

St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1293

Thursday, December 18, 2025

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COCA-COLA SANTA AT MILT DUNNELL FIELD (ALEX HUNT PHOTO)
Bill Pickering, senior manager of equipment operations at Coca-Cola, as Santa Claus at The Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan at Milt Dunnell Field last Saturday.

Brogan Aylward appointed deputy mayor for third-straight year

Deputy mayor appointed by council each year

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For the third year in a row, St. Marys council has appointed Coun. Brogan Aylward – the youngest member of council – as deputy mayor.

Aylward was nominated by Coun. Marg Luna during council's regular meeting Dec. 9, a nomination accepted by Aylward and unanimously supported by the rest

of council. In accordance with the town's procedure bylaw, the deputy mayor is not a publicly elected position. Instead, council is responsible for nominating and appointing a councillor to serve as deputy mayor at the end of each year.

"I'd like to nominate Coun. Aylward once again as deputy mayor," Luna said. "I believe he's represented (the mayor) well in the past two years when needed and

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

Santa brought excitement and joy to Milt Dunnell Field last weekend

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

The Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan made its return to St. Marys over the weekend, allowing locals to visit Father Christmas himself.

The Town of St. Marys once again turned Milt Dunnell Field into a winter wonderland last Saturday, Dec. 13, giving locals a chance to take pictures with Santa Claus, who was stationed at the Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan. Coca-Cola's senior manager of equipment operations, Bill Pickering, dressed as Santa and enjoyed bringing smiles to children and families.

"I've been involved with this ever since it started," said Pickering. "For me, it's all about the kids, the families and the community. Coca-Cola believes in being part of the communities we live in and supporting them, and that's exactly what this is all about. We do this right across the country."

The caravan accepted non-perishable food donations for The Salvation Army Stratford-St. Marys Regional Community Ministries' Food Drive, which was held at Your Independent Grocer last Saturday.

The Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan tours communities across Canada, offering free Coke samples and photos with Santa. The annual event brings festive cheer and celebrates community spirit while supporting Coca-Cola's Canada's Kindest Community initiative, a nationwide effort that runs from November to January inviting Canadians to nominate their towns for acts of kindness.

"It was great to bring back the holiday caravan after its absence last year," said Mogren Easton, tourism and events coordinator at the Town of St. Marys. "It was the perfect way to start Christmas break with the family and kick off the holiday season."

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COMMUNITY

Brogan Aylward appointed deputy mayor for third-straight year

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

represented council and the town very well at public meetings, and has done a great job."

In St. Marys, the deputy mayor presides over any meeting of council in the absence, ineligibility or incapacity of the mayor. The deputy mayor also represents the mayor and council at public and other events when the mayor is unavailable.

Speaking with the Independent after his appointment as deputy mayor, Aylward said he is humbled by his colleagues' confidence in him as a representative of both council and the town, and he is honoured to continue serving as deputy mayor.

"I have a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for my colleagues. I've learned a great deal from the other councillors and Mayor (Al) Strathdee over the last three years," he said. "... I enjoy being a sort of lightning rod for the community. When folks have concerns or questions, I love having those discussions. Often, I'll learn something myself when following up with staff."

"The deputy mayor position has allowed me more chances to have those conversations; more chances to serve the community that I love so much. I feel very fortunate to be a part of something that I am so passionate about."

Aylward said serving as deputy mayor for the past

two years have given him a unique insight into the responsibilities that go with serving as a head of council.

"You have to know your procedure well to chair meetings," he said. "Guiding an effective discussion is necessary when there are long agendas. When bringing greetings from the town at events, you represent something much greater than yourself. There is a necessity to hold yourself to a higher standard. I've really enjoyed the way the position has pushed me to be a better representative."

Looking ahead to the final year of this term of council, Aylward said he is excited to finalize some of the larger projects he and his council colleagues have led and overseen over the past three years. He said he is confident the current council can leave the town in a good place and make the transition as smooth as possible when a new council is sworn in next November.

"As a first-term councillor, this has been a very special experience to me. I can't overstate my gratitude to the community and council for the opportunities that I've had. I hope to continue to support the Town of St. Marys moving forward."

Aylward's third term of deputy mayor will span from Dec. 10, 2025, to Nov. 14, 2026.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF BROGAN AYLWARD)

Coun. Brogan Aylward has been appointed by St. Marys council as deputy mayor for the third year in a row.

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EDITORIAL

Making Christmas magic happen for the people we love

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

What was your favourite Christmas present you remember getting? Mine was when I was four. It was the Star Traveler Barbie Camper. It was so cool and I remember being so excited when I saw it. As I grew up, I heard the stories about what went into putting it together by my dad and grandpa.

This is the joy of Christmas. From a child's eye, it is magical, exciting and just happens. From a parent's eye, it is a lot of planning, organizing, spending and exhaustion, but when it comes time to glimpse a bit of that magic from a child, it makes up for it and reminds us of why we do it.

It may also give you a reminder of your past and that feeling of joy you once had, kind of like when Clark Griswold got stuck in his attic and found the old home movies. For some reason, that always gets me. One of my favourite things about Christmas is when my dad still

tells his grown children he saw Norad tracking Santa on the news. It makes me smile every time.

We are so lucky in this town to have many festive events that take place from the wonderful Kinsmen Santa Claus Parade, the Winter Lights, markets, festivals, the Merchant Open House and many opportunities to help others in our community. It starts early and carries us through the craziness of the season.

I ask all of you to try and remember one exciting gift or memory from Christmas that you have. This is a big ask as there may be many who didn't have that joy or are experiencing grief either past or present. So, maybe now is a good time to create one. Call a family member or friend, walk in the snow, donate to the Salvation Army if you haven't already.

It's never too late to create some magic, especially at Christmas time. May we all try to look at Christmas like a child does, through awe, excitement and wonder, and may we never lose the magic of the season.

Bravo

We have 4 Bravos this week.

- 1) Bravo to the St. Marys & Area Mobility Service for safely and dependably transporting our family members. A special shout out to Irene, as she makes her final runs this week. She has brought sunshine to the lives of so many, and we wish her the happiest of retirements!
- 2) Bravo to the kind man who took the time to clear the snow from my driveway with his backhoe. I appreciated it very much and bravo to the caring and helpful people in our town.
- 3) Bravo to our newspaper delivery team. The weather has been less than ideal but you still get out there. Thank you!
- 4) Bravo to the Independent Grocery Store for getting a disabled child shopping cart. It is extremely appreciated.

Boo

We have 3 Boos this week.

- 1) Boo to the person who defaced the Whoville display downtown at the Buck or Two building. By vandalizing the storefront downtown, it's unfortunate that this obviously passionate artistic person chose to voice their opinion in such an uncreative way. Quite frankly, this is an example of some very pedestrian and juvenile graffiti. If "real art" is so important to them, you would think they could be more imaginative. If you have a valid point of view, step up and have the conversation.
- 2) Boo to the individual that stole the Canadian flag off my flag pole in my backyard this past week. I hope you're a proud Canadian and fly it with pride as I did.
- 3) Boo to the person on Meadowridge Drive; he was blowing his driveway snow all onto the road. He blew a huge pile on the road that you had to drive around. Please be more considerate.

*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.

Quote of the Week

"I'm going to die – please see my family [and tell them] that I went down to save people's lives."

- Ahmed al-Ahmed, speaking to his cousin over coffee, moments before heroically tackling and disarming one of the gunmen during the Bondi Beach terror attack in Australia on Dec. 14, 2025.

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According to my chocolate advent calendar, Christmas was two weeks ago!

May you never be too old to search the skies on Christmas Eve.

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others? Either email them to us at info@stmarysindependent.com with the title "Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519.284.0041 or drop by the office to let us know!

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the tree that counts but
rather who is around it.

Gilly's Pubhouse wins best burger in United Way Perth-Huron's Burger Battle



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNITED WAY PERTH-HURON)

United Way Perth-Huron executive director Ryan Erb, St. Marys Mayor Al Strathdee and staff at Gilly's Pubhouse in St. Marys proudly pose with The People's Choice Trophy from the United Way Perth-Huron's Ultimate Burger Battle.

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

St. Marys' Gilly's Pubhouse has won the People's Choice Award for Best Burger in the United Way Perth-Huron's (UWPH) Ultimate Burger Battle fundraiser competition.

Gilly's Pubhouse brought their sweet and salty Lincoln Burger to customers throughout November in support of United Way Perth-Huron's fundraising contest. Patrons were able to vote online on which restaurant made the best burger.

UWPH debuted the Ultimate Burger Battle competition this year, which invited local restaurants to make an original burger and sell it on their menu throughout the month of November. Participating restaurants donated \$2 to UWPH from every burger purchase to raise funds for community programming.

"It feels great to win this award," said Miguel Raposo, manager at Gilly's Pubhouse in St. Marys. "We aim to be a restaurant first and bar second. I think that's what makes us stand out in a town like St. Marys. We are very warm and

welcoming and that makes a difference in the hospitality atmosphere."

Ten restaurants competed in the contest to bring home the titles of People's Choice or Most Burgers Sold, the latter of which went to Bentley's in Stratford for their Gouda Cause Burger.

UWPH senior manager of resource development and communications Sonja Heyen said the local United Way brought in around \$5,000 through the competition. She added the organization is proud of the intake, especially since it was the UWPH's first time hosting the contest.

"We accept donations in different forms and this is another way for people to support us," said Heyen. "It's got an element of creativity and it encourages people to support local restaurants. It's a friendly competition that brings in different pieces that combine to make this a successful event."

"We have plans to include a judging panel and ranking systems to make this event more exciting next year. The People's Choice is a pretty fun trophy, which will live at the winner's restaurant for the year, and we hope that they display it proudly."

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STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



HOLIDAY BREAK DAY CAMPS

The PRC is offering a Holiday Break Day Camp weekdays on December 22, 23, 29, 30 2025 and January 2, 2026. These full-day programs are geared towards kids between the ages of 6 – 13 years old and include skating, crafts, outdoor play and more!

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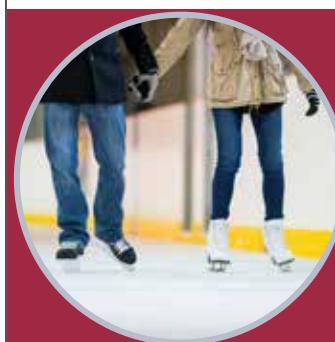
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Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Santa Claus, who also goes by Father Christmas, Kris Kringle and Saint Nicholas. He is over 1,700 years old. He has been married to Mrs. Claus, who reports say is a similar age to her husband but stays out of the spotlight a bit more than her famous man. He is most known for bringing gifts to children around the world on Christmas Eve. He is a jolly man who loves the colour red and, with a twinkle in his eye, he spreads happiness and joy to many. Santa and Mrs. Claus live in the North Pole with nine reindeer (one has a red nose) and many helpers who assist the big man in making toys that help spread cheer. While not from St. Marys or the surrounding area, he pays a special visit to the Stonetown every year!

If you would like to nominate someone for Senior of the Week, contact us at 519.284.0041 or info@stmarysindependent.com.

WEEKEND QUIZ

By Jake Grant

SPONSORED BY: The Wine Lab
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1. Where does Santa live?
2. How many reindeer does Santa have?
3. In the classic song, "Frosty the Snowman," what made Frosty come to life?
4. Which fairy tale were the first gingerbread houses inspired by?
5. Which popular phrase was made popular by Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol"?
6. Who catches the Grinch stealing?
7. Buddy the Elf sticks to the four main food groups, what are they?
8. What is the color of the berries on mistletoe?
9. Where was Jesus laid after he was born?
10. What is the day after Christmas called?

This week's answers are found on pg. 39

'It's Just Like Christmas' by LoFi Mind raising money for A Child's Smile

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

LoFi Mind, featuring St. Marys musician Jesse Webber, is once again giving back to children in need this holiday season with a new single.

LoFi Mind released the single, "It's Just Like Christmas," on Bandcamp with proceeds from the song supporting A Child's Smile. Based in Stratford, A Child's Smile provides toys for children in need.

"We decided to keep it in the spirit of Christmas if we just donated some proceeds back to A Child's Smile, which just got the ball rolling for us on the Christmas side of things to begin with," said Webber, featured on the song playing electric guitar and singing backup vocals.

Webber performed at a past A Child's Smile fundraiser and so have bandmates Ryan Brohman and Craig McNair.

"It's just important that all of us, having kids, make sure that some of those underprivileged kids have presents. Give them like a normal feeling on Christmas Day," Webber said.

He likes to give back to the community when he can, especially since he saw the housing crisis while living

in the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Previously, LoFi Mind created the song, "A Child's Smile," for founder John Gray to use as theme song for the organization.

Brohman, lead vocalist, had been playing around with the tune for "It's Just Like Christmas" for around five or more years. He wrote the song with Danica Guenette and Jack Pender.

Up until now, it had been a while since LoFi Mind did a song together. All members were based in Kitchener-Waterloo until some moved away. Along with Webber moving to St. Marys, McNair moved to Font Hill and Brohman moved to Port Burwell with his wife.

When putting the song together, everyone sent each other tracks via email until the song's production was complete.

"It worked almost like riding a bike; it really did," Brohman said. "Before, we would sit in the same room and hash things out for hours, but I think we've all evolved as musicians since then and it was really a pleasure to send things out and wait for something to come back."

To listen to "It's Just Like Christmas" and to purchase the single as a gift, visit <https://lofimind.bandcamp.com/track/its-just-like-christmas-time>.

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Equipment breakdowns lead Town of St. Marys to declare significant weather event

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The combination of significant snowfall and mechanical breakdowns led the Town of St. Marys to declare a significant weather event on Dec. 11.

Declared over roughly 24 hours later, the declaration of a significant weather event was made in accordance with provincial law, stating a municipality must declare a significant weather event when it is unable to meet the minimum requirements for clearing snow from roads and sidewalks.

According to town public works director Jed Kelly, town staff was concerned it would not be able to meet minimum snow-clearing requirements after the town's large loader plow – the plow used to clear tighter spaces – was stranded on Thomas Street Dec. 11 with a blown hydraulic line as staff waited for the parts to fix it.

