

St. Marys Independent

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USE AT YOUR OWN RISK! (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
A few people got stuck recently on Glass Street between James Street North and Emily Street. This is an unassumed road meaning that it is not maintained by the town, nor is it their responsibility for snow removal, repairs or liability. Travelers are required to use them at their own risk.

Local survivor to speak at St. Marys community session on intimate partner violence

Sydney Touzel to share her experiences in hopes of encouraging others to seek support

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

When St. Marys and area residents gather at Little Falls Public School on Feb. 17 to learn more about intimate partner violence, they'll hear from someone whose life was nearly taken in that very parking lot.

Domestic-violence survivor Sydney Touzel will be the featured speaker at the Stop Violence Against Women (StopVAW) Perth County community information session in St. Marys from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The event is part of a countywide series aimed at helping residents recognize the signs of intimate partner violence, respond safely and understand the supports available close to home.

For Touzel, the invitation came at the same time she was planning a fundraising half-marathon for Optimism Place Women's Shelter and Support Services in Stratford, and the timing felt impossible to ignore.

"It just kind of worked out timing-wise," she said. "I've always wanted to somehow use what happened to me to help people, but these two things just kind of landed in my life and I was like, 'Well, I don't want to say no now.'"

On Feb. 12, 2020, Touzel was attacked and nearly killed by her former partner in her car outside Little Falls after dropping off her young son. She

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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Personal liability risks prompt governance review for Kirkton-Woodham Community Centre

Board members and volunteers could be personally liable in the event of an accident or injury

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Concerns about personal liability exposure for volunteer board members and volunteers at the Kirkton-Woodham Community Centre have prompted Perth South and South Huron councils to begin examining significant changes to how the jointly owned facility is gov-

erned and operated.

At a joint meeting held at the community centre on Feb. 9, councils from both municipalities received a report from David Woodward, a partner with Lerner LLP in London, outlining serious gaps in liability protection under the current governance structure of the community centre and the broader Kirk-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 8

CB

Heidi James

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COMMUNITY

Local survivor to speak at St. Marys community session on intimate partner violence

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

survived the assault, but the attack and the years of abuse leading up to it changed the course of her life. Since then, she has been rebuilding, parenting and slowly deciding how and when to speak publicly about what happened.

At the Feb. 17 session, she doesn't plan to retell every detail.

"I don't really plan on sharing my whole story. I mean, you can only hear it so many times," she said. "I more so want to share the things that people maybe don't really realize or are too scared to leave for these reasons – like the court process for one. My court process was horrendous. And I know a lot of times that can deter people. ... I kind of want to lean more towards those processes and how they were for me because I know that sometimes those things alone are enough for people to not want to come forward or leave the situation they're in."

Touzel said she's especially hoping to connect with other parents who feel trapped between their own safety and fears about what might happen to their children if they leave.

"I'm hoping (to see) mothers like me," she said. "... I'm hoping that I can kind of relate to some mothers who have gone through it or are wondering, 'How do I get out and protect my kids?' And hopefully I can speak to that."

Returning to Little Falls for the event will be its own emotional milestone.

"I haven't been back to the school since COVID," she said. "I haven't even been in that parking lot since. So, I think the whole thing is going to be a little bit of a journey for me, but I don't know. I'm hoping it's going to go well."

Touzel also hopes the location, and the fact that she grew up in St. Marys, will help the message land with a local audience.

"In a town like St. Marys, everyone knows everyone, right?" she said. "I grew up with the teachers that were at



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Sydney Touzel will share her experiences with intimate partner violence as a featured speaker at Stop Violence Against Women Perth County's St. Marys community information session at Little Falls Public School Feb. 17 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

the school the day it happened ... and I feel in a town like this, especially when all the first responders are mostly people we all know too, it's a little bit harder to come

forward or to go to someone you trust because they might know your partner or they know your parents or something like that. And so, I'm hoping by coming forward and being able to talk about what happened to me that it might give someone just a little bit of courage to do something, to talk to someone."

Ultimately, Touzel wants people to leave the session believing reaching out is worth it, even when it feels terrifying.

"I hope I can maybe give them a little bit of peace of mind even though these situations are the hardest thing you'll go through and coming forward is going to be terrifying; nine times out of 10, it feels more terrifying than actually just staying in the situation. But it does get better," Touzel said. "You just have to take one step forward. And telling people; tell one person in your life because they can help, ... which is something I never did. No one in my life knew, and if I would have just told my mom or my dad or a best friend, I probably could have gotten out of this a lot sooner than I did."

The St. Marys session will include a presentation from StopVAW on the different forms of intimate partner violence, warning signs and practical ways to support someone who might be experiencing abuse. Local service providers, including Optimism Place, will be on hand to answer questions and connect people with resources in a low-pressure setting.

The event is free with food, drinks and parking provided. Registration is requested only to help plan refreshments and can be completed online at stopvaw.ca under the Events tab. No personal information collected for registration will be used beyond planning for the evening.

Anyone concerned about intimate partner violence can contact Optimism Place's 24/7 support line at 519-271-5550 or 1-800-265-8598.

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St. Marys video series highlights creative community housing solutions

ALEX HUNT
Independent Reporter

St. Marys is opening the door to new housing ideas through a video series that shares the real stories behind local development projects.

The Town of St. Marys has launched a video series featuring residents, builders and developers who share their experiences on attainable housing solutions and how the movement will impact the future of the town's housing infrastructure.

The series focuses on key concepts of the Opening Doors program, part of the town's Attainable Housing Action Plan aimed at increasing and diversifying the local housing supply.

"Opening Doors is the foundation for what the council wanted to see, a focus on how we can do things more locally," said Grant Brouwer, director of building and planning for the Town of St. Marys. "We sat down and crafted what we wanted the series to represent, looking at what the town wants to look like as we move through this process."

Local couple Dave and Sandy MacPherson were approached by the town last year to be featured in

the series after selling their house to their son and his family, then converting their garage into a livable home.

"The space is much easier to clean and I really love it," said Sandy MacPherson. "Everything is on one floor, which makes the space more convenient. We were excited when the town approached us to be part of the video series. It was a great experience."

Dave MacPherson, with the help of family and friends, began to demolish parts of the garage at the end of 2020. Construction extended through 2021, and the couple was ready to move in for 2022.

"We talked about making this place a home quite often," said Dave MacPherson. "It was always at the back of my mind, but I had to check with the town to make sure it was doable."

Dave and Sandy MacPherson's home includes a furnished main floor, a kitchen, a bedroom and a bathroom with an upstairs recreational attic area.

To watch the Town of St. Marys Community Video Series Highlighting Attainable Housing Solutions, visit townofstmarys.com.



Dave and Sandy MacPherson with the family dog, Marla, at their St. Marys home.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

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EDITORIAL

The St. Marys sports community deserves better

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

On Feb. 6, a St. Marys Minor Hockey tournament was delayed by approximately an hour and 20 minutes due to a leak in the roof of the Blue rink at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC).

The way it was handled by PRC management was wholly inadequate.

To be clear, I do not mean the actual staff of the PRC acted improperly. The people who work at the PRC, from the guest-services desk and concessions, to cleaning the floors, to driving the Zamboni, work hard and generally do a good job. They should not be viewed in any negative light because of this situation.

This is about arena management feeling they don't need to tell local sports organizations about a problem that has the chance to have major negative consequences.

At 1:25 p.m., two teams were stopped by referees from going onto the ice because there was a slushy hole behind one of the nets caused by a leak in the roof. The leak had progressed from a "slow drip" on Thursday, Feb. 5, though the "slow drip" was enough to warrant buckets being placed on the ice and at least two different user groups being told to avoid skating in that particular section.

In many instances, such drips are caused by condensation, and they go away on their own. Let's accept that as a reasonable expectation. Let's also give the benefit of the doubt that the arena is doing what it can to find a solution to the problem.

There is still a gaping hole in how the arena handled this. St. Marys Minor Hockey – which was hosting a weekend-long tournament with five divisions and 33 teams in attendance, some of whom came from as far away as Toronto-Leaside, Chatham-Kent and Sault Ste. Marie – were not told of the leak by the arena.

Again, the people tasked with running a weekend-long tournament, who also have jobs and lives to maintain outside of this tournament, found out about the leak when two referees did the right thing and decided it wasn't safe to play on an ice pad that had a slushy hole behind the net moments before the game's scheduled puck drop.

The arena didn't tell St. Marys Minor Hockey's leadership, including the association's president, of the leak on Thursday, or even on Friday. They found out about it through the referees' decision. When asked why minor hockey wasn't informed

of the leak when it was known to the arena on Thursday, recreation operations manager Douglas LaPointe declined to answer.

The fact that a minor sports organization that is hosting a tournament isn't informed there was a leak in the roof is unacceptable and ridiculous.

Even if it is a reasonable expectation that the leak would resolve itself, and even if you're doing everything in your power to fix it – and let's assume both of those are true – you cannot be 100 per-cent certain that this so-called "slow drip" won't turn into a more problematic leak.

All you have to do is send the leadership of the association a message to the effect of, "We don't expect this to cause a big issue for the reasons outlined, but there is a chance it becomes a problem, so we're informing you of the situation."

A local contractor who is also a member of St. Marys Minor Hockey, when the 1:25 p.m. game was prevented from starting, scrambled to get the materials to install a makeshift eavestrough to have the leaking water drip off the ice. That individual deserves full credit for jumping into action and working as quickly as they could to fix the problem.

But imagine if they, or anyone within the association's leadership, had found out Thursday night. Maybe that individual shows up Thursday night and installs the eavestrough just as a precaution. Maybe that individual, who was coming to the rink anyway for the tournament, brings those materials for the eavestrough with them to the arena, just in case. Maybe they don't bring those materials but have them on standby and are ready to drive a few blocks to get them.

Maybe the delay is 30-45 minutes instead of an hour and 20 minutes. Maybe there isn't a significant delay at all. Whether or not anything is different about what happens after the referees halt the tournament is irrelevant because it's all hypothetical, and we can't know for sure exactly what would have changed.

If the association was informed of the leak Thursday night, even with the qualifier that it wasn't expected to be a major issue, they would know about it and they would have the chance to be prepared to deal with it.

The user groups across all sports who spend so much money on ice time deserve, at the bare minimum, to know when there is a problem such as a roof leak. It's called being proactive, something that evidently has a harder time permeating the walls of the PRC than water does permeating the roof of the Blue Rink.

Bravo

We have 4 Bravos this week.

1) Bravo to Alona Vasylieva with her weekly column in the Independent newspaper. We are grateful to you for opening our eyes to how much Canadians take their everyday lives for granted. You help us to appreciate how much we have as Canadians.

2) Bravo to the Town of St. Marys for clearing out the parking lot at the curling club. All we need now is more parking or access to the gravel lot!

3) Bravo to Peter Rice and Galen Simmons for their insightful, well written back-to-back editorials in your paper. Both articles had excellent points and reflected what many of us have been thinking. Well done!

4) Bravo to Spencer Seymour for his dedicated sports coverage in town. Last weekend for the hockey tournament, he was there first thing in the morning taking photos for the girls' final and when I returned in the evening for the boys' game, he was still at it. Thanks for all you do for local sports!

Boo

We have no Boos this week.

**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

"The message that Bad Bunny sent, whether you like his music or not, was with love, culture, and affection. In a world where everyone seems to be fighting, you recognize Lady Gaga and Ricky Martin came, and if you are in Mexico, Argentine, Colombia, Chile or wherever you are – it's okay to have a tear in your eye and feel proud that Benito sang in Spanish at America's biggest celebration."

- ESPN reporter John Sutcliffe became emotional while reporting on Bad Bunny's performance at Superbowl's 2026 halftime show.

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Overheard

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The Chinese are out
to destroy hockey?
I swear, Trump gets
stupider every day.

If complaining about
winter was an Olympic
sport, I would have
won a gold, silver and
bronze by now.

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

Roof leak causes delays on PRC's Blue rink

Minor Hockey tournament delayed by over an hour

SPENCER SEYMOUR
Independent Sports Reporter

A leak in the roof of the Pyramid Recreation Centre's (PRC) Blue ice pad caused a delay of approximately an hour and 20 minutes on Feb. 6, right in the middle of a tournament being hosted by the St. Marys Minor Hockey Association (SMMHA).

Right as players were waiting to step onto the ice for a game at 1:25 p.m., referees noticed a slushy hole in the ice caused by a leak that had begun as a slower drip the day before, but became more prominent by Friday. In the interest of player safety, the referees didn't allow the teams to play until the ice was fixed and the leak contained.

The game didn't commence until around 2:45 p.m., just over an hour and 15 minutes later. Minor hockey games typically have a run time of 50-55 minutes, making the delay roughly the equivalent of a game and a half of time that was lost.

Katharine Found, SMMHA president, told the Independent later Friday afternoon that accommodations were made to avoid totally derailing the tournament schedule.

"I am disappointed that the issue was not addressed and resolved by the town when it was identified earlier," Found said. "However, I will say that when we approached the town to request that their weekly skating program be pushed to prevent further delay in the tournament, they were able to make a mutually respectful compromise, and now our tournament is basically back on schedule."

Douglas LaPointe, the recreation operations manager for the town of St. Marys, cited the harsh winter conditions as a primary factor causing the leak.

"The snow and extreme cold have caused an abundance of ice, and ice has penetrated a metal seam on the roof," LaPointe said. "The leak began Thursday afternoon as a slow drip, which, when dripping slowly, causes a bump, not a hole. Oftentimes,

these drips are caused by condensation, so they go away on their own. The leak got steadily worse throughout the morning until we had to pause to fix it."

