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(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SHOW US YOUR WILMOT FACEBOOK PAGE)

Ade Dangerfield shared this patriotic photo to the Show Us Your Wilmot Facebook page from the Plattsville 175th Anniversary Celebration's incredible drone show that took place on June 20.

EZT enhanced OPP officer off the job

Township does not know how long they have been without the service

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Concerns about safety on an East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT) roads led one member of council to introduce a notice of motion at last week's regular meeting.

Deputy mayor Brad Smith said he was contacted by a resident on the 16th Line

saying they hadn't seen the dedicated traffic cop in a long time. He decided to look into the issue, and while the township is investigating it, many questions remain unanswered.

"He said it was so bad that he would not allow his children to walk out to the bus to be picked up. He wouldn't allow them to go out alone. A few days later, I

was contacted by another constituent on the 16th and Cassel Sideroad, and he had observed extreme speed through that intersection many times and even vehicles passing each other right at the intersection," said Smith.

Smith explained speed had become an issue again since the enhanced officer's

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Local water advocacy group loses bid for hybrid event option as region opts for virtual meeting

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

"We want to provide an important update regarding the region's upcoming public workshop for the Groundwater Interference Complaints Policy."

That's how an email sent from Samantha Lernout, president of Citizens for Safe Ground Water (CSGW), began late Tuesday afternoon. The decision to not have both in-person and online options falls under the jurisdiction of staff at the Region of Waterloo.

"Despite our strong advocacy and repeated requests for a hybrid format, the region has decided to move forward with a virtual-only event," she said.

The Region of Waterloo is reviewing its Groundwater Interference Complaints Policy and the meeting is part of the review process which focuses on how concerns are assessed, how decisions are made and what happens when interference is identified. Recent concerns raised by residents, particularly in rural areas, have highlighted the need for a process that is more transparent, independent and

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TIM LOUIS

Member of Parliament for Kitchener-Conestoga



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EZT enhanced OPP officer off the job

Continued from page 1

presence had been absent for several months.

"It seemed to happen near the end or during the Christmas season of 2025. During subsequent conversations with others in the township, including staff, it was noticed that the enhanced officer had not been in their usual places of Huntingford, Cassel, Hickson and Innerkip."

Smith said he advised constituents to call the non-emergency OPP number and report their concerns.

"I took my own advice and made a call, and I was told that an officer would return my call. I waited for a week and hadn't heard anything, so I called again," said Smith, adding he eventually had a fulsome discussion with an officer.

"He informed me at that time that we indeed did not have an enhanced officer, and the OPP were in the process of putting someone in place. When asked how long we had been without this coverage, I was informed it had been quite some time, and

that was the only answer I could really get."

The Gazette reached out to the Oxford OPP detachment for answers and was provided with a written statement from Sgt. Ed Sanchuk.

"Thank you for your questions. The Oxford OPP recognizes the importance of this role within the community and the value of maintaining strong, transparent relationships with our municipal partners."

He added the OPP remains committed to accountability and transparency in its municipal policing agreements.

"Municipalities with any enhancements or additional service positions under a Section 17(2) Community Safety and Policing Act agreement are billed using actual salaries, wages, overtime and benefits. The total hours of service provided by these positions are reconciled annually, with annual billing statement estimates issued in the fall for the following year, and municipalities invoiced on a monthly basis. In keeping with this framework, East Zorra-Tavistock is billed only for the

hours worked in relation to this position and would not be billed for times when the position is vacant."

Sanchuk added while police understand the interest in staffing processes, operational considerations and internal deployment decisions are not discussed for reasons of officer and public safety.

"That said, we remain focused on ensuring appropriate resources are in place to support traffic safety and broader community needs."

Smith added he was assured the township was not being invoiced for the role, which comes with a price tag of about \$190,000 annually.

"I have no doubt we're not paying for this service, that it's not being rendered, and I take (the officer) at his word. Saying that, I'd like to know exactly how long we have been without this service. This would give us an idea of how important it is to maintain paying the extra for the enhanced officer. It didn't take long for drivers to take advantage of this situation and

resume unrestricted driving habits."

The motion was moved by Coun. Scott Zehr and seconded by Coun. Scott Rudy.

"That staff be directed to prepare a report regarding the enhanced officer, including, if possible, costs from Jan. 1, 2026, to present and the approximate hours that the officer has been on duty in the township in 2026 to present."

The motion was approved unanimously while staff offered no comment on the situation.

East Zorra-Tavistock is represented on an OPP police oversight board. It is now part of the joint Oxford OPP Detachment Board 2 rather than operating solely through its former standalone police services board.

East Zorra-Tavistock's municipal representative is Coun. Matthew Gillespie who did not speak on the motion. He attended the majority of the former local police services board's meetings and has not responded to the Gazette's request for comment.

Wilmot Township celebrates retirements of two long-serving staff members

WILMOT-TAVISTOCK STAFF

thewtgazette@gmail.com

The Township of Wilmot is celebrating the retirements of two long-serving staff members. Elaine Bender and Wayne Zehr are leaving the organization this year, following several decades of dedicated public service.

Elaine Bender started with the Township in 1994 as the supervisor of Castle Kilbride operations and volunteers. Since then, she has excelled in various roles, often serving as the first point of contact for residents and visitors.

In a press release, the township said Bender's local knowledge and customer-friendly approach will be missed when she retires this month after 32 years.

Throughout his 40 years of service, Wayne Zehr has played a key role in maintaining and

improving local roads and infrastructure. The township said Zehr will be remembered for his professionalism, strong work ethic and service-oriented approach when he retires later this summer.

"It is increasingly rare that people commit their entire career to one organization," Wilmot CAO Jeff Willmer said in the press release. "We commend Elaine and Wayne for their dedication and wish them well in this next chapter. Wilmot as a community, and the township as an organization, have benefited greatly from their decades of service as well as the example they have set for others to follow."

The township thanked Bender and Zehr for their contributions to the organization and commitment to improving quality of life for Wilmot residents.



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOWNSHIP OF WILMOT)

Long-serving staff members Elaine Bender (left) and Wayne Zehr (right) are retiring from the Township of Wilmot this summer.

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Local water advocacy group loses bid for hybrid event option as region opts for virtual meeting

Continued from page 1
resident-centered.

Lernout said there are many advantages to holding a meeting of this importance in person and while she understands it may be an uncomfortable situation for staff, she believes it would help build trust.

"Having a back-and-forth conversation with a resident face-to-face would advance the situation for residents. Having a one-way where the region controls the narrative and the script is not going to cut it for residents and won't help build that trust back up. This isn't doing it right for the residents who are impacted."

She added the region is getting a lot of pressure from the development community, something she feels is taking the attention away from the problems facing some Wilmot residents.

"But the bottom line is you can't be building this growth on unsustainable (water) pumping. They need to take a step back and not look ahead to the next few months, but into the future. They can't be unloading all the risk onto private well owners and that's what it feels like at this point in time."

The online only meeting was held via Zoom yesterday (Wednesday, June 24) from 6-8 p.m. The Gazette will have full coverage in next week's paper.

"We are deeply discouraged by this decision. We know that a number of our neighbors have limited or no internet access, meaning they will be locked out of this vital conversation. A hybrid option would have provided an accessible, collaborative process where our voices could truly be heard. Frankly, a collaborative approach is what's needed to make us feel like valued residents of this region," she added.

When asked why the region won't offer a hybrid version, Lernout couldn't offer a reason.

"That's a good question. I know it has been brought to their attention that with our community, virtual is not really an accessible option for many people. We have made it very clear this is not an accessible option for many residents."

The Gazette reached out to the Region of Waterloo for comment on Tuesday but did not hear back by press time. The decision on what type of public meetings are held by the region are left up to staff, not members of council.

Lernout said while the group continues to push back on the format, it needs to keep up the pressure by documenting every single water issue.

"If you notice a sudden drop in water



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The president of Citizens for Safe Ground Water has called out the Region of Waterloo for not making an important public meeting accessible in person. Samantha Lernout said many residents don't have reliable internet in the affected areas.

pressure, sand, sediment, or your well running dry, please report it to the region immediately. First, call the region's 24/7 hotline, 519-575-4400, and say you would like to report a well interference complaint and ask for a reference number. Ask for emergency water."

CSGW is also recommending anyone experiencing water issues email the region's hydrologist, Supriya Singh, at ssingh@regionofwaterloo.ca with a formal well interference complaint and CC wilmotgroundwater@gmail.com and all regional councillors at regionalcouncilall@regionofwaterloo.ca.

The Gazette reached out to Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen, who said she was disappointed the region chose the online-only outreach in a written statement.

"I am glad the region is engaging the public on the well interference policy update, but I am disappointed the public meeting is virtual only. In rural Wilmot, internet access is not always reliable or universal, and that creates a real barrier for some residents. I raised this directly with regional staff and asked whether a hybrid option could be considered. The region has chosen to proceed virtually, but I continue to believe a hybrid meeting would have better supported accessibility and public confidence."

The region has also not followed through on a survey it claimed would go live on June 23 at www.engagewr.ca/groundwater-interference-complaints-policy-update. As of press time, it was not available. The region recently delivered paper copies of another survey in Wilmot, something that is not happening in this case.

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Graduating W-O students celebrated at Commencement



(STEWART GRANT PHOTO)

The Commencement program for Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School took place on the evening of Monday, June 22. A total of 339 graduates comprised the Class of 2026 for the ceremonies held at Centre In The Square in Kitchener. Robert Kovanchak was the Master of Ceremonies while Samantha Wright gave the Valedictory Address.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF WATERLOO-OXFORD DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL) Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School graduate Adina Boronka accepts the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette Award from Grant Haven Media publisher Stewart Grant in recognition of her valuable contribution to student publishing.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF WATERLOO-OXFORD DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL) Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School graduate Noah Bausmer accepts Optimist Club of New Hamburg Award from club member Jeff Smith. Photo courtesy of Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School



(PHOTO COURTESY OF WATERLOO-OXFORD DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL) Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School graduate Iris Wettlaufer accepts the Wilmot Agricultural Society Award from society vice president Christine Snider and member Tammy Snyder. This year, the award was increased in honour of longtime board member James Snyder. "James spent his entire life farming on his fifth-generation dairy farm. He also dedicated more than 40 years of volunteer service to the Wilmot Agricultural Society, where he worked with enthusiasm and commitment to support agriculture and give back to his community. James passed away on Dec. 24, 2024," the agricultural society said.

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Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School Class of 2026 Valedictorian Address

SAMANTHA WRIGHT

Submitted to the Gazette

The following address was delivered to the Waterloo-Oxford Class of 2026 during the school's Commencement ceremony on June 22 by Valedictorian Samantha Wright.

Good evening, everybody. My name is Samantha Wright and it is my pleasure to give a warm welcome to Mrs. Bender, our Superintendent; Mr. Linnerth, our principal; Mr Holmes and Ms. Rajack, our vice principals; the faculty of the school; our parents and guardians; and last but not least, the graduating class of 2026.

I would like to begin by thanking the class of 2026 for electing me as valedictorian; I am honoured. In addition, I want to thank all of my friends who looked over my speech more times than I can count – especially you, Mason.

Most importantly, I would also like to thank all of the staff that we have worked with over the last four years to make our high school journey an unforgettable experience. Now I want to reflect and speak on what we have learned from our last four years at W-O.

When you first come to high school, it is hard to predict who you are going to end up being when you leave. In ninth grade, you are somewhat of a blank slate, and as time goes on, your experiences, interests and peers turn you into the person you will later become.

Nobody in this room is the same person they were four years ago, and that represents the sum of all of the opportunities we have had the chance to experience, both in class and through

extra-curriculars.

Coming to W-O specifically is a very different experience to other schools in the board. We pull from a vast geographical area. Many of us come from small towns or rural homes, limiting our exposure with others our own age.