Slower-than-normal sidewalk clearing was also an issue that led to the declaration.

"The town has two trackless sidewalk machines; due to the snow accumulations, we switched to the blowers, which are much slower moving than

the blades," Kelly told the Independent. "We had multiple issues with the sidewalk machine blowers intaking random debris, causing downtimes. The machines are newer and in a good state of repair, but the blowers don't react well to metal debris."

By Dec. 12, Kelly said both sidewalk machines were operational again and were out clearing sidewalks early in the day. By early afternoon, Kelly said he hoped to have the sidewalk machines do a single pass of all town sidewalks before the significant weather event was declared over.

Town equipment operators were also working hard throughout the day blowing snow banks back, clearing fire hydrants and trucking away snow-storage piles.

Now that the significant weather event is over, town staff say local roads and sidewalks are once again being maintained to provincial standards, and they thanked residents for their patience and cooperation.

For winter-weather and snow-clearing updates in St. Marys, visit the town's website (townofstmarys.com), Facebook (facebook.com/stmarysontario) and Twitter/X (twitter.com/townofstmarys).

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Happy Holidays!

Thank you for sharing in a successful year with our team!



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A St. Marys mother makes it her mission to honour her son by helping others find hope

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

To honour her son's memory, Anna Maria Iredale has turned grief into purpose by helping others and advocating to reduce stigma around substance use.

On Sept. 8, 2017, Iredale's son, Mathew Keller, died from a fentanyl overdose. Keller was 36 years old and is remembered by many as a compassionate man with a big heart who possessed immense inner strength and resilience.

To honour her son's recent birthday on Dec. 10, Iredale is collecting food donations from the community for the St. Marys Library pantry to support the hungry and homeless. Those who wish to donate non-perishable food items can send Iredale a message on Facebook.

Iredale will be collecting food from donors' homes throughout the year. Along with community donations, Iredale will purchase food herself to give to the pantry.

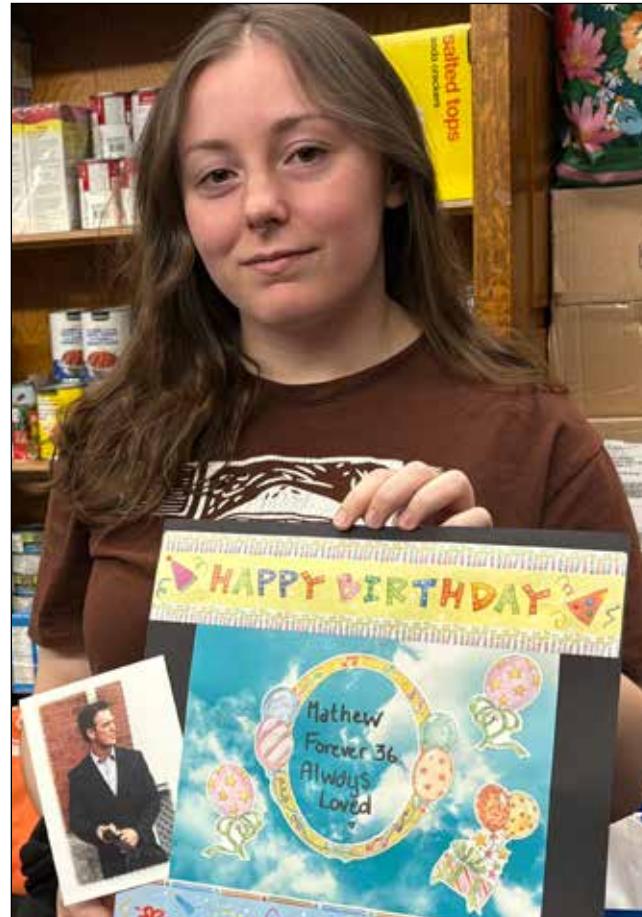
"This is a good cause; I want to make a difference and do something to help. I encourage others to do the same. I've been finding ways to honour my son's memory," said Iredale.

Iredale said her son was honest about his challenges and was known as a person who would go out of his way to help others. Iredale said when Keller worked as a bricklayer, he would hire people living on the streets and provide them with a bed, food and pay.

"If Mathew can do it, then so can I and it feels good to help others, especially when it's something that's needed," said Iredale.

"Hungry people will never have enough to eat; that's never going to change, and for me, the grief will never go away. My son is still dead. People who have never lost a child will never understand that; they don't know. It's a different kind of loss. I'm always going to advocate for those who struggle."

In recent years, Iredale has organized the International Overdose Awareness Day in St. Marys, a global



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Anysha Keller-Ivory, granddaughter of Anna Marie Iredale and niece of Mathew Keller, at the St. Marys Library food pantry.

event aimed at raising awareness of drug overdoses, as well as reducing the stigma of substance use and overdose deaths. The day is also meant to allow reflections on people who have been affected by or lost to overdose complications, as well as to promote change and

show compassion for those who are struggling.

Iredale said she believes there's a troubling stigma associated with substance users that results in a sense of embarrassment and shame for the individual. These associations can prevent the user from seeking help and taking steps toward recovery.

"I know I'm doing the right thing, but it's not easy," said Iredale. "I'll keep doing this for Mat because I want people to truly know who he was. I don't want stigma to overshadow his story or the person he really was."

Iredale and her granddaughter, Anysha Keller-Ivory, have advocated for keeping safe consumption sites open in Ontario to prevent overdose-related deaths.

"I think my grandmother is amazing for doing this community donation initiative," said Keller-Ivory, who is also Keller's niece. "I think she's doing a great job at making a big impact, it's very admirable and she's someone that I really look up to a lot."

Keller-Ivory is currently attending Centennial College's addiction and mental health worker program to become a mental health therapist.

"Everyone in my program has some kind of connection to the field, whether it's a history of substance use, a loved one who's struggled, or personal experience with mental-health challenges," said Keller-Ivory. "I think that shared connection makes it a lot easier for us to relate to the material and really take it in."

Diagnosed with ADHD and having struggled with it throughout her life, Keller-Ivory plans to use the knowledge she's gained from her education and experience to help others navigate their ADHD and other mental-health challenges.

"It's become more normalized nowadays to talk about mental health, and I plan to not bring any stigma to my future practice," said Keller-Ivory. "People want to feel normal, validated, seen, heard and understood, and I want to help them feel that way. I think it's important to be open about our challenges because it encourages others to speak up about their own and seek help."

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Stratford police gets provincial funding boost to enhance mental-health response capabilities

Stratford Police Service gets \$240,000 over two years for mobile crisis response team

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Police Service (SPS) is among several local police forces that will receive a funding boost from the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General to support their unique, community focused programs that help better protect the communities and people they serve.

Last week, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae announced more than \$700,000 in funding for police services in the riding, including \$240,000 over the next two years for SPS for its mobile crisis response team (MCRT), a program started in 2019 in partnership with the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance that has qualified mental-health workers respond to calls involving people in crisis with frontline police officers, allowing for de-escalation and connection to mental-health services and resources as an alternative to arrest and treatment in hospital.

"Our communities continue to see a rise in vulnerable populations experiencing mental illness, addiction and homelessness," Stratford police Chief Greg Skinner said. "... Having a qualified mobile crisis response team worker available to respond to people in mental-health crisis and provide support and assessment in the field instead of apprehending and transporting to hospital is the most efficient and effective means to make referrals to community agencies."

"... This program has been the most effective frontline support program to deal with vulnerable people in our communities. Having a mental illness is not a crime and that's why I, as the chief



of police, am supportive of the mobile crisis response team program and am grateful that the Ontario Government continues to financially support a program that has so many benefits to individuals and our communities of Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South."

Rae also announced more than \$267,000 over the next two years to support Perth County OPP's MCRT enhancement program.

"It is great to see our provincial government supporting local police services to protect our rural communities," Rae said in a press release. "This funding will help local police services and health-care workers offer specialized mental health supports to community members experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis. Our government will continue to support our first responders."

In addition to the MCRT Grant funding, the province is also providing funding through its Community Safety and Policing Grant program – nearly \$61,000

for the Perth County OPP thanks to a joint application between the West Perth and North Perth detachments, and nearly \$178,000 for SPS to support the police service's purpose-driven responses.

"That grant supports an enhancement to our special constable corps to support court security, community visibility and electronic low priority call response," Skinner said. "With the changes to the Community Safety and Policing Act, the roles and responsibilities of special constables have expanded, allowing them to be assigned to more frontline duties in communities."

Skinner said SPS is in the process of hiring four additional special constables, adding to the service's six current special constables for a total of 10.

"We will be implementing a deployment model that supports the three priorities listed above. We have heard from the community that they would like more visibility in the downtown cores during peak hours over and above the summer period and provide visibility in

identified areas of concern within our policing jurisdiction. With these new positions, we intend to provide that increased visibility and add to the sense of safety and security that our residents feel as they're out enjoying what our communities have to offer," Skinner said.

In addition to adding more special constables, Skinner said the police service continues to leverage technology to support community safety including cameras, lighting, signage, drones and automated licence plate readers, all of which play a role in preventing, detecting and solving crime.

Wellington County will also receive more than \$187,000 through the Community Safety and Policing Grant program to support the Wellington Fraud Prevention and Response Strategy.

"Our government is taking decisive action to protect Ontario by ensuring police have the tools, resources and partnerships they need to keep our communities safe," said Ontario Solicitor General Michael Kerzner in the press release.

The Community Safety and Policing Grant program is part of the government's \$91-million investment to support policing initiatives that focus on local or provincial priorities and provides eligible police services or boards and municipalities policed by the OPP with funding to deploy frontline officers where and when they are needed most.

For 2025-2026 and 2026-2027, 36 police services and OPP detachments across the province will receive approximately \$9 million through the MCRT Enhancement Grant to increase the capacity of mobile crisis response teams.



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Rotary Exchange student Samir Zogbi talks about life in Argentina



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Samir Zogbi shares with the St. Marys Rotary Club information about his home country, Argentina.



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Pictured, from left, are David and Erin Dunbar – Rotary Exchange student Samir Zogbi's first host family – Zogbi, Marg and Bernie Vandenk – his current host family – and Mark Oliver, the youth services Rotary rep.

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

The St. Marys Rotary Club held its last meeting of the year on Monday, Dec. 12, during which members welcomed inbound exchange student Samir Zogbi, who delivered a presentation about his home country, Argentina.

Zogbi started off by thanking Erin and David Dunbar, his current host family. He has been in Canada for three months and plans on staying for seven more. In his time here so far, he has visited Niagara Falls, Kitchener, London and Stratford, as well as Toronto to see a soccer match.

“I thought it was amazing,” Zogbi said of his trip to Niagara Falls. “The size and the power of the water are incredible, and I also really liked the streets around the falls.”

His favourite part of St. Marys is how

quiet the town is – and maple syrup!

Zogbi's presentation started with an introduction of Argentina. He talked about where it is located and shared that it has a population of more than 47 million people. The capital city of Argentina is Buenos Aires and it is known for its diverse culture, beautiful landscapes and fascinating history.

Next, he shared about the traditional cuisine of the country. Asado, which consists of beef, pork, chicken and chorizo, is cooked on an open fire or grill and is a crowd favourite, as is Locro, a hearty stew, and empanadas, baked or fried turnovers. When it comes to culture and traditions, Argentina is known for its vibrant folk music as well as the tango that was founded in Buenos Aires.

Soccer is one of Argentina's passions with some big-name players like Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona coming from there.

Planning on travelling to Argentina?

Zogbi shared a couple of the must-see tourist spots, the first being the Perito Moreno Glacier located in Patagonia and the other being Iguazu Falls, which is one of seven wonders of nature, boasting over 250 waterfalls.

Zogbi proudly showed the crowd a picture of his family, including his parents and his brother, who is planning on visiting and working in the United States. He also shared a picture of his family dog.

The city that Zogbi is from is called Quilmes, where he attends a tech school called EEST No. 7 IMPA.

Outside of school, Zogbi loves to play football (soccer).

The local Rotary members asked Zogbi how he got involved with the Rotary Exchange program. He said youth exchange programs are a tradition in his family and he chose to pursue his own

adventure.

After the exchange, Zogbi would like to pursue a career in law. However, while in Canada, he would like to see more of the country and spend some time in the winter skiing and making memories.

St. Marys resident Clair Dunbar has been on an exchange in Denmark for the last three months. She sent an update letter for the club to share after Zogbi's presentation. She is now with her second host family, is taking Danish lessons, has met all of the inbound Canadians and is enjoying being busy and learning lots.

The Rotary Exchange program is just one of many great initiatives the Rotary Club supports. The club is always looking for new members to join and carry on these important projects. For more information on the club, visit rotarystmarys.ca.

Instead of a card: St. Marys Poetry Circle collection of winter poems available at Betty's Bookshelf

ALIZON SHARUN

St. Marys Poetry Circle

It's a neat idea from a publishing company, Candlestick Press, in England, to produce small booklets of poetry which can be sent “instead of a card.”

Jan Scott at Betty's Bookshelf on Water Street stocks these on a variety of subjects, and the St. Marys Poetry Circle has taken this idea and produced our own collection of seasonal poetry, *Twelve Poems for Winter*.

Thanks to Scott, the booklets are on

sale in her bookstore for \$20 as a fundraiser for the poetry circle. The pack comes with an envelope and seal for mailing and a bookmark wide enough for your own written message.

This is our first ever fundraiser, having no membership fees and an ad-hoc style of organization. Small expenses are covered by members' contributions when needed. However, we would like to be able to develop some projects this year that require more formal funding.

As well as regular meetings at Barista's on the last Friday of the month where

all are welcome, the St. Marys Poetry Circle takes part in and organizes events that add to the artistic life of the town, a little like the wandering bards of old.

This April, we had a Pop-Up Poetry Showcase at St. Marys Station Gallery, with poetry written by pupils of the Coyote Nature School. Thanks to the St. Marys BIA, we display poetry in store windows during April for National Poetry month. In August, we helped to celebrate 150 years of the Riverview heritage home with poems on the front lawn as part of Doors Open St. Marys and,

in October, we gave a poetry reading at The Station Gallery inspired by the paintings of Jane Loucks for her exhibit, “The Order of Things.”