A local contractor who is also associated with the SMMHA was able to mobilize quickly to secure the necessary materials to install a makeshift eavestrough that would divert the leaking water from dripping onto the ice and instead running off past the top of the glass into a garbage bucket.

LaPointe added that plans are in place to institute short- and long-term solutions to the problem.

"A temporary eavestrough was installed to have the leak drip off the ice surface, and a roofing contractor is arriving Monday (Feb. 9) to temporarily fix the leak," said LaPointe. "There is currently a tender out for roof repairs to be completed at the PRC in the spring, and this section is included in the scope of that project, with specifications outlined by an engineer to permanently address the cause. The metal itself is in good condition, with seams and transition areas needing work done as part of regular asset management."

The tournament saw teams from as far away as Chatham-Kent, Toronto-Leaside and Sault Ste. Marie in attendance. Despite the issue, Found doesn't expect the SMMHA to be viewed negatively as a result of the issue.

"I am disappointed that our tournament attendees did face a significant delay, and one that was beyond our control and likely could have been prevented," said Found. "But I am satisfied with the resolution and do not fear that this will have significant negative impacts on our SMMHA reputation or our ability to be viewed as a host of quality and well-run tournaments. We will be following up with the arena and town staff to do a deeper dive into the incident and ensure appropriate communication is in place should something like this happen again."

STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



CALL FOR HERITAGE FESTIVAL VENDORS

The Stonetown Heritage Festival will return to downtown St. Marys on Saturday, July 25 as part of the brand-new Stonetown Summer Series!

Food truck and vendor applications are now OPEN for the Heritage Festival! Apply by 8:00 a.m. Monday, March 2.

Apply: discoverstmarys.ca/heritagefestival

UPCOMING SPONSORED SKATES

Grab your friends and hit the ice at one of our upcoming sponsored skates - thanks to St. Marys Buick GMC and the Optimist Club of Downie!

- February 16, 10:30 AM - 11:50 AM
- March 16, 1:30 PM - 2:50 PM
- March 17, 1:30 PM - 2:50 PM
- March 19, 1:30 PM - 2:50 PM
- March 20, 1:30 - 2:50 PM

Register: townofstmarys.com/activenet



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This course is ideal for aspiring swim instructors. Monday, March 16 - Thursday, March 19 2PM - 7PM daily. Must be 15 years of age by the end of the course and have completed Bronze Cross certification.

Register by March 2: <https://tinyurl.com/2jdjuha8>



THINKING OF RUNNING FOR COUNCIL?

Join one of these upcoming Candidate Information Sessions!

February 25 | 6 - 9 PM | Pyramid Recreation Centre
March 25 | 6 - 9 PM | Perth East Rec. Complex

Experienced and knowledgeable trainers from Clerks On Call will guide prospective election candidates through the essential information they need before deciding to run for municipal office.

More information at townofstmarys.com/candidate



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Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Janice Grant. Janice was born and raised in St. Marys. She has been married to Bruce, who grew up here as well, for 55 years. She is the mother of Rebecca and Nicolas and a grandmother to Peyton and Ashton. Janice loves gardening, reading, walking, playing cards and travelling. She is turning 75 on Feb. 10. Happy Birthday Janice!

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

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

This week's answers are found on pg. 35

Town of St. Marys and other local municipalities to host Election Candidate Information Sessions

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys, Municipality of North Perth, Municipality of Perth East, Municipality of West Perth, Township of Perth South and the City of Stratford are jointly hosting Election Candidate Information Sessions for residents who are considering running for municipal office.

The sessions will be led by experienced and knowledgeable trainers from Clerks On Call and are designed to provide prospective candidates with essential information to help them make informed decisions before entering the municipal election process.

Participants will learn about reasons to run or not run for municipal council, key personal and financial considerations, and the roles and responsibilities of council members and municipal staff. The sessions will also include an overview of the powers and influence of municipal government and council members, including strong mayor powers, as well as governance, legislative and decision-making processes. The importance of transparency and accountability in local government will be discussed, along with general campaign information and strategies for engaging with the media and the public.

Join one of these two sessions being offered to provide accessibility across the region.

Wednesday, Feb. 25

Pyramid Recreation Centre End Zone, 317 James St. S, St. Marys from 6-9 p.m.



Wednesday, March 25

Perth East Recreation Complex, 40 Temperance St., Milverton from 6-9 p.m.

Join virtually by registering via email by 4:30 p.m. on the day of the session: clerksoffice@town.stmarys.on.ca.

"These sessions provide valuable insight for anyone considering serving their community through municipal office," said Town of St. Marys clerk Jenna McCartney in a press release. "By offering clear and practical information about the responsibilities of council and the realities of running for office, we hope to support informed and engaged local leadership across the region."

The Election Candidate Information Sessions are open to residents of all participating municipalities. No prior political experience is required.

For more information, residents are encouraged to visit their local municipal website or contact their municipal clerk's department.

THINKING OF RUNNING FOR COUNCIL..... NOW WHAT??

JOIN ONE OF THESE UPCOMING CANDIDATE INFORMATION SESSIONS!

Wednesday, February 25

Pyramid Recreation Centre – End Zone
317 James Street South, St. Marys
6:00 – 9:00pm

Wednesday, March 25

Perth East Recreation Complex
40 Temperance Street, Milverton
6:00 – 9:00pm

Or Join Virtually!

Register via email by 4:30 pm on the day of the session: clerksoffice@town.stmarys.on.ca

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Kinsmen Club of St. Marys gearing up for Summerfest concert series



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Mark King, vice president of the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys, at Milt Dunnell Field.

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

From Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd tributes to emerging Ontario talent, this year's Summerfest promises to deliver the biggest and most diverse lineup yet.

Summerfest's second annual concert series will be held at Milt Dunnell Field from July 23-25. Friday will open with tributes to rock classics such as The Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd. Saturday will feature performances by Small-Town Strip Club, Loviet, City Ground and The Faultliners.

"It's more than double the musical acts we had last year. We want to continue to branch out and keep growing," said Mark King, vice president of the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys. "The more support we get, the more we can raise for the community, and the more we can keep that money local."

The event will close on Sunday with country hits from Kelsi Mayne, Bradley Hale, Jessie T, Maxwell Smith, Rebekah Stevens and The Faultliners. Local ven-

dors and The Great Canadian Midway will also be present.

King said he wants the festival to be a launching point for up-and-coming southern Ontario artists. He loves the idea of musicians becoming noticed at local events and transitioning to other career opportunities.

King said funds raised from the event will go to support struggling teenagers in the community, but he's open to whatever is the greatest current local need.

The Kinsmen are looking for local men to join the club. King said candidates must have a passion for helping the community.

"Being a member of the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys is incredibly rewarding," said King. "We get to give back to the community, meet likeminded people and be part of projects that make a real difference in the town."

To become a member, contact the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys through the website at stmaryskinsmen.com or through their social media.

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Personal liability risks prompt governance review for Kirkton-Woodham Community Centre

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

ton-Woodham Community Complex.

“At this point, the community centre is owned by Perth South and South Huron together 50/50, however they are not directly involved in the operation – it’s members of the community who are running it on a day-to-day basis,” Woodward said. “There are contributions from South Huron and Perth South. ... More recently, it’s been \$20,000 each (annually) by South Huron and Perth South with the volunteer contingent here in Kirkton-Woodham operating the community centre.”

The complex, which includes the community centre, swimming pool, community hall, squash courts, pavilions, ball diamonds, playground and a Huron County Library branch, is jointly owned by Perth South and South Huron. While Perth South is designated as the operating municipality under a 2024 agreement, the day-to-day operations of the facility are handled by a volunteer board drawn from the Kirkton-Woodham community.

Woodward’s report makes it clear that, under the current arrangement, volunteer board members and other volunteers may not be personally protected by any liability insurance if an injury, accident or other claim arises from the operation of the complex. In some scenarios, those volunteers could be personally responsible for damages.

“By volunteers operating the community centre, unfortunately those volunteers – those of you who are volunteering – can be personally responsible for any liabilities and claims that arise in connection with the operation of the community centre,” Woodward said. “That would be incredibly unfortunate if some of you, altruistically, try to make your community better and run community events, whether it be buck and does, baseball tournaments, all that sort of thing. When people are injured, it’s quite possible that they would look to the people who operate the community complex and the community centre and make a claim against you.

“That means personal responsibility. It’s very important that gets addressed because right now, under the current structure, there’s no insurance involved to protect you and there is no direct alternate company in place – or at least clearly in place – to protect you. Those claims that can arise as a result of the operation of the complex could be paid by you. That means your farm, your home, everything you earn; that could be a big problem for people here.”

While the report notes it is not fully clear whether the board is operating as part of the incorporated Kirkton-Woodham Community Centre or as an unincorporated volunteer committee — a distinction that has major implications for liability exposure – board members and councillors from South Huron clarified the operators of the community centre had been incorporated at one point, but that corporation was dissolved to secure grant funding in the past.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SOUTH HURON)

The Kirkton-Woodham Community Centre.

Even if the board was operating under an incorporated entity, Woodward said directors and officers can still face personal liability without adequate insurance in a number of circumstances including workplace safety issues, environmental claims, construction-related liabilities, payroll remittances and unpaid debts.

As owners of the land and buildings, Perth South and South Huron would also likely be named in any lawsuit arising from the operation of the complex, the report states, underscoring the need for clearer accountability, oversight and risk management.

Woodward emphasized the current governance model “must change” to protect volunteers and ensure both municipalities can properly manage their potential liabilities. While acknowledging the strong community pride and local involvement that have sustained the complex for decades, the report stresses that goodwill alone is not a substitute for appropriate insurance coverage and formal governance structures.

The report outlines multiple possible governance options, but discussion at the Feb. 9 meeting focused on two primary paths forward.

One option would see the volunteer board become a formal committee of council. Under this model, the committee and its volunteers would be covered under Perth South’s municipal liability insurance, significantly reducing personal risk. Day-to-day operations would be more directly tied to municipal oversight, with the board functioning in more of an advisory role within a municipal framework. Operation of the community centre could fall to municipal staff under this option.

“In order for liability coverage to be extended to a committee of council, there needs to be a resolution passed by coun-

cil (saying) you are officially a committee of council,” said Intact Insurance regional manager of municipal and public administration Tony Commisso, who was on hand to lend his expertise as Perth South’s insurer. “That committee needs to be accountable to council for all their activities and actions. That means that committee group needs to report to council and all finances are directed by council and approved by council.

“I’m going to assume that’s where you lost your insurance coverage as a previous committee of council because it sounds like the board is running its own finances without getting direction from council on how to use those finances. ... And the final condition is that one or two councillors sit on that committee of council as well, which it sounds like there was in the past. What’s important to note is that the committee of council and their volunteers are all covered under that general liability insurance that the township purchases annually.”

The second option would involve the Kirkton-Woodham Community Centre board formally establishing itself as a separate legal entity and securing its own comprehensive insurance coverage to protect board members and volunteers. While this approach would preserve a higher degree of operational independence, both Woodward and Commisso noted insurance costs for a stand-alone entity would be substantially higher and could place new financial pressure on the organization.

Council and community discussion at the meeting touched on the importance of maintaining meaningful local input in the operation of the complex, regardless of which governance model is ultimately chosen. The report acknowledges that community members value local control and responsiveness and cautions that any

transition must balance risk management with the community’s longstanding role in shaping programming and operations.

Speaking on behalf of the community centre board, treasurer Tim Shute told those gathered that many of the prerequisites necessary to be covered under Perth South insurance policy as a committee of council are already being met, making the process of becoming a committee of council simpler and less expensive than if the board chooses to secure its own insurance as a separate entity leasing the community centre from Perth South. However, Shute warned both councils that having municipal staff take over operations at the community centre might be more involved than either municipality fully understands.

“I don’t think the community wants to be in the position where they feel like they need to ask the municipality for permission to make use of this place,” Shute said. “On paper, it belongs to the municipalities, but mostly it belongs to the community. It was not built by the municipalities; it was built by the community. It was built by community dollars, not municipal dollars. Further to that, we witnessed the (Township) of Perth South taking on the administration of the whole complex and finding out they do not have the staff; they were not prepared to carry on with what they got into.

“So, I’m nervous and I’m afraid and I would hope the councils put a lot of consideration into the amount of staff time that is going to be required to take on the operations of this facility.”

Following the presentation and discussion, both Perth South and South Huron councils voted to direct staff to prepare a follow-up report exploring the two options in greater detail. That report is expected to outline governance implications, insurance considerations, financial impacts and how each model would affect volunteer involvement and community access.

As no immediate changes were made at the meeting, members of the community centre board and the wider community expressed concern with continuing to operate the community centre in the short term without liability protection for board members and volunteers.

“We do have a product called the recreation affiliates policy,” Commisso said. “There is an application; I cannot guarantee that this group will qualify for that coverage, but I can send that application to staff, they can complete the application, submit it for a quote and if it is a number that meets the requirements, then we can possibly have short-term liability policy to protect this group.”

When asked how quickly that short-term coverage could be in place, Commisso said the application is just 10 questions and, if approved, the policy could be in place within 10 days.

Further discussion is expected once staff return with additional analysis and recommendations. At that time, Perth South Mayor Sue Orr said another joint council meeting will be held.

Downie Optimist Club continues strong support for youth and community programs

GARY WEST

Independent Reporter

One of the most active Optimist Clubs in southern Ontario continues to be the Downie Optimist Club, based in St. Pauls between Stratford and St. Marys.