Take where I am from; I grew up having only four other kids my age in the neighbourhood. The four of us were incredibly different, so to have friends in the neighbourhood, I either had to pretend I was someone I wasn't or deal with having no one to easily hang out with.

That makes discovering who you are without outside influence more difficult for us than other schools.

Our graduating class is even more special, as we came from a middle-school experience completely online.

Two of our most formative years, socially and academically, were spent behind a computer screen due to the pandemic, leaving us at a disadvantage to other graduating classes.

Because of this, we were not able to explore extra-curriculars at our schools. This felt incredibly isolating and unmotivating, as we weren't given many opportunities to learn about ourselves as well as our peers.

This meant as we entered high school, we had double the learning to do. We had

to catch up with social and academic expectations and try to discover who we truly were.

Our class, the class of 2026, was the first class to attend W-O after the pandemic. We had no upperclassmen to guide us through what a high school experience without COVID should look like.

Teachers had expectations and memories, but we were the class that truly had to rebuild the W-O experience from scratch.

When we started in the ninth grade, it felt like there was a common mentality amongst our grade that we should take every opportunity given to experiment and search for those spaces where we fit in.

Many of us tried out for sports, joined clubs, or tried an instrument for the first time. We were hungry for these experiences and wanted to fill that gap left by missing our chances in middle school.

For me, that was trying out for field hockey. In ninth grade, I was far from athletic and I came from ice hockey where I shot left. I would love to say that despite the odds, I was a natural talent, but I wasn't. The coaches have confirmed that if I hadn't offered to be the back-up goalie, I would've been cut.

Yet despite all of the reasons I shouldn't have tried out, I still did because I wanted to try something new. That tiny bit of courage to put myself out there allowed me to discover one of my greatest passions.

This sense of courage and willingness to try new things was shared amongst our grade and carried into our social lives. As I mentioned, when you come from a small town, it is usually hard to find people similar to you, and for many, coming to W-O was finally an opportunity to meet others like you.

We forced ourselves out of our comfort zones to meet and find "our people." We went to the school social events with zero expectations. This may have led to our SACPAC limbo games not ending as intended.

Regardless, we were the graduating class to reinvent what being a student of W-O should look like, and our courage allowed us to create a positive experience for the classes after us to look up to.

Our high school experience will always stand out as being special because it was built on trying out things we hadn't experienced before. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, but everyone still took risks to discover their own passions.

As we learned about ourselves from the trials and errors of finding where we fit in, we decided on electives and career paths based on our interests, not on what others chose.

Now, as we continue on to our next endeavors in life, wherever they may take us, I want to discuss how our time at W-O has set us up for success in the future.

These last four years have taught us how to take risks and seize opportunities. This has allowed us to fill up our slates to define who we are as people. Even though

we have had a lot of common experiences, our choices in different paths through high school and into the future have helped broaden our horizons on what success looks like.

Success isn't measured by where you are headed, rather it's the work you are willing to put in to follow your passions and to reach your goals. I believe that our experiences throughout our lifetimes will allow us to reach our own version of success, no matter what that looks like.

But this means we must not forget the lessons we have learned from our unique high school experience. We must continue to try new things, meet new people and take those risks even if it is intimidating because, ultimately, that is how we grow as individuals.

Our paths may look different from each other's, but we all share the capability to seize opportunities to follow what we are passionate about.

I believe everyone in this room is capable of reaching their own version of success. I am excited to watch you, my classmates, as we continue into the next stage of life with the courage and resilience that got us here.

No matter what adventure comes next, I have no doubt that each and every one of us will leave our own mark on the world. Thank you and congratulations, class of 2026.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF SAMANTHA WRIGHT)

Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School 2026 Valedictorian Samantha Wright delivers her address to the graduating class at the school's Commencement ceremony June 22.



NOTICE OF PASSING OF GENERAL ZONING BY-LAW AMENDMENT

On June 23, 2026, the Council of the Corporation of the Township of Wilmot passed By-law 2026-46 (General amendment to Zoning By-law 83-38) under Section 34 of the Planning Act, R.S.O., 1990, as amended.

Purpose and Effect

The purpose and effect of this Zoning By-law Amendment is to update the Township's Zone 12 framework to better regulate residential uses in institutional zones to align with the Official Plan update. The framework directs additional needs housing to appropriate locations based on scale, operational function, and associated demand on infrastructure, services and transportation networks. The amendment will also repeal Interim Control By-law 2025-75 which restricted new residential uses in Zone 12.

Written and Oral Submissions

Comments received were considered as part of Council's decision-making process.

Appeals

A Notice of Appeal must be submitted to the Municipal Clerk by 4:30pm on July 15, 2026. You can submit your appeal in the following ways:

- Online: use the Ontario Land Tribunal's (OLT) e-file service at <https://olt.gov.on.ca/e-file-service> by selecting Wilmot (Township of) as the Approval Authority (first-time users must register for a My Ontario Account). If the e-file portal is down, you can submit your appeal to planning@wilmot.ca.
- By mail or in-person: Appellant Form (A1) is available at <https://staging-oltontario.kinsta.cloud/forms-submissions/>.

A notice of appeal must set out the reasons for the appeal, and must be accompanied by the required fee (\$1,100) payable through the OLT e-portal or by certified cheque/money order made payable to the Minister of Finance. The Ontario Land Tribunal should be consulted for more information on the appeal process: www.olt.gov.on.ca. The Township of Wilmot appeal processing fee (\$1,129) must be paid directly to the Township in person or by mail and be received prior to or at the time of submission of the appeal.

Who can file an appeal?

Only a specified person, public body, applicable landowner, and the Minister may appeal a decision of the municipality to the OLT.

No person or public body shall be added as a party to the hearing of the appeal unless, before the by-law was passed, the person or public body made oral submissions at a public meeting or written submissions to the council or, in the opinion of the Ontario Land Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to add the person or public body as a party.

Additional Information

The complete by-law and details on the application can be reviewed in the Development Services Department during regular business hours or online: <https://www.engagewr.ca/general-zoning-amendment-residential-uses-within-institutional-zones>

For more information, please contact the Township of Wilmot Development Services at 60 Snyder's Road West, Baden, ON, N3A 1A1, 519-634-8591, planning@wilmot.ca, or visit www.wilmot.ca/devapps.

Music brings smiles and memories at The Maples

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Music filled the air and had toes tapping Tuesday afternoon, June 23, at The Maples Home for Seniors on William Street in Tavistock.

Residents gathered to enjoy live performances by local musicians who brought a variety of familiar songs and fond memories to audiences in both the retirement and long-term-care areas of the home.

On the retirement-living side, Elizabeth Finch entertained residents in the dining room with a selection of folk and Celtic music while accompanying herself on the ukulele.

Finch, a multi-instrumentalist, also plays the piano, banjo and autoharp. She said she enjoys sharing songs that evoke positive memories and encourage audience participation.

Among the songs featured in her performance were "You Are My Sunshine," "This Little Light of Mine," "Down in the Valley," "Amazing Grace" and "Drunken Sailor."

Finch regularly encourages audience members to sing along, clap their hands and tap their feet, creating an interactive and enjoyable experience for residents and their families.

In addition to her appearances at

The Maples, Finch performs weekly at Greenwood Court in Stratford's Heritage Ward and at a variety of other venues throughout Tavistock, Stratford and Kitchener.

Meanwhile, residents in the long-term-care wing were treated to a performance by Stratford musician Con Smythe, who is well known for performing popular hits from the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

Smythe remains a favourite among seniors wherever he performs and is known not only for his music, but also for sharing the stories and history behind many of the songs he sings.

His repertoire includes music made famous by artists such as Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley and Charlie Pride.

Visitors and residents alike said they appreciate the energy and nostalgia Smythe brings to every performance.

Smythe's son, Blythe Smythe, is a professional musician based in Nashville, Tenn. After leaving Stratford many years ago to pursue a career in country music, he continues to perform professionally in Music City. Con and his wife still visit their son whenever they have the opportunity.

The afternoon performances were another example of how music continues to enrich the lives of residents at The Maples, bringing people together through songs that span generations.



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Musician Elizabeth Finch performs for residents in the retirement-living wing at The Maples Home for Seniors in Tavistock on Tuesday afternoon. Accompanying herself on the ukulele, Finch entertained residents with a selection of folk and Celtic songs that inspired plenty of singing along and toe tapping.



Stratford musician Con Smythe performs for residents in the long-term-care wing at The Maples. Known for his renditions of classic hits from the 1950s, '60s and '70s, Smythe remains a favourite among seniors and often shares stories behind the songs he performs.





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Local concert supports music program at Milverton Public School

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

The music program at Milverton Public School has received a welcome boost thanks to the generosity of local music supporters.

Paul Hyatt, organist at Shakespeare Presbyterian Church and organizer of the church's spring concert, recently presented a cheque for \$500 to music teacher Ms. Hombach and her students at Milverton Public School.

The donation was raised through the Shakespeare Concert Series, which featured Curbstone, an a cappella quintet performing songs spanning a variety of genres and decades. The May 24 concert welcomed freewill donations from audience members, with proceeds dedicated to supporting local school music programs.

The event also showcased the talents of several Milverton Public School students. Performers included Gregory Fisher (Grade 6) on violin, Claire Fisher (Grade 4) on piano, Flora Harman (Grade 3) on piano and Mavis Menard

(Grade 2) as a vocalist. Their performances were a highlight of the afternoon and demonstrated the strength of the school's music program.

"We were excited to be given the opportunity to be part of the concert that Paul Hyatt organized," said Ms. Hombach.

While plans for the donation are still being discussed, Ms. Hombach said the contribution is greatly appreciated.

Milverton Public School offers a variety of musical opportunities for students, including a voluntary choir for grades one to six, as well as vocal and instrumental instruction featuring ukuleles and percussion.

Throughout the school year, students have opportunities to perform at school assemblies and special events, including Remembrance Day, the Holiday Concert and Music Monday, which showcases musical talent from all grade levels.

The donation will support ongoing music education and performance opportunities for young musicians at the school.



(DIANE DANEN PHOTO)

Paul Hyatt of Shakespeare Presbyterian Church presents a donation for Milverton Public School's music program. Pictured with Hyatt are student performers Gregory Fisher, Claire Fisher, Flora Harman and Mavis Menard, who shared their musical talents at the Shakespeare Concert on May 24.

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Parliament rests for the summer break; what do the two local MPs think about the last sitting?

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

The most recent sitting of Canada's House of Commons ended on Thursday, June 18.

The House passed Bill C-30, the Spring Economic Update 2026 Implementation Act, which implements measures from the federal government's spring fiscal update. The bill then quickly cleared the Senate and received royal assent later that day on the 18th.

The government's Build Canada Homes Act, Bill C-20, also received royal assent. The legislation establishes a new federal entity intended to help increase housing construction and improve housing supply.

The Gazette reached out to Conservative MP Arpan Khanna who represents Oxford, and Tim Louis, the Liberal MP for Kitchener-Conestoga, for their thoughts.

Khanna said it became more difficult to be an effective opposition party after the Liberals were able to achieve what he called a "manufactured majority."

"That being said, our team constantly put out new legislation that would make the lives of Canadians more affordable but also safer."

Khanna pointed to the passing of Bailey's Law, or Bill C-225, a bill that strengthens the criminal code's response to intimate partner violence. It was introduced by Conservative Frank Caputo and is named in memory of Bailey McCourt, a Kelowna, B.C., mother who was killed in July 2025 after her former partner – who had previously been convicted of assaulting her – was released on bail pending sentencing.

"That will make the lives of Canadians safer. I tabled the Jail Not Bail Act, Bill C-242, which received national attention. Our job is to hold the government to account, and we unveiled quite a few scandals. Whether it's Prescribe IT or the ALTO \$90-billion boondoggle, these are all because of the great work of our members in Parliament."

Khanna's bill was introduced in the House of Commons on Sept. 22, 2025, as part of the Conservatives' platform to tighten Canada's bail laws but was not passed into law.