Come and see the St. Marys Poetry Circle in action at The Station Gallery on Dec. 19 in a celebration of art, music and poetry at the Gallery Soirée, 6:30-8:30 p.m., and be sure to pop into Betty's Bookshelf to browse for gifts in her festive store and perhaps give the gift of poetry this year.

Minor changes to curbside recycling coming Jan. 1 for St. Marys businesses

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

St. Marys businesses, industries and institutions (ICI) that rely on Bluewater Recycling Association's (BRA) curbside recycling pickup will see some minor changes as the province's producer-responsibility residential recycling program comes into effect on Jan. 1, 2026.

ICI recyclers will need to pay close attention to the BRA's pickup schedule for the new year as the organization prepares to initiate separate pickup days for residential and ICI recycling. The reason for that, explained Town of St. Marys manager of environmental services Dave Blake, has to do with a number of new materials that will be accepted for residential pickup, but not for ICI pickup.

"A couple years ago, the province brought in new regulations for blue-box recycling across the province. It was a

phased-in approach, so a lot of the phasing in occurred between 2023 and 2025, with full transition happening Jan. 1, 2026. So that's why the changes are happening for ICI properties as of Jan. 1 as it's fully transitioned over to producer responsibility at that point," Blake said, referencing the province's updated Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, which puts funding and oversight of residential recycling in the hands of new producer responsibility organizations (PROs).

"... Basically, it standardizes the blue-box recycling program across the province, so there's some new materials that are going to be added to the residential curbside program as of Jan. 1 such as tinfoil, aluminum pans or trays, some takeout Styrofoam packaging, things like that, and that's the same whether you're in St. Marys, Toronto, Parry Sound, right across the province – it's all standardized."

Since the PROs are only responsible for residential recycling and the materials that can be recycled by ICI properties will remain as they are, residential and ICI recycling must be collected separately and on different days.

Recently, Blake said representatives from the BRA have been visiting affected ICI properties throughout the town – many of which are businesses located in the downtown core – informing them of the changes to the program and swapping out their blue recycling-bin lids for red ones to help recycling collectors differentiate between residential and ICI recycling on pickup days.

While residential pickup days will remain the same, ICI pickup will instead take place on Thursdays on a biweekly schedule. Exact pickup dates for ICI properties are being distributed by the BRA through its 2026 recycling schedule, online at www.bra.org/my-services/st-marys-town/ and through the new

Bluewater Recycling app, which offers personalized reminders for recycling collection and special collection days among other features.

While the town is footing the bill for ICI recycling collection in 2026 as the changes are implemented by BRA, Blake said the recycling association will have more information on the exact costs of this modified program prior to the beginning of council's budget deliberations for 2027. At that time, he said council will need to decide whether the town will continue paying for ICI recycling or if it will move to a cost-recovery model.

For now, Blake is encouraging those affected by the changes to refer to their 2026 recycling schedules, ensure their recycling is at the curb by 7 a.m. on collection day and to be patient as these changes are implemented at the beginning of the new year.

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From believing in Santa to becoming the spirit of Christmas: Eight years of giving

JENN NOBLE

Contributed Article

What began as a six-year-old's simple idea, "Let's make sure every kid has a great Christmas by collecting Canadian Tire money and buying toys for kids in need," has grown into an eight-year tradition of generosity that has left a lasting mark on the community.

For Porter Huffman and Colton Lawrence, the journey has been nothing short of extraordinary. They began this effort as young children who believed in Santa, and over time, discovered the real magic of Christmas comes from becoming Santa for others. Through their growing years, the boys witnessed firsthand how kindness, empathy and determination can ripple outward to touch countless lives.

Over the past eight years, Porter & Colton's Toy Drive has raised more than \$50,000, with over \$8,000 raised in its final year alone. Those funds have provided toys, food support and gift cards to families across Lucan, St. Marys, London and surrounding communities, helping ensure thousands of children experienced the joy of Christmas morning.

A highlight of the 2025 campaign saw the boys once again "take over"



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

Once again, the boys "took over" the St. Marys Canadian Tire, filling carts with over \$6,000 worth of toys and gift cards that will go towards helping many families this Christmas. Pictured from left to right are Blake Robertson, Porter Huffman, Colton Lawrence, Kaine Dobinson and Canadian Tire employee Shannon Rooney.

St. Marys Canadian Tire, filling carts with over \$6,000 worth of toys and gift cards. With the help of their friends,

Blake Robertson and Kaine Dobinson, the purchases were delivered directly to the Ailsa Craig Food Bank, where they

will support families throughout the holiday season. The remaining funds will be donated to the local library's food pantry.

What started with a handful of Canadian Tire bills quickly grew into a communitywide effort. Each year brought more donated bottles, more overflowing shopping carts and stronger partnerships. Families and friends rolled up their sleeves to sort bottles and collect donations while local organizations including the Lucan Lions, Lucan Small Businessmen, Lucan Legion Branch 540 and Nicholas Smith Memorial Group stood behind the boys year after year.

As Huffman steps away from the toy drive, this final season closes a chapter that has shaped both boys in profound ways. While the initiative may be ending, its legacy will continue in the families it supported, the momentum it inspired and the reminder that believing in Santa can grow into becoming the spirit of Christmas itself.

Huffman and Lawrence extend their sincere and heartfelt thanks to everyone who believed in their mission – the donors, volunteers, businesses, service clubs, friends and neighbours who made eight unforgettable years of giving possible.

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St. Marys Legion recognizes winners of annual National Youth Remembrance Contest

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

Despite a snowy day, many parents and students showed up to the Legion on Thursday night to give recognition to the winners of the National Youth Remembrance Contest.

Every year, schools across the country have the chance to honour Canada's veterans through art, writing (poems and essays) and video.

"It was awesome to see so many students with their parents, friends and relatives out to attend the awards ceremony," organizer Ken Felkar said. "Of the 27 winners, only five were absent. This season saw 222 entries in the various categories."

There were 10 categories that were acknowledged. As names were called for the poster winners, their creative art was displayed on a screen for the room to see.

Poster and literary submissions compete first at the local Legion branch level before the winners move on until they reach provincial level.

Felkar thanked the students, their teachers and parents for keeping this annual competition alive.

Congratulations to all the winners.

Primary colour poster

1.Jolee Beech



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

The local winners of the Royal Canadian Legion's annual National Youth Remembrance Contest, except for five, posed for a picture with their certificates with St. Marys Legion members Bim Graham, Tom Jenkins, President Reg Rumble and Ken Felkar.

2.Lacey Terpstra

3.Briar Corneil

Junior colour poster

1.Kassy Van Erik

2.Sofia Leclair

3.Rylan Lord

Intermediate colour poster

1.Sophia Johnston

2.Paula Black

3.Maayan Heaton

Senior colour poster

1.Charlie Ferguson

2.Bennett Herbert

Junior black-and-white poster

1.Kylie Blake

2.Clark Monteith

3.Ayla Boemer

Intermediate black-and-white poster

1.Saskia-Lyn de Boer

2.Clara Shepley

3.Miljhey Jane Sagapi

Junior essay

1.Reed Martin

2.Grace Jacobs

3.Samantha Wilson

Intermediate essay

1.Tayia Jezard

2.Logan Westman

Junior poetry

1.Grace Jacobs

2.Greyson Gilbert

3. Finn Reid

Intermediate poetry

1.Ryan Zwambag

2.Maaya Heaton

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'This is just chaos': UTRCA board opposes consolidation of conservation authorities

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

At the most recent Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA)'s board of directors meeting on Nov. 25, Brian Petrie, mayor of Ingersoll and one of the UTRCA's directors, warned that municipalities need to wake up.

"I think the problem I have with what's going on now, and generally the government's scope, is that local governance model – whether its school boards, health units, municipalities, conservation authorities – is being lost and turned into an administrative role to levy our residents for money that the government changes their priorities on," Petrie said. "... Unfortunately, if we don't wake up as municipalities and put the brakes on here and fight back ... that's where I think the message needs to be."

Petrie was speaking on the Province of Ontario's proposal to consolidate 36 conservation authorities into seven large regional authorities. The UTRCA, which covers an area of 3,421 square kilometres and is focused on conservation, flood control and the preservation of the watershed, is proposed to amalgamate with Catfish Creek CA, Essex Region CA, Grand River CA, Kettle Creek CA, Long Point Region CA, Lower Thames Valley CA and St. Clair Region CA to form the Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority. The proposed authority stretches as southwest as Windsor and as north as Shelburne. Within its boundaries, there would be 81 municipalities and, to put that into perspective, the UTRCA is currently composed of 17 municipalities.

As presented by Tracy Annett, general manager of the UTRCA, there are not many concrete steps put in place by the province yet. So far, it has made changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, including the establishment of a new agency, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, to provide leadership,

governance and strategic direction to conservation authorities. The changes to the act were part of Bill 68, the Plan to Protect Ontario Act, which was introduced and passed without any consultation.

The province's news release on the proposed change states legislation to create a new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency will be released soon. The goal of the change is "improving the province's conservation authority system to help get shovels in the ground faster on homes and other local infrastructure projects, while strengthening the vital role conservation authorities play in managing watersheds and protecting communities from floods and natural hazards."

Petrie was only one of many directors to voice their frustrations with the idea. Skylar Franke, London city councillor, called the legislation "absolute garbage" and "a big time waste."

"This is just chaos," said Tom Heeman of Thames Centre. "... What we're looking at; it's the freight train of inevitability. ... The reality is that this is going to have chaos for the next four years. This is also downloading from the province because that board is going to be funded by municipal taxpayers."

In a recorded vote, a motion to oppose the consolidation was nearly unanimous. Only Peter Cuddy, a London city councillor, was in favour of consolidation.

In a Dec. 8 post on its website, and in accordance with the sentiments of its board, the UTRCA has advised the public to tell the province a few key messages while its public comment period is still active, including:

Reduce the size of the proposed region

"The proposed Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority is much too large to remain responsive and effective," the UTRCA advises. "The province should consider smaller, more fo-

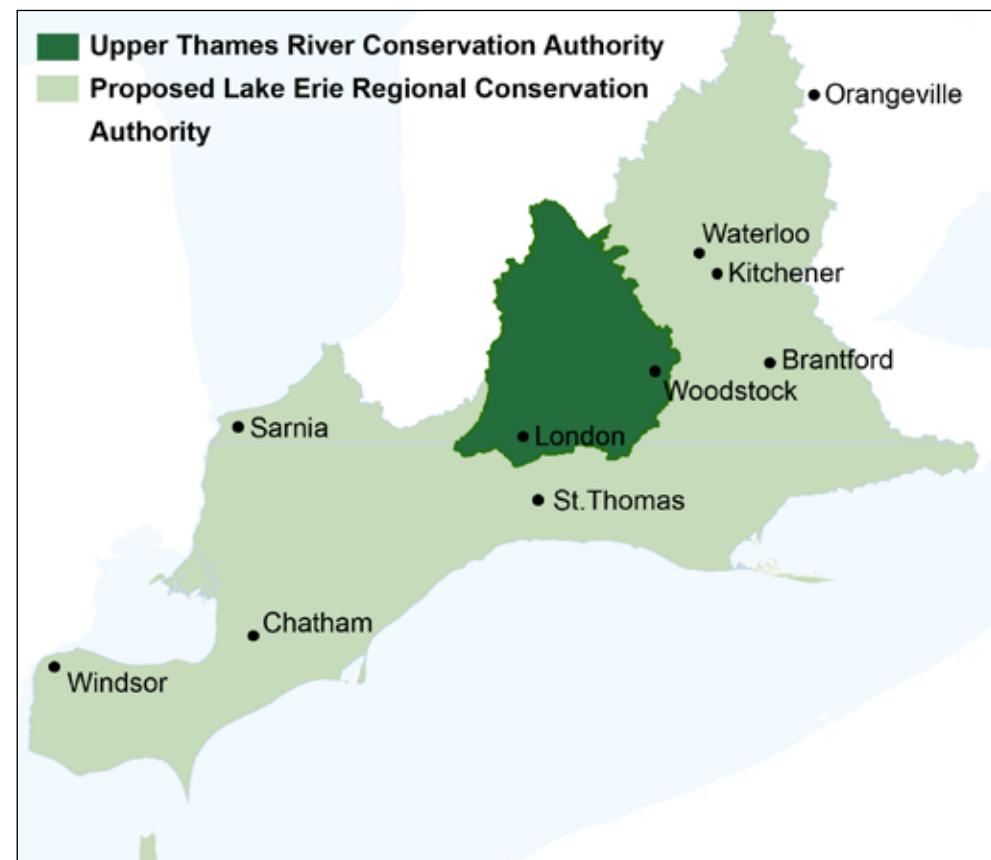
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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) is opposed to a provincial plan to consolidate 36 conservation authorities into just seven regional conservation authorities. If approved, UTRCA would join with seven other conservation authorities to form the Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority.



Merry Christmas!



MATTHEW RAE
MPP – Perth-Wellington

519-272-0660 | matthew.rae@pc.ola.org | matthewrae.ca

'This is just chaos': UTRCA board opposes consolidation of conservation authorities

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

cused regional models that improve efficiency while preserving local knowledge and relationships."

Ensure local representation in governance

"The UTRCA was created in 1947 as a partnership between member municipalities to use local knowledge and expertise to make decisions regarding the management of the watershed's natural resources," the UTRCA writes. "The 17 watershed municipalities appoint a board of 15 members who determine the programs and services the UTRCA provides to watershed communities. A single board representing 81 municipalities will dilute local voices. The governance model must ensure meaningful local representation that balances rural and urban priorities and interests, so watershed priorities remain community driven."

Keep conservation local

"Local conservation staff and offices understand the water, land, people and challenges of the Upper Thames River watershed in ways centralized deci-

sion-makers cannot," the UTRCA advises. "Decisions made from afar will not reflect the area's unique environmental, agricultural and community needs. Local expertise is essential for public safety, environmental protection and the delivery of effective community services."