Founded in 1976 with sponsorship from the Stratford Optimist Club, the Downie Optimists have grown steadily over the decades. The club now counts 67 members, including 10 charter members who have remained involved since the organization's earliest days.

A strong focus on supporting youth programming remains at the heart of the club's mission. To fund its many community contributions, the Downie Optimists host several popular fundraising events throughout the year including the annual sauerkraut, rib and pigtail dinner held at the Downie Optimist Hall in St. Pauls. The dinner regularly attracts hundreds of local residents, offering an evening of good food and community connection while supporting a wide range of charitable initiatives.

Club president Manny Puetz said the past year has once again been a busy one, with ongoing programming and financial support directed toward youth-focused organizations across the region. Through its fundraising efforts, the club has been able



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Downie Optimist Club volunteers who recently served hundreds of guests at the club's rib, pigtail and sauerkraut dinner at the St. Pauls community hall include, from left, Bill McGavin, Bill Thomson, Steve Coulthard, Patrick Kennedy of Kennedy's Catering in St. Agatha, club president Manny Puetz and Brent Baker.

to make significant donations to numerous causes.

Among the club's recent contributions was \$5,000 in Christmas gifts for families supported by Optimism Place in Stratford

and the Emily Murphy Centre. Another \$5,000 donation was directed to Well-spring Stratford to support an art program for children either experiencing cancer themselves or supporting a family member

who is undergoing treatment.

The Downie Optimists have also supported local sports and recreation, serving as a platinum sponsor for St. Marys Ringette and a gold sponsor for the Mitchell Skating Club. A \$1,200 contribution was made to the Upper Thames Conservation Authority to assist with water-safety education around lakes and rivers in Perth South.

Additional support has included sponsorship of the school hard-boiled egg snack and lunch program for public, separate and secondary schools throughout Perth County. The club has also been a longtime sponsor of the "Farm to You" experience at the Stratford Fall Fair, helping connect visitors with agriculture and farm animals.

Community involvement extends beyond financial contributions. Each year, members participate in the St. Marys Santa Claus Parade, handing out candy bags to children lining the parade route.

With 2026 marking the club's 50th anniversary as a chartered Optimist Club, members are now planning special initiatives to recognize five decades of service. Puetz thanked area residents for their continued support, noting that community participation plays a vital role in sustaining the club's many programs.

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St. Marys Public Library to host presentation on grief, loss and end-of-life awareness

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

The St. Marys Public Library and London-based death doula/registered nurse Jayne Dill will collaborate to bring new awareness to grief education.

The Learning for Life: Grief & Loss with Jayne Dill event will run on Feb. 23 at 6 p.m. at the Pyramid Recreation Centre. The free presentation will explore topics of grief coping mechanisms as well as end-of-life care support.

“I want people to leave with a better understanding of what grief is. It’s so individual; there’s no wrong way to do this,” said Dill. “As a Death Doula, I’ve supported people when they’re dying, and we go through what the goals of care are.”

With decades of nursing experience, Dill says that the system can do better when it comes to supporting individuals who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

“We’re expected to go back to work after four or five days. This is a process, and it’s a topic that’s not discussed because it’s

uncomfortable,” said Dill. “As a society, we need to be more open to the concept of death because it’s something that we all experience.”

Library clerk and event facilitator Laura McAsh said she hopes the event will help make the topic more universally discussed and provide education to individuals unaware of the grief process.

On Feb.23, Dill will present a slideshow explaining how society navigates grief and loss. She encourages people to ask questions during the presentation, allowing the audience to lead themselves through topics they wish to discuss.

“I think it’s important to bring that awareness front and centre because when you believe you’re going to die, you live differently,” said Dill. “People are most present in the moment, and many of us don’t live that way. The thing with grief is that people need to be witnessed, acknowledged and validated.”

For more information about Dill, visit her website at londondeathdoula.ca.



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Jayne Dill, registered nurse and death doula, at the Pyramid Recreation Centre.

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Perth County awards contract for courthouse roof replacement

Roof replacement comes in under budget

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth County staff has awarded a contract to replace a leaking roof section at the recently renovated Perth County courthouse in Stratford.

At its Feb. 5 council meeting, councillors received a staff report recommending Semple Gooder Roofing Corporation as the successful bidder for the replacement of a flat roof located above a second-floor vault at the historic courthouse. The work will address ongoing water infiltration issues in an area of the building currently occupied by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

“The roof is located at the back of the courthouse over a vault on the second level, which is an area rented by our tenant, the Ministry of the Attorney General,” said Perth County executive director of public works John McClelland. “Fifty-thousand dollars was budgeted for the roof replacement, and it is a carry-

over project from 2025.”

The contract, valued at \$43,950 plus HST, came in under the county’s approved 2026 capital facilities budget. Under the county’s procurement policy, the contract can be authorized and executed by senior staff without requiring additional council approval.

According to the report presented to council, the existing roof membrane has reached the end of its service life and requires replacement to prevent further damage to the structure below. The new roof system will consist of a self-healing modified bitumen membrane with a gravel surface, designed to offer enhanced resistance to ultraviolet exposure and water deterioration.

McClelland said with the inclusion of a special protective coating, the new roof will be warrantied for a lifespan of 25-30 years.

“I’m not a great lover of rooves ... but the opportunity is probably there

right now to put a steel roof on, and that would give us a longer lifespan and prevent leakage coming in there,” Coun. Walter McKenzie suggested. “It’s just a thought.”

“We’re dealing with the courthouse; if we are to alter anything with that courthouse as far as aesthetics and/or structural on the outside, we’re going to have to go through the heritage committee and the heritage department,” McClelland responded.

Three bids were submitted through the county’s request-for-tender process, which closed on Dec. 17, 2025. Semple Gooder Roofing Corporation submitted the lowest bid, followed by Proteck Roofing and Sheet Metal Inc. and Atlas-Apex Roofing Inc. While the county has not previously worked with Semple Gooder, staff confirmed the contractor met all tender specifications and provided satisfactory references.

“Everything checks out with their sub-

mission and references,” McClelland said.

Construction is expected to begin in early spring, weather permitting, with completion anticipated by the end of April 2026.

The roof replacement follows a series of major upgrades to the courthouse campus in recent years, including the installation of a three-storey, fully accessible elevator and associated interior renovations aimed at improving public access to the 19th-century building. A multi-million-dollar project connecting the courthouse to the former land registry office at 5 Huron St. also saw its formal ribbon-cutting last summer, consolidating Perth County administrative services at the site.

County staff noted the roof replacement is a necessary maintenance project to protect recent investments in the courthouse and ensure the long-term sustainability of the historic building.

Holiday hours for town facilities – Family Day (Feb. 16)

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The following hours will be in effect for Town of St. Marys facilities for Family Day (Monday, Feb. 16).

Closed Monday, Feb. 16:

- Administrative offices (town hall and municipal operations centre)
- Adult Learning
- Before and After School Program
- Child care centre
- EarlyON centre
- Fire station
- Friendship Centre
- Landfill
- Library
- Mobility services offices (rides must be booked by 3



p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 12)

- Museum
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- Youth centre
- Home support services**
- Home support services such as Meals on Wheels and Telephone Reassurance will continue.
- Garbage and recycling collection**
- Will continue as scheduled. Details at www.bra.org/my-services/st-marys-town/.
- Pyramid Recreation Centre**
- Free public skating from 10:30-11:50 a.m., sponsored by St. Marys Buick (pre-register online)
- Free family swim from 1-3:30 p.m., sponsored by Downie Optimists (pre-register online)
- Open for regularly scheduled games and practices on the Rock Rink and Blue Rink. Ice and multi-purpose rooms are available for rentals. Contact guest services for bookings.
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Perth County council formally adopts 2026 budget

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Perth County council has formally adopted its 2026 operating and capital budget, approving a financial plan that maintains core service levels while directing new investment toward infrastructure, facilities and long-term sustainability.

The budget includes a total increase of \$2.64 million over 2025, representing an 8.75 per-cent levy increase. Based on the average 2016 MPAC-assessed household value of \$284,000, the increase amounts to approximately \$89.24 per year, or \$1.72 per week, for the average household. The increase includes 1.76 per cent attributed to growth to the county's taxbase in 2025.

Perth County Warden Dean Trentowsky said in a press release that council and staff worked carefully to balance rising costs with the need to maintain essential services and invest in the county's future.

"I would like to thank my council colleagues for their detailed review and active participation throughout this year's budget process," Trentowsky said. "Both council and staff recognize the continued financial pressures and economic uncertainty faced by the ratepayers and their families, the farms and the business owners across Perth County. The county is doing the best it can to ensure that essential service levels are upheld in a fair and responsible manner, while continuing to invest in the future needs and opportunities for Perth County citizens."

The 2026 budget supports ongoing service delivery while advancing a number of key priorities, including 33 capital projects representing a total investment of \$9.6 million. Major infrastructure work includes the rehabilitation or replacement of four bridges and culverts, as well as the resurfacing of approximately 22 centreline kilometres of county roads.

Facility upgrades also feature prominently in the budget, with funding allocated for renovations to the provincial-offences courtroom and county council chambers at the Perth County courthouse in Stratford. Council also approved a \$50,000 contribution toward the continued development of the Ontario Agri-Food Discovery Centre, along with funding for the creation of a new countywide



economic development and tourism wayfinding signage program.

In addition to capital and operating expenditures, the 2026 budget includes several financial measures aimed at long-term stability. Municipal drain work will be shifted to capital accounts to help smooth annual budget impacts, while additional funds will be directed to capital reserves to address infrastructure needs and reduce reliance on reserves for operational support.

The county's reserve contributions for 2026 represent 4.3 per cent of the total levy increase, a move staff say reflects a proactive approach to closing the infrastructure gap and managing costs downloaded by the province.

"I know we add only \$10 here, \$10 there to people's taxes, but in 2025, we had 62 more (ratepayers) in Perth East who cannot afford their taxes – so we're up to 380-something," said Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz, one of Perth East's representatives on county council, prior to council's vote to adopt the 2026 budget bylaw at its Feb. 5 meeting. "I'm not sure where the other municipalities are at, but we have to keep that in mind."

"It's too easy just to keep upping and upping and upping and not think about those people that can't afford it. People have kids and they need to eat, and you're going to feed them before you pay your taxes. So, the numbers are increasing ... and I fear it's going to get worse. I think we're going to have to buckle down here and we're going to have to start making some cuts whether we want to or not because people just can't afford it."

Ultimately, Ehgoetz along with deputy warden Sue Orr and Coun. Bob Wilhelm – both of whom represent Perth

South on county council – voted against the adoption of the budget bylaw. With Coun. Doug Kellum absent at the Feb. 5 meeting, the result of the vote, weighted by population for each lower-tier municipality, was 10-6 in favour of adopting the budget.

Council was first presented with the proposed 2026 budget in December, followed by a series of detailed presentations throughout January. The final budget aligns with the county's 2023-2026 corporate strategic plan, which focuses on economic development, service effectiveness, community planning and long-term organizational sustainability.

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Chilis sell out at second-annual Legion Chili Cookoff



(PHOTO COURTESY OF COLIN COBURN)

The crowd at the second annual Chili Cookoff at the St. Marys Legion was certainly hungry for chili on Feb. 7 with pots of chili dwindling over the course of the afternoon.

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

Though there was certainly plenty of chili to eat, organizers of the second annual Legion Chili Cookoff over the weekend said turnout for the event was better than expected, leading to chili shortages as the day went on.

St. Marys Legion Branch 236 hosted its second annual Chilli Cookoff Feb. 7. A

total of 20 vendors including local restaurants and businesses, service clubs and individuals turned out, each with two pots of their best chili to compete across four categories.

“We’ve had a great crowd,” said Colin Coburn, legion executive member and Chilli Cookoff organizer. “Our goal is to get the Legion more involved in the community. We’re one of the service clubs and we donate a lot of money to kids’ sports in

town. The more money we raise, the more we can put back into the community.”

After the votes were tallied, the results were as follows:

- Best Restaurant Chili: Joe’s Diner
 - Best Service Club Chili: The Rotary Club of St. Marys
 - Best Independent Chili: Dorothy Taylor
 - People’s Choice Chili: Dorothy Taylor
- Competitors at the second-annual Chili

Cookoff in the restaurant category included: Chris Campbell Catering, Gilly’s Pubhouse, Joe’s Diner, Sunset Diner, the Creamery and Perthstone Kitchen.

St. Marys service clubs were also represented at this weekend’s event, including the St. Marys Lions Club, the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys, the St. James-Tecumseh Masonic Lodge No. 73, the Rotary Club of St. Marys, and the St. Marys Public Library.



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

Blaine Myers and Rebecca Taylor of Joe’s Diner served up some award-winning maple bacon chili during Saturday’s Chili Cookoff event at the Legion.

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Readers invited to help choose 2026 Perth County Reads title

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Residents of St. Marys, Perth South and the wider Perth County area are being invited to help shape this year's Perth County Reads program by voting for the title that will anchor the countywide reading initiative in 2026.

Now entering its third year, Perth County Reads is designed to spark conversation, connection and shared experiences among readers across the county through a single, community-selected book. The program is run through the Perth County Information Network (PCIN), which connects public libraries throughout Perth County and allows them to share resources, programming and collections.

"The purpose of Perth County Reads

is to choose a title to create conversation amongst Perth County residents," said St. Marys Public Library CEO Sarah Andrews. "It just gives them a similar item that they can chat about."