Louis, along with being an MP, is also

the parliamentary secretary to Dominic LeBlanc, the minister responsible for Canada-US trade as well as Canadian interprovincial trade, among other files. He explained quiet diplomacy has been the norm as the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) continues to make headlines.

"We are working with our partners in the United States. Those conversations are ongoing, whether it's the prime minister talking to the president, or Minister LeBlanc or trade representatives talking to their counterparts – or myself."

He added the government is also talking with businesses, unions and organizations on this side of the border, especially ones with divisions in the United States.

"As we are working to renew this trade agreement, it's an all-hands-on-deck approach."

Louis praised his government for its "get-down-to-work attitude," which has come directly from Mark Carney.

"We had a core mission, which was to invest directly in Canadians and infrastructure, which is long overdue. We are addressing affordability issues and protecting our communities. We passed over 20 pieces of legislation."

One bone of contention among all Conservatives is the prime minister's attendance during Question Period. He attended less than 30 per cent of them, leading to an accusation of avoiding parliamentary accountability from opposition leader Pierre Poilievre and Khanna.

"He's worse than Justin Trudeau, especially during a time of need when Canadians are looking for answers and hope. They want to make sure their leaders are doing their job. If he's travelling to get trade deals done or trying to negotiate on the world stage, we support that travel."

Khanna said missing Question Period when Carney is in Ottawa is something the opposition just can't accept.

The government promised to move at speeds not seen before during the 2025 election campaign. Louis said they are working as hard as possible, but it takes longer to reach the finish line when compared to the private sector.

"Building major projects, increasing the infrastructure, our ports, rail system,

energy takes longer than some people expect. We're shortening those time frames but it's still not ready today. You aren't going to build these major projects soon, but the best time to start is now."

Inflation rang in at a 3.2 per cent in May, the highest in over two years thanks in large part to the price of gasoline, fruits and vegetables. Khanna said Carney told Canadians to judge him based on prices at the grocery store.

"He promised he was different. He said all these great things, but the results aren't matching his words and it's disappointing to Canadians. It has been over a year, and we haven't seen the light at the end of the tunnel and it's very concerning for people I talk to in the riding and across the country."

Louis admitted he is hearing from residents in his riding and elsewhere that affordability is still top of mind for them. He added 22 million Canadians have received tax cuts and the government temporarily suspended the federal gas tax (until Sept. 7) and added the Canada Groceries and Essentials Benefit.

"These are all things that are going to help with affordability. For housing, we are moving quick to partner with all levels of government and we have eliminated the GST for first-time homebuyers, and we are reducing development charges."

The so-called summer barbeque season has kicked off now that MPs are back in their riding, something Louis said will provide him a better chance to talk with his constituents.

"That really helps shape the messaging I will be bringing back (to Ottawa) and I can have longer conversations. I can have local stakeholder meetings and talk to local boards of trade and businesses, labour unions. I can find out what their needs are, and I really do enjoy that."

Khanna said despite the house being in recess, he and his team continue to meet with constituents just like they did while the house was in session.

"We have Canada Day events – and I am going to about eight or nine of them – obviously StreetFest and Turtlefest and the Highland Games in Embro. There's always so much going on. I made that pitch in parliament that we are such a great county with lots going on. I want people to come and discover what we have and shop and spend locally."

He added he is ready to hear from residents who are facing economic, health and other challenges. It's been three years since I have been elected and my hunger and passion to serve the community hasn't changed."

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Provincial police say risky behaviours continued during 'Stop. Look. Live.' Campaign

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

Members of the Ontario Provincial Police West Region have concluded the "Stop. Look. Live." campaign, conducted from June 15-21.

Officers engaged in targeted enforcement and public education initiatives aimed at reducing high-risk driving behaviours at intersections.

"Despite these efforts, officers continue to observe a concerning number of motorists failing to comply with traffic laws designed to prevent serious and fatal collisions," said OPP Sgt. Ed Sanchuk.

During the campaign period, police laid 354 charges and issued 126 warnings across West Region. Offences primarily included failing to stop at stop signs, failing to stop for red or amber lights and failing to yield the right-of-way.

"These behaviours remain among the leading contributing factors in intersection-related collisions. Collision data recorded during the campaign further underscores the ongoing risks at intersections," added Sanchuk.

Police investigated a total of 46 intersection-related collisions, one of which resulted in a fatality. There were also 15

collisions resulting in injuries and 30 with damage to vehicles.

"Each of these incidents reflects the significant and often irreversible consequences that can result from a momentary lapse in judgment behind the wheel," Sanchuk said.

Staff Sgt. Julie McLeod is with the West Region OPP traffic safety and marine unit. In a press release, she said the behaviours police continue to see at intersections are both concerning and preventable.

"Every failure to stop, every missed observation and every decision to rush through an intersection carries the potential

for devastating consequences. These are not just traffic violations, they are choices that can result in serious injury or loss of life. We are asking all drivers to take that extra moment to stop, look and ensure it is safe before proceeding."

Police said intersections continue to be one of the highest-risk environments on Ontario roadways and they are reminding all drivers that safe and attentive driving is essential at every intersection, every time.

Drivers are urged to come to a complete stop at stop signs, obey all traffic signals, yield the right-of-way when required and remain alert and focused at all times.

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Wild Hog Country Market celebrates fifth anniversary

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The Wild Hog Country Market celebrated its fifth anniversary last week with a busy week of customer appreciation events, special promotions and plenty of food.

Owners Marvin, Wendy and Derek Bachert, along with their families and staff, welcomed a strong turnout throughout the

celebration at the market's location on Highway 7/8, just east of Stratford.

The anniversary festivities came on the heels of another success for the business, which also served the winning entry at the recent Taste the Best competition during the Ontario Pork Congress.

To mark the milestone, the market offered anniversary specials, daily prize draws, a complimentary barbecue featuring house-made hamburgers and hot dogs,

and all-you-can-eat ice cream for visitors.

The celebration attracted customers from across the region, many of whom took advantage of the special offers while enjoying the food and family-friendly atmosphere.

Staff members remained busy throughout the week as customers stopped by to congratulate the Bachert family on five years of operation and support local food producers and products.

The Wild Hog Country Market has become a popular destination for locally produced meats and food products, serving customers from Perth County and beyond.

Owners said they were grateful for the support they have received from customers over the past five years and were pleased with the community response to the anniversary celebration.



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Marvin Bachert, second from left, joins members of the Wild Hog Country Market team as they serve hundreds of hamburgers and hot dogs during the market's fifth-anniversary celebration on Highway 7/8, east of Stratford.



Members of the Perth County Pork Producers helped prepare and serve pork during the Ontario Pork Congress before bringing their barbecue operation to the Wild Hog Country Market's fifth-anniversary celebration. From left are Keith Bachert, original founder of Bachert Meats, Wild Hog Country Market owner Marvin Bachert, Perth County pork producer Doug Ahrens and Perth County pork and egg farmer Henry Groenesteghe, who oversaw the barbecue.



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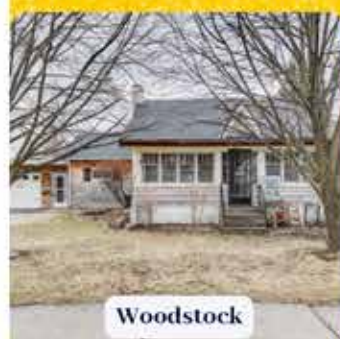


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Teddy Bear Picnic brings old-fashioned fun to Brocksden

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

Beautiful sunny weather welcomed visitors to the second annual Teddy Bear Picnic at Brocksden Country School Museum on Saturday, June 20.

Families gathered in the historic school for a day of old-fashioned fun. Activities included bubble blowing, face painting and a scavenger hunt. One of the day's highlights was Grandma's Storytime with Pat Campbell.

Guests also had the opportunity to step back in time by touring the historic schoolhouse museum, meeting a costumed schoolmarm and experiencing what a classroom was like over a century ago. Children tried writing on slates and gained a glimpse into school life in the early 1900s.

Many parents who had attended Brocksden on class trips as children enjoyed reminiscing as they looked through

photo albums, finding their class pictures.

Brocksden Country School Museum has a full lineup of summer programming planned.

On July 11, Model Train Day runs from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., offering a fun-filled day of miniature railway magic for the whole family.

On Aug. 8 at 10:30 a.m., participants can create a leather pouch using simple hand-stitching techniques, followed by a 2 p.m. workshop to make a handbound leather journal. Pre-registration is required for both workshops by contacting Jessie Campbell.

On Aug. 29 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., a skilled blacksmith will bring history to life with a working forge demonstration, showing how raw metal is heated, hammered and shaped using traditional techniques passed down through generations.

For more information, contact Jessie Campbell at brocksdenschool@gmail.com or call 519-271-2619.



(DIANE DANEN PHOTOS)

Brocksden Schoolmarm Colleen Crosbie shares the story "There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly" with sisters Paisley Davy, three, and Sabrina Davy, two. Paisley reacts to the idea of swallowing a fly!



The Hart family enjoys a Picnic with their Teddy Bears at Brocksden Country School Museum. Pauline Koert holds her 18-month-old son, Ben Hart, and his teddy bear, while Camilla Hart, five, sits with her favourite teddy alongside grandmother Ruth Hart.



Indiana Parsons, seven, and Luna Parsons, five, enjoy an old-fashioned sack race during a visit to Brocksden Country School Museum this past Saturday. Their father, Adam Parsons, recalled visiting the school as a Grade 2 student while attending Avon Public School in Stratford.



Dafne Vandergaag, 14, of St. Jacobs paints a design on the hand of Adelynn McDermid, nine, of North Easthope. In the background, Christina Miklos, 13, of Kitchener paints the face of Delilah McDermid, five, also of North Easthope.



Three generations attended the Brocksden Teddy Bear Picnic this past Saturday. Pictured left to right are Darryl Ehnes, Vanessa Trotter (great-niece of Darryl) and Angela Trotter (niece of Darryl). Darryl is the son of Roy and Erna Ehnes, who farmed in North Easthope. As children in the 1920s, Roy and Erna each received a store-bought, factory-made, straw-stuffed teddy bear for Christmas. In the photo, Darryl holds his father's teddy bear, Angela holds his mother's teddy bear and Vanessa holds her own Care Bear.

Brenner challenging incumbent in EZT Ward 2

LEE GRIFFI

Gazette Reporter

No one has run against East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT) Coun. Scott Rudy during his political career, but the two-term Ward 2 councillor will have some competition on the ballot in October.

Angie Brenner and her partner are raising their two children, students at Hickson Central Public School and College Avenue Secondary School in Woodstock. She grew up in Waterloo Region and has proudly called East Zorra-Tavistock home for almost a decade.

"When I first joined this community, I was struck by the care and compassion that greeted me. The deep roots established by generations of families who have created strong social and spiritual ties were apparent. I quickly became involved in volunteer initiatives to broaden my connections and contribute to my community."

Brenner's volunteer experience includes helping with community events at Cassel Mennonite Church, service on the board of the Tavistock Assistance Program for four years, ambassador with Do More Agriculture Foundation, and she is currently the secretary for the Hickson Central Public School parent council and is U7 parent representative with the Tavistock Tornadoes Soccer Club.

She is a graduate of both the University of Waterloo and the University of Windsor.

"Professionally, I am a registered social worker with more than 25 years of experience working with children and their families. Currently, I am the program director with the Tavistock Assistance Program (TAP), serving Hickson, Tavistock and Shakespeare. In addition, I own and operate a therapy and consulting practice focused on mental health and wellness in agricultural and rural communities and first-responder populations, including transition and succession, conflict resolution, traumatic events, women's health and older-adult life stages."

Brenner explained her interest in local government started at a young age with family members participating in municipal



Angie Brenner is running for the Ward 2 seat on East Zorra-Tavistock council in the Oct. 26 municipal election.

elections and through involvement in student government and mock parliamentary conferences.