Protect existing programs and services

"The UTRCA delivers programs that directly support the unique requests and needs of watershed landowners, municipalities and communities," the UTRCA advises. "Our residents value our species-at-risk initiatives (turtles and fish), environmental education for students, specialized technical advice and outdoor recreation – but these are just some of the programs that may be lost under a centralized, standardized regional model. These locally developed services must be protected. A regional model may lead to reduced service levels, loss of expertise or diminished community access for local residents."

Support efficient planning and permitting

"UTRCA provides timely respons-

es and approvals that meet or exceed provincial timelines," the UTRCA advises. "In 2024, 99 per cent of permit applications were completed within the provincial guidelines. Regionalizing permitting must not create delays, bottlenecks or reduced access to technical expertise."

Ensure fair and transparent funding

"A regional funding model must be fair to rural municipalities and avoid cost shifts that disadvantage small communities," the UTRCA advises. "Member municipalities contribute 34 per cent of the UTRCA's operating budget through levies and cost-sharing agreements, 34 per cent is self-generated through user fees and donations, and 30 per cent is obtained through applications to foundations and other levels of government to leverage municipal contributions and provide more robust programs to watershed residents. The provincial contributions represent just two per cent of the UTRCA's operating budget."

Recognize the value of UTRCA's local assets

"The UTRCA owns and/or manages

more than 5,790 hectares (14,300 acres) of land within the watershed," the UTRCA advises. "Decisions about lands and resources should stay close to the communities that use and care for them."

Maintain the principles of integrated watershed management

"Watershed decisions should be based on science, geography and local hydrology, not overly large administrative boundaries," the UTRCA advises.

Ask the province to listen to local communities

"The province should carefully consider input from municipalities, landowners, conservation authorities and community groups before any final decision is made," the UTRCA concludes.

Comments from the public will be accepted by the province until Dec. 22 at <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/025-1257>.

The UTRCA is also asking the public to provide comments to their local MPP – Matthew Rae in Perth-Wellington.

With files from Jeff Helsdon, Tillsonburg Post editor.

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Town of St. Marys holiday hours 2025

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The following hours will be in effect for Town of St. Marys services for the 2025 holiday season:

Administrative offices (town hall and municipal operations centre)

- Closed from Dec. 24 at 12 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.

Adult learning

- Closed from Dec. 19 at 4:30 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 9:30 a.m.

Child-care centre and Before and After School program

- Child-care centre closed from Dec. 24 at 11:30 a.m. to Jan. 5, 2026 at 7 a.m.
- Before and After School program closed from Dec. 19 at 5:30 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026 at 7 a.m.
- Winter Break Camp running Dec. 22 and 23 from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Community outreach

- Closed from Dec. 24 at 12 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.
- For non-emergent needs, contact communityoutreach@town.stmarys.on.ca or Stratford Social Services at 519-271-3773 ext. 200
- For emergent needs, contact Stratford Police Service at 911

EarlyON Centre

- Closed from Dec. 24 at 10:30 a.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 8 a.m.

Friendship Centre/senior services

- Closed from Dec. 23 at 4:30 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.
- For in-home support throughout the holiday season, contact the Friendship Centre at 519-284-3272 prior to Dec. 23.

Landfill

- Closed on the following regular days of operation (Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday):

- Dec. 24 at 12 p.m.
- Dec. 25 and 26
- Dec. 31 at 12 p.m.
- Jan. 1, 2026

Library

- Open Dec. 24, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.,

Dec. 29-30, 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Dec. 31, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

- Closed Dec. 25-28 and Jan. 1, 2026
- Open Jan. 2, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Jan. 3, 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Museum and archives

- Closed from Dec. 24 at 12 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 9 a.m.

Mobility services

The mobility services and EasyRide offices will be closed from Dec. 23 at 4 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026. Staff will be available to respond to inquiries at 519-284-4010 during this time.

Transportation services can be offered for prearranged bookings from Dec. 22 to Jan. 5, 2026. Please call 519-284-4010 to reserve your spot. Rides must be booked by Dec. 18 at 4 p.m.

Pyramid Recreation Centre

- Arena and rooms closed Dec. 24 at 3 p.m. to end of day Dec. 26; reopening Dec. 27 at 6:30 a.m.

- Arena and rooms closed Dec. 31 at 3 p.m. to end of day Jan. 1, 2026; reopening Jan. 2, 2026, at 6:30 a.m.

- Holiday Break Day Camp runs Dec. 22, 23, 29 and 30 as well as Jan. 2, 2026. Program hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (pre-register at www.townofstmarys.com/activenet)

Service Ontario

- Closed from Dec. 24 at 12 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.

Train station

- No change to station hours
- Visit www.viarail.ca for train scheduling

Youth centre

- Closed from Dec. 20 at 6:30 p.m. to Jan. 5, 2026, at 3:30 p.m.

Waste and recycling collection

- Running as scheduled throughout the holiday season

Any updates will be posted to the town website (townofstmarys.com), Facebook page (facebook.com/stmarysontario) and X account (twitter.com/townofstmarys) as soon as they are available.



Lianne Rood

Member of Parliament
Middlesex-London

liannerood.ca

lianne.rood@parl.gc.ca

519-245-6561

Holiday magic down at Milt Dunnell Field



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Locals were treated to horse-drawn wagon rides as part of the town's winter festivities at Milt Dunnell Field over the weekend.



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

The Winter Lights illuminated the park, welcoming the spirit of Christmas.

Renovations to PRC aquatics centre officially finished

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys has announced the renovations at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC) aquatics centre are finished, and the facility will once again open to visitors.

The town will re-open the doors to the aquatics centre on Wednesday, Dec. 17 with a grand-opening event to follow on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026. The December soft-opening date will be the launch of all regular programming including aquafit, lane swims, open swims and rentals. There will be several additional open swims throughout the holiday season. Registration for these programs will begin on Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 11 a.m. through ActiveNet.

New this year, St. Marys residents will have priority access to swimming-lesson registration through ActiveNet on Monday, Dec. 22, at 9 a.m. Registration for swimming lessons to non-residents will open Tuesday, Dec. 23, at 9 a.m. Swimming lessons will resume the week of Jan. 5, 2026.

The aquatics centre is offering free Swim Level Assessments in December. Swimmers can meet with an instructor to determine their abilities and get a recommended level to register for swimming lessons. Visit www.townofstmarys.com/aquaticscentre to view the full holiday schedule for more information.

Leadership courses will start on Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026. Programs offered will include Bronze Medalion, Bronze Cross, and Swim Instructors. Registration for these courses will begin on Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 11 a.m. through ActiveNet.

a.m. through ActiveNet.

Membership passes and pool rentals will be available with the 2025 rates until Dec. 31, 2025. The town encourages individuals to take advantage of this current pricing while rates still apply. To view a full list of rates, visit www.townofstmarys.com/aquaticscentre.

The highly anticipated grand-opening event will be taking place on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026. This event will feature a big splash, ribbon cutting, giveaways, free swim times and other celebratory fun! More details will be announced soon on the Town of St. Marys' website, Facebook and X/Twitter accounts.

"We understand how much this reopening means

to our community, and we are dedicated to providing a safe, enjoyable experience for all," said Mayor Al Strathdee in a press release.

"Our staff are ready to greet patrons in the refreshed space, and we look forward to seeing families, swimmers and visitors make new memories in the facility once again," added director of community services Stephanie Ische.

As the aquatics centre re-opens its doors, the Town of St. Marys invites everyone to rediscover the revitalized space. With refreshed facilities, dedicated staff and a renewed commitment to community wellness, there has never been a better time to dive back in.

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Local is perfect for last-minute celebrations!

Saturday, Dec. 20

Limited edition market calendars available;
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8 a.m. to noon
317 James St. S.

Letters to Santa



Dear Santa,
My name is Aiden. This year I have been trying to clean my room. Sometimes I clean windows. For Christmas I want a blue fluffy toy and a Magic Mixie. Are there lots of presents in the North Pole?
Love, Aiden Grade 1 Little Falls



Dear Santa,
My name is Emmi. I am making good choices at school this year. I put my Christmas tree up. I would like a surfboard for Christmas. Do you like the colour red?
Love, Emmi Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Fletcher. I've been good this year. I work hard at school. I want a phone and a toy car. I will give you cookies and milk. How do your elves fly?
Love, Fletcher Grade 1 Little Falls



Dear Santa,
My name is Ethan. This year I have been trying to be good to my brother and my dad and my mom. How does the North Pole make the reindeer fly? I want some Blade Blades and a Blade Blade Stadium.
Love, Ethan Grade 1 Little Falls



Dear Santa,
My favorite things about Christmas is presents. I am six years old and I love Christmas. Do you like to play hide and seek? What is your favorite color? I hope everybody in the world gets presents. May I please have a elf? I hope you have a very good Christmas.
Love, Jordan



Hi Santa,
I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I love my family. I like to play hide and go seek. I like to play games. I want a DJ Furby and I want a snap bracelet and a stuffy.
Best wishes, Audra

Dear Santa,
My name is Sam. This year I have been good at Math. I want a boat with a claw and a Mosasaurus. Do your reindeers switch turns with pulling the sleigh?
Love, Sam Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Ronnie. This year I am trying not to fight with my brothers. I hope to get a snowboard for Christmas. What is your favourite type of apple? Have a good Christmas.
Love, Ronnie Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Grayson. I am trying to feed my dog its food. It is so fun to play with my dog. Do you like ice cream? I want new colourful markers for Christmas.
Love, Grayson Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I like playing with all of my cousins because they are funny and I like them.
Love, Layton

Dear Santa,
My name is Lydia. This year I am trying my best at hockey. I want a phone and a humongous stuffy and an angel stuffy. Do you really give kids presents?
Love, Lydia Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Marla. This year I've been trying to learn Math. And I've been trying to clean my room. I want to get a fluffy carpet and a cute stuffy and some Christmas stuff. Does Rudolph ever ride in the sleigh?
Love, Marla Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Lauren. This year I helped do some chores. For Christmas I want some art, a Pokemon poster and some books. How do the reindeer learn how to fly?
Love, Lauren Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Hailey. I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I love you Santa! We are going to Mexico because my parents are getting married. I like that you travel around the world and you give people presents.
Love, Nash

Dear Santa,
My name is Jayson. I have been working on keeping my room clean. I want a shelf to put my toys on and more bunnies too. Do you have bunnies in the North Pole?
Love, Jayson Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Addilyn. This year I have been tidying the house all by myself. I want a Magic Mixie and some new clothes. What cookies are Mrs. Claus's favourite?
Love, Addilyn Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Lincoln. This year I am trying to get better at UFLI. I would like Blade Blades, a phone and a racecar track. How do you get people presents who don't have a chimney?
Love, Lincoln Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Landon. I am in grade one. I am at Little Falls Public School. I do my chores. I do my work. I want a new Lego set. I love you Santa.
Love, Landon

Dear Santa,
My name is Bentley. This year I am helping my brother and doing chores. For Christmas I want a remote control truck. How do you deliver the presents in a night? Do you use magic?
Love, Bentley Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Kinsley. This year I have been cleaning the house. I want a fake dog that is hurt and comes with a cast. What is Mrs. Claus's favourite kind of cookie?
Love, Kinsley Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Cora. This year I am trying to not fight with my sisters. Can I have a phone for Christmas? Can I have a humongous stuffy? What kind of cake do you like?
Love, Cora Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
I am a student at Little Falls Public School. I am in grade one. I like my family. I like gymnastics. I want a real life microphone.
Love from your friend, Nyla

Dear Santa,
My name is Tori. This year I have been helping people when they get hurt. I would like a stuffy kitten for Christmas and a phone for Christmas. Does Rudolph always lead your sleigh?
Love, Tori Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
My name is Gabby. This year I have been trying to not argue with Lydia. I want a pair of gloves for Christmas. Thank you for calling me. Is there a Mrs. Claus? Merry Christmas Santa.
Love, Gabby Grade 1 Little Falls

Dear Santa,
I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I like to play hockey. I play on a St. Mary's team. I would like a bracelet making kit.
From, Austin

Dear Santa,
My name is Gabe. I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I do chores. I love you Santa. I would like a Stitch hat or stuffy.
Love, Gabe

Dear Santa,
My name is Nash. I am 6 years old. I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I wish I could see you. For Christmas I would like a Mr. Bean toy please. I hope I'm on the good list. I love you!
Love, Nash

Hello Santa,
I am a student at Little Falls Public School. I am in grade one. I like playing Transformers with my grandpa. I want Optimus Prime for Christmas.
From, Maddox

Dear Santa,
I am a student at a Little Falls Public School. I am in grade one. I am proud of myself. I am learning new things. I want a toy jeep.
From, Beckham

Dear Santa,
I am a student at Little Falls Public School. I am in grade one. I like my elf Holly. I like cuddling with my family. I want a kitten.
Love, Nellie

Hi Santa,
My name is Jada. I am a great sister. I want a lamborghini and my dad will drive it.
From, Jada

Hi Santa,
My name is Lucy. I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I love school days because there is a lot of fun. I want a Barbie set and I would like a black skirt. I

Letters to Santa

have been very good this year. I want an elf on a shelf.
Love, Lucy

Dear Santa,
My name is Winnie. I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I have been good at school. I love to spend time with my family. For Christmas I want a Labooboo and a closet for it. I want a DJ Furby and I also want a stuffy.
Love, Winnie

Dear Santa,
My name is Sophie, I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I like to spend time with my family and I like to play hide and seek. I love you Santa.
Best wishes, Sophia

Hi Santa,
I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I like my family. My favourite food is chicken nuggets. I am a great sister. My sister is the best.