In previous years, the featured titles were selected by library staff, but this year, the decision is being handed directly to the public. Beginning March 2, residents will be able to vote on one of five curated titles chosen by library staff from recent Ontario authors and timely topics.

"We've curated a list of titles that we, as staff, think are on the money for topics and really great authors," Andrews said. "And then we're asking the community to vote on one of those five titles, which one they think would be the best for the community for this year."

Voting will be available both online at

perthcountylibraries.ca and in person at local libraries, with the selected title expected to be announced later in March. Andrews said the goal is to encourage participation at every level, regardless of how quickly – or slowly – someone reads.

"Some people will deep dive, they'll read the descriptions, but others will just say, 'That author looks good, I'll pick that one,'" she said. "And that's all – any way people vote is great."

Once the title is chosen, libraries across the county will purchase additional copies in multiple formats including print, audiobook and e-book, and build programming around the book throughout the year. That can include book clubs, themed events and, in many cases, an author visit.

"We don't just select a book," Andrews said. "We actually purchase more copies, we select that title as a book club and several of us will be hosting the author later in the year."

For Andrews, the program is as much about community as it is about reading.

"It's been a long winter and it's fun to come together as a community," she said. "These are books that library staff recommend that you explore at some point through the year, but we'd love for people to participate in this campaign and be part of what's happening."

Library staff are encouraging residents to watch their local library's social media channels on March 2 when the five short-listed titles will be revealed and voting officially opens.

Huron Perth District Women's Institute offering \$500 education award to graduating students

MARGARET MCINROY

Contributed Article

The Huron Perth District Women's Institute (WI) is once again investing in the future of local youth through its annual Education Award, offering a \$500 scholarship to a graduating high school student from Huron or Perth counties.

The award is open to students who will be continuing their education as full-time learners in their first year at a post-secondary institution or entering an appren-

ticeship program. All secondary schools serving Huron and Perth counties have received application packages for the 2026 award.

Community involvement and personal growth are key values of the Women's Institute, and those elements will play a significant role in the selection process. In addition to meeting eligibility requirements, applicants must submit a minimum 500-word essay addressing the topic: "How would you entice young people to work in Huron or Perth counties after graduating

from their post-secondary education?"

Applicants are also required to include three signed reference letters from community organizers and/or high school faculty members. A maximum of one reference letter may come from the applicant's high school.

Applications will be reviewed by members of the Huron Perth District WI education award committee, who will evaluate submissions based on community involvement, quality of the essay and overall merit.

The successful applicant will be invited to attend the Huron Perth District Women's Institute annual meeting on Wednesday, May 27 at the Howick Community Centre, where the Education Award will be formally presented.

For students considering further education and looking to make a positive impact in their home communities, the Huron Perth District WI Education Award offers both financial support and recognition of community-minded leadership.



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All persons having claims against the Estate of **Matthew Arbogast Mackey**, late of Stratford, Ontario, deceased, who died on October 18, 2025, are hereby notified to send into the undersigned Personal Representative of the said deceased, on or before the **17th day of March, 2026**, full particulars of their claims. After the said date, the Personal Representative will distribute the assets of the said deceased, having regard only to the claims of which he shall then have notice.

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AKoolFilm Company to collaborate with Stone Cold Productions and Sarracco Studios

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

AKoolFilm Company has some new co-productions in the works with Sarracco Studios and Stone Cold Productions, two award-winning film and television companies in Canada.

The St. Marys film and television production company announced in a Feb. 2 press release that it will be collaborating with Stone Cold Productions in Halifax, N.S. on projects like scripted dramas and factual series.

Led by Mi'kmaq Acadian filmmaker Hank White, who has 45 years of filmmaking experience, Stone Cold Productions is an international award-winning company that advocates for Indigenous representation and diversity in media with

dynamic characters. White won multiple awards such as Best Indigenous Director at both the Dreamspeakers Film Festival and ImagiNative Film Festival for 2013's Charlie Zone, a gritty feature film written by Joe Leclair.

AKoolFilm and Stone Cold will be filming a new series together in Nova Scotia. Screen Nova Scotia will also provide additional incentive for filming in the province.

A week later, in a Feb. 9 press release, AKoolFilm Company announced it will also be working with Sarracco Studios, a Quebec-based independent film and television production company. Founder Anthony Sarracco and his team is behind works such as Land of Thorns, Mother of Mayhem and 2022 Cannes World Film Festival Grand Winner Malocchio Moderno.

AKoolFilm Company and Sarracco Stu-

dios are currently working on script revisions for their feature film, The Ramblers. The team next plans to do location scouting and brainstorm actors who could be part of the cast.

"We're very lucky to have both Hank and Anthony as our co-producing partners and I think it will stem very well for the company moving forward," AKoolFilm Company founder Allen Kool said. "Plus, it also gives us a little bit of new and extra and young blood to work with as we grow."

AKoolFilm Company is also a multi-award-winning media production company with its hit Cry of Silence earning at least 80 awards and several nominations.

The collaborations come during a time when Kool feels like there is a bit of a slow down in film and television production

across Canada. He hopes other film companies follow suit and collaborate with each other.

"I think that the best way to have more productions happening across the country is for companies to meet each other and to work together, find a common ground, have the same visions, like the same type of creative and also have the opportunity to film in Ontario and in Nova Scotia, film in Ontario and in Quebec, film in Ontario and the western provinces as well," he said.

More information about AKoolFilm Company, including new project announcements, can be found online by visiting akoolfilm.com and through the AKool Film Company's Instagram and Facebook pages.

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St. Marys Independent **SPORTS**

U14 R Snipers bring home silver from Kitchener tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys Kinsmen-Cascades U14 R St. Marys Snipers captured the silver medal at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1.

According to head coach Korey Graham, the tournament encapsulated the team's season-long progression.

"From a coaching perspective, this weekend was about how far we have come as a team," Graham told the Independent. "From doing all the little things to have success, the work put in practices and the attention to details, we were really happy. Was it a perfect weekend by the results? No, but we did a lot of really good things in every game."

After losing their first game of the tournament 3-2 to the Mitchell Stingers followed by a 6-2 victory over the Kitchener Wildcats, the Snipers needed a win or a tie in their third game against the Caledonia Lightning to advance to the championship contest, and they jumped out to a hot start, scoring the first three goals of the game.

"The girls were consistent every game with quick starts, and this game (against Caledonia) was no different," said Graham. "We got a 1-0 lead early in the game. We were engaged and playing quality ringette that led us to a 3-0 lead. We kept telling the girls, 'Keep going, don't let off the gas.' Caledonia realized they had to change their style and made some adjustments, and our team was not ready for it. They had two checkers on us at all times and took away the space, and we started chasing the game."

Adriana McCutchen opened the scoring just 17 seconds in before a pair of goals by Breanna Bearss extended St. Marys' lead to three. However, the Lightning responded in the latter half of the first, eventually tying the game at three apiece heading into



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The St. Marys Kinsmen-Cascades U14 R St. Marys Snipers took the silver medal at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1. Pictured laying in front is Liv Hendriks. In the first row, from left to right, are Evan Habermehl, Abilene Votary, Regan Smith, Mikayla Ford and Vaida Graham. In the back row, from left, are Ashlyn O'Hara, Amara Grant, Bria Henderson, Adriana McCutchen, Brenna Bearss, Lyla Habermehl, Korey Graham, Lori Bearss and Anthony Votary.

the second.

Mikayla Ford added another goal for St. Marys in the second period.

It was in the second frame that Graham credited his squad for their resilience in closing out the game.

"At the break, we talked to the girls about getting back to our game and not Caledonia's, and start moving the ring quicker through the zones. The second period was a tight, contested period with both teams trading chances and each team was rewarded with a goal. The tie was good enough for us, but not Caledonia, so, with

two minutes to go, they pulled their goalie as they were going for the win. We battled strong and played some hard defense and with the smallest roster of nine skaters and a goalie, found a way to defend and not concede a late goal."

In Graham's eyes, the group's willingness to battle back against adversity started in their very first game of the tournament.

"I believe we set the tone in our first game against Mitchell, one of our biggest rivals," Graham said. "It's always a close game, and ultimately, we lost 3-2, but it was a heck of a game. The compete lev-

el by all of our players was memorable. I think getting second place sets our girls up with confidence. We can beat any of those teams, and that was our takeaway. It will give us a boost for the remaining league games and set us up to compete at regionals."

Though they were unsuccessful in coming away with the win in the finals, Graham had high praise for the entirety of the squad.

"Our goalie Liv (Hendriks) was excellent. She battled through adversity in the finals and came out with a strong second period. All the girls played their hearts out. With only four players on the bench, one forward line and one spare defender, they had to give everything each shift, and we can honestly say they did. Adriana (McCutchen), Bria (Henderson) and Amara (Grant) were strong on defence. Lyla (Habermehl), Breanna (Bearss) and Vaida (Graham) showed tremendous chemistry that helped the success of that line, and the tenacious checking of Mikalya (Ford), Regan (Smith) and Abilene (Votary) was noticeable each game."

Graham also stated the tournament result reflected the team's "tremendous growth" over the course of the season.

"We have been working on some set plays when we have a free ring in the offensive end," Graham said. "We executed the play against each team and came out with great scoring chances. It was nice to see them apply what we are working on and execute it in game situations."

"Our conditioning has come a long way, and it needed to, again with such a small roster. All the skating and dryland training is benefiting us now, and we will only get better. Our team character has also continued to get better as we're playing for each other. This is an amazing group of girls with great camaraderie."

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(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Elly Kittmer fires a shot on goal during one of the Finnbilt Construction U9 MD Boys St. Marys Rock's tournament games this past weekend.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Ryan Pickel does the splits to keep the puck out during one of the Social Thirty-One U11 A Boys St. Marys Rock's tournament games this past weekend.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Kane Douglas releases a wrist shot during one of the St. Marys Building Centre U12 A Boys St. Marys Rock's tournament games this past weekend.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Liam Showers advances the puck up the ice during one of the St. Marys Firefighters U13 A Boys St. Marys Rock's tournament games this past weekend.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Addison Jones passes the puck through centre ice during the Sam's Home Hardware U15 B Girls St. Marys Rock game this past Sunday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Peyton Wynands rockets a wrist shot on goal during this past Monday's St. Marys GMC U18 LL Boys St. Marys Rock game.

FUN3 Snipers Vergeer take silver at Kitchener tourney

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Synterra FUN3 St. Marys Snipers captured the silver medal at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1.

Head coach Kerry Vergeer told the Independent the team's strong play as a united group was a throughline over the weekend.

"The running theme was, again, teamwork and positivity," said Vergeer. "Every player found their name on the scoresheets again for our third tournament in a row. They always felt like they could do it and success was in reach. They played super smart, worked as a team and they had beautiful passing and hustle. Five different players found the back of the net in the finals, which reflects on this team's overall strength of teamwork and working together."

The Snipers went undefeated in the round-robin play, which clinched them a berth in the gold-medal game. Vergeer cited a tightly contested opening game of the round robin against their eventual opponent in the finals, the Cambridge Turbos, which St. Marys won 9-8, setting the tone for the rest of the tournament.

"We had a close, back-and-forth battle with Cambridge in our first game of the tournament," Vergeer said. "Cambridge tied it up with 1:20 left on the clock. Emerson (Muir) scored with less than a minute left to edge us ahead, and we made some smart defensive plays to count down the clock. After that game, we knew we might see Cambridge again in the finals."

Their teamwork became more important after their first round-robin game, when Vergeer noted the roster was notably depleted.

"We had injury and illness plague us in the first game, which left us shorthanded in our next game against St. Thomas. The players stepped up. We got strong perfor-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Synterra FUN3 St. Marys Snipers earned the silver medal at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1. Pictured laying in front is Annie Simons. Pictured in the first row, from left to right, are Lenny Vergeer, Charlie Sharp, Ali Harrigan, Jolee Beech, Briar Corneil and Ruby Kissler. In the second row, from left, are Emerson Muir, Natalie Kittmer, Keira Pfister, Elizabeth Robinson, Adelia Verbaan, Kinsley Buck and Janette Whaling. In the third row, from left, are Michelle Robinson, Cheryl Harrigan, Tanya Buck and Kerry Vergeer.

mances from them all, which made that game smooth sailing. Their grit and endurance came into play to succeed short-handed, and they again worked hard as a team and tried hard to have everyone on the scoresheet again."

One of the biggest bright spots of the tournament came in between the pipes with Annie Simons stepping up to fill in as the team's goaltender with their main goalie away. Vergeer praised Simons, who has been gearing up for several weeks to fill in as the netminder.

"Our goalie was away on vacation, so for weeks leading up to the tournament, we were training Annie who showed interest in the position and a natural talent.

She practiced and played a few league games and stepped up to the tough role. She played incredible all tournament for us. She always played with a smile and determination.

"In the finals, we had a similar back-and-forth game with Cambridge," Vergeer continued. "Annie remained calm and focused and played her heart out that game against a few extremely tough and talented girls on the other team who had the ability to push through and always be in position to score. She made some huge, timely saves to keep the game in reach."

Vergeer also raved about the team's strong structure in their own end and the execution of their zone-defence gameplan.

"Triangle defence has been a skill we have put a lot of effort and focus on in the second half of the season at practice," Vergeer said. "Our defence was incredible this weekend. They couldn't have played better. They remained calm and stayed tight in formation to push the other teams out of the scoring zone in front of the net. It takes a lot of discipline to stay in the triangle and not panic and chase, and they have really got that part of the game down pat.