"While I was growing up, had several influential females in school board and municipal government positions; they served as role models to me. Over the years, my interest in local government and community service has grown into a passion. I have taken part in learning opportunities through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and have observed countless council meetings to familiarize myself with procedure."

She said she is running for council because she cares deeply about the

community and feels she can be a strong voice for Ward 2 residents.

"In my recent conversations, I have noted that people are not always aware of how municipal government works or how local decisions are made. I look forward to the possibility of helping residents to stay informed and encouraging more people to become involved in local issues."

While collecting nomination signatures, a resident told Brenner that East Zorra-Tavistock has many more goods than bads, something that has stayed with her.

"No community is perfect, and not everyone will always agree. My goal is to listen, to be present and to work hard to

ensure our community shines, with many more goods than bads."

Some issues top of mind includes speed and road safety. She explained continued oversight of these projects is imperative in the coming weeks and months, with the intent to reduce speeds to prevent speed-related incidents and to improve safety for children as they enter and exit school buses on local roads.

"I expect recreation opportunities, funding and community facilities will be an important topic of discussion on the tails of the township programming survey. Recreation plays a key role in maintaining healthy, connected communities."

Brenner said another important issue will be ongoing financial planning.

"I have heard positive feedback about recent surplus budgets and the creation of reserves. Residents want to know that their tax dollars are being spent wisely, and where accumulated dollars are housed. Community education opportunities and feedback sessions are a helpful way to encourage resident participation, and further knowledge acquisition related to the merits of saving and spending."

She added she has built strong relationships with her fellow Ward 2 residents and has gained an understanding of the issues that matter.

"I value respectful conversations and differing opinions. I am present at local events in Ward 2 and throughout the township. I believe that good decisions happen after gathering information, considering community input and being open and honest about the challenges and limitations."

Brenner said she understands decisions made at the municipal level in East Zorra-Tavistock affect families, farms, businesses and future generations, and she is committed to being thoughtful, financially prudent and accessible to residents.

"I am grateful for the support and encouragement I have received from residents across Ward 2. I look forward to continued conversation over the coming months. I am ready to work hard, to be a councillor who is approachable, accountable and engaged," she added.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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North Easthope Public School receives donation

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

North Easthope Public School recently received a \$5,000 donation to its Technology Fund from Shakespeare Presbyterian Church.

Church members Al Morris and Murray McTavish presented the cheque to principal Charles Longston on behalf of the congregation.

The generous contribution will help purchase 20 new Chromebooks for the Grade 3 classroom for the upcoming school year.

The donation covers just over half of the total cost, with the remaining funds to be raised through school fundraising efforts.

Staff and students at North Easthope Public School expressed their gratitude for the donation and the church's ongoing support.



Students at North Easthope Public School gave a huge "Eagle Thank You" to Shakespeare Presbyterian Church for its generous donation to the school's Technology Fund. Students created a giant thank-you card to show their appreciation.



(DIANE DANEN PHOTOS)

Al Morris, left, and Murray McTavish of Shakespeare Presbyterian Church present a \$5,000 cheque to Charles Longston, principal of North Easthope Public School. The donation will support technology in the classroom.

TDHS announces jellybean contest winner

TAVISTOCK & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Submitted to the Gazette

The Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS) is pleased to announce the winner of the jellybean contest held at Tavistock Home Hardware, formerly The Glasgow Warehouse.

Congratulations to Harrison Milmine, age five, of Tavistock. Harrison guessed 737, the exact number of jellybeans in the large jar! The prize is

a copy of Crossroads in Time, a pictorial History of Tavistock (1890-1920) from the Lemp Studio Collection and a small bag of tasty jellybeans.

This wonderful book by William J. Gladding, was published by The Rotary Club of Tavistock on the occasion of their 50th anniversary on June 7, 1998, and in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Tavistock.

It was a pleasure meeting Harrison! Congratulations on your win!

Congratulations to Harrison Milmine, pictured right, of Tavistock the proud winner of the jellybean contest, guessing 737 jellybeans, the exact number in the large jar.



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF TDHS)

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Local mayors reflect on what Canada Day means to their communities

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

From backyard barbecues and fireworks displays to parades and quiet weekends at the cottage, there is no shortage of ways Canadians celebrate this country on Canada Day.

As communities across Perth County, Oxford County and the Region of Waterloo prepare to celebrate Canada Day, local mayors are taking time to reflect on what the holiday means to them and the residents they serve.

While celebrations may vary from one municipality to another, a common theme emerged among the mayors of Wellesley, Wilmot, Perth East and East Zorra-Tavistock: Canada Day is about family, community, gratitude and pride in the country Canadians call home.

Mayor Joe Nowak, Wellesley Township

For Wellesley Mayor Joe Nowak, Canada Day is an opportunity to celebrate the people and values that make Canada special.

"On Canada Day, we celebrate the beauty, diversity and strength of our country," Nowak said.

He reflected on the sacrifices made by those who helped preserve Canada's freedoms, including his father-in-law, Jim Broomfield, who survived internment during the Second World War.

"He fought for our freedom like so many others," Nowak said. "Their courage, sacrifice and dedication have helped build and safeguard this nation."

Nowak said he takes pride in the

qualities Canadians are known for around the world.

"I think of Canadians with shared values of kindness, resilience and determination that make Canada the envy of the world. I am proud to be a Canadian now, more than ever."

Mayor Phil Schaefer, East Zorra-Tavistock

East Zorra-Tavistock Mayor Phil Schaefer said spending time with family and participating in local celebrations are among his favourite Canada Day traditions.

"I like to celebrate Canada Day first and foremost by being around family and attending Canada Day events as much as possible," Schaefer said.

One tradition he particularly enjoys is driving a vintage tractor in the annual Innerkip Canada Day parade.

While Schaefer believes Canadians should celebrate their country year-round, he said Canada Day provides an opportunity for everyone to come together with a common purpose.

"Canada Day provides us with a common day for all to celebrate the same thing – being proud and thankful to be a citizen of this great country."

He added that local celebrations are often made possible by dedicated volunteers and service clubs.

"A community's Canada Day celebrations further affirm that, and in many cases, they are provided by local service clubs, to whom we owe a huge thank you."

As for displaying his Canadian pride, Schaefer keeps it simple.

"Like most Canadians, I will be wearing

red on Canada Day."

Mayor Rhonda Ehgoetz, Perth East

Perth East Mayor Rhonda Ehgoetz said Canada Day is a chance to enjoy time with loved ones and participate in community traditions.

"We get together with family and friends on Canada Day, go to local parades and see the fireworks at night," she said.

For Ehgoetz, the holiday is also an opportunity to reflect on Canada's history and the sacrifices of those who helped build the country.

"It is a day when we can reflect and remember all the people who came before us and how lucky we are to live in this country."

She said community celebrations help bring residents together and strengthen local connections.

"It brings the community together. People like to be in the parades or watch them."

When it comes to showing her Canadian pride, Ehgoetz has a special outfit reserved for the occasion.

"I have a Canada shirt and hat that I wear on that day."

Mayor Natasha Salonen, Wilmot Township

Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen described Canada Day as one of her favourite community celebrations.

Growing up in Wilmot, she recalls spending the day with family and friends before ending the evening watching fireworks. Today, she continues to celebrate in much the same way.

"I still enjoy celebrating much the same way – connecting with neighbours,

attending community events and taking time to appreciate the people and places that make our community special," Salonen said.

She said Canada Day offers an opportunity to celebrate Canada's many strengths while also reflecting on the country's history and future.

"For me, Canada Day is both a celebration and a reflection. It's a chance to celebrate the freedoms, opportunities and quality of life we enjoy as Canadians while also reflecting on our shared history and the responsibility we all have to continue building strong, welcoming communities."

Salonen said she believes a community's Canada Day celebrations reveal a great deal about the people who live there.

"When residents come together to volunteer, attend events, support local organizations and celebrate alongside their neighbours, it demonstrates a sense of pride, belonging and connection," she said.

She also expressed appreciation for the volunteers, sponsors, township staff and members of the Wilmot Canada Day committee who make local celebrations possible.

As mayor, Salonen said she enjoys spending the day with residents and recognizing the many people who contribute to community life.

"Canada Day is a reminder that our national pride begins in our local communities."

The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette wishes each of our township mayors, members of council and the residents who live in our coverage area a very happy Canada Day.



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Staff-led approach streamlines planning for Wilmot's biggest Canada Day celebration yet

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

When thousands of people gather at Norm Hill Park in New Hamburg on July 1, many won't notice one significant change behind the scenes.

For the first time since Wilmot Township revived its Canada Day celebrations in 2024, the event has been planned under a staff-led model rather than through a formal volunteer taskforce.

While the change may sound dramatic on paper, those involved say the transition has actually allowed staff and volunteers to work together more effectively while preserving the community spirit that helped make the event such a success in its first two years.

Last September, Wilmot council voted to dissolve the Canada Day Taskforce, an official committee of council that had overseen planning for the 2024 and 2025 celebrations. The move came after volunteers and staff alike expressed frustration with the rigid rules governing council committees, including restrictions on discussions outside formal meetings and limitations on communication between members.

"The feedback from the committee over both the 2024 and 2025 planning years was that they found the formal structure prohibitive to planning and more spontaneous and creative discussion," said Wilmot manager of community services Manny O'Krafka, who also served as a staff representative on the previous Canada Day taskforce.

Rather than eliminating volunteer involvement, the change shifted leadership responsibilities to township staff while allowing volunteers to continue focusing on the areas they know best.

"The feedback provided by the volunteers was what led to the staff report requesting the dissolution of the formal task force," O'Krafka said. "Much of the original committee is still involved in planning the event."

That includes longtime volunteers Lou and Janet Divita, who have remained heavily involved in organizing this year's celebration.



(LOU DIVITA PHOTO)

Volunteer face painters Janet Divita and Shauna Koehler add artistic flair to the 2025 Wilmot Canada Day celebration in New Hamburg. While planning for the annual event is now led by Wilmot Township staff, volunteers continue to play an important role in bringing the festivities to life.

At first, Lou Divita admitted he wasn't entirely convinced the new approach would work.

"I thought, well, I don't know if I like that idea," he said. "Some of the others thought the same way, but I think in the end it works well."

Under the previous structure, volunteers often had to wait until the next scheduled meeting to make decisions or move projects forward.

"If I have a question or if I want to do something faster, I just call (staff) and say, 'Can we do this?' 'Yeah, we can do that, no problem,'" Divita said. "Everything goes a lot smoother."

For Divita, who handles marketing and promotion for the event, the streamlined process has made planning far easier.

"It was a lot smoother," he said. "There's only one person

sort of looking after it. I think it worked out really well."

The township's recreation staff say one of the biggest advantages has been the ability to respond quickly to opportunities and challenges as they arise.

Under the old structure, customized sponsorship opportunities or other changes often required formal committee approval. Now, staff can work directly with sponsors and vendors, helping secure additional funding and programming.

Staff were also able to secure the federal Celebrate Canada grant along with additional FIFA-related funding tied to the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

As a result, this year's event will feature several new attractions, including a dedicated Youth Zone with bubble soccer, a soccer-target challenge, an inflatable obstacle course and the return of Top Shot Hockey.

Organizers have also added a family bike parade, where participants can decorate bicycles, wagons and strollers in either a Canadian Spirit or FIFA-themed category.

Despite the new structure, both staff and volunteers stress the event remains very much a community effort.

Volunteer committee members continue to oversee everything from fireworks and children's programming to entertainment, vendors, sponsorships and event-day logistics.

"We can't say enough about the group of volunteers," O'Krafka said. "They've worked in their respective areas and collaboratively as a group with tireless dedication and they're so passionate about planning a fantastic event for the community."

The township has also introduced several measures aimed at improving the volunteer experience, including better orientation materials, maps, rotating shifts and additional support throughout the day.

