30 AM - 4 PM OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

St. Mary's Catholic High School, 431 Juliana Drive,
Woodstock, ON, N4V 1E8

Free admission and parking. Framed and Judged exhibits, Stamp dealers, youth gift bags, Sales Circuit, draw prizes.

Contact: dhfe@silomail.com

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

MARCH 24 | 7 PM "LIFE WORTH LIVING"

Woodstock Polish Hall, 878 Dufferin Street, Woodstock

The one-hour film was produced by Woodstock native, Alex Schadenberg, Executive Director of Euthanasia Prevention Coalition and will be followed by a Q & A session with Alex. Admission is free. For more information, please email info@oxfordcountyrighttolife.com

MARCH 25 | 6:30 PM

OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2026 SPEAKER SERIES: LITTLE ENGINES CAN DO BIG THINGS

Chartwell Oxford Gardens, 423 Devonshire Ave.
Woodstock

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

APRIL

APRIL 11 | 6:30 PM - MIDNIGHT

IN THE MOOD WITH BIG BANDEMIC

South Gate Centre, 191 Old Wellington St. S.
Woodstock, 519-539-9817

Big Bandemic will have you toe-tapping and dancing, maybe evening singing along at South Gate Centre's In the Mood concert. Come see this 17 piece big band, with a an additional 10 piece strings section and 2 terrific crooners! BUY TICKETS at the Front Desk in advance or online at www.southgatectr.com/events

ONGOING CLASSES, CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS

EVERY FRIDAY | 1 PM

TILLSONBURG DUPLICATE BRIDGE CLUB

Tillsonbur Senior Centre, 45 Hardy Ave, Tillsonburg

Don't have a partner? Come anyway and we will match you up with someone. For more information, visit their Facebook page: TburgBridge.

2ND TUES. OF MONTH (SEPT. TO MAY) | 2 - 4 PM

4TH TUES. OF MONTH (SEPT. TO MAY) | 7 - 9 PM

OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY

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

If you have never belonged to a stamp club, now's the time. Meet new friends, grow your knowledge and collection. Contact: Don Eaton dhfe@silomail.com. Website: <http://www.rpsc.org/chapters/oxford>

VON OXFORD GRIEF CARE:

FREE MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

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

TILLSONBURG

WHEN: 2nd Tuesday of every month

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

TIME: 6:30PM-8:00PM

INGERSOLL

WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month

WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll

TIME: 10:30AM -12:00Noon

WOODSTOCK

WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month

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

TIME: 10:30AM-12:00 Noon

OXFORD COUNTY DIABETES EDUCATION PROGRAM

Are you looking for support with your Diabetes? Our Team of Registered Nurses, Registered Dietitians and a Social Worker is here to support YOUR goals. We can help with medication adjustments, lifestyle and diet changes, stress management, weight reduction strategies and more. Appointments are available at Alexandra Hospital Ingersoll and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital and by phone.

SELF REFERRALS ARE WELCOME. Please call 519-485-9611 to book an appointment. Let's work together!

MARCH 25 | 6:30 PM

COMING EVENTS

THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF OXFORD COUNTY

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

THE LIONS CLUB OF WOODSTOCK

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

OXFORD COUNTY BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS

Are you looking to start a summer pastime? Are you interested in your family history? Oxford Branch has an extensive collection of family history and genealogical resources that can help you.

Come visit our Resource Centre at 82 Light Street, Courthouse Square, Woodstock. We are open Tuesdays to Thursdays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Volunteers are ready to help you get started or help you research for missing information. You can also connect with us on the web at <https://oxford.ogs.on.ca>. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting genealogical research in Oxford County. Hope to see you through the summer!

FREEZER MEALS PROVIDED BY ST. PAUL'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

BEACHVILLE LEGION EVENTS: 434852 ZorraLine, Beachville

WEDNESDAYS | 7 - 8 PM CHAIR YOGA

THURSDAYS | 7 - 8 PM LINE DANCING

THURSDAYS | 7 PM EUCHRE

THURSDAYS | 8:15 - 9:15 PM INTRO TO BALL ROOM DANCING

No partner required.

FRIDAYS | 8 PM DARTS

SATURDAYS | 1 - 4 PM THAMES VALLEY BLUEGRASS AND OLD TIME COUNTRY PICKERS

Open Mic(acoustic only). Come enjoy the music.

FEBRUARY 14 | 7 - 10 PM URBAN COWBOY LINE DANCING

Lessons and Open Dance 7-10 pm. Open dance 10-11 pm. Food and drink available.