"As they grow and age in the sport, that becomes the most important part of playing defence, and we have definitely laid the groundwork this season in practice for their success in that skill. Seeing triangle defence executed so well made us as coaches so proud, as their hard work at practice is paying off. Coach Cheryl (Harrigan) has been an integral part of our success in that skill. She is still a defensive player in her own league, and she has helped to tighten and perfect that for us."

Though the team narrowly fell in the final game to come away with the silver medal, dropping the game to Cambridge 11-10, Vergeer was thrilled with the result of the tournament for her group.

"We truly are the little engine that could as a team. We're a primarily first-year team that is really coming into its own and finding the positions that work best for everyone. This result for us shows us that we have what it takes to succeed if we continue to play as a team and believe in each other's skills when we pass and make plays. The friendships that have formed on this squad this season are woven into how they play and focus on teamwork. They have so much respect and trust for each other as teammates. With regionals approaching, we are going to continue to focus on passing, teamwork, strong defence and, most of all, laughing and having fun, which this team does best."

U12 B Snipers capture silver at Kitchener tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Hubbard's Pharmacy-Frayne's Custom Cabinets U12 B St. Marys Snipers brought home the silver medal from the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1.

Head coach Courtney Beech was impressed by the team's resilience throughout the tournament.

"The team played with heart and gave their all," Beech told the Independent. "We met the team we played in the finals in our very first game and lost 8-2. We played hard but were outmatched against St. Thomas. The final was the strongest game I've seen the girls play in recent weeks despite the score, and we were so proud of how they hung in there."

According to Beech, there were significant contributions made from players up and down the lineup.

"Natalie (McQuorcodale) scored a few decisive goals over the weekend that kept us in the tournament, and she was dominant in our second game against Caledonia. Our defence played strong and several of our defenders, including Harper (Buck), Isabelle (Feltz) and Jordyn (Rosenberg), scored goals cycling in and out of the offensive zone, a skill we are getting pretty good at.

"Our centres played a lot and skated hard all weekend,"

Beech continued. "Our forwards did what we asked. They took hard shots, got open to break out of the defensive end and took short shifts to keep our skates and legs moving. We had very solid goaltending from Evelyn (Parsons) and Suzie (McCutcheon), likely the strongest we have seen all year."

The Snipers advanced to the finals based on plus-minus after a 7-7 tie in their third game of the tournament. Though St. Thomas defeated St. Marys in the gold-medal game, Beech was thrilled with the team's performance in the final.

"Overall, we learned a lot and I think it has prepared us well for provincials coming up in April. We learned a lot about perseverance. We lost 8-2 in the first game against St. Thomas, and it was a decisive win from the start on their part. Our kids stepped up their game so much when we met them again in the final, and even though we lost, it looked like a much more evenly matched game. Our team never gave up."

Beech added the silver-medal finish should inject more belief in the group.

"This result gave us more confidence and the time together helped us continue to build a strong bond," said Beech. "This is a really amazing group of kids who get along well, support each other and have lots of fun. We are so proud of their progress so far this season."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Hubbard's Pharmacy-Frayne's Custom Cabinets U12 B St. Marys Snipers earned the silver medal at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1. Pictured in the front, from left to right, are Evelyn Parsons, Aubrey Feltz, Natalia Mattucci and Suzie McCutcheon. In the middle row, from left, are Brooklyn Meta, Ellie Beech and Peyton Foley. In the back row, from left, are Brent Foley, Natalie McQuorcodale, Kelsey Pickel, Jordyn Rasenberg, Hannah Pickel, Briella Graham, Harper Buck, Chelsea Hughes, Courtney Beech and Kendra McQuorcodale.

U14 A Snipers emerge as silver medalists of Kitchener tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The A.N.A.F.-St. Marys Rotary Club U14 A St. Marys Snipers claimed the silver medals at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1.

Head coach Kim Garniss described the team's consistently energetic play as a major factor in coming away with the second-place prize.

"One of the biggest keys to our success all weekend was maintaining a high tempo for a full 30 minutes," said Garniss. "When we keep our pace up and stay loud on the bench – cheering for each other and supporting our goalie – it really feeds into our game, and that energy often becomes a turning point. One especially memorable moment was a round-robin shutout by our goalie, Anna (Hogan), which gave the group a lot of confidence and set the tone moving forward."

Assistant coaches Natalie Reay and Christen Graham also spoke on the team's silver medal finish and the team's strong play that led to it.

"The team turned in a solid performance at the tournament, battling in every match-up and supporting one another from start to finish," Graham told the Independent. "The weekend was a positive reflection of the group's continued growth this season."

"Watching this group over the weekend was rewarding. As the games went on, their confidence built, the energy stayed high and the bench was always loud with encouragement," added Reay. "They supported one another through every shift, and that connection carried them to win against some really competitive teams."

Winning all four round-robin games set the Snipers up to battle Forest in the semi-final. After less than nine minutes into the game, St. Marys jumped out to a



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The A.N.A.F.-St. Marys Rotary Club U14 A St. Marys Snipers left the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1 with the silver medals. Pictured in front is Anna Hogan. Pictured in the middle row, from left to right, are Meredith Stokes, Olivia McCutcheon, Mary McCutcheon, Rachel Mabon, Kyla Graham, Madi McCutcheon, Samantha Hamilton, Kim Garniss, Natalie Reay and Kacey Graham. In the back row, from left, are Laurie McCutcheon, Christen Graham, Jordyn Schellenberger, Hadley Bolinger, Lily Johnston, Scarlett Gloor, Lilly Garniss and Kenzie Shackleton.

4-0 lead with goals by Jordy Schellenberger, Rachel Mabon, Lily Johnston and Samantha Hamilton. Forest scored the next three goals, but Schellenberger added her second of the game before an insurance marker by Lilly Garniss secured the 6-4 victory for the Snipers and earned the team a spot in the championship contest.

"The semi-final was an intense, fast-paced game, and the girls brought the heat right from the opening whistle," Kim Garniss said. "It was a tight battle throughout, and our goalie, Anna (Hogan), came up huge when we needed her most, including an unbelievable toe save that kept us in the game and gave us momentum.

"Offensively, we had contributions from all over the lineup. Lily (Johnston) stepped up with a key goal, while Sam (Hamilton) and Rachel (Macon) found ways to capitalize and get on the scoresheet. Jordy (Schellenberger) led the charge offensively with a hat trick. It was a true team effort, and that combination of pressure, timely scoring and clutch goaltending is what earned us the win and sent us to the finals."

The head coach noted numerous "stand-out individual performances" throughout the tournament.

"Kyla (Graham) led the way with seven points over the tournament and did a great job keeping the group focused and

on track," said Kim Garniss. "Kenzie (Shackleton) contributed five goals at key moments, while our defensive unit was outstanding as well. Mary (McCutcheon) and Meredith (Stokes) came up big, shutting down multiple two-on-three situations and making smart, composed plays in our end. Those kinds of efforts don't always show up on the scoresheet, but they were critical to our success."

Additional bright spots, both individually and as a team, came in the form of the team's excellent defensive tenacity.

"One thing that really came together for us this weekend was our backchecking," Kim Garniss said. "It's something we've been stressing in practice all season, and the girls executed it extremely well. Lilly (Garniss), Kyla (Graham) and Madi (McCutcheon) in particular were outstanding. They worked hard tracking back, created a lot of turnovers and helped us regain possession of the ring consistently. That effort made a big difference for us throughout the weekend."

"We also had some really strong individual performances overall with Hadley (Bolinger), Olivia (McCutcheon) and Scarlett (Gloor) all having great weekends and making a big impact for our team in key moments."

While the Snipers came up short in the gold-medal game, Kim Garniss explained finishing with silver will hopefully allow the team to finish in the top three provincially.

"Our main focus heading into each ranking tournament was to win our round-robin games and put ourselves in the best possible position for provincials. Winning 11 of our 12 round-robin games this season is an incredible accomplishment, and we're hopeful we can hold onto our third spot in the province as we wait for the final ranking tournaments to wrap up."

Open A Snipers take silver at Kitchener tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Open A 18+ St. Marys Snipers picked up the silver medals at the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1.

Player-coach Allison Sage told the Independent the team was able to unite for their final tournament of the season in a big way.

"It was nice to see that in our last tournament, we were all able to come together and really piece together a few good games," Sage said. "We've struggled to have enough players usually on the first day of the tournament, but the girls really showed up this time, and we were able to go into Saturday with two wins under our belt. It's a really great group and a real fun weekend of Ringette."

The Snipers put together a perfect 4-0 record in the round robin, including a win over the eventual gold-medalist Cambridge Turbos.

Their strong round-robin play set St. Marys up for a semi-final clash against the Waterloo Wildfire. The Snipers jumped out to a 3-0 lead in under nine minutes, with goals by Nicki Van Bakel, Josie Butler-Watson and Natalie Reay. Waterloo clawed the game back to within a

single goal, but the Snipers pulled back ahead in the third with goals by Sage, Tess Erb and Rachelle Keys to win 6-2.

Sage noted the game semi-final came with an added challenge of facing a team new to them.

"We hadn't played this team before, so everyone was pretty excited to play against a different team because sometimes opponents can get repetitive," said Sage. "We started off hot and got a few good, quick goals. There was a period of maybe six or seven minutes where we let up a little bit, but we were able to get back on our feet in the second period and finish strong to win the game."

Though the Snipers fell in the finals to Cambridge, Sage said the tournament was a good exclamation point of their season.

"We're really proud of the accomplishment. It was a close final game and a fun competition to be a part of. We're really proud of the season that we put together, with the very few practices and only participating in tournaments. We really gelled this season. I think we finally settled into our lines and everyone was really able to put some plays together and feel confident of where each other would be. It was really a group effort."



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Open A 18+ St. Marys Snipers left the Kitchener Golden Ring Tournament Jan. 30 to Feb. 1 as the silver medalists. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Josie Butler-Watson, Ashtyn Wedow, Tess Erb, Brenna Athill, Laynee Partridge, Nicki VanBakel, Rachel VanBakel and Melissa Mann. In the middle row, from left, are Shannon Hill, Emily Sage, Laura Van De Walle, Allison Sage, Rachelle Keys, Avery Wedow, Kaylee Tobias, Natalie Reay and Rachel Mann. In the back row, from left, are volunteer bench staff Jim Harison and Steve Reay.

Lincs' 16-game win streak ends with back-to-back losses



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Jakob Drobny fires a shot on goal during the St. Marys Lincolns' 5-2 loss to the LaSalle Vipers on Feb. 6. Drobny, who has points in two of his last three games, was one of few bright spots in the Lincolns' winless weekend, which also featured a 4-2 defeat at the hands of the Stratford Warriors on Feb. 8.



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Vaughn Barr, pictured, made 35 saves in a solid showing on Feb. 6 in the St. Marys Lincolns 5-2 loss to the LaSalle Vipers.

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The warts and inconsistencies that had been popping up in the last few weeks finally bit the St. Marys Lincolns, who dropped back-to-back games against the LaSalle Vipers on Feb. 6 and the Stratford Warriors on Feb. 8.

After the Lincolns escaped the first period ahead 2-0, with goals by Chase MacQueen-Spence and Owen Voortman, the Vipers completely took the game over, scoring five unanswered goals to win 5-2, three of which came with LaSalle on the powerplay.

Vaughn Barr was solid in between the pipes, making 35 saves.

Associate coach Mike Herman told the Independent the Vipers were far more intense than the Lincolns.

"I thought LaSalle came in with a playoff mentality and took it to us right off the bat, and we weren't in the same mode and didn't respond," said Herman. "I think we were pretty fortunate to be up 2-0 after the first period because the overall tone of the period was they were physical and playing with a lot of intensity and focus, and we didn't match that, and that was an indicator of a trend of the last few games."

Herman explained how the lengthy unbeaten stretch the Lincolns were on heading into their game against the Vipers can lead to a team losing a bit of the edge that helped them begin such a hot streak.

"You get into a state of mind to go on a long run like we did, but over time, it's easy to start not playing with the same details you had instilled when the run started," Herman said. "It's not unique to us. Your play starts to deteriorate but you're still winning. None of us were overjoyed about how we were playing in our last three or four games of our winning streak, but I think Friday was the peak of it. Fortunately, we were a lot happier with how we played (in Stratford), especially in the second half of the game, where we started to get that desperation back in our game."

After the Warriors jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the Lincolns' visit to Stratford on Feb. 8, Jack Clarke tied the game in the final minute of the opening period on a one-timer set up by Voortman and Chase McDougall. However, for the second straight game, the second period

was the beginning of the Lincolns' downfall on the scoreboard, with two straight goals by Stratford to go up 3-1.

The Lincolns cut the lead back to one in the last minute of the second, with affiliate player Quinn Roberts potting his first career Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL) goal, which Herman noted was a bright spot for the team.

"The entire team loved it. We have a really good bunch of guys in terms of supporting these kids when they come and play for us and making them feel welcome and comfortable to play their game. Quinn (Roberts) had a really good game and showed he can compete at this level. He played like a seasoned guy in this league. I'm always impressed by the poise of these young guys when they come in. It can be difficult to feel comfortable with a bunch of older guys in a new setting with a higher level of play. He wasn't afraid to make plays. He used his speed to disrupt them. He got involved physically a little bit, and he handled himself well defensively."

Herman also cited the team's goaltending trio and one of the team's first-year defenceman as also being positives in their winless weekend.