"Our goal is to enhance it, to have our volunteers enjoy themselves, tell their friends, come back and continue to grow that aspect of the event," said Wilmot supervisor of recreation programming Lacey Smith.

For Divita, the results are already apparent.

"I think this year will be better than last year," he said. "There's more for kids to do, more events and more activities. I think it's positive."

While the planning structure may have changed, the goal remains the same – creating a memorable Canada Day celebration for the entire community.

And according to those organizing it, the partnership between township staff and dedicated volunteers may be the best formula yet.

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Canada Day is about remembering what we have in common, not what tears us apart

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Galen Simmons



The smell of burgers wafting up from the grill. A cold plunge off a lakeside dock on a hot, summer day. The sound of fireworks going off after dark. Wide, unencumbered smiles on the faces of family, friends and neighbours.

The freedom to celebrate where you like, how you like and with the people you love most.

When I really think about Canada Day, about what that day off on July 1 has meant to me over the years, those are the memories that come flooding back. And I think those simple traditions – gathering with community, watching parades and fireworks displays, eating at picnics and backyard barbecues

– is what Canada Day looks like for most Canadians.

Despite all the political arguments, economic uncertainty and social divisions we encounter every day, Canada Day offers a rare opportunity to pause and remember what we still share.

Most Canadians don't spend Canada Day arguing politics. They spend it with family and friends. We don't all vote the same way, worship the same way, or agree on every issue, but we share communities, schools, arenas, parks and main streets.

Canada isn't perfect. No country is. But we remain one of the safest, freest and most prosperous nations in the world. We have universal

health care, democratic institutions, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and peaceful transfers of power.

We can disagree fiercely and still live next door to one another.

Local Canada Day celebrations are reminders that community is built face-to-face, not on social media.

The parade organizers don't ask who you voted for. The volunteer serving pancakes doesn't care about your political stripe. The kids waving flags don't care about ideological divisions.

Small-town Canada Day celebrations are powered almost entirely by volunteers. That says something important about who we are. In communities like those in Wilmot, Wellesley, East Zorra-Tavistock and Perth East, people still step forward to coach teams, serve on committees, organize events, raise funds and help neighbours. Those are deeply Canadian values.

Canada's strength has always been its ability to bring people together from different backgrounds and ask them to build something collectively.

The Canadian flag belongs to everyone, regardless of political belief, background, ethnicity or where their family came from. Patriotism doesn't require believing Canada is perfect. It means believing it's worth celebrating and worth improving.

This year, as we gather around barbecues, watch fireworks over local parks, attend parades and spend time with those we care about, perhaps the most Canadian thing we can do is remember that we have far more in common than we sometimes think.

The communities we call home are proof of that every day. For one day at least, we can put aside the things that divide us and celebrate the country and communities that bring us together.



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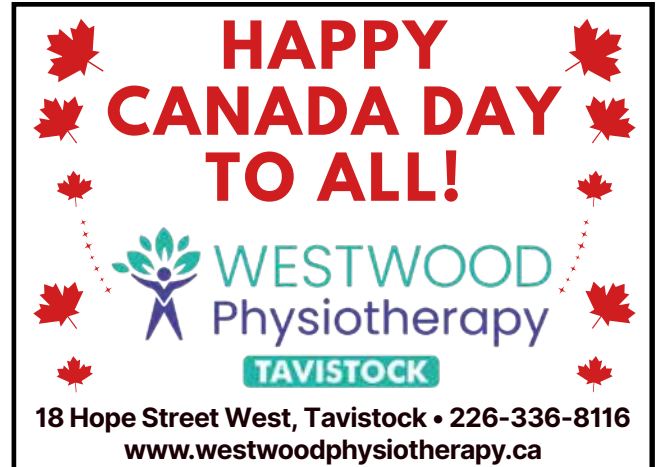
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HAPPY Canada DAY

WILMOT CANADA DAY 2026

EVENT SCHEDULE

Norm Hill Park, 251 Jacob St., New Hamburg, ON. Canada

Come celebrate Canada Day with us on Wednesday, July 1
 A day packed with live music, tasty food, family-friendly activities, and plenty more to enjoy!

7 AM | Indigenous Sunrise Ceremony
 In partnership with the Wilmot Indigenous Relations Interfaith Working Group and Crow Shield Lodge

1 PM | Opening Ceremonies

- New Hamburg Legion Colour Guard and Bike Parade
- "O Canada" by The Community Players with New Hamburg Concert Band
- Cake Cutting hosted by members of Township of Wilmot Council

1:15 PM - Dusk | Live Local Music

- 1:15 - 1:45 PM: New Hamburg Concert Band
- 2:00 - 3:15 PM: Dolinar Dosman and Dunn
- 3:30 - 4:45 PM: Randy Satchell Band
- 5:00 - 6:10 PM: Dave Martin
- 6:30 - 7:45 PM: After Midnight
- 8:00 PM: Counting Down the Hours

Dusk | Fireworks!

1:00 - Dusk | Kid Zone and Youth Zone

- 1:00 - 8:00 PM: Top Shot Hockey
- 1:00 - 6:00 PM: Game Asylum (Video Game Trailer), Dunk Tank, Inflatables and Henna Tattoos
- 1:00 - 6:00 PM: Crafts, Corn Bin, Face Painting and Books
- 1:30 - 2:15 PM: Erick Traplin show #1
- 2:15 - 3:00 PM: Potato Sack Race
- 3:00 - 3:45 PM: Erick Traplin show #2
- 3:45 - 4:30 PM: Egg and Spoon Race
- 4:30 - 5:15 PM: Erick Traplin show #3
- 5:15 - 6:00 PM: Three-Legged Race
- 6:30 - 9:30 PM: Balloon Twisters

1 PM - Dusk | Food available for purchase

- 1:30 - 6:00 PM: New Hamburg Optimist BBQ
- 1:00 - 8:00 PM: Dessert Food Trucks
- 5:00 - 10:00 PM: Food Vendors

1 - 6 PM | Vendors Market

- 1:00 - 6:00 PM: Various Vendors and Community Groups
- 6:30 - 9:30 PM: Jr. Optimist Club Novelty Merchandise Sales

Free Admission and Parking

Event schedule is subject to change. This event is funded in part by the Government of Canada www.canada.ca
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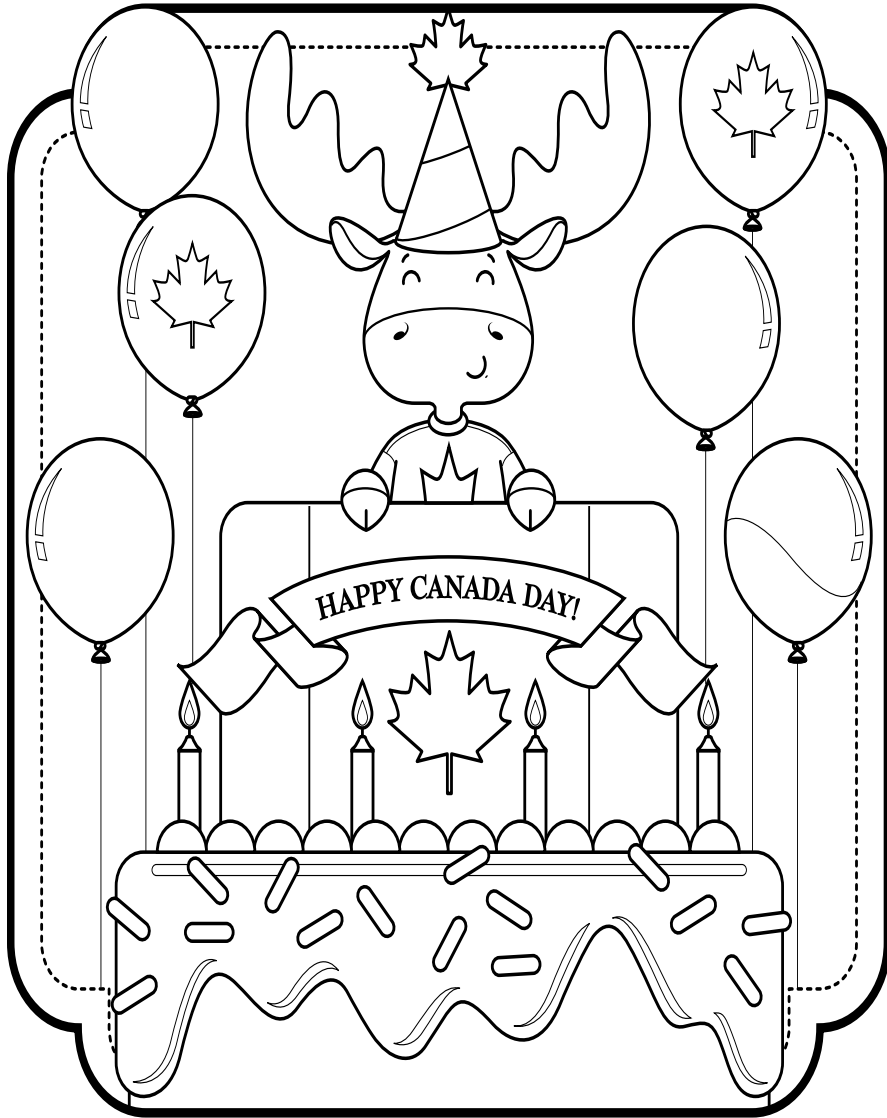
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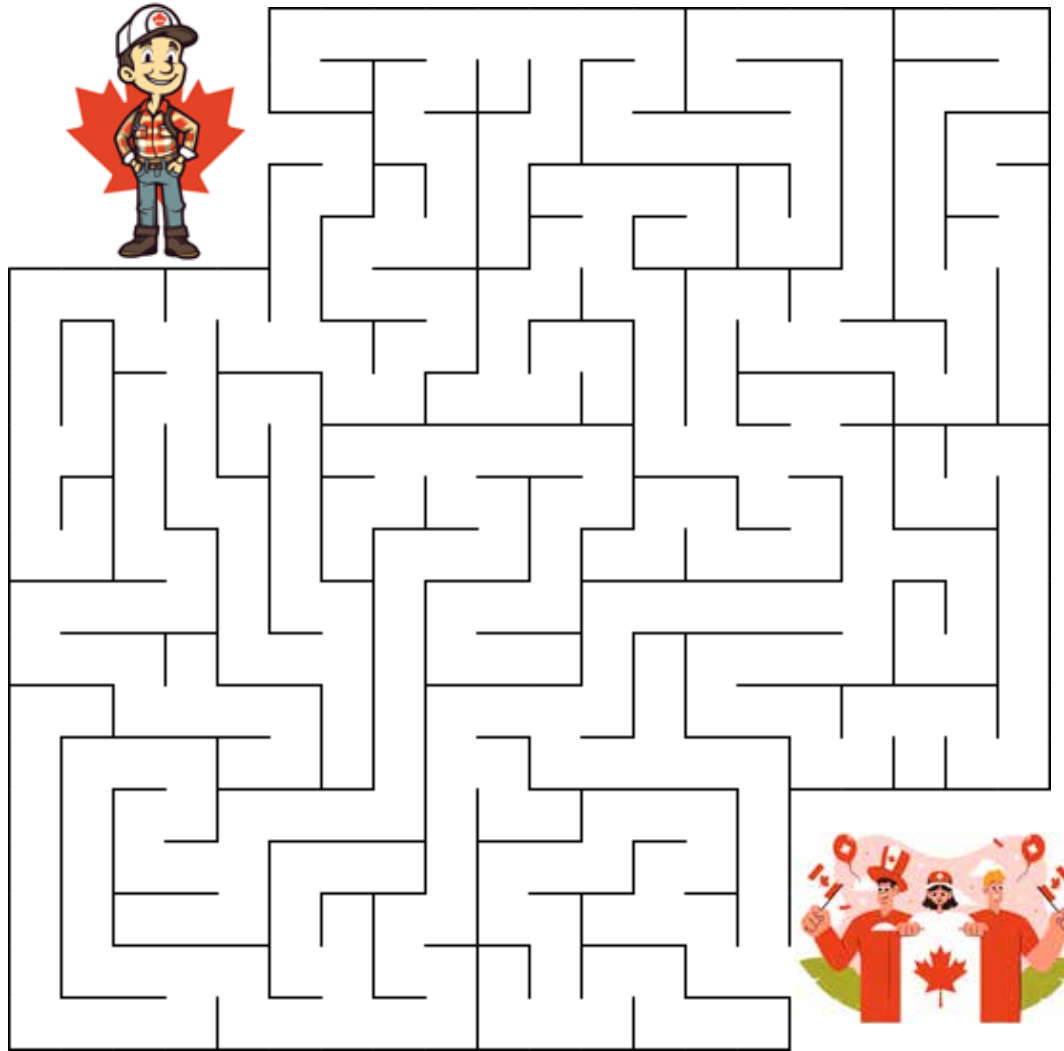
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Grant Haven Media owner shares newspaper journey with Tavistock Men's Club

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The Tavistock Men's Club is well known in the community not only for its home-made sauerkraut, annual fish fry and popular sauerkraut supper, but also for the interesting guest speakers it welcomes to its monthly dinner meetings.