Yours, Saylor

Dear Santa,
My name is Lincoln. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been kind and helpful this year. I would like Kirby toys, I will look for your sled in the sky!
Love, Lincoln

Dear Santa,
My name is Anna. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been good at skating. If I try something I don't give up! I want a doll house and I also want a doll car. I have a cat. Can you get a present for it? I also want my Mom to be happy! I would like roller skates and a DJ Furby. Thank you, Santa!
Love, Anna

Dear Santa,
My name is Jude. I am a grade

one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been working hard at adding and subtracting and writing heart words. I am a good big brother and I love rainbow colours! For Christmas, I would like number blocks and a Pokemon eraser. I also like Squishmallows and Minecraft.
Love, Jude

Dear Santa,
My name is Lukas. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been good to my family. I want an art set and a DJ Furby. Have a safe flight!
From, Lukas

Dear Santa,
My name is Sterling. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I am good at home. I washed my mom's car. I am good at lego. I want Robux and a toy house. I will leave milk and cookies for you.
Love, Sterling

Dear Santa,
My name is Noah. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have fun with my family at Great Wolf Lodge. For Christmas I would like an Adopt-me Egg. I want Easton to have baby toys. I am getting better at drawing and I have been great at working. I hope you are safe, Santa!
Love, Noah

Dear Santa,
My name is Kelson. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I am practicing riding my bike. I help my mom shovel. For Christmas, I would like a lego set. I will leave you some cookies and milk.
From, Kelson

Dear Santa,
My name is Lidia. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been listening to

my mom and dad and my sisters. I have been kind to my friends. This year I want a big unicorn for Christmas. I love my family!
Best wishes, Lidia

Dear Santa,
My name is Remy. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I am working hard on reading and writing. I would like an Angel Stitch stuffy. I will leave you milk and cookies.
Your friend, Remy

Dear Santa,
My name is Dalton. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I am helping at home with my baby sister. I would like Hot Wheelz cars. I want my dog to get a bone.
Love you Santa, Dalton

Dear Santa,
My name is Owen. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been trying to be good and listen at school this year. I have a sister and I want my sister to get everything she wants. I want a remote control car that has wheels that flip around. I also have a dog. Can you get him a bone? I want a Minecraft book for Christmas. It's cold, let's build. Milk and cookies for you!
From, Owen

Dear Santa,
My name is Wren. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been so good this year. Can my dog have a bone? Can I have a remote control car? I have been really good! I think that Santa is the best ever!
From, Wren

Dear Santa,
My name is Tianna. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been kind this year. I want a red coat for my dog. I want a desk to do work



on. I will leave you a cookie!
Love, Tianna

Dear Santa,
My name is Isabella. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been kind to my mom, dad and cousins this year. I would like for Christmas some face paint and a DJ Furby. I hope you make it to my home.
Love, Isabella

Dear Santa,
My name is Zoe. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I want a DJ Furby. I want a kitty and a puppy. I want rollerskates. I want a motorcycle. I want a My Little Live Pet dog. Stay warm, Zoe

Dear Santa,
My name is Burk. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I was good this year. I was cleaning up my living room and doing chores. I want a DJ Furby and a Labubu.
Love, Burk

Dear Santa,
My name is Liam and I am in grade one at Little Falls Public School. I have been good at school and I have been nice to my brother. I want a baby high chair and a Stitch Lego set.
Love, Liam



Beyblades and a creepy spider or snake. I will give you some cookies.
Your friend, Liam

Dear Santa,
My name is Adelaid, I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I love my parents. You would be proud of me for making my brother feel better. I would like a Ningago set that has two dragons. I would like a cute puppy stuffy and an Eevee and Pikachu stuffy. Have a good time with the reindeers!
Love, Adelaide

Dear Santa,
My name is Weston. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been nice to my sister and my friends this year. Santa, I would like a Transformer. I am hoping I get one. Safe travels.
From, Weston

Dear Santa,
My name is Kaydan. I am a grade one student at Little Falls Public School. I have been good at school and I have been nice to my brother. I want a baby high chair and a Stitch Lego set.
Love, Kaydan



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MATTHEW RAE
MPP - Perth-Wellington

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matthewrae.ca

The community gives back at Christmas time



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTOS)

The annual Salvation Army Christmas Food Drive was held at Your Independent Grocer and Foodland Dec. 13 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Many people were very giving and one anonymous man donated 17 turkeys and two cartloads full of all the trimmings for many lovely Christmas dinners. Above left, pictured from left, are Salvation Army representative Michael Tigani, volunteer Steve Goad, Stratford Police Service Const. Wanda Hughes and auxiliary Const. Moriah Myers-Bedfore. Above right, firefighters donated their time to help with the Salvation Army food drive at Your Independent Grocer Dec. 13. Pictured from left are firefighters Darcy Robinson, Devin Oliver, Mark Manzano, John Becker and Mike McKone.

Early Christmas Deals are on now @ Stratford Nissan

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2024 Nissan Sentra SV



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LOW KMS - 24,730 KM + HST & IC

2021 Nissan Rogue SV



iQ GREAT PRICE
\$22,495 OR \$182 B/W
LOW KMS - 93,245 KM + HST & IC

2023 Hyundai Elantra SEL



PRICE DROP
iQ GREAT PRICE
\$22,999 OR \$165 B/W
LOW KMS - 18,469 KM + HST & IC

2025 Nissan Sentra S PLUS



iQ GREAT PRICE
\$23,495 OR \$169 B/W
MILEAGE - 15,651 KM FWD

2024 Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross ES



PRICE DROP
iQ GREAT PRICE
\$24,999 OR \$180 B/W
LOW KMS - 31,946 KM AWD

2025 Nissan Sentra SV MOONROOF



iQ GREAT PRICE
\$25,495 OR \$183 B/W
LOW KMS - 17,893 KM FWD
+ HST & IC

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PRICE DROP
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2021 Honda CR-V EX-L



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2025 Chrysler Grand Caravan SXT



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2024 Jeep Wrangler Sahara



PRICE DROP
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LOW KMS - 46,603 KM 4WD

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PERTH COUNTY OPP



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Good news! Perth County residents can request a **FREE Assessment to identify vulnerabilities in their homes and receive advice on safeguarding their property**. Contact Perth County OPP to learn more! (519) 393-6123



PERTH COUNTY OPP

CAMSAFE (Volunteer Registry of Security Cameras)

Volunteer registry aimed at keeping our community safe and informing police if any cameras are available in the neighbourhood.

CAMSAFE does not have access to footage or cameras - only basic contact info. Delete your information or account at any time. Register any cameras with as many or as few details as you wish. Visit camsafe.ca to learn more.

Non-Emergency Line: 1-888-310-1122



Merry Christmas and all the best in 2026
from Black's Financial Services

Black's Financial Services Inc.
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St. Marys Independent SPORTS

DCVI Junior Girls Volleyball team wins pair to start season

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys DCVI Junior Girls Volleyball team scored back-to-back victories to open their season when they defeated Central Huron and Listowel on Dec. 10.

Head coach Cooper Preszcator said the start gives the team a great foundation to build off.

“Starting as well as we have should be really good for the rest of the season,” Preszcator told the Independent. “We should be able to keep going forward with that. Typically, you don’t move backwards as a team and starting off this hot in our first two games is a great starting point.”

After falling in a close first set in their first game of the day against Central Huron by a score of 25-22, the Salukis won back-to-back sets to win the game with scores of 25-18 and 25-21. Preszcator called it a “great first game” for the junior girls.

“Going in, we talked about making smart plays and they made lots of smart plays,” said Preszcator. “We had some snow days that gave us more practices, so we were able to work on a lot more before you would normally get to before a first game, and they listen to everything, from Joey (Binning) letting the ball fall off the net before hitting it to just making the smart play over the net instead of hitting it.”

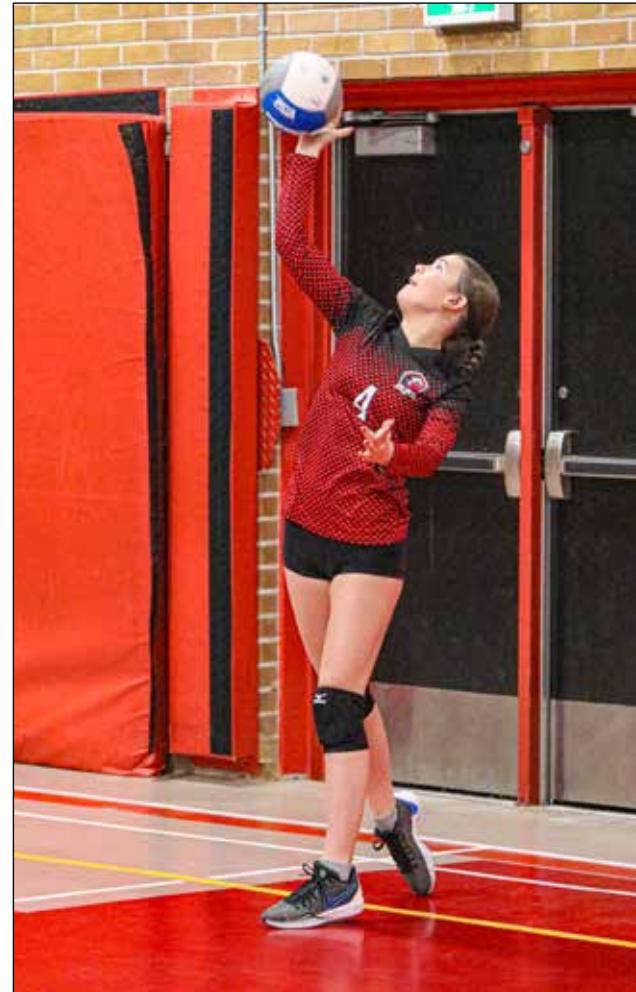
Preszcator explained the squad’s mental fortitude was on display throughout the day.

“Their mental attitudes and mental awareness impress me. They are able to recoup after a few lost points and take a breath, and just get back into it and get some points on our side again. In practice, we talked about always being ready, and that’s something they did really well.”

DCVI faced Listowel in their second game of the day and continued to roll after their strong finish to the first game, beating the visiting team in two straight sets by scores of 25-20 and 25-21.

According to Preszcator, several factors went into their early-season success.

“I was extremely happy with the pace at which the girls began the game with. The first game was a bit of a slow start, but in the first set of the second game, they came out swinging. I think the key to winning early on in the season is consistency. We had consistency in serving, passing and effort, which was the



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTOS)

On the left, Emma Hodkinson winds up to serve the ball during one of the St. Marys DCVI junior girls volleyball team’s two games on Dec. 9. On the right, Aubrey Cousineau bumps the ball into the air.

driving force behind these wins.

“Another factor to help us win was the snow days that delayed our start,” Preszcator continued. “This allowed us time to work on rotation and positioning as a team. The girls worked hard in practice so that in the game, they could focus on passing and hitting rather than spending their effort on positioning.”

Preszcator added the junior girls brought incredible positivity even during moments of adversity.

“Being new to junior girls sports, this level of competition honestly caught me off guard. It was so awe-

some to see the girls grinding for every point. They did a fantastic job at being ready in the defensive position, which made it hard for the opponents to score. On top of this, they maintained good attitudes. When we called timeouts, they were able to regroup and refocus on the task at hand. They did a good job at not blaming each other for the past but rather encouraging each other to work hard for the next point, saying, ‘We got this girls,’ or, ‘One good pass and we’re back in this.’ ”

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SMRA hosts annual Snipers Ringette Tournament



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTOS)

Pictured on the left is Eleena Rundle shooting the ring on net during the FUN1 St. Marys Snipers' game during the St. Marys Ringette Association (SMRA) Snipers' Tournament hosted Dec. 12-14. On the right is Clara Marcaccio flinging the ring on goal for a scoring chance.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTOS)

Pictured on the left is Everly Graham sending the ring up the ice during one of the FUN2 St. Marys Snipers' games during the Snipers' Tournament. On the right is Adelaide Burnham readying to fire a shot on target.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTOS)

Pictured on the left is Natalie Reay releasing a shot during one of the Open A 18+ St. Marys Snipers' games at the Snipers' Tournament. On the right, Richelle Forrester drops to a knee as she launches the ring on goal.

Lincs navigate up-and-down back-to-backs for pair of wins

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

Seldom have the scoring summaries of two games been less indicative of how the contests actually played out than the St. Marys Lincolns' back-to-back wins over the Stratford Warriors on Dec. 11 and St. Thomas Stars on Dec. 12.

The Lincolns had their first faceoff against their rivals from Stratford, and while they came away with a 4-2 victory, according to head coach Jeff Bradley, it was not the performance the team was hoping for.

"I did not think we were good at all," Bradley said. "I thought it was an incredibly disappointing effort. We won basically because of Brogan (Colquhoun) and because of Lincoln (Moore). We didn't have it going and we were forced to defend and that's something we do very well, and we had to sell out to do it with a lot of blocked shots."

Evan Arnold gave the Warriors a 1-0 lead midway through the first period, but Lincoln Moore tied the game for St. Marys with just under five minutes to go in the period. Moore's goal was arguably the first and only high-quality scoring chance of the opening frame for the Lincolns, who were stymied by the stingy Warriors defence. And while the Lincolns managed a few more chances in the final two periods than they did in the first, Bradley noted he wasn't pleased with the team's execution at any point in the game.

"We were second to every puck," said Bradley. "We lost most of the battles. We turned pucks over. The only good thing that came out of that were the two points, but that wasn't our only goal. It was our first time playing Stratford this season, so we had a message we wanted to send, but we didn't send any type of good message."

Moore scored again just 96 seconds into the middle stanza before Devun Colebrook buried his 10th of the season in the final minute of the second period. Moore completed the hat-trick just 52 seconds into the third with Max Wildfong cutting the Lincolns' lead back to two with a goal at 16:19 mark of the final frame.

Bradley credited Moore and Colquhoun, who made 36 saves in the Lincolns' crease, as being the only bright spots in the team's otherwise-lacklustre showing.

"It's been great for Lincoln (Moore) as of late," Bradley said. "In the game against Chatham at home (on Dec. 5), he sat a little bit and I think he took that message to heart because every single shift since then, he's been in beast mode. Lincoln knows how important he is to our team, not only production-wise but as a kid who can do it all. When he's engaged, there's nobody that's going to stop him."

Lincs' dominance finally pays off in barn-burning comeback win

Just 24 hours later, the Lincolns delivered arguably one of their most complete games of the season, a feat not reflected in the scoresheet, which showed the Lincs as going down 3-0 to the St. Thomas Stars in the first period and staying down by three through two periods.

George Matsos scored a pair for the Stars before Luke Wachowiak extended the St. Thomas lead to 3-0. Vaughn Barr was pulled to start the second period.