"We're getting outstanding goaltending from all three guys. We've given up a lot more shots over the last three weeks than what we have all season, so we've needed to lean on them a bit and they were put into a difficult situation. It was a situation that was unavoidable, but they've handled it like pros and they're using the time between games to stay sharp. We have a real competition going on there with three good goaltenders that are acting like grownups."

"There has been a growth in Jakob (Drobny) over the course of the season, but over the last month, it's really started to click in with him," Herman continued. "I thought he had an outstanding game (in Stratford). That's a continuing trend with him, and if he keeps it up, we will have a really good player on our hands going into the playoffs. He's an offensively driven player, but he's learned how to defend and balance his offensive skills and put a priority on defence."

An empty netter in the third sealed a 4-2 win for the Warriors. The loss resulted in the Lincolns heading into their game on Feb. 11 against the London Nationals sitting in third in the Western Conference, just one point back of Elmira and Chatham, who are tied for first.

While the two defeats are frustrating, Herman said the team has every capability of righting the ship quickly.

"You have to face some adversity," said Herman. "Our play has been a little bit uneven, but we'll get back to it. These guys have a lot of pride. We haven't lost a lot this year, so it's an experience we don't like and we're not familiar with. Getting out of it is the most important thing, and we do that by focusing on the process. Getting results is always important, but we've always preached that results come when you follow the process."



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St. Marys and Listowel curling clubs launch new Perth County Cup

JASON CLARKE

Contributed Article

A new community rivalry is taking shape this season as St. Marys Curling and the Listowel Curling Club come together to launch the inaugural Perth County Cup, a two-day curling event designed to celebrate sport, community and regional connection across Perth County.

The Perth County Cup introduces a club-versus-club format that brings curlers from both communities together for a weekend of friendly but competitive play. The event features multiple curling formats, including traditional team games, doubles, tankard, skins and skills challenges, with points accumulating toward the overall cup standings.

The weekend will officially get underway on Feb. 14 at 9 a.m., with opening

ceremonies that include both teams being piped onto the ice, marking the formal start of the competition and setting the tone for the rivalry weekend.

While curling is at the heart of the event, organizers say the broader goal is community connection. By alternating hosting duties between St. Marys and Listowel in future years, the Perth County Cup aims to encourage travel between communities, support local businesses and build a lasting annual tradition rooted in friendly rivalry and shared pride.

“This event is about more than wins and losses,” organizers said. “It’s about bringing two communities together, creating something people can rally around, and building an event that can grow year after year.”

The winning club will claim the Perth County Cup, while both clubs will proud-



ly display commemorative banners recognizing the outcome — a visible reminder of the rivalry until the cup is contested again.

The Perth County Cup is expected to draw participants, spectators and supporters from across the region, with organizers hopeful the event will expand in future years to include additional communities.

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COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER: Fluent in romance, failing at French

ALONA VASYLIEVA

Independent Columnist

In the grand, pink-and-red stadium of life, there are usually two types of people: those who treat Valentine's Day like a national holiday involving tactical chocolate strikes, and those who treat it like a scheduled root canal.

I'll admit, I've had a seat in both boats. I've been the one clutching a giant teddy bear with a look of manic glee, and I've been the one rolling my eyes so hard I saw my own brain. These days? I've settled into a comfortable, slightly cynical middle ground. I call it "The Zone of Reasonable Expectations."

When I first started dating my husband, he was actually quite the floral overachiever. He kept the vases full on random Tuesdays just for the fun of it. However, I sat him down on our very first date and issued a decree: "Do not bring me flowers on Feb. 14."

It sounds ungrateful, but it was actually a savvy financial intervention. Growing up in Ukraine, I witnessed firsthand what I call "Holiday Heist Logic." In my homeland, flower prices fluctuate with the volatility of a tech startup.

Feb. 14: Prices skyrocket because ... love?

Sept. 1: Prices skyrocket again because every child in the country is required by intense social pressure to hand a bouquet to their teacher.

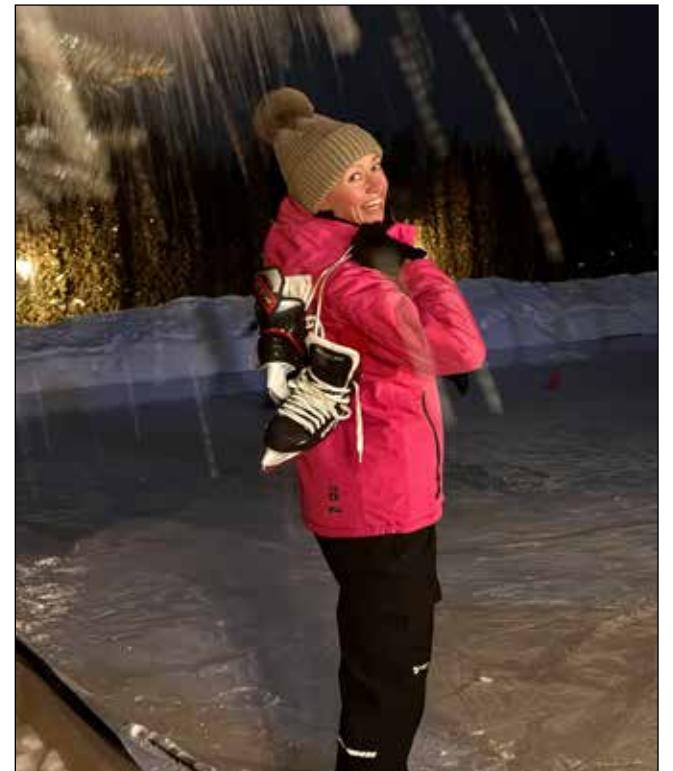
Buying a dozen roses on Valentine's Day isn't just a romantic gesture; it's a high-interest, short-term loan. Personally, I'd rather have a bouquet on Feb. 15 at a 75 per-cent discount. Call it "thrifty romance" – the flowers smell just as sweet when they're on clearance.

Then there is the "Romantic Dinner." If you haven't booked a table by mid-January, your options are basically a gas station sandwich or the drive-through.

Even if you do manage to secure a reservation, the vibe is rarely "Passionate Romance." It's more like an episode of *The Bear* – high-octane chaos. You're usually sitting three inches away from another couple, essentially participating in a double date with strangers. You can see the sheer agony in the waiter's eyes as they attempt to flip 40 tables in three hours.

As you know, I've embarked on a quest to master the language of love. However, I've hit a bit of a linguistic "roadblock."

I set out with the best of intentions, but finding a teacher turned into a geopolitical puzzle. It turns out the French that kids learn in Canadian schools is, well, it's Québécois. Now, I am 100 per-cent confused because I don't



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

A double dose of Alonas. Alona Vasylieva and Alona Zabihailo warm up with hot beverages while enjoying the newly opened outdoor ice rink at the Stone Willow Inn. The community is grateful to have this new public space to embrace the winter season.

want to learn a version of a language that limits my conversations to a specific province.

I've pivoted to apps and YouTube tutorials, but after learning Spanish and English, French feels like a personal attack. I understand it's a "long-run goal" that requires patience and consistency, but the spelling and pronunciation rules make me want to weep. Why are there so many letters if we aren't going to use half of them?

Reading a single sentence feels like trying to solve a conundrum while blindfolded. At this point, I'm convinced that Saint Valentine and the French language are connected somehow – they both involve a lot of high expectations, expensive overhead and a significant amount of crying.

I've discovered that the most "balanced" way to celebrate Saint Valentine's Day isn't found in a crowded bistro, but rather on a sheet of ice. Lately, the Stone Willow Inn has graciously opened its outdoor rink to the community, and it strikes me as the ultimate alternative to the

traditional holiday pressure. After all, nothing fosters true intimacy quite like clutching your partner's arm in a desperate, white-knuckled grip to ensure you don't fall flat on your face.

We recently visited the rink with some dear Ukrainian friends, and the experience managed to capture that elusive, cozy winter magic that you usually only find in postcards. It was the perfect trade-off; while our children burned off an impressive amount of energy under the open sky, we parents were treated to the rare luxury of actual, uninterrupted conversation.

Wrapped in the warmth of great company and even better hot drinks, we found a sense of community that a box of chocolates simply can't provide. It wasn't just a quick skating trip; it was a genuine memory-maker. In the end, a few laps around a local gem and a bit of physical stability on the ice beat a marked-up rose and a stressful reservation every single time.

Straight from the Shelves

LAURA MCASH

St. Marys Public Library

The next guest speaker in our Learning for Life: Life Planning series is Jayne Dill. Dill is a registered Death Doula and Grief Educator with years of experience in helping people navigate the realities of dying and grieving. Join us in the 2/3 hall of the PRC on Monday, February 23 at 6 p.m. for Dill's informative presentation. She will explore her role as a Death Doula, discuss end-of-life choices, and talk about how to cope with grief and loss.

To attend this free program, please sign up at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/Jayne-Dill>

For more resources on end of life, death, and dying in our Library collection, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/enfolfife-death-grief>

Up This Week

Fri., Feb. 13: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sat., Feb. 14: Open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Mon., Feb. 16: CLOSED
Tue., Feb. 17: Open 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Wed., Feb. 18: EarlyON Play & Read (9:30-10:30 a.m.), Mahjong (1-4 p.m.), Books & Brews*~ (7 p.m.)

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HISTORIC ST. MARYS: The Great Changeover, 1951

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

In the Independent of January 29, 2026, “Looking Back” columnist Amy Cubberley included the following news item from 75 years ago: “The number of workmen reporting for duty in St. Marys with the contracting firms handling the St. Marys Cement Company enlargement and with the HEPC and Comstock changeover crews is severely taxing the board and room accommodations in the town.” What exactly was happening in St. Marys in the early weeks of 1951?

The part referring to the work at the cement plant makes sense to longtime area residents. After World War II, under the efficient management of J. S. Lind, production increased in response to the post-war building boom. In early 1951, work was underway to install a third kiln to replace an older, smaller one installed in 1919. Outside contractors were also constructing a building to hold a new crusher and conveyor. For the duration of these projects, the workers would have been accommodated in the town’s two hotels – the Royal Edward and the Windsor, at opposite ends of downtown St. Marys on Queen Street.

But who were the HEPC and Comstock changeover crews and why were they coming to St. Marys? The initials stand for the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario, founded in 1906 by Sir Adam Beck, as the world’s first major publicly owned electrical utility. Its generators, powered by the mighty waters of Niagara Falls, provided electricity to municipalities at cost. St. Marys had been one of the earliest communities to sign on in 1911, phasing out a town-owned steam-powered generator on St. George Street. In the early 1900s, the electrical grid from Niagara Falls began as 25-cycle (25 Hertz). Later installations, in Quebec, for example, and much of the United States, were 60-cycle and this became the preferred North American standard. In 1950, the Ontario government decided to upgrade all the province’s electrical service to 60-cycle. In a corridor that stretched roughly from Whitby to Windsor, including Toronto, the change would affect a million households, as well as commercial buildings and industries. Canada Comstock, an electrical contractor based in Leaside, was hired to work with HEPC employees to make the conversion. The project was expected to take as long as ten years.

This massive undertaking would cost three hundred million dollars, the equivalent of more than four billion dollars today. Public Utilities Commissions in each affected municipality would bear part of that cost but PUC commissioners were assured that switching to the more efficient 60-cycle would result in future savings. In the meantime, there was an enormous amount of work to do to prepare for the frequency standardization project – even in a small town like St. Marys. The town’s



(PHOTO COURTESY OF R. LORNE EEDY ARCHIVES, ST. MARYS MUSEUM)

As an official from the Hydro-Electric Power Commission looks on, Robert Stapleton, the town’s oldest Public Utilities employee, throws the switch to activate the first phase in St. Marys of the changeover from 25-cycle to 60-cycle at the St. George Street substation in February 1951.

Public Utilities Commission held its inaugural meeting January 8, 1951. Newly elected mayor, Melvin Lightfoot, along with commissioners George Glover and Herb Sparling, met with manager A. E. Fort and the superintendents of the electrical and waterworks departments, Gerald Near and Charles Noice. Fort explained that the PUC crew had already been working overtime for months to prepare for the big changeover ahead, upgrading the current electrical infrastructure.

The HEPC’s Frequency Standardization Division would undertake the actual changeover work on behalf of the local PUC. However, the cost of the work – \$49,900 (more than a million dollars current value) – would be charged to the local commission. The PUC had accumulated some reserves but had to take out debentures for \$40,000. The St. Marys Journal Argus was closely following the PUC’s decision to borrow and reported: “Of the proposed expenditures, \$32,400 will be allotted to frequency standardization, \$5,800 will go for additional transformers, and \$11,700 for distribution lines.”

By the beginning of February, A. E. Fort made an urgent appeal in the Journal Argus for local people to open their homes to board the many employees of the HEPC and Comstock Company. About 200 men were expected to arrive in mid-Febru-

ary “making their temporary home in St. Marys.” Comstock had already begun preparing a local depot. It had taken over the former Richardson-Hansen rennet factory on James Street South, converting the former laboratories into offices and constructing a new steel building to the east. Behind that, a ten-acre field had been levelled and covered with gravel. The Journal Argus reported, “This large area will be used for parking for the hundred or more trucks and other vehicles which will arrive in town and remain here during the changeover period.”

For personal households, standardization meant replacing or rewinding motors in frequency-sensitive items of equipment – everything from clocks to refrigerators and washing machines to kitchen fans. In 1951, the town had a population of just under 4,000, representing about 1,500 households. Each household was likely to have at least six electrical items that would need to be exchanged or modified before the change to 60 cycles took place. The HEPC sent mailings to every residence with this explanation: “The work of changing your district over from 25 to 60 cycle power is progressing. Before the actual changeover can be made, a tremendous amount of work must be done. Most important will be that of getting accurate lists of all the electrical equipment in the district which

will have to be altered or adjusted before it can operate on the forthcoming 60-cycle power.”