At a recent gathering, club members heard from Stewart Grant, owner and publisher of Grant Haven Media, who shared the story of his career and the growth of his newspaper publishing business.

Grant, owner of the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette, the St. Marys Independent, the Stratford Times and many other community newspapers across southern Ontario, spoke about his path into the media industry.

With a smile, Grant joked that perhaps his future career was destined from the beginning.

"Since I was the first baby born in 1974 and had my picture splashed all over the front pages of local newspapers, maybe that's why I ended up in the newspaper business," he told the audience.

After graduating from high school, Grant attended the Ivey Business School at Western University and became a chartered accountant. He later accepted a position with a successful company in Bermuda.

By the age of 30, however, Grant decided it was time to return home to St. Marys where he and his wife, Laurie, wanted to raise a family. By that time, his parents, June and Murray Grant, had sold their Master Breeder Holstein dairy herd and farm on the Mitchell Road and had also



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Grant Haven Media owner and publisher Stewart Grant speaks to members of the Tavistock Men's Club during a recent monthly dinner meeting in Tavistock. Grant shared the story of his career and the growth of his community newspaper and publishing business.

relocated to St. Marys.

In 2014, Grant purchased the St. Marys

Independent from longtime owner Frank Doyle, who remained as editor during the

transition. Grant said the newspaper focused heavily on local news and community coverage, believing readers wanted information they could not find in national newspapers or online.

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, Grant learned the Tavistock Gazette was available for purchase from Bill and Sherry Gladding. He acquired the publication, with Bill Gladding remaining involved for another year.

Grant later launched the New Hamburg Post to serve the Wilmot area. Staffing challenges eventually led to the merger of the Post and the Gazette, creating the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette.

Beyond publishing, Grant also founded Stonetown Travel, opening agencies in both St. Marys and New Hamburg.

His media ventures continued to expand with the launch of the Stratford Times and the acquisition or creation of additional community newspapers, including the Woodstock-Ingersoll Echo, Goderich Sun, Tillsonburg Post, Simcoe Advocate, Paris Independent and Exeter Examiner.

Grant also acquired two agricultural publications serving Norfolk and Brant counties and retained members of their existing staff.

Looking ahead, Grant told the audience he hopes to expand into eastern Ontario with the acquisition of a newspaper in Cobourg, which would become the first Grant Haven Media publication east of Toronto.

Club members enjoyed learning about the growth of one of Ontario's largest independently owned community newspaper groups and the entrepreneurial spirit behind its success.

Tavistock resident wins Shakespeare Field Day 50/50 jackpot

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

A Tavistock resident is heading into summer with some extra spending money after winning the Shakespeare Community Athletic Association's (SCAA) Field Day 50/50 draw.

Lindsay Weicker was presented with a cheque for \$2,365 Monday evening at the Shakespeare ballpark after her ticket was selected as the winning entry.

The 2026 edition of Shakespeare Field Day attracted one of its largest crowds in recent years, helping boost ticket sales for the annual fundraiser.

Weicker's daughter, Leah, plays for the U15 Shakespeare Falcons softball team. Like many of the association's young athletes, Leah helped sell 50/50 tickets as part of a fundraising effort to support the purchase

of equipment for local ball programs.

A smiling Weicker said she had never won a prize of this size before.

The timing couldn't have been better for the family, which is planning a trip to Canada's East Coast this summer to visit relatives in Newfoundland.

Weicker, a Grade 1 teacher at Forest Glen Public School in New Hamburg, said the winnings will help make the family vacation even more enjoyable.

Her husband, Adam, and the couple's two children were also excited about the unexpected bonus as they prepare for their summer travels.

Funds raised through the 50/50 draw help support the Shakespeare Community Athletic Association and its ongoing efforts to provide equipment and opportunities for local athletes.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Shakespeare Field Day chair Deb Bell, left, presents a cheque for \$2,365 to 50/50 draw winner Lindsay Weicker during a presentation at the Shakespeare ballpark on Monday evening. Joining them is Shakespeare Community Athletic Association president Paul Bender. In the background is Weicker's daughter, Leah, a member of the U15 Shakespeare Falcons, who helped sell tickets for the fundraiser. The Falcons went on to win their game by a wide margin.

Petersburg Optimist Club Father's Day Breakfast draws crowd of 1,000

DIANE DANEN

Gazette Correspondent

The Petersburg Optimist Club's annual Father's Day Breakfast and Car Show was once again a tremendous success, bringing together families, volunteers and car enthusiasts for a morning filled with great food, fellowship and fun.

Held at Petersburg Community Park, the popular event welcomed approximately 1,000 guests between 8:30 a.m. and noon. Visitors enjoyed an all-you-can-eat breakfast featuring pancakes, scrambled eggs, toast, bacon, home fries, fruit cups, juice and coffee.

The scale of the event was impressive. Volunteers served approximately 180 dozen eggs and nearly 300 pounds of bacon throughout the morning as they worked to keep up with the steady stream of hungry guests.

Over the years, the Father's Day Breakfast has grown into one of the community's most anticipated annual events, attracting visitors from across the region and providing an opportunity for residents to connect while supporting local community initiatives.

A highlight of the morning was the popular car show organized by the Waterloo County Shifters Car Club. More than 350 classic, vintage, custom and exotic vehicles filled the park, attracting automotive enthusiasts from across the region.

This year marked the fourth consecutive year the Petersburg-based club has partnered with the Petersburg Optimist Club



(DIANE DANEN PHOTOS)

Gary Collins, treasurer, and Dan Litwiller, vice president of the Waterloo County Shifters Car Club, were busy selling tickets for the 50/50 raffle. Proceeds from the draw help the Petersburg Optimist Club support youth programs throughout the region.

for the Father's Day Breakfast event.

Founded in 1957, the Waterloo County Shifters Car Club has proudly called Petersburg home since 1976 and remains an active supporter of community events and local initiatives.

Tony Hergott, a member of the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades, attended the Father's Day Car Show with the

organization's fully restored 1940 Fargo/Bickle Pumper.

The truck served the Baden Fire Department from 1940 to 1975 and is now owned and maintained by the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades.

The non-profit organization supports the preservation of local firefighting history through scrap steel collections, bottle

and can drives held on the last Saturday of each month at 10 Bell Dr. in Baden, and a monthly online 50/50 raffle.

Community spirit was evident throughout the morning as volunteers worked together to ensure the event ran smoothly. Local high school students assisted, earning community service hours and giving back to their community.

Members of the 38th Kitchener-Wilmot Scouts also came out to lend a hand. The Scouts volunteer each year as a way of showing appreciation for the ongoing support they receive from the Petersburg Optimist Club.

The Optimist Club expressed its gratitude to all the volunteers who contributed to the event's success, with special thanks to the 38th Kitchener-Wilmot Scouts Group and the Waterloo County Shifters Car Club for their continued support and partnership.

"The Optimist Club of Petersburg is a small club, but we have a great group of volunteers who make it happen," said Warren Bechthold. "The strong community spirit behind this event is what keeps it growing year after year."

With another successful Father's Day celebration in the books, the Petersburg Optimist Club continues its mission of supporting youth and strengthening community connections throughout the region.

The Petersburg Optimist Club is always looking for new members and volunteers. For more information or to get involved, call 519-465-1157.



Members of the 38th Kitchener-Wilmot Scouts volunteered at the annual Petersburg Optimist Father's Day Breakfast and Car Show. Back row (left to right): Scout Leader Josephine Jobagy, Venturer Analise Deck (17), Scout Leader Chris Deck, Scout Leader Peter Miller, Griffin Smith (12), Scout Leader Nicolas Smith. Front row (left to right): Crosby Stevens (13), Maxwell Stevens (10) and Luca Deck (13). For more information about Scouts Canada contact Gerald Knight at knightowlsrock@gmail.com.



Tony Hergott of the Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades stands by a fully restored 1940 pumper truck, one of seven antique fire trucks preserved by the organization. For more information, visit their website at <https://wilmotfiremuseum.com>.

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Grace United Church musician recognized for dedication to church music

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

Music plays an important role in worship services, and many churches are fortunate to have talented musicians and choir directors who help enrich the experience for congregations each week.

At Grace United Church in Tavistock, Marilyne Nystrom has faithfully served as organist, pianist and choir director for regular Sunday services, as well as special Christmas and Easter celebrations that require additional musical leadership.

Congregation members say Nystrom's contributions are greatly appreciated. In addition to accompanying services, she directs the church choir, regularly introducing new music that enhances worship and provides a fresh experience for the congregation.

During Sunday's service, Nystrom once again showcased her musical talents by performing on the flute accompanied by a programmed piano arrangement. The performance demonstrated the versatility she brings to the church's music ministry.

For her postlude selection, Nystrom performed "The Wind Beneath My Wings" on the flute, accompanied by piano. The piece drew the attention of those attending the 10:30 a.m. service and served as a fitting conclusion to the morning's worship.

Through her ongoing dedication and musical abilities, Nystrom continues to make an important contribution to Grace United Church and its congregation.



Grace United Church organist, pianist and choir director Marilyne Nystrom performs a flute selection during Sunday's worship service. Accompanied by a programmed piano arrangement, Nystrom's rendition of "The Wind Beneath My Wings" was enjoyed by members of the congregation.



by PeterS 2026

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Answers found on classified page



1. How old is Canada turning this Canada Day?
2. What is the national animal of Canada?
3. Who was Canada's first prime minister?
4. What landform sits between British Columbia and Alberta?
5. Charlottetown is claimed to be "the birthplace of _____".
6. What are Canada's two official national sports?
7. The four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together for the first time at what battle?
8. In what year was Nunavut established?
9. Who was the lead singer of the Tragically Hip?
10. Who ran across Canada to raise awareness for cancer?

Answers found on classified page

OBITUARY

PFAFF: Bryan Edward Jacob



Passed away peacefully at his home in New Hamburg surrounded by his family on Tuesday, June 16, 2026 in his 85th year.

Beloved husband of Mary (Wilhelm) Pfaff whom he married February 21, 1996. Dear father of Scott (Marie Martin) of New Liskeard and Jody (Amanda) of New Hamburg. Sadly missed

by his grandchildren Evan, Braden, Julia, Brendan, Parker and Sadie. Remembered by his step-children Ann Junker of Kitchener, Tara Junker (Mike Irwin) of Guelph, Jim Junker (Emily) of Holstein and by his step grandchildren Arikka, Reese, Brooke (Adam), Jack, Brianna, Taylor and great grandchildren Austin, Harper and Wyatt. Survived by his brother Tom (Bertie) and sister-in-law Karen all of New Hamburg. Bryan will also be remembered by the Wilhelm Family.