FEBRUARY 18 | 4:30 - 6 PM OX ON THE RUN LIBRARY BOOK MOBILE

FEBRUARY 27 | 5:30 PM CHICKEN PARMESAN DINNER

FEBRUARY 28 | 7 - 11 PM KARAOKE

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

THURSDAYS | 1:30 PM SHUFFLEBOARD

MONDAY EVENINGS CADETS

TUESDAY - FRIDAY EVENINGS DART LEAGUE

JANUARY 31 | 7 - 11 PM EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - FLASHBACK

FEBRUARY 14 | 7 - 11 PM EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - FLASHBACK

FEBRUARY 15 | 5 - 6 PM ROAST BEEF DINNER

Sold out. For more information please call 519-537-3112.

FEBRUARY 21 | 7 - 11 PM EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - RANDY THOMAS

FEBRUARY 28 | 4:30 - 6 PM WING NIGHT

Pre-order by February 20th. For more information please call 519-537-3112.

FEBRUARY 28 | 7 - 11 PM EVENING ENTERTAINMENT - 2 FOR THE ROAD

MARCH 15 | 5 - 6 PM FISH N CHIPS

For more information please call 519-537-3112.

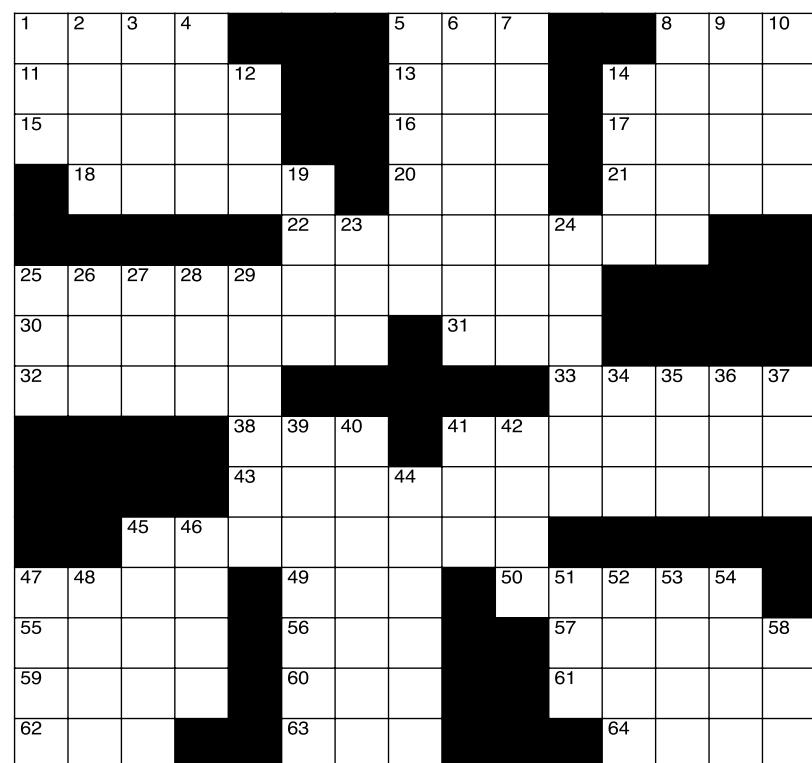
MARCH 22 | 5 - 6 PM CORN BEEF & CABBAGE

For more information please call 519-537-3112.

MARCH 28 | 4:30 - 6 PM WING NIGHT

For more information please call 519-537-3112.

CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Breezed through
- 5. Consumer protection agency
- 8. Criminal syndicate
- 11. Moves back from
- 13. Satisfaction
- 14. Feel concern or interest
- 15. Monetary units
- 16. Congressman (abbr.)
- 17. Israeli city
- 18. Restaurants
- 20. 2,000 lbs.
- 21. Grandmother
- 22. North, South and Central
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Foes
- 31. Social networking platform
- 32. Early term for basketball player
- 33. Another name for sesame plant
- 38. Disallow
- 41. Provide greater detail
- 43. Inaccessible
- 45. Evoke emotions
- 47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- 49. Celtic punk rockers
- 50. A fencing sword
- 55. Actor Idris
- 56. Affirmative (slang)
- 57. Afflicted in mind or body
- 59. One point north of northeast
- 60. Born of
- 61. Social media hand gesture
- 62. Hong Kong food stall __ pai dong
- 63. Opposite of beginning
- 64. Email function

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Sign language
- 2. Fashionable
- 3. Borough in Helsinki
- 4. Inability to hear
- 5. More quickly
- 6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
- 7. Shrewdly
- 8. Rooney and Kate are two
- 9. Mediterranean port
- 10. Benedictine monk
- 12. Midway between south and southeast
- 14. Town in Galilee
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. Mice genus
- 24. Brass instrument
- 25. Chest muscle (slang)
- 26. Transmits genetic information from DNA
- 27. Records electric currents generated by the brain
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Short route aircraft
- 34. Pitching statistic
- 35. Pointed end of a pen
- 36. Popular sports league
- 37. Body part
- 39. Inoffensive
- 40. Yellowish cotton cloth
- 41. Feline
- 42. Does not tell the truth
- 44. Seduced
- 45. Spiritual leader
- 46. Abba __, Israeli politician
- 47. Repair
- 48. Olive genus
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. C. European river
- 54. Keep under control
- 58. Father

Answers found on page 31.