Despite the deficit, there was no question in anyone's mind that the only reason the Stars were in control of the scoreboard was goaltender William Camputaro, who stoned the Lincolns for the first 40 minutes.

Bradley explained how he felt very positive all game long behind the bench despite his squad trailing by three at the end of two periods.

"From puck drop, we were outstanding. I thought it was a complete game by us. There were a couple breakdowns, specifically on the first two goals, but other than that, I thought we dominated the game, the possession, the shots and the scoring chances. St. Thomas really didn't have much at all."

"We were getting beat by a goalie, but we kept going. It's easy to throw in the towel and just think, 'You



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Lincoln Moore puts home his first of three goals in the St. Marys Lincolns' 4-2 win over the Stratford Warriors on Dec. 11.

know what? It's not our night.' But we didn't do that. We kept going and eventually we got the results. The hunger in this team is amazing. We're so proud of this team after a game like that."

Bradley credited the Lincolns' captain, Chase MacQueen-Spence, for providing steady, motivational leadership on the bench throughout the game.

"That comeback is a testament to Chase (MacQueen-Spence). Chase has grown and matured so much over the years. There are times when players aren't scoring and they can get negative and start getting down on each other, but I kept hearing Chase the entire night on the bench saying, 'We've just got to keep going, we're almost there, we're right there, keep going.' He didn't get negative once, and the guys follow that. That was a great example set by our captain."

Both teams failed to find the back of the net in the second frame, but it was clear the Lincolns were in control as they led the shot clock 34-14 at the end of two periods.

"It was honestly almost videogame like where you're playing on extra-hard mode," said Bradley. "We just could not beat that goalie. He kept them in it as long as he could, but we just did not give up, and we deserved it. We looked at it as just a matter of time that we would break that goaltender, and boy, did we ever."

Less than a minute into the third, Owen Kalp finally got the Lincolns on the board with his sixth of the campaign. After around seven and a half minutes of constant Lincolns pressure, they blew the doors down on the Stars, scoring three goals in three minutes and 15 seconds, including goals by MacQueen-Spence, Callum McAuley and Declan Ready.

Despite dominating the game, the adversity continued presenting itself to the Lincolns, with the Stars not only firing off a lucky shot to tie the game at four apiece, which ended up forcing overtime, but St. Marys lost a pair of defencemen to injury, including Jacob Montesi and Luke McMillan. This forced the Lincs to not only rely heavily on their four remaining defencemen but also

GOHL Western Conference Standings (as of Dec. 16, 2025)							
Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
Chatham Maroons	22	5	1	2	47	144	90
Elmira Sugar Kings	22	4	1	0	45	131	65
St. Marys Lincolns	20	6	2	0	42	112	64
London Nationals	21	9	0	0	42	140	95
Stratford Warriors	17	5	1	2	37	91	64
Waterloo Siskins	14	8	4	1	33	93	75
St. Thomas Stars	15	12	1	1	32	107	99
LaSalle Vipers	13	14	3	0	29	100	113
Strathroy Rockets	12	14	2	0	26	111	113
Listowel Cyclones	10	15	1	1	22	74	84
Komoka Kings	8	17	2	1	19	87	121
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	29	0	0	0	39	194

shift forward Ryan Hodkinson to the blueline. Bradley credited all five for delivering clutch defensive minutes when they needed it most.

"It speaks to our depth that the other guys were able to get us through that," Bradley said. "And to have a guy like Ryan (Hodkinson) go back and play as if he's one of our best defensemen, it shows these kids are selfless players and selfless teammates and that they'll do whatever it takes to win."

In overtime, after four and a half minutes of mostly end-to-end action, Hodkinson outwaited the Stars' defenders as well as Camputaro in goal until McAuley was left all alone, at which point Hodkinson placed the puck on a platter for the Timmins native, who buried the game-winner for his second of the night and third goal in as many games since joining the Lincolns.

Bradley had high praise for the 19-year-old McAuley, noting he has been a positive contributor since joining the Lincolns.

"It's tough for a kid to join a new hockey team, and it's even tougher for a kid to come in and have an immediate impact, and Callum (McAuley) has fit like a glove. Everything about him is what we look for in a player for the St. Marys Lincolns. He works hard. He's smart. He's quick. He's got skill. He's everything we needed at the time Pat acquired him and the fact he's fit in so seamlessly is such a relief."

St. Marys Lincolns Player Stats (as of Dec. 16, 2025)						
Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS	
Ryan Hodkinson	F	26	8	29	37	
Chase MacQueen-Spence	F	27	13	19	32	
Lincoln Moore	F	25	15	16	31	
Owen Voortman	F	28	8	18	26	
Blake Elzinga	F	28	9	13	22	
Owen Kalp	D	28	6	13	19	
Ethan Weir	F	26	9	8	17	
Declan Ready	F	28	6	11	17	
Jack Clarke	F	23	8	7	15	
Devun Colebrook	F	27	10	4	14	
Oliver Lacko	F	11	5	6	11	
Atley Rogers	F	25	2	9	11	
Chase McDougall	F	27	2	7	9	
James MacGregor	D	26	3	5	8	
Jacob Montesi	D	27	1	6	7	
Luke McMillan	D	26	1	5	6	
Callum McAuley	F	3	3	1	4	
Jakob Drobny	D	19	0	3	3	
Will Wright	D	23	0	2	2	
Cam Kean	D	9	0	1	1	
Goals		Record	GAA	SV-%		
Brogan Colquhoun	13-4-1-0	2.08	0.932			
Vaughn Barr	7-2-1-0	2.40	0.916			

MINOR SPORTS

SCRAPBOOK



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Blake Munro fires a shot on goal during one of the Cherry Hill Carpentry-McKinley Hatchery FUN3 St. Marys Snipers tournament games last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Ali Harrigan lets a quick shot fly during one of last Saturday's Synterra FUN3 St. Marys Snipers tournament games.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Natalie McCorquodale shoots the ring during one of the Hubbard's Pharmacy-Frayne's Custom Cabinets U12 St. Marys Snipers tournament games this past Sunday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Will Graham launches the puck towards the net during this past Sunday's Finnbilt Construction U9 MD Boys St. Marys Rock game.



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Finn Harburn rockets a wrist shot on target during the St. Marys Building Centre U12 A Boys St. Marys Rock game this past Monday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Nelleke de Wit loads up a shot off the rush during this past Sunday's Veterinary Purchasing U15 C Girls St. Marys Rock game.

DCVI senior girls open season with straight-set victories



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

The St. Marys DCVI senior girls volleyball team celebrates scoring a point during one of their games on Dec. 9.

TURNER ROTH

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys DCVI Senior Girls Volleyball team took home two wins on home court versus Central Huron and Listowel on Dec. 9.

With St. Marys gaining valuable experience in a tournament the Friday before, playing against strong teams from St. Michael Catholic Secondary School and Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS), the Salukis came to play in their first game against Central Huron. The senior girls dominated each set against Central Huron, winning the first set by 18 points and the second set by 17.

Head coach Stephen Chateauvert talked about instilling and developing concepts in his team.

"I would say three things that we talked about from the start of the season are to be ready, call the ball loud and early, and don't hesitate," Chateauvert told the Independent. "They started to do that

with a little bit more regularity, which was nice to see."

The second game against Listowel was tougher for DCVI's senior girls. The sets were closer and the game was more back and forth than the previous. The Salukis still managed to pull out a sweep, winning both sets by scores of 25-21 and 25-19.

Chateauvert praised three of the team's most experienced players for helping guide the younger roster members through the Salukis' successful start to the season, with experience Chateauvert called invaluable.

"They got the win (against Listowel) because they were determined to get the win, particularly with few players on the court. We've got a lot of experience with Marin (Chateauvert), Katie (Namink) and Lena (Thompson). They take control out there, which is what we need. We've got a few rookies out there, and they're still learning the game and trying to process and do everything at



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Alanna Savile dives to keep the ball in the air during one of the St. Marys DCVI senior girls volleyball team's games on Dec. 9.

a much quicker speed. They are getting there, but they've still got a little ways to go, so having that experience out there and having players who know how to win and what to do to win allowed us to get that victory.

"All three of them have played so much volleyball from a young age, and I keep telling them, 'You will play as well as your energy allows you to.' If you're enthusiastic, energetic and loud out on the court, you'll play well, and we've seen that so far. We've been able to compete with some really strong Stratford schools, and when things don't go your way and you get a little bit quiet, a little bit hesitant and a little bit nervous, then things don't happen as easily. We're trying to instill that in them, and having Katie, Lena and Marin on the court certainly helps with that."

Chateauvert also explained why he thinks the team has the potential to enjoy a strong season, while also describing the next step for the youthful senior

squad.

"I want them to be lower, I want them to be more ready, I want them to be louder and I never want them to hesitate. We've only got so much time to work on some of the technical and fundamental aspects of the game, which a lot of them still need to work on, but if they do some of those other non-skill-based things, they will do very well as they're all very athletic and very talented."

"I think we will be able to compete with anyone in Huron-Perth," Chateauvert added. "We played two really good matches against St. Mike's and Stratford District at the tournament we were at last Friday, and that showed me that they can compete with anyone in Huron-Perth. As far as moving forward, it's hard to see where any of the other teams are, but I would like to think that we could compete for a WOSSAA Championship this year."



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May the magic of the Christmas season be filled with peace, joy and making memories. Cheers to a healthy 2026!

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COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER:

The white Christmas paradox – why I traded my shovel-free life for all that annoying magic

ALONA VASYLIEVA

Independent Columnist

Comparing Christmas in Ukraine and Canada is like eating two different, yummy holiday cookies – both are great, but they have their own special tastes!

In Ukraine, the main Christmas tree is a very big deal. The tree in our capital city, Kyiv, is the most important one in the whole country. Seeing it light up is like a big national party!

I'm imagining that glorious moment; stepping onto hallowed ground, maybe humming a carol, maybe already smelling the slightly too-greasy-but-who-cares deep-fried goodness that, universally, tastes like a Michelin-starred meal when you've been outside long enough to confuse your fingers with icicles.

Turns out, the legendary Toronto tree, residing at the Distillery Winter Village, has a bouncer, a velvet rope a ticket office!

"A charge," I sputter, "to look at a large, decorated piece of wood and its accompanying bright sparkly friends? Is this the Spirit of Christmas or a pay-per-view sporting event?!"

Apparently, during the glorious, prime, you-can-actually-see-the-lights hours, the village transforms into a charitable, fiscally responsible enterprise. They charge a fee to cover operational costs and to raise funds for local charities.

They do offer a loophole: free entry on weekday afternoons, which is fantastic if your primary goal is to see a dark, unlit tree and a bunch of market stalls looking sad and closed, possibly while squinting and yelling, "I think I see the sparkle!" Plus, you have the double whammy of queuing; first, a line for the tickets, and then a separate line to actually enter the thing. It's less festive stroll and more amusement park ride that only ends in a view of a tree.

Honestly, I was ready for the traditional Ukrainian Christmas market experience; the long walk, the fresh air, the feeling that any deep-fried atrocity you consume is the



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A seasonal staple: a tradition of large, outdoor skating rinks flourishes in Ukraine's major cities, serving as popular Christmas destinations complete with fairs, food courts and festive lights.

most exquisite meal ever, and the general ambiance that makes you feel warm despite the freezing temperatures. But now, it seems the true spirit of a Toronto Christmas requires a small financial sacrifice and the patience of a saint waiting in two separate lines. Next time, I'm bringing my own deep-fried pierogies and just looking at pictures of the tree online. It's probably cheaper.

Here is something that still confuses me. In Ukraine, our holiday season must have free outdoor ice-skating rinks. You put on your skates and glide under the twinkling lights.

Canada is the home of hockey – a country known for ice! I thought outdoor rinks would be everywhere, but they don't seem as popular as I expected. My son, Alex,

wanted skating lessons and I was so happy! I thought, "We'll skate together for Christmas!" But getting onto a nice outdoor rink with Christmas lights and a tree usually means waiting in a very long line. It's a fun wait, but still a long wait!

I've found some Canadian traditions that I absolutely adore! The best one is the Christmas Cookie Box! I love this idea! First, we have fun baking many different kinds of cookies with the kids. Then, we carefully pack them into pretty boxes and bags. The cheap dollar stores have tons of cute bags and boxes. Making a handmade gift to share with friends and family feels like a true hug of holiday love.

Another lovely thing is the family photo to postcard. We didn't do this in Ukraine. Getting a card in the mail with a picture of

our friends smiling by their fireplace is so happy and sweet. It brings a big smile to my face.

Finally, we have the lovely difference in who brings the gifts. In Ukraine, the main person is St. Nicholas. He is linked to good deeds and the Christian faith. He visits on Dec. 6 and brings smaller, sweet gifts – a little magic to start the month. Santa Claus, with his jolly laugh, is the North American star. He comes on the 25th with the bigger, main presents.

I love having both! It's like getting a nice warm-up present and then the main surprise! My December calendar is full of fun things to do, but nothing beats those cozy family nights at home, feeling the magic of the season. These small traditions are the true secret to making the biggest, happiest memories.

Right now, it's still December, which means the snow is in its magic phase before it turns into the annoying phase.

I totally get why almost all Canadians aren't big fans of snow. It's a pain! But having a white Christmas is just pure, beautiful magic.

I remember back in Ukraine, we had to travel to places like Scandinavia just to find snow for the kids. It sounds funny to Canadians – paying to see snow – but that's because we only wanted it for a few days. Nobody wants to shovel all winter!

Even though driving in the snow is terrible, I still love watching it fall from my warm, comfy home.

No matter if you're buying a ticket to see a tree or just enjoying the snow, the most important part of the holiday is the same; joy, family and being kind to others. I'm so happy to celebrate both Ukrainian and Canadian ways this year!

I sincerely hope you have a truly Merry Christmas filled with peace and warmth. It remains an absolute and tremendous pleasure and honour to share my thoughts (and, let's be honest, my slightly bewildered observations) with you. Thank you for welcoming me onto these pages.