Predeceased by his first wife Kathy (May 28, 1989), parents Orville & Gladys (Weber) Pfaff and brother Grant.

Starting very early in life Bryan found the love of sports. He carried that love of sports through his life being an active player winning Championships along the way and then taking up the Coaching role. He was a long time executive member of the New Hamburg Spirit83/Firebirds Jr."C" Hockey Club. Because of his support of sports in his community he was awarded "Fan of the Year" multiple times for cheering on the local kids. Bryan had a love of painting and many homes and businesses in New Hamburg are blessed to hang his paintings. He was also a very active member of the Living Water Community Fellowship Church, New Hamburg.

Relatives and friends will be received in the Mark Jutzi Funeral Home, 291 Huron St., New Hamburg on Friday, July 3, 2026 from 5 -8pm. Memorial service will be conducted at the Living Water Community Fellowship Church on Saturday, July 4, 2026 at 11:00am. A celebration of Bryan's life will continue upstairs at the Wilmot Recreation Complex from 1:00pm until 4:00pm. Please feel free too just join us at the Celebration if you are unable to attend the visitation or the service.

In lieu of flowers, donations to the Living Water Heritage Fund or the WRHN Foundation would be appreciated by the family. Personal condolences can be shared at www.markjutzifuneralhomes.ca

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For info visit www.tavistockbc.org/drivein

The Old Gazettes

By Sydney Grant

Slowly but surely, I'm reading through the past pages of the Tavistock Gazette (est. 1895). Within this weekly column I'd like to share with you some of my findings.

June 17 - 24, 2021, Edition (5 years ago)

Beau Akey was at a loss for words when he heard his name called during the first round of the Ontario Hockey League draft. "My agent called me and told me to get ready, and so I knew I'd be in the next few picks. Then my name popped up and I was in shock," said Akey. The 16-year-old defenceman was selected 19th overall for the Barrie Colts. He was surrounded by parents Lisa and Dave Akey, and the rest of his family when he got the big news. "It's an amazing feeling; I'm just really excited to play for Barrie."

The provincial government will provide \$16 million for a recreation complex in Wellesley township. The new facility, located on 40 acres at the corner of Queen's Bush and Hutchison roads, will feature an ice pad, senior and youth centre space, a walking track, a gymnasium, and two soccer pitches. Construction is expected to begin in nine months, and completion is slated for fall 2023. "This facility is really community-driven, designed with the entire township in mind and will build upon the offerings at existing facilities," said MPP Mike Harris Jr.

A police investigation is underway after a string of thefts from vehicles in Wellesley during the early morning hours of June 17. Ashley Dietrich, a spokesperson for the Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS), said eight complainants reported their motor vehicles were entered. Cash, tools and personal property were targeted. In some cases, the suspect(s) damaged windows to enter the vehicle and in other instances, they entered through unlocked doors.

June 22 - 29, 2011, Edition (15 years ago)

Two local teams surpassed their fundraising goals and reached medal status at the Woodstock Relay for Life on Friday,

June 17, at College Avenue Secondary School in Woodstock. The community 4-H club "Delectable Dozen 4-H Bakery" Team was designated as a silver team while "The Ladies of the Night" achieved bronze. This year, they achieved their goal of being a silver team, raising a total of \$7,796. They also received the award for the best decorated tent and team spirit.

If you've never had the opportunity to see a show at Silver Dollar City in Branson, Mo., come to the 28th annual Southwestern Ontario Open Fiddle and Step Dance Championships to be held in Tavistock this weekend. Canadian Powerhouse, who performed at this year's World-Fest from April 7 to May 8, will put on a show during the finals on Saturday night in Tavistock. The show features 12 of the top step dancers in Ontario today as well as five incredibly talented musicians. Step dancing, tap dancing, singing and some great old-time fiddling are all jammed into this non-stop performance.

Raymer Financial in Tavistock has raised over \$37,000 for local charities over the past nine years with their annual charity golf tournament. This year, they were pleased to support the Tavistock Assistance Program (TAP) and on Saturday, owner and investment advisor Andrew Raymer presented TAP program director Sharon Walkom with a cheque for \$4,800. "There are just no words," Sharon said at the post-game barbecue at the Tavistock Golf Course. "Tap is honoured and humbled by the sheer magnitude of this gesture."

June 19 - 26, 1996, Edition (30 years ago)

The Hickson Atoms were a proud group of lads following their tournament win over Tavistock by a 12-2 score in the championship game on Sunday morning at Hickson Park. Members of the team include Jeff Harmer, Ian McLaren, Daniel Benbow, Ryan Fallowfield, Matt Slager, Darryl Wettlaufer, Tyler Townsend, Tyler McKay, Lucas Raymer, Sean Hutchison, Rob McLaren and Kris Yungblut.

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette SPORTS

Sully Kipfer selected by Sarnia Sting in OHL U16 draft

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Sports Director

Sully Kipfer, a native of Milverton, was drafted into the OHL during the June 12-13 Ontario Hockey League (OHL) Priority Selection, with Kipfer getting selected in the 15th round by the Sarnia Sting.

Kipfer described the relief he felt when he found out he had finally been selected, which happened while he was at work.

"It was a long day. I expected to go more towards the eighth round to 10th round range, so I started following it more intensely around the seventh round or so, and I didn't expect it to go as late as it did in the day. I actually had to go to work at 2 p.m. I work with my teammate, Declan McCotter, who also got picked, so I left and I was feeling a bit nervous around that point, just not really knowing what was going to happen.

"After I got to work and about 30 minutes into my shift, my head coach from last year, Jason Brooks, who is on the Sarnia Sting staff, was actually the one who called me, which was a pretty cool experience," continued Kipfer. "It was definitely an emotional call, and a big relief to finally get picked, and special to be with Declan and get the call from my head coach."

The call from Brooks, according to Kipfer, made the experience of getting drafted more sentimental.

"It started off just being a gut feeling when the phone rang," said Kipfer. "I knew he was affiliated with Sarnia, and I knew Sarnia was on the clock for the pick, so as soon as I saw his name pop up, I had a gut feeling that it was going to be about the draft. And then he said that he was



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured is Milverton native Sully Kipfer with the U16 Huron-Perth Lakers this past season. Kipfer was drafted by the Sarnia Sting in the 15th round of the OHL Priority Selection June 12-13.

going to make me a Sarnia Sting.

"Me and Jason (Brooks) have known each other for seven years. We've gotten very close and had quite a special bond over the past couple of years, so just having him be the one to tell me was special. And then he told me that he started tearing up at the draft, and he knew he wanted

to take me, and then I started tearing up, and it was just a really special moment between the two of us."

Kipfer also explained his excitement to continue progressing as a player.

"It's just nothing but excitement. The Sting's camp is this weekend, so I'm just really excited to get up there and meet

all the staff and meet all the other drafted players. I'm just absolutely excited for the opportunity and so grateful that I have this opportunity. Obviously, I was a bit nervous when you see the rounds going by, and you start thinking, 'Maybe I'm not going to get drafted.' But as soon as I got that call, it was just immediate excitement. I think that I'm ready to make the most of this opportunity, and I just can't wait to get up there."

When looking ahead to this coming season, Kipfer said he wanted to become more fleet of foot on the ice.

"I'd say right now, just my speed and my skating ability are probably my biggest weak points," said Kipfer. "I've got the defensive ability down, and I have the strength and, obviously, you always want to build on the strength and keep that up. I've always been big on developing that in the gym three times a week down in Waterloo with a training facility called Depth, and then just at home doing agility drills, sprints, running and footwork training. I work with Luke Israel, who really helps me with my skating ability."

Kipfer said he believes, with improvements to his skating, he could blossom into a reliable stay-at-home blueliner at the OHL level.

"I think I can definitely be a good third or fourth defenseman on the roster who shuts down guys and plays with a very specific defensive defenseman role on that team who just shuts down guys using my strength. I don't let guys get around me. I'm not on for many goals. And then, a big ability of mine is my penalty kill ability."

Tavistock Community Health Inc. hosts successful fundraising golf tournament

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

For perhaps the only sunny day of the week, Tavistock Community Health Inc. (TCHI) board members gathered at the picturesque River Valley Golf Course near St. Marys for their annual invitational golf tournament fundraiser.

Now in its second year, the event continues to help the TCHI board raise funds toward recent upgrades at the Tavistock Medical Centre.

Longtime Tavistock family physician Dr. Paul Bartlett spoke briefly about the origins of the Tavistock Medical Clinic and its growth over the decades.

With a smile, Bartlett noted many of the golfers attending the tournament had likely been delivered by him during his years of

medical practice.

Three of Bartlett's four sons – Brett, Jeremy and Mark – joined their father on the course in support of the fundraiser.

The sons joked that their father was fortunate he chose medicine rather than golf as a career.

TCHI board secretary Carolyn Kropf and board member and tournament chair Dennis Kuepfer were pleased with the strong turnout and support for the event.

They noted anyone unable to participate in the tournament but wishing to support the fundraising campaign can still make a donation by contacting Kropf at cjgkropf@gmail.com.

Board members said donations of any amount are appreciated as they work toward reaching their fundraising goal.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Members of the South Easthope Mutual Insurance Co. team were proud to represent the Tavistock-based company as the tournament's naming sponsor during the Tavistock Community Health Inc. invitational golf tournament at River Valley Golf Course near St. Marys. From left are Brendan Leis, Heidi Danen, Brent Lange, who recorded the longest drive of the day, Greg Rabe, Justin Brenner, Ben Fallowfield and Peter Thomson. Missing from the photo is Aaron Howe.

One comforter at a time: Christa Bender's cross-Canada journey by bicycle

GREG YANTZI

Nith Valley Mennonite Church

When Christa Bender dipped her bicycle tire into the Pacific Ocean in Tofino, B.C., on a spring morning in May 2024, she was beginning more than an athletic feat. She was embarking on a six-month journey across Canada that would weave together faith, community and a Singer Featherweight sewing machine – one comforter top at a time.

Bender, a member of Nith Valley Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, completed the 10,602-kilometre route over 125 days of cycling, arriving in St. John's, Nfld., in late September. Her husband, Mark Bender, drove their 15-foot Hymer camper from campground to campground, meeting her every 30-40 kilometres along the way. Together, they passed through every province, camping in 88 sites, parking in driveways and church lots, and along the way, collecting fabric from thrift stores across the country.

The idea had been taking shape for decades. The dream of cycling coast to coast first stirred while Christa and Mark Bender rode the Cambridge-to-Paris trail roughly 40 years ago, when they encountered a couple who had dipped their back tire in the Pacific and were heading to Maine to dip the front in the Atlantic.

But it was three events in 2023 that gave the trip its distinctive shape: Christa Bender's longstanding volunteer work at the MCC Thrift Centre in New Hamburg; her involvement in Nith Valley's sewing circle making comforter tops; and the arrival of a little Singer Featherweight sewing machine from a nephew's family. The Featherweight came along on the trip.

"These three events all happened in 2023 and defined our trip across Canada – one comforter at a time," Christa Bender said.

Rather than volunteering at MCC Thrift stores along the route as she had originally



(MARK BENDER PHOTO)

New Hamburg's Christa Bender recently completed a six-month, more than 10,000-kilometre bicycle trip across Canada.

planned, Christa Bender found herself stopping to shop for fabric at MCC shops, Salvation Army stores, Value Villages and independent thrift outlets from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland. By the end of the trip, she had pieced together 15 comforter tops. A quilt assembled from all the leftover scraps – a literal cross-Canada quilt – now tells the story of the journey in patchwork.