Riddles

What has lots of eyes, but can't see?
A potato

I have pointed fangs, and I sit and wait. I have piercing force, and I crunch with weight. I grab my victims, but they do not fight. I join them each with a single, quick bite. What am I?
A stapler.

What has many needles, but doesn't sew?
A Christmas tree

What has hands, but can't clap?
A clock

What has legs, but doesn't walk?
A table

What has one head, one foot and four legs?
A bed

It has keys, but no locks. It has space, but no room. You can enter, but can't go inside. What is it?
A keyboard.

What can you catch, but not throw?
A cold

What kind of band never plays music?
A rubber band

What has many teeth, but can't bite?
A comb

What is cut on a table, but is never eaten?
A deck of cards

Pronounced as one letter, And written with three, two letters there are, and two only in me. I'm double, I'm single, I'm black blue and gray, I'm read from both ends, and the same either way. What am I?
Eye.

Sudoku

by PeterS 2026

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

Solutions on page 31

Featured Pet



DANA

Dana is a 12 year old mix- border collie lab. Loves people but not dogs so much. Swims like a fish and herds family cats. She's a treasure!



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

Word Search

VALENTINE'S DAY

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

VALENTINE

HEART

LOVE

ROMANCE

CHOCOLATE

FLOWERS

CARD

CUPID

KISSES

SWEETHEART

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CANDY

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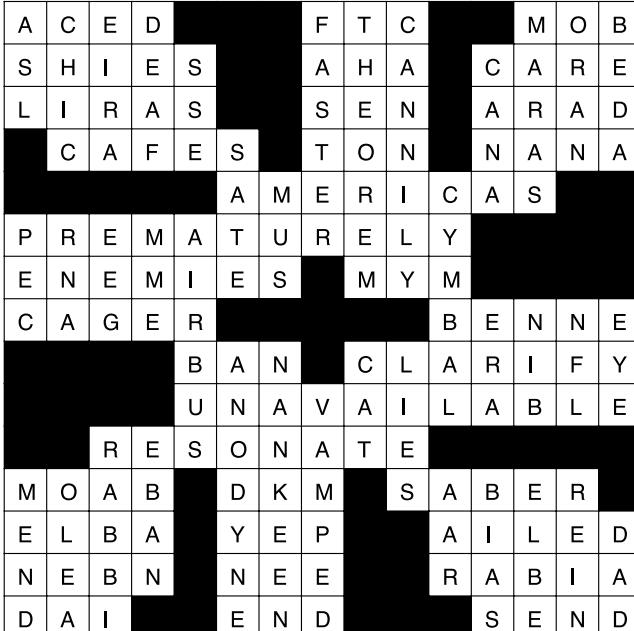
QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Mount Olympus
2. A kangaroo
3. Ravens
4. The liver
5. Bad Bunny
6. William Shakespeare
7. Cerberus
8. MKUltra
9. North Atlantic Treaty Organization
10. Buyer beware

SUDOKU

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

CROSSWORD



OBITUARY

EVELYN JEAN SUTHERLAND

1938 – 2026



Evelyn Jean Sutherland (1938 – 2026) formerly of R. R. #2, Thamesford, Ontario, died peacefully on Friday, February 6, 2026 at Sakura House, Woodstock, Ontario. Born April 5, 1938 in Konawa, Oklahoma, she was the beloved daughter of Wm. Evan (d. 1987) and Bonnie (d. 1942) Sutherland. Loving Cousin of Pamela Fines, Jim Sutherland, Elizabeth Pirie, Anne Pirie, Sheila McKibbin and Camilla McCracken, and their families. She will be fondly remembered by nephews Carl and Paul Luster of San Diego, California. Also cherishing her memory are friends Eileen Stapel -Blauw, The Netherlands, and Valerie and Jim Milostan, Brantford. Jean was predeceased by her step-siblings Annabelle Hogan and Bill Luster, cousins Helen duPlessis and Donald Pirie. During her many years as a resident of Zorra Jean welcomed family and friends to share her delight in her gardens and animals. Cremation has taken place with inurnment at St. Andrew's Cemetery, Thamesford in the spring. Memorial donations to VON Sakura House, Woodstock, Ontario would be appreciated at VON Oxford, 550 Ingersoll Avenue, Woodstock, ON N4S 4Y3 Attn: VON Sakura House. Personal condolences may be made at www.mcbeathdynes.ca/memorials/evelyn-sutherland/5684348/

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