HISTORIC ST. MARYS: Holiday snapshots from the archives

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

The St. Marys Museum is decorated for the holidays with Christmas trees, red ribbons, and garlands. In the upstairs hallway, a special display is titled "Capturing Christmas." Curator Emily Taylor has selected four of the Museum's antique cameras to exhibit and included photographs that, through the years, have marked local holiday celebrations. The earliest picture in the display was taken in 1893 in a photographer's studio in downtown St. Marys, using a large format bellows camera. It shows the seven members of the Wilson family – parents Henry and Frances and their five children who ranged in age from two years to 18 years old. Lying at their feet, quiet but alert, is the family dog, Duke. The Wilsons mailed prints of this photograph to friends and relatives with their best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy 1894!

In the 1950s, photographer Frank Robinson created the Christmas picture shown with this week's column to send greetings to his customers. Santa and his sleigh, with a slimmed-down team of only two reindeer, pass the town hall while the lights of a tall Christmas tree shine through the falling snow. Photographic technology had improved so that outdoor pictures at night were possible. While Robinson's efforts can't match today's manipulation of digital images, still the result is a holiday favourite from the Museum's collection. The most recent pictures in the "Capturing Christmas" display were converted from 35 mm slides, taken several decades ago, showing Christmas activities at the old Friendship Centre when the facility for seniors was still in a renovated factory building in the southeast corner of Cadzow Park.

Visitors to the Museum's Holiday Open House on Sunday afternoon, December 7, enjoyed not only the Christmas displays but also the other exhibits and activities that the Museum has to offer. Although it will be closed between Christmas and New Year's, the Museum is open until noon on December 24. There is still the opportunity to see the holiday displays and perhaps pick up last-minute gifts or greeting cards from the Museum's gift shop. People can also take the opportunity – either next week or when the Museum reopens on January 5 – to visit the reference room and "capture" more of local history by browsing the reference library shelves or reading historic copies of local newspapers, dating back to 1857. These old newspapers, available on microfilm, not only make very entertaining reading but also cast light on St. Marys life in years past. They are the source for the items in Amy Cubberley's popular weekly column in the Independent, "Looking Back."

In December 1925 – a century ago – the St. Marys Journal Argus was filled with advertisements for Christmas with many suggestions for appropriate gifts for every family member. For example, Kodak cameras were available at McIntyre's Rexall Drugstore, along with Kodak's special photograph albums. McIntyre's had a



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ST. MARYS MUSEUM'S COLLECTION / R. LORNE EEDY ARCHIVES)

St. Marys photographer Frank Robinson captured this picture, ca 1950, of Santa Claus driving his sleigh past the lights of the town hall.

varied inventory for Christmas shoppers. As well as the usual shaving supplies, cosmetics and candy, the store sold Edison photographs, talking dolls, leather school bags, mouth organs, thermos bottles and "novelties in all lines." St. Marys shoppers who were able to spend the money could buy the "New Orthophonic Victor" record player at Tovell's Music Store on Queen Street, or an electric toaster from The Hydro Store, a shop on Water Street that promoted the use of electric appliances. Even shoe stores, like Gilpin's, had holiday specials: "The entire stock of men's spats reduced in price!"

The 1925 December newspapers also described the activities of St. Marys town council. At that time, municipal elections were held yearly and during their final meetings, the councillors tried to clear up the year's business. One concern was road safety. The mayor, Charles E. Richardson, reported that an out-of-town driver, travelling west on Elgin Street East in slippery conditions, had crossed Church Street and "almost precipitated down the Knox Church hill," not realizing that there was no actual road there. That accident had been averted, but the mayor suggested that some sort of barricade should be erected. One councillor suggested posts and boards

painted white. But another councillor objected "on the grounds that it would spoil the looks of one of the finest streets in town." He thought that perhaps a sign would be sufficient. The matter was referred to the Board of Works to report back to council.

The principal of Central School wanted council's permission for his students to use the Knox Church hill as a toboggan slide, under supervision. Councillors were divided on this issue, and it was not resolved. Some thought it would be a good opportunity for the children to get exercise, as long as they were supervised; others thought it was much too dangerous and that a law should be passed against it. (Children would, of course, toboggan on that hill after school hours, despite any council ruling.)

The mayor suggested that there was a safer alternative, although it was not as convenient for Central School students. The newly formed St. Marys Rotary Club had, "at considerable expense," built a toboggan slide in the east ward near Brock Street on the hill from Queen Street down to Trout Creek. The Rotarians now wanted to turn its maintenance over to the town's Parks Board. The club hoped that "the younger people of the town would derive some benefit. Every precaution had been taken by the constructors to make the slide safe, and the gradual slope was ideal for the purpose." Council agreed that the town should pay for upkeep and that the Parks Board would deal with any management issues. The town owned two floodlights to use on the hill in the evenings. The Rotary Club could, therefore, see their new toboggan slide in use for the Christmas holidays. The slide was very popular in the winters through the 1920s but during the Great Depression in the 1930s, its maintenance was not a priority, and it was dismantled.

The last newspaper before Christmas, published on Thursday, December 24, contained a detailed description of the annual commencement exercises at the St. Marys Collegiate Institute on north ward hill. The event was spread over two evenings, the last Thursday and Friday before the start of the school's Christmas holidays. This was a community event and those attending paid a small admission charge. It combined the recognition of academic and athletic achievement with a concert featuring musical performances and demonstrations of dancing and gymnastics. The second evening featured a Shakespearean play. The Journal Argus reported that The Taming of the Shrew "was very realistically presented by thirteen students dressed in suitable costumes." When the program was over and the seats were stacked away, the principal allowed time for the students to enjoy "an impromptu dance."

In the Christmas Eve issue of the Journal Argus, the publisher made sure that the newspaper sent its own season's greetings to the community it served. A notice appeared prominently at the top of the front page: "This issue goes out to you, dear readers, with every good wish for your happiness at Christmas, and your prosperity during the New Year."

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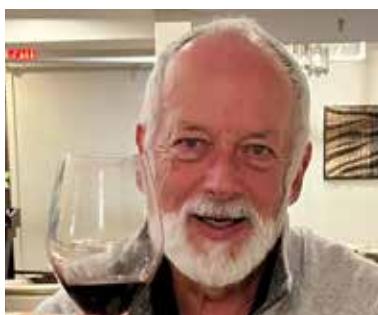
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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Can't wait to see old friends on stage in 2026



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

About 20 years ago, I discovered that CBC Radio was promoting community-based readings of Charles Dickens' wonderful story, "A Christmas Carol." The idea was initiated by CBC radio news anchor Judy Maddren. CBC would provide scripts, posters and a volunteer reader for such an event if local organizers did the rest.

I liked the idea and so did some others in the community of New Hamburg. So, we contacted CBC Radio, got the supplies and started to recruit the other four readers we would need, as well as some musicians.

The way it worked was the story was read in five "staves" by five separate readers, with musical interludes between each stave. Charles Dickens himself had converted and abridged his novel for live presentation and had been the first one to do such a reading in 1853.

I emceed our first one a century and a half later. Although we didn't present such an

event every year, we did do at least 10 in New Hamburg, Fullarton and London, and I got to emcee each one, sharing the stage with fabulous readers.

And what, you are asking by now, has this to do with travel?

Okay, maybe it's a bit of a nostalgic stretch, but stay with me. To digress for a moment (it will all come together, I promise), I am a big fan of the Stratford Festival and I think it is important to write about Stratford – both the festival itself and the rest of the community, a day-trip destination we are very lucky to be close to.

So, I was interested to receive the full menu of plays being mounted at the festival in 2026, including a list of all of the actors appearing on Stratford stages next season.

The playbill looks great, by the way. Check it out on the festival website (stratfordfestival.ca). I can't wait to see *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Guys and Dolls*, the return of *Something Rotten*, *The Importance of Being Ernest* and much more. It will be a superb season.

And the reason I link 2026 Stratford with my fond memories of Dickens' readings? Well, that first year, as we stumbled our way through a process we had never done before, we realized our proximity to Stratford might mean we could do something special. So, we naively reached out to some wonderful actors who were appearing on the Stratford stage at that time. First

to say "yes" was the amazing Brian Tree, showing amazing trust in us. Brian not only came to read the fifth and final stave (which he did for us several more times over the years), he also brought with him Thom Marriot, a terrific actor, hugely impressive as the Ghost of Christmas Present. And we were off and running.

Subsequent Dickens events saw the returns of both Brian and Thom, and a revolving cast of Stratford greats. The readings were so well performed that in 2010, when Judy Maddren herself came to read, she told me it was the finest she had ever attended. After CBC Radio stopped sponsoring the readings, we continued with five first-rate volunteer actors every time.

And so, as I read the details about the 2026 festival season, I was thrilled that half a dozen of "our" actors will be on stage in Stratford next year. These are folks who volunteered their time and talent for our readings and never ever took it for granted. They brought their full passion and commitment every time.

Sara Topham (in our Dickens in 2008, 2011 and 2017) will be busy this year; she is Titania in one of my favourite Shakespeare comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she plays Cath in *The King James Bible Play* and she is also movement director in *The Hobbit*.

Steve Ross (2017) – who knocked it out of the park in previous seasons in *La Cage aux Folles* and *The Rocky*



(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

Sara Topham as Hermoine (front-right) and André Sills as Polixenes (front-left) with members of the company in *The Winter's Tale*. Stratford Festival 2025.

Horror Show – will play Shylock in the much-anticipated return of *Something Rotten* and Nicely-Nicely Johnson in *Guys and Dolls*, where he gets to bring down the house with "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat."

Rod Beattie (2014) – famed for his Wingfield Farm one-actor plays, but also well known for his work in classical theatre – is back on the Stratford stage playing Antonio in *Saturday, Sunday Monday*.

Stratford icon Lucy Peacock (2006) plays Miss Prism in *The Importance of Being Ernest* and Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman* where she will share the stage with another of "our" alumni – Tom McCamus (2009). Tom is the tragic protagonist, Willy Loman, and

will also appear as Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. And finally, Tom McCamus' wife, Chick Reid, who joined us for a Dickens' reading (2009), appears in *Death of a Salesman* and as Brabantia in *Othello*.

So, forgive me for wallowing in nostalgia, but I for one can't wait to see these generous and talented people on stage, once again, in the best theatre in Canada, in a city which I think is the number one day-trip destination in southern Ontario.

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.



(DARIANE SANCHE PHOTO)

From left, Lucy Peacock as Linda Loman and Tom McCamus as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Stratford Festival 2026.

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FROM THE GARDEN: Plant traditions celebrated at Christmas



NANCY ABRA

Independent Columnist

Many of us practice various traditions at Christmas. Knowing why, how and when our Christmas traditions began gives us a better understanding and appreciation of our ancestors and the faith that inspired them. These customs or rituals have been passed down through the ages and generations to strengthen family ties and create cherished memories.

Many traditions at Christmas time vary with countries, cultures, and faith, making them unique and distinct with its own strengths and blessings. As families merge in culture and faith, so do their traditions and the contribution to the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The idea to celebrate Christmas on Dec 25 originated in the fourth cen-

tury by the Catholic Church to challenge and compete with the Pagan's winter festival.

One such plant tradition at this time of the year is the Christmas tree and it is one of the holiday customs we perform without giving any thought as to where this ritual originated. The evergreen tree, which we bring into our homes at Christmas time and decorate, was taken from pagan midwinter feasts of Northern Europe. It became a symbol of immortality because it survives even the harshest winters without dying. The first record of a decorated fir tree at Christmas is from Germany, in 1605. The star atop the tree was later added to represent the star on the first Christmas night. Decorations evolved from homemade food items, sweets and fruits to small gifts hung on tree branches.

Among the most cherished symbols of Christmas are the plants that feature prominently in our festivities. Evergreens, such as holly, ivy, and mistletoe, have long been associated with hope and renewal during the darkest days of winter. These plants, with their vibrant greenery, were once used in ancient celebrations to adorn

homes and churches, signifying eternal life and the promise of spring's return.

Flowers such as the poinsettia, native to Mexico and known as the 'Flower of the Holy Night' in that country, is commonly used to decorate our homes or is given as a gift here. Christmas cactus, Schlumbergera, is native to the rainforest of Brazil where it naturally grows in trees, is another flowering plant we associate with Christmas.

Rosemary, an aromatic herb, native of the Mediterranean region, goes back thousands of years. It is celebrated as the herb of ritual and remembrance. In the traditions of this region, it is associated with Mary, mother of Jesus, and used as festive decorations. Spices, such as cinnamon, cloves, allspice and nutmeg are essential in mulled wine, as well as being popular ingredients in festive cakes and cookies we enjoy this time of the year.

There are various fruits and vegetables that also have a significant role in festive traditions around the globe. Before ornaments became common, apples were hung on trees for decorations in Germany and Central Europe. Cabbage and



turnips are the main feature in Eastern European Christmas Eve meals, symbolizing humility. Wheat, sprouted into lush green shoots by Christmas Eve, are a symbol of renewal, fertility and the promise of new life in Croatia, Hungary and Italy. The radish is the central star of the 'Noche de la Rabanas' festival where artisans carve oversize radishes into intricate nativity scenes for competitions held in Mexico, on December 23. In

Greece, it is a tradition to break a pomegranate at the doorstep after midnight on New Year's Eve. This act scatters the seeds, which is believed to bring good luck, fertility, and abundance for a prosperous new year.

Botanical elements that are part of our Christmas festivities not only enhances the beauty of the season but also connects us with centuries-old traditions that transcend cultures and faiths.

St. Marys Independent

GRANT
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MEDIA

WE WISH YOU A VERY MERRY
CHRISTMAS

To give our staff a well-deserved holiday break, we will not be publishing a St. Marys Independent next week on Dec. 25.

Our annual Year In Review edition will publish on Jan. 1 and we will be back to our normal weekly publishing schedule on Jan. 8.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish all residents of St. Marys, Perth South, Thorndale and the surrounding area a wonderful holiday season and a happy New Year!

From all of us at 
Merry Christmas!

Holiday Hours

Dec 24th	9am - 3pm
Dec 25 & 26th	Closed
Dec 27th	9am - 3pm
Dec 31st	9am - 3pm
Jan 1st	Closed

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Riddles

What do snowmen like to eat for breakfast?
Frosted flakes!