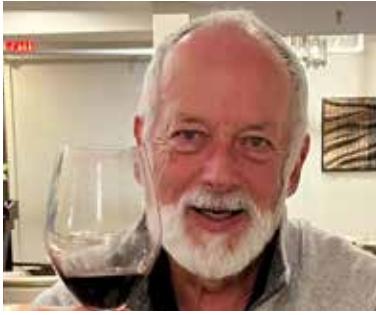
The HEPC needed everyone to cooperate and provide access to the changeover crews when they came to inspect each household’s electrical equipment. This massive project was completed in phases. On February 21, 1951, a ceremony was held at the St. George substation. Robert Stapleton, the oldest employee of the St. Marys PUC, threw the switch that brought 60-cycle power “to the first cut-over area in the north ward of the town.” High ranking officials from both the HEPC and Comstock were on hand to witness this “momentous occasion,” along with PUC commissioners from other nearby communities that would soon be hosting changeover crews. Following the ceremony, they toured “the Comstock warehouse, offices and clock, gramophone, and frequency conversion portable workshops on James Street before they visited the clock and fan exchange depot on Wellington Street.”

Inevitably, there were headaches and unexpected problems as the changeover project continued. An old transformer in the St. George Street substation blew up on a Sunday morning in mid-February, leaving many residents unable to cook Sunday dinner. A replacement was found in Sarnia and the PUC staff and the commissioners themselves put in “many hours of back-breaking labour moving out the defunct transformer so that the replacement could be steered into its berth.” Power was restored by mid-afternoon on Monday. Of course, as well as residences, factories and businesses used electrical motors in production. The Journal Argus, for example, had many machines with specialized electric motors that all needed to be standardized – the large press, linotype machines, saws, folders and heating crucibles for the metal pots. An article in the newspaper on March 1, 1951, outlined the challenges involved in the back shop changeover and how everyone held their breath, hoping that following the changeover the presses would still run and the weekly paper would get out in time.

Once the frequency standardization was completed, there were noticeable improvements in electrical service. Today many people can still remember 1951 clearly. They may have been young children when the changeover happened, probably not sure just what was going on. But they might recall that with 25-cycle, lights would frequently flicker. The lights were steadier and brighter with 60-cycle. Someone might remember that an old kitchen clock was taken away while another arrived in its place. A boy’s electric train might have needed a power adapter before he could run it again. But those disruptive weeks in St. Marys 75 years ago that made our local electricity supply more reliable have almost completely faded from our community’s memory, recalled thanks to “Looking Back.”

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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Two lesser-known features of Lyon, France



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

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

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

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

But when we visited the Basilica, I was tempted to skip the rest of the tour and simply stay and savour the incredible mosaics that line the walls. They're not ancient; the gilded mosaics were created from 1872 all the way up to 1964. There are six mosaics covering a vast, 6,000 square metres and portraying two overarching themes arising from the life of Mary the mother of Jesus: Mary and the Church, and Mary and the

History of France.

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

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

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

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

"Free Zone" or "Vichy Zone" under Marshall Petain, a First World War hero who, by the time of the occupation, had become a collaborator with the Nazi regime.

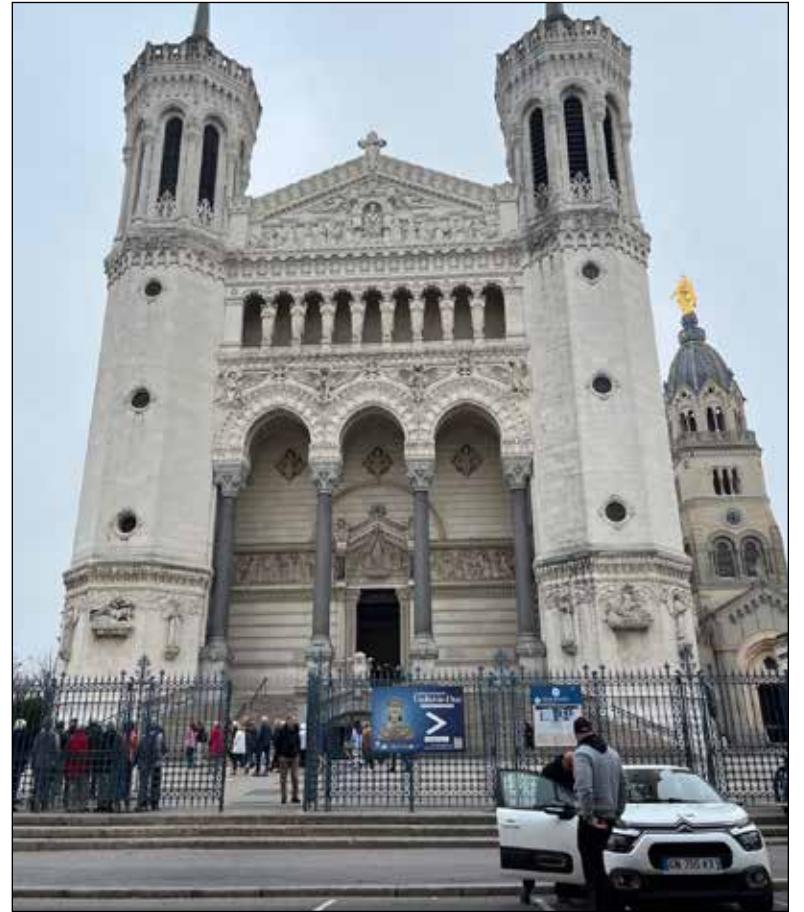
The French Resistance arose in opposition to the Nazis and their puppets, and Lyon became the centre of the Resistance. And yes, those mailboxes and enclosed passages played a role, but there were lots of other factors too.

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

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

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

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



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTO)

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

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

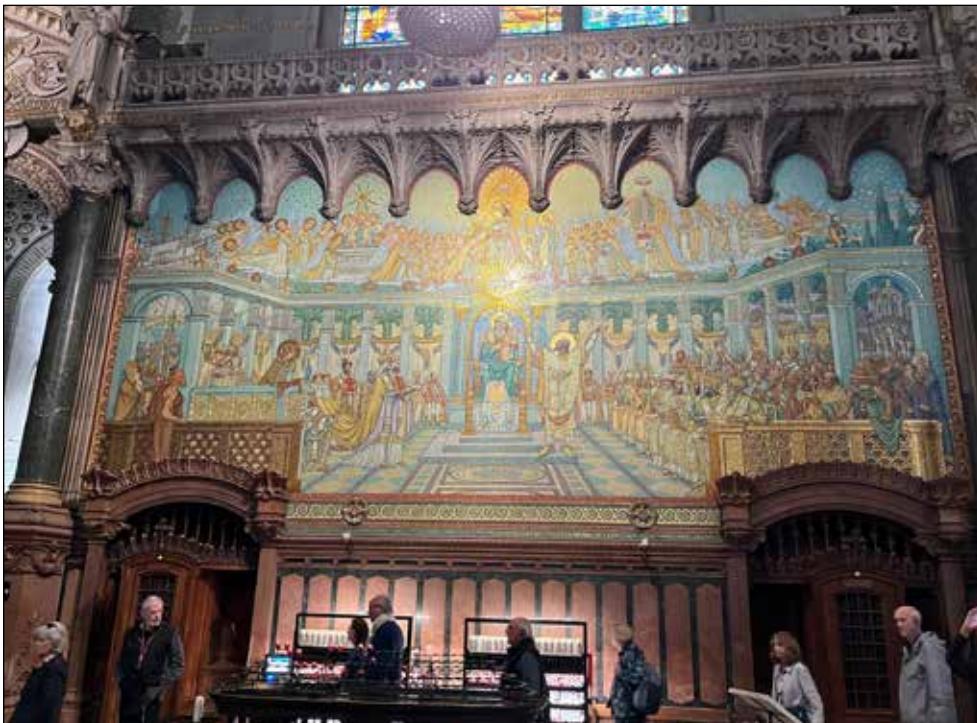
On Sept. 3, 1944, Lyon was liberated by Allied forces.

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

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

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

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



One of six astonishing mosaic murals in the basilica.



Lyon is known for its unique, local "Bouchon" gastronomy.

EAT AT OUR HOUSE: Valentine's menu inspiration



LAUREN EEDY

Independent Columnist

Eating out on Valentine's Day can be pricy, depending on where you choose to go and what prix-fixe menu speaks to you.

A guaranteed cost of at least \$50 per person is expected and accepted. Why not treat your loved one to a meal cooked from the heart that doesn't put a dent in your wallet? That way, you can save on discounted chocolate the next day!

The following are elegant and effortless recipes that give you ample time to spend with your Valentine and enjoy over a romantic evening.

Pappardelle in saffron cream

Serves: 2; Prep: 5 minutes; Cook: 25 minutes

- Kosher salt
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1/2 small shallot, minced
- Pinch saffron threads *Troyers Spices sells very reasonably priced saffron
- 2/3 cup heavy cream
- Freshly ground pepper

- 1/4 tsp lemon juice
- 1/4 tsp vanilla extract
- 4 oz pappardelle pasta
- 3 tbsp grated parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish
- 2 tbsp roughly chopped chives
- 1/2 tsp grated lemon zest

Method:

-Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Melt butter in a medium skillet over medium heat. Add shallot and saffron, stirring occasionally until shallot has softened, about 2 minutes. Add cream, 1/4 tsp salt and pepper to taste; increase heat and simmer until slightly thickened, about 2 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and vanilla.

-Add pasta to boiling water and cook as label dictates. Remove 1/4 cup cooking water, drain pasta and add to skillet with sauce. Add reserved cooking water, parmesan and half of the chives. Toss to coat. Garnish with remaining chives, parmesan and lemon zest.

Chicken with sautéed apples and mushrooms

Serves: 4; Total Time: 40 minutes

- 3 tbsp olive oil, divided
- 1 10 oz package cremini mushrooms, quartered
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 1 large shallot, finely chopped
- 2 Gala apples, cut into 1/2-inch thick wedges
- 1 tbsp unsalted butter
- 4 skin-on chicken thighs

- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 6 sprigs thyme, plus more for serving
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard

Method:

-Heat oven to 375°F. Heat 2 tbsp oil in large oven-proof skillet on medium-high. Add mushrooms and a pinch of salt and cook, tossing occasionally for 5 minutes. Add shallot; cook until mushrooms are golden brown. Transfer to a plate. Add apples and butter to skillet, cook until beginning to turn golden brown, 2-3 minutes. Transfer to a second plate. Wipe skillet clean.

-Return skillet to medium heat. Rub chicken with remaining 1/2 cup oil, 1/2 tsp each salt and pepper and cook, skin side down first until browned, 8-10 minutes. Drain excess fat. Turn chicken skin-side up, add wine and cook 1 minute. Add broth

and thyme. Return apples to skillet, transfer to oven and bake 7-8 minutes until internal temperature of 165°F.

-Transfer chicken and apples to plate, discard thyme and return skillet to medium heat. Whisk in cream and mustard, fold in mushroom mixture and cook until heated through, 2 minutes. Serve with chicken and apples and additional thyme if desired.

Chocolate lava cakes

Serves: 4; Total Time: 45 minutes

- Cooking spray
- Cocoa powder, for dusting
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 6 oz semi-sweet chocolate, chopped
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour, spooned and leveled
- 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1 tsp espresso powder
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 2 large eggs, plus 2 egg yolks
- Vanilla ice cream, confec-

tioners sugar and/or berry compote to serve

Method:

-Preheat oven to 425°F. Spray four 6 oz ramekins with cooking spray and dust with cocoa powder.

-Place chocolate and butter in a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring after each, until melted and smooth. Whisk together flour, confectioners' sugar, espresso powder and salt in a bowl. In a second bowl, whisk together eggs and egg yolks. Add chocolate mixture to the eggs and dry ingredients; stir until combined.

-Spoon batter into prepared ramekins on a baking sheet. Bake until set but centre is still soft, 14-15 minutes. Remove from oven and cool for one minute. Carefully invert cakes onto plates (ramekins will still be hot). Serve immediately topped with ice cream, powdered sugar and/or compote.

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Riddles

I'm tall when I'm young and short when I'm old. What am I?
A candle

The more you take, the more you leave behind. What are they?
Footsteps

I can be cracked, made, told, and played. What am I?
A joke

I go up and down but never move. What am I?
Stairs

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

I have no life, but I can die. What am I?
A battery

What belongs to you, but others use it more than you do?
Your name

I can fill a room, but I take up no space. What am I?
Light

The more you share me, the less you have. What am I?
A secret

What can travel around the world while staying in one spot?
A stamp

I have a head and a tail, but no body. What am I?
A coin

- Word Search -



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VALENTINE'S DAY

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- Fourteenth
- True love
- Sweetheart
- Romance
- Arrow
- Cupid
- Chocolate
- Champagne
- Flowers
- Affection
- Hugs
- Kisses
- Cherub
- Celebrate
- Embrace
- Together



The Riddle Kid OF THE WEEK



What do you call a Frenchman wearing sandals?

Phillipe Phillope!

Isla Timmins (8)

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



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ELLIE

Our Pet of the Week is Ellie, a seven-year-old cockapoo. She loves to be around people and steal all the attention. Her favourite activities are playing ball and cuddling with Mom and Dad. Ellie loves her car rides and trips to the cabin where she goes for boat rides, explores the woods and plays chase with the squirrels and chipmunks. Her proud owners are Todd and Becky Thibodeau.