The route took Christa Bender through landscapes that tested and astonished her. She cycled the Icefields Parkway from Jasper to Banff – "beyond beautiful," she

says – and endured five days of horse flies in northwestern Ontario by starting each morning at 5 a.m., before the insects woke. She pedalled beside the St. Lawrence, circled the entire Gaspé Peninsula, crossed Prince Edward Island on the Confederation Trail and arrived in Newfoundland for a final, misty 700 kilometres to Cape Spear. She biked through 119 days of sunshine and 23 days of rain.

Throughout the journey, Christa Bender understood herself to be on a spiritual pilgrimage as much as a physical one. Reflecting on the timing of the trip

– delayed one year from the original plan due to family visits and the arrival of a grandchild – she says, "I always marvel at how insignificant events shape the journey of our lives. We need to acknowledge that God does guide us, and we need to trust that guidance."

MCC was a thread woven throughout. Christa Bender visited the four MCC Thrift stores in Winnipeg – she was most impressed by the Kildonan Thrift Centre – and made her fabric stops at MCC shops a recurring feature of the trip. Each piece of fabric carried potential – a future comforter top to warm someone in need.

The journey ended not with fanfare, but with characteristic warmth. After visiting the Terry Fox memorial in St. John's and stopping at a pub with Mark Bender to celebrate, Christa Bender pulled into a local thrift store – still in her cycling gear. When she mentioned to the cashier that she had biked from Victoria, the cashier made an announcement to the whole store.

"In her amazing Newfoundland accent, she announced to everyone in the store that this lady had biked across the country – and everyone applauded," Christa Bender recalled. "A standing ovation in a thrift store. What a way to end the trip."

Christa Bender shared her story with the Nith Valley congregation on June 2, two years after the journey began, and brought along the cross-Canada quilt, now completed, as evidence that the road had indeed led somewhere beautiful.

Christa Bender is a member of Nith Valley Mennonite Church (New Hamburg), a volunteer at the MCC Thrift Centre in New Hamburg and a member of the congregation's sewing circle. The 15 comforter tops made during her trip have been donated through MCC. She shared her story at a recent dinner event. A video of her presentation can be found on the YouTube channel of Nith Valley Mennonite Church.

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Young Bell riders continue to excel at Saddle Club competitions

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The Bell family of North Easthope once again enjoyed a successful day of competition at the recent Stratford and District Saddle Club show.

According to club president Martin Ritsma, one of the most rewarding aspects of the club's summer show season is watching young riders develop their horsemanship and riding skills year after year.

"It seems almost unbelievable how much they improve," Ritsma said of the young competitors who participate in monthly

shows throughout the summer and fall at the Schlotzhauer riding facility on Line 37 (Vivian Street), east of Stratford.

The Bell family, who live near Shakespeare, have been regular participants in the Saddle Club's competitions since the children were old enough to ride. At Sunday's show, the family once again earned several strong results, highlighted by a collection of red ribbons.

The oldest of the three siblings, 11-year-old Ben Bell, has earned two championship belt buckles over the past three years as the club's top points rider.

His younger sister, Hailey, and younger

brother, Luke, are also familiar faces at the shows. While all three enjoy the competitive aspect of the sport, they are equally quick to congratulate fellow riders on their accomplishments.

The Bell family rides a variety of horses, including Quarter Horses, Paints and Palominos. The family's mares also raise colts on the farm.

Parents Brianne and Dan Bell, who were both raised around horses as well as dairy and beef cattle, continue to support their children's involvement in the sport. They believe competition helps build confidence, sportsmanship and character while

allowing the children to enjoy time with their horses.

The family stays busy beyond the show ring. From their home farm on the Third Concession of North Easthope Township, north of Shakespeare, they grow corn, wheat, soybeans, barley and hay, while also operating a sizeable custom-farming business.

Following another successful day at the Saddle Club show, the Bell family was off to support another favourite activity – a softball game in Tavistock.



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Eleven-year-old Ben Bell races his horse, Holly, to a first-place finish with the fastest time in his class during Sunday's Stratford and District Saddle Club show



From left, Ben Bell, 11, rides Holly, Luke Bell, seven, rides Harley, and Hailey Bell, nine, rides Comet during Sunday's Stratford and District Saddle Club show. The Bell siblings are regular competitors in the club's summer show series.

Wilhelm family continues proud dairy tradition in North Easthope

GARY WEST

Gazette Correspondent

The arrival of summer brought warm sunshine and lush pastures for a group of Holstein heifers grazing in the rolling hills of North Easthope Township.

The cattle belong to the Wilhelm family, whose dairy farming roots run deep in the area.

David and Jess Wilhelm, along with David's brother, Jonathan, continue to build on a longstanding family tradition of breeding registered Holstein cattle. Their herd includes both black-and-white and red-and-white animals carrying the sought-after red gene.

Travellers along the Fifth Concession north of Shakespeare can often spot the young dairy animals grazing on the family's picturesque pastures. Mixed among the Holsteins are also a few long-horned beef cattle adding variety to the herd.

The family's dairy operation traces its roots back many years to Ross and Anne

Wilhelm, who established the Rossanne Holstein herd and developed a reputation for breeding quality cattle with strong genetics.

Today, the next generation continues that tradition, working to maintain and improve the herd while carrying on the family's commitment to dairy farming.

The Wilhelm family's involvement in the community extends beyond agriculture. Their children attend North Easthope Public School, where staff say they are positive contributors to school life.

David Wilhelm also dedicates time to serving his community as a volunteer firefighter with the Perth East Fire Department out of Shakespeare. Over the past several years, he has responded to fires and emergencies throughout Perth East and the surrounding area.

As summer begins, the sight of healthy cattle grazing on the hills of North Easthope serves as a reminder of the area's strong agricultural heritage and the farm families who continue to care for the land and livestock.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A group of Holstein heifers grazes on pasture owned by the Wilhelm family in North Easthope Township. The family continues a long tradition of breeding registered Holstein cattle in Perth County.

NEAT members enjoy breakfast gathering at Neeb farm near Gadshill

GARY WEST
Gazette Correspondent

Members of the North Easthope Antique Tractor Club (NEAT) gathered near Gadshill last week for one of their popular summer breakfast outings, this time hosted at the farm of Matt Neeb.

While threatening skies and occasional showers made for less-than-ideal travelling conditions, the weather did little to dampen the enthusiasm of club members, some of whom received an unexpected soaking during the trip.

A large turnout of antique-tractor enthusiasts made the journey to the North Easthope farm, where they enjoyed breakfast, fellowship and the opportunity to explore a collection of artifacts and

memorabilia displayed throughout the Neeb family's farm buildings.

Host Ron Neeb also welcomed neighbours, friends and relatives to the gathering, ensuring there was plenty of company and conversation throughout the morning.

Breakfast sandwiches and hash browns were prepared by the Gerber family food truck, whose farm is located nearby toward the hamlet of Hampstead. As always, ice-cream sandwiches proved to be a popular dessert for attendees.

The weekly breakfast outings continue to be a highlight for club members, combining a love of antique farm machinery with visits to local farms and rural landmarks throughout Perth, Oxford and Waterloo counties.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

With a green Oliver 1650 tractor in the background, members of the North Easthope Antique Tractor Club enjoy breakfast and conversation during last week's visit to the Neeb farm near Gadshill. The Oliver tractor line was later acquired by Cockshutt, and many Cockshutt tractors were built in Brantford. The company is recognized as one of Canada's notable tractor manufacturers and was among the first to offer an independent power takeoff (PTO) system on farm tractors.



Ron Neeb, left, and neighbour Al Schmidt look over a collection of interesting vehicles, photographs and memorabilia displayed in the Neeb farm workshop during the NEAT club gathering.



Ron Neeb, pictured, and his son, Matt, are well known locally for their ability to restore and repair tractors and vehicles. Residents can watch for Ron and several of his restored John Deere tractors in the upcoming Canada Day parade in Stratford.

Gazette Puzzles

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“Please Mr. Postman, look and see, Is there a letter, a letter for me?”

MARILYN PEARSON

Tavistock and District Historical Society

The Tavistock and District Historical Society (TDHS) in partnership with the Hickson 4-H Club has set up a Heritage of Hickson Post Office Display in the lobby of the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock administration building, 89 Loveys St., Hickson, open for viewing Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

History of the post office as compiled by the 4-H members from the Tweedsmuir Hickson Women's Institute scrapbooks

The postal service was the lifeline for community news, personal correspondence and military dispatches. Because travel was difficult and roads were often poor before the arrival of railways and proper stagecoach routes, sending mail was an expensive luxury.

Postage rates were calculated by the distance traveled and the number of sheets of paper used. This changed in 1851 with the introduction of standard, flat-rate prepaid stamps, which made sending items more accessible before social media.

Personal letters, postcards and greeting

cards were the primary method for families and friends to share personal news and stay in touch. Newspapers, magazines and periodicals were frequently mailed to subscribers to keep everyone informed on local, provincial and global news before TV coverage.

Money letters allowed pioneers and settlers to safely send cash or drafts to distant relatives or business partners.

The Hickson post office has been housed at three locations. The first post office opened on July 1, 1883, in a building owned by Thomas J. Loveys with Miss Susan Vance as the first postmistress in the Calder & Parker Store, just west of the railway on the north side of the street.

The second location was at the Parker store, formerly R.G. Nichols store, on the south side of the street just east of the two-room School. A long-serving postmaster from 1918 for 47 years was postmaster A. Clarence Parker.

In 1971, the post office was moved to its present location at 83 Lovey's St., commonly known as Todd's Place with Mrs. Mary Elaine Todd as postmaster who served for 31 years.

The current postmaster is Mrs. Candy

Lightfoot. Thanks to her kind, caring personality and assistance, a generous collection of Hickson post office artifacts is on loan for public viewing including Hickson's hammer stamp, a vintage postal bag, a carousel of ink stamps, signage and postal replicas.

Of interest are display boards titled “Reflections of Canada” illustrating images of each postage stamp issued by Canada Post from 1851-1980. Vintage Hickson postcards, a World War II letter dated February 5, 1942, and a wooden stagecoach with horses carved with a knife by Ken Fink of Tavistock complement the display.

History of rural mail delivery

Rural mail delivery was not available to the Hickson rural farming community until 1911. It took a bit of politics and letter writing to the editor of The Sentinel Review by an Oxford County resident, Mr. George Wilcox from Springford, who pushed for rural mail delivery.

He also spoke to David Robinson, Woodstock's acting postmaster, who was not interested as he felt it would cost too much. Mr. Wilcox then took his plea to top politician, Liberal Prime Minister Sir

Wilfred Laurier. With an election looming, Conservative Robert Borden promised to bring rural mail if elected.

Prime Minister Laurier, gauging the potential vote grabber with the rural constituency, had the postmaster general announce the establishment of rural mail service in Canada before the election took place.

Rural mail wagon service began across Canada in 1908. Rural mail service expanded quickly. By 1912, there were 900 routes established with some 25,000 mail boxes including Hickson! Couriers began making stops in the countryside, selling stamps and money orders. A huge asset to the Hickson farming community was the delivery of mail to their homes, something taken for granted today.

Be sure to take a look at the list of names in the display of all the postmasters who have faithfully served and fulfilled their important role at the Hickson Post Office. With 161 Hickson mail slots and 850 for Embro rural mail delivery, it is a busy, inviting atmosphere. Not only do they personally hand you your mail, but they also greet you with a smile and listen to your family news and weather reports in the friendly village of Hickson.



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARILYN PEARSON)

Heritage of Hickson Post Office Display by the Tavistock and District Heritage Society and 4-H members.



Mrs. Candy Lightfoot, postmaster at Hickson Post Office, changing the date on the vintage Hickson hammer stamp.



A vintage postal mail bag.



A vintage postal mail bag.

**READ US ONLINE AT :
GRANTHAVEN.COM/WILMOT-TAVISTOCK-GAZETTE**

Wilmot Rooted Together: Tree by tree, plant trees to grow Wilmot's tree canopy

LOUIS SILCOX

Let's Tree Wilmot