Where does Santa keep his money?
In a snow bank!

What falls at the North Pole but never gets hurt?
Snow!

What do you call an old snowman?
Water!

What do you call Santa when he stops moving?
Santa Pause

What has a red nose and flies at Christmas?
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer!

What do you get if you cross a snowman and a vampire?
Frostbite!

What do elves learn in school?
The elf-abet!

Why did the elf sit on the shelf?
Because there were no chairs!

What do reindeer use to brush their teeth?
Rein-deer-paste!

What do snowmen wear on their heads?
Ice caps!

- Word Search -



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MERRY CHRISTMAS

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Excitement
Nativity
Santa
Rudolph
Sleigh
Presents
Decorations
Turkey
Stuffing
Cranberries
Eggnog
Fruitcake
Elf on the shelf
Naughty
Nice



The
Presents
Riddle Kid
OF THE WEEK

What do elves do after school?

Gnome-work!

Carter Van Wieren (9)

Hey Kids... Every Riddle Kid that appears in the paper gets a FREE MILKSHAKE at the Sunset Diner!

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic is pleased to be the sponsor of the
PET OF THE WEEK



THIS CHRISTMAS, GIVE YOUR PET SOMETHING TRULY SPECIAL – THE GIFT OF GOOD HEALTH

Regular checkups, vaccinations, and dental care can help your furry companion enjoy many happy holidays to come. Because nothing says love like keeping your pet healthy and strong. Celebrate the season with a healthy start – book your appointment today!



KEVIN

Our Pet of the Week is Kevin, a member of the Grant household. Kevin would like to wish all the pets a very Merry Christmas with lots of treats and lots of love for everyone.



Thorndale News

A section within the
St. Marys Independent



**THE ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT AND ITS WEEKLY
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Preserving Thorndale and Thames Centre's social and cultural heritage

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

Many area residents have been given the task, either by choice or by chance, to house precious family documents, scrapbooks and photographs, and some people have old records from community groups, schools and cemeteries.

We can easily be labelled the Thames Centre “History Keepers.”

We live in one of the oldest counties in Ontario, rich in cultural heritage. Neighbouring counties have created their own archives to fulfill their legal obligations and to preserve important heritage materials, yet Middlesex County has no archives. Since 2020, Susan Ralyea of

Dorchester and I have been representing Thames Centre on the committee to establish a Middlesex County archives (CEMCA).

This committee, with representation from all areas of the county, has been advocating for a county archives through community outreach, social media and presentations to county council.

At the Middlesex County council meeting Nov. 25, county council unanimously passed Thames Centre Mayor Sharron McMillan’s motion to fund a feasibility study for a Middlesex County archives. The money is to be allocated in the county’s 2026 budget. The feasibility study will be conducted by an unbiased professional, examining all relevant points

with input from the community.

There is still work to be done. In Thames Centre, there has been no formal historical society, museum or other organization that has championed the preservation of our social and cultural heritage. Consequently, many irreplaceable documents and photos of enduring social value are up to the History Keepers to warehouse.

For now, we are doing our best to live up to our title. The storage of important historical keepsakes in closets, under beds, in damp basements or outside sheds is not a safe situation. Many people in the area are also thinking about downsizing. Where will these boxes of historical records go? They may even be

destroyed outright by the next generation when cleaning out their loved ones’ homes.

Before the feasibility study is undertaken, we must begin to identify our collective materials here in Thames Centre. This will help us prepare for the study and the community consultations to follow. We urgently need to know what old documents and records are being saved by the History Keepers in our area.

We are half of a generation away from losing our social and cultural heritage. If you have any family or community history records you want preserved and protected for future generations, please contact me at nancy.ellen.abra@gmail.com.

Thorndale Santa Claus Parade a longstanding festive tradition

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

The Thorndale Santa Claus Parade, a longstanding Christmas tradition hosted by the Thorndale Lions Club since 2002, was held last Friday evening, Dec. 12.

The cold, wintery evening was the perfect setting for this festive procession, consisting of 24 creative and brightly illuminated floats with many entries from Thorndale’s commercial sector, adding to the lively cavalcade. The streets were lined with hundreds of people of all ages who waved and cheered, while some enjoyed the parade from the comfort of their warm homes.

Thorndale’s firetruck led the procession from the Thorndale Lions Community Centre, making its way west on Upper Queens, across to King Street, east on King Street, through the Monteith subdivision, through the Foxborough subdivision and then back to the community centre. Along the way, the fire department collected new, unwrapped toys for the Dorchester Food bank. Lions members collected non-perishable food items, totaling approximately 600 pounds.

After the parade, families gathered back at the community centre for hot beverages and snacks supplied by the Thorndale Lions, visiting with friends and neighbours, while children enjoyed making crafts supplied by I Love Thorndale and lined up to have a chat with Santa.

Over the years, the Thorndale Santa Claus parade has been a time-honoured tradition for the area, bringing people together to celebrate the Christmas season, building unity, generosity and community spirit.



(MICHAEL MCCALLUM PHOTO)

Thorndale Fall Fair Ambassador Beth McCallum with Santa after the Thorndale Santa Claus Parade at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre.

OBITUARY**Franke**

Karin Franke (Meyer), age 86, of Seebach's Hill passed away peacefully at Ritz Lutheran Villa on November 26, 2025. Born in Halle, Germany, May 23, 1939, daughter of the late Wilhelm and Erna Meyer.

Beloved wife of Otwin Franke (deceased) for 65 years. Loving Mother of Dirk (Karen), Oliver (Susanne – deceased), Roger (Deborah). Grandmother of Katie (Blake), Haden (Ana), Amanda (Christopher), Sabrina, Samantha (Adam), Connor and Alexander.

We will be waiting until spring to hold a celebration of life for our beloved Mother and Oma, a time when the flowers are blooming. When the season arrives, we will invite family and friends together to honor her memory, share stories, and celebrate the love she gave so generously. Until then, we hold her in our hearts, looking forward to a time when we can all come together to celebrate her life.

A celebration of Life service will be at the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street, Stratford on Friday, April 24, 2026 at 11 a.m. with a reception to follow.

Memorial donations in Karin's memory may be made to the Stratford General Hospital Foundation the Alzheimer's Association or the charity of one's choice. www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com

OBITUARY**Riordan**

Paul "Chicago" Riordan passed away suddenly at his home in Stratford on Dec. 8, 2025 at the age of 70. Survived by his siblings Connie Hart (Gary), Cheryl Riordan, Stew Riordan (Cheryl), Jim Riordan (Linda), and Claude Riordan (Chantelle Mattiussi). Also survived by friend Laura Dempsey and several nieces and nephews. Predeceased by his brother David (2019) and parents Art (2000) and Zora (2014). An Open House Celebration of Life will be held at the ST. MARYS LEGION, 66 Church St. N. St. Marys, on January 24, 2026 from 1 to 4 pm. Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

Birthday Open House for Elton Baker

December 27, 2025 2-4 p.m.
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IN MEMORIAM**Podsadecki**

In Loving Memory of Sharon Podsadecki
June 20, 1944 - December 27, 2022



Three years have passed since you left us, yet your presence is woven into every day. Time moves forward, but the love you gave remains timeless, echoing in our laughter, guiding us in quiet moments, and comforting us when we need strength.

We carry your light with us, wishing you warmth, love, and peace on every path beyond this life. Until we meet again, you are forever in our hearts—a blessing that never fades.

And when the Blue Jays made it to the World Series, we could almost feel you right there beside us, cheering, smiling, and sharing in the joy.

Your spirit is in those moments, reminding us that love never leaves; it simply finds new ways to stay.

Love Ted, Paul, Michelle, Jeff, Faye, Avery and your grand fur babies.

CELEBRATION**Congratulations Brian Boreham!**

We are pleased to announce the promotion of Brian Boreham to the rank of Platoon Chief.

Brian has been with the Kitchener Fire Department for 23 years and has been a Captain for over 10 years. Brian has led by example of his leadership role. Mom and Dad, Rob and Connie, Paul and Tara, Casey and families

GREETING**Richardson**

To my family, friends and neighbours;
Wishing you a Christmas filled with warmth, laughter and cherished moments that last throughout the year.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Doris Richardson

THANK YOU**Miller**

Thanks for the happy memories. There is nothing nicer than getting together with family and friends. Thanks for the visit, cards, and gifts. A big thank you to my family and Fred for arranging my birthday celebration.

God Bless - Elaine Stephen Miller

THANK YOU**Marziali Garage Closing after 75 Years**

We at Marziali Garage would like to inform all our customers that we will be closing the doors on Dec 29, 2025. After serving the community for 75 years, it was decided it was time for us to finally retire.

We want to thank all our past, present customers for your patronage over the years.

Sincerely Paul and Anthony Marziali

IN MEMORIAM**Webb**

In memory of Michael Webb



"Our dead are never dead to us unless we have forgotten"
(George Eliot)

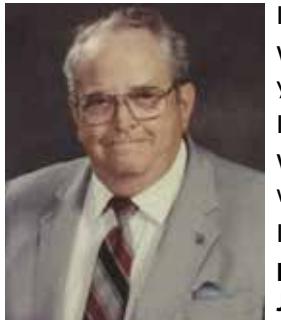
Please take a moment today to remember our Michael with a smile.

In our hearts everyday.
Mom, Dad, Kiel, Megan & Boys

IN MEMORIAM**Webb**

In memory of Donald Webb

April 15, 1925 - December 23, 2008



If time would stand still,
We could listen to the stories
you loved to tell.
If time would stand still,
We could tell you how proud
we were of you.
If time would stand still.

**In our hearts everyday, David,
Judy, Kiel, Megan & Boys**

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Dave Versteegh Auto Repair Inc

Merry Christmas!

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
From Dave and Betty, Melvin, Alisha, and Jill



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Solutions on pg. 39

Looking Back

AMY CUBBERLEY
Independent Columnist



Robins in December

25 years ago (2000)

St. Marys Clerk-Administrator Ken Storey has announced he will retire in six months. Storey made his announcement at last night's Council meeting. He has worked for the town for 30 years and would have to have put in 35 years to receive a full pension but has opted for an early retirement.

Vince Judge, mayor of North Perth, is Perth County's new warden. He was acclaimed to office last Wednesday. He also held the post nine years ago. Annabell Thomson and Gerald Wallis, from Perth South, are members of Perth County Council.

50 years ago (1975)

Reeve Don Simpson of Blanshard Township has announced his intention to run for the post of finance committee chairman in Perth County Council for 1975. Reeve Simpson is one of three reeves in Perth to declare interest in running for office, generally accepted as a stepping stone toward the Warden's chair.

The Fire Department water cannon, purchased several months ago, has now been mounted atop the cab of the number one pumper at James Street South firehall.

75 years ago (1950)

The Flats, following the high water of last Thursday and Friday, provided the young folks with a good skating surface for a time this week. Now plans are being made to either flood a section of the flats or the surface of the old tennis courts at the upper section of the park for use as an outdoor rink.

H.E. Dickenson has just returned from a business trip to Calgary and Edmonton for C. Richardson and Co. Mr. Dickenson found himself interested in the amount of news in western newspapers concerning happenings in Ontario. St. Marys got a mention in the Calgary Herald concerning the change of voting day to Tuesday.

100 years ago (1925)

On Tuesday, the office staff of the DeLong Hook and Eye Company witnessed rather an unusual sight when they beheld a pair of real live robins strutting about on the lawn outside the factory, looking for worms, just as though it was the middle of summer, when in reality it was about 26 degrees above zero. Mr. E.E. Hardisty was puzzled to know whether to call these birds the first or the last of the robins.

Sometime about midnight on Saturday, E.M. Crosthwaite's drug store was broken into and a quantity of liquor stored in the stock room was taken. Chief Erle Young was notified on Sunday morning and after a sharp look-out he finally arrested, on Monday morning, Howard Bain, a local youth. After some hours of interrogation, he finally wrung a confession from the suspect.

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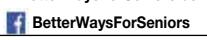

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5. Bah! Humbug!
6. Cindy Lou Who
7. Candy, candy canes, candy corns, & syrup
8. Milky white
9. In a manger
10. Boxing Day

SUDOKU ANSWERS

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6	5	9	7	1	3	2	8	4
3	1	2	5	4	8	7	6	9
5	9	1	2	8	7	3	4	6
2	3	4	9	5	6	8	7	1
7	8	6	4	3	1	9	5	2
4	7	5	1	9	2	6	3	8
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THE WEEK AHEAD

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PRC & Friendship Centre events - See the Stonetown Crier on Page 5

Town of St. Marys holiday hours - See Page 19

Friday, Dec 19

- Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon
- A.N.A.F. meat draw - 6 p.m.
- Station Gallery Soiree featuring Paul Nicholson art, classical guitar by Rob MacDonald and poetry by the St. Marys Poetry Circle - 6:30-8:30 p.m., food & beverages provided. Free event
- St. Marys Lincolns vs Komoka Kings at the PRC - 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, Dec 20

- St. Marys Farmers Market at the PRC - 8 a.m. to Noon
- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw - 5 p.m.
- Free horse and wagon rides at Milt Dunnell Field - 6-8 p.m.

Monday, Dec 22

- Free skate at the Stratford Rotary Complex sponsored by Matthew Rae - 1-2:50 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec 23

- Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee - 10 a.m. to Noon
- Friends of the Library free skate at the PRC - 3-4:20 p.m.
- St. Marys Legion cribbage - Starts 7 p.m. sharp

Wednesday, Dec 24

- Free horse and wagon rides at Milt Dunnell Field - 6-8 p.m.

Thursday, Dec 25

- Merry Christmas

Legion 

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SATURDAY MEAT DRAWS

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TUESDAY BUDDY CHECK

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BINGO FIRST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH

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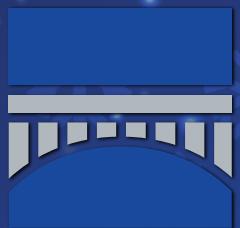
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- Saturday 12-7 pm
- Sunday CLOSED

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Happy Holidays

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