Thorndale News

A section within the
St. Marys Independent

Recipes are more than just ingredients

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

Recipes are widely accessible through numerous sources. A simple online search yields an extensive selection of food-preparation websites, while bookstores offer a broad range of cookbooks covering topics from appetizers to vegetarian meals.

But a recipe is more than a list of ingredients and directions.

The recipes in old Women's Institute or church ladies' cookbooks are treasures; ones that have been gathered from their members and reflect the community. Many of those old cookbooks lay dormant in the bottom of kitchen drawers or on pantry shelves, tattered and badly stained. Or they could be long gone, victim of the trash bin when downsizing. Community cookbooks are usually not part of the family photos or papers from our grandmothers or dear aunts that get passed along.

Two young women, Sarah Darling and Nichole Mongeon, want to create a cookbook of recipes from the community of Thorndale.

"There are amazing cooks in our community and their knowledge is priceless," Mongeon said. "They are our inspiration to make good, wholesome food for our families."

"Food brings people together and recipes from our residents are precious," Darling added. "We want to preserve those recipes, the culinary history of our community. Food also reflects our social and culture. Thorndale is growing and we also want to embrace recipes from our diverse



(NANCY ABRA PHOTO)

Pictured are Sarah Darling and Nichole Mongeon, the masterminds behind a Thorndale cookbook aimed at preserving those treasured recipes of the community.

community as well."

Recipes from the community are more than ingredients; there are the stories behind those dishes. People often hesitate to share "sacred" recipes because they feel personal, but these recipes are part of the community heritage. Along with the recipes submitted, their backgrounds, who made them and the stories of dishes that were part of celebratory family dinners, served at a family reunion or community suppers add to the value of these recipes. How quickly traditions disappear if they

aren't written down. Sharing the story with the recipe is a way of preserving its legacy.

"Memories of get-togethers and food resonate deeply," Darling said. "An ordi-

nary family dish could be special to someone else. And if you remember a dish that was a hit at a church supper or community event, we would love to include it."

Besides special family dishes, the community of Thorndale has amazing cooks and bakers winning top prizes at the Thorndale Fall Fair. Those champion pies and tarts auctioned off on the Friday evening at the fair were baked by talented members of the community. Prize-winning, mouthwatering apple, berry, peach pies and delicious butter tarts are coveted during the frenzied bidding process.

"Sharing those prize-winning recipes along with a few lines of the people who made them would be wonderful," Mongeon said. "And it is preserving their achievement along with sharing their talents."

Over the next few months, Darling and Mongeon will be collecting recipes from the community for a Thorndale cookbook. This curated collection of community recipes, sponsored by I Love Thorndale, is scheduled for release later this fall. Recipes along with a brief story behind them can be sent to Darling and Mongeon at thorndale.cookbook@gmail.com.



(NORM JARY PHOTO)

Pictured are Thorndale Lions member Mel Lee with Stacey Steele, winner of the 50/50 draw at the Thorndale Lions Valentine's Bingo on Monday, Feb. 2. The Lions' Valentine's Bingo is one of four bingos the Thorndale Lions host every year with others at Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas – a longstanding tradition for over 50 years. The next community event hosted by the Thorndale Lions is their Social Gaming Night on Saturday, March 28, at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre.

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OBITUARY

Robin Edward Berwick Coleman



It is with great sadness that the family of Robin Edward Berwick Coleman, of St. Marys announce his gentle departure from this earth on February 2nd, 2026 in his 93rd year. Robin leaves behind his darling wife of 60 years, Joan Coleman (nee Hatcher) as well as his four children and their spouses, Mary & Chris (Wybrow), Elizabeth (Nancy) & Remi (Lemaire), David & Christy (nee Vanderheide) and Michael & Andrea (nee Coyle).

He will be missed by his three cherished grandsons and their partners William & Emily, Noah & Taylor and Jack & Jayla. As proud as dad was of his Coleman and Berwick roots, he embraced his large and boisterous Hatcher family with enthusiasm and love. He

leaves behind several members of the Hatcher family, including Hannah (Minnie) Taylor, Clifford & Rachel Hatcher, Ann & Willie Parsons and Mary Gharzouzi, various nieces, nephews and their partners & children as well as several cousins on both sides of the family. He leaves behind many dear friends old and new, including some of his oldest friends, Tony Pichler and Ann Birch. Robin was predeceased by his parents Roy and Marie Louise Coleman (nee Berwick), his in-laws Henry & Myrtle Hatcher as well as Roy & Irene Hatcher, Tom Taylor, Harry & Marjorie Hatcher, Murdock & Helen Matthews, John Hatcher and Morgan Taylor. He was also predeceased by his dear cousins Frank Lewis & Jeanette as well as Mary Zinn and Frederick & Noreen Zinn and childhood friend Bill Middleton. He will be reunited with his loyal and best fur friend, Betty, from his childhood as well as our family dog, Tia. Robin was the precious only child of his parents, the product of a beautiful love story.

Born in the Shelburne, Ontario area in November, 1933, he was said to have heralded in the wintry weather of that year. Growing up, he was very much "all boy", who had a history of both adventures and misadventures, resulting in many a skinned knee and a grin. Dad loved sports of all kinds and enjoyed both participating in them as well as watching them. He also loved planes, particularly the Avro Arrow, trains, and automobiles. Dad's knowledge of cars was practically encyclopedic, and he could identify the make, model and year of any vehicle he saw on the road.

As a young man, Dad purchased a few beautiful automobiles, including a 1956 Mercury Monarch and later a 1960 Monarch with robin egg blue leather seats. He admittedly owned one or two 'lemons' over the years, which were the subject of many (interesting!) conversations. He loved his adventures on the water, including deep sea fishing in Newfoundland. Dad owned a beautiful wooden motorboat as a young man and spent many happy hours in Blind River, Ontario waterskiing with his friends. Dad loved being outside and always said swimming in a lake was preferable to anything else. Dad even won a bowling trophy for "Best Dad Ever!" at his 90th birthday party.

Dad began a career with the Royal Bank, which moved him to many different places in Ontario. Once he got married in 1965, Mom and Dad settled in London, Ontario and decided that they were more interested in providing a stable home for their family, resulting in a career change. He eventually settled into a career in optics, and went back to school as a young dad with a wife and three young children in order to earn his diploma. Dad worked in a number of capacities as an optician and eventually the family moved to St. Marys, Ontario, where he owned and operated Coleman Optical Shoppe for many years. It was always a delight for Dad to meet former customers, who he always remembered with fondness. Dad was a proud member and Past President of the Lion's Club (St. Marys) as well as St. James Anglican Church of St. Marys and St. George's Anglican Church of Thorndale, where he also made many meaningful and lifelong connections.

Dad was a former member of the St. John's Lodge, 209a, Ontario. In retirement, dad took his responsibilities of becoming a grandparent very seriously and he enjoyed playing with his three grandsons as well as proudly attending sporting events, concerts, plays and activities with them. He helped them to get over their fears and taught them important skills like swimming, skating and the love of reading. He and Joan were grateful to have the opportunity to travel, including going on cruises, day trips, exploring Canada and "Adventure Fridays". They also wintered in Florida for several years and made a lot of happy memories doing so.

Family was the most important thing to dad, and he relished any opportunity to get the gang together and have some laughs. With Dad, there was always laughter, love and Robin's divine homemade wine. If You Know, You Know. He always said it was "hard to be humble" and loved to dance, party and be the centre of attention. In his later years, Dad faced some health challenges with his usual optimism. He never complained, and gave us all a masterclass in accepting one's challenges with grace and dignity. Aside from being lovingly supported by his family, Dad received the very best care from many compassionate providers, including the staff at the VON Day programs, One Care, Paramed, Ontario Health at Home and the Mobility Bus.

Mention must be given to the wonderful people who made Dad's days extra special, including Heather, Tina, Mercedes, Walter, Irene, Jantje, Amie, Marylynne, and especially Shannon. We are also grateful to the loving friends and neighbours of Trailside Court who helped Dad whenever needed, including Todd, Heather, Helena, Agnes, Doug and Simon. Thank you to the amazing teams at Rotary Hospice, Stratford General Hospital, St. Marys Memorial Hospital, Dr. Peel, Dr. Kara, Leanne Ruston and Dr. Hiscock for their wonderful care of Dad.

In memory of Dad, donations to a charity of one's choice would be gratefully accepted. Some organizations which are near and dear to Dad's heart are the Alzheimer's Society of Perth Huron, VON Perth Huron, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the St. Marys Mobility Bus, the Stratford General Hospital Foundation, the Stratford Rotary Hospice and the Lion's Club Gift of Sight or Leader Dogs for the Blind. A private family service with interment in the cemetery in Shelburne, Ontario will be held at a later date. We will miss you, Dad. We know that "Rockin' Robin" will be waiting for us with his cap and fancy socks on, ready to give us a big hug, a back pat and a fist bump or three. "WOO WEE". Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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Looking Back



AMY CUBBERLEY
Independent Columnist

Meet the Faulkners

25 years ago (2001)

St. Marys Town Council has applied for a SuperBuild Sports, Culture, and Tourism Partnerships grant that will allow the Friendship Centre to become part of the St. Marys Community Centre. The new facility will be an addition to the St. Marys and Area Community Centre. It will be wheelchair accessible and include multipurpose rooms.

Braden Furtney, who owns the Sunset Café, is making his directional debut with a movie "The Wait" which will be shot this spring, using the Café as its primary location. The movie will have 32 speaking parts and auditions will be held this spring.

50 years ago (1976)

Bryant Rumble, St. John Street North, reports from 70-100 people are using his indoor pool facility for swim classes each week. Cathie Irwin, Karen Muma, and Paul Carter guide the young swimmers; Miss Frances Dale the adults; and Mrs. Barbara Taylor teaches the swimmers for special needs groups.

Cross-country skiers are making good use of Wildwood Park and the Murray Forest. On Saturday afternoon over a dozen cars parked near the Wildwood gate indicated the growing popularity of this sport in the area.

75 years ago (1951)

Cecil Oliver, trapping and hunting enthusiast, reported a successful jackrabbit foray on Monday. Cecil bagged four jacks during a short walk across the fields north of town.

About a dozen large trailer-transport trucks were concentrated in the downtown streets of St. Marys this morning, owing to the blizzard conditions. The blow, which started yesterday, lasted all night and snow was still falling most of this morning. Visibility was reduced to fifty yards at times last night.

100 years ago (1926)

The St. Marys United Church O.A.B.A. basketball juniors defeated the Western University team of London on the floor of the Memorial Hall here Tuesday night by a score of 27-25. The game was exceedingly fast, and the score was tied most of the game.

The investigation prompted by the finding of five silk scarfs in the home of Provincial Officer S.J. Faulkner of Stratford by Inspector A.B. Boyd last week resulted in charges of theft being laid against Mrs. Winnifred Faulkner, wife of Officer Faulkner on Tuesday. The prisoner pleaded guilty in Stratford police court that she did steal six silk scarfs and two neckties in November or December 1925. She was remanded for sentence until February 17 and was allowed out on bail. Officer Faulkner was recently transferred from Stratford to Chatham.

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Solutions on pg. 35

IN MEMORIAM

Fred Watkins

In loving memory of our wonderful Dad
Fred who we lost 41 years ago.

This month comes with deep regret

It brings back a day we can't forget

You left us suddenly with no goodbye

But memories of you will never die.

May the winds of love blow softly

And whisper so you will hear

That we will always love and miss you

And wish that you were here.

Still miss you Dad

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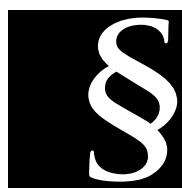
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3. Ravens
4. The liver
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THE WEEK AHEAD



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

St. Marys Public Library events - See Page 26

FRIDAY, FEB 13

Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon

A.N.A.F. meat draw - 6 p.m.

St. Marys Lincolns vs Elmira Sugar Kings at the PRC - 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, FEB 14

Royal Canadian Legion meat draw - 5 p.m.

Valentine's Day Ghost Walk - 7 p.m., Tour begins in front of MacPherson Arts & Crafts

SUNDAY, FEB 15

Kirkton-Woodham Optimist Club community breakfast at the K-W Community Centre - 9 a.m. to Noon

A.N.A.F. Marg Hogg memorial darts - Register at Noon, Games start 12:45 p.m.

MONDAY, FEB 16

Family day free skate at the PRC - 10:30 a.m. to Noon, Sponsored by St. Marys Buick GMC

Thorndale Winter Carnival at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre - 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

St. Marys Lincolns vs St. Thomas Stars at the PRC - 1:30 p.m.

TUESDAY, FEB 17

Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee - 10 a.m. to Noon

Stop Violence Against Women info session at Little Falls Public School - 6:30-8:30 p.m.

St. Marys Legion cribbage - Starts 7 p.m. sharp

WEDNESDAY, FEB 18

Tradition Mutual Insurance annual general meeting at Downie Optimist Community Centre, St. Pauls - 2 p.m.

Friends of the Library management committee meeting at the library - 6 p.m.

THURSDAY, FEB 19

A.N.A.F. sausage on a bun - 12-1:30 p.m.

St. Marys Nourish Market at St. Marys United Church - 2-4 p.m.

St. Marys Lincolns vs Sarnia Legionnaires at Pat Stapleton Arena - 7:10 p.m.



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COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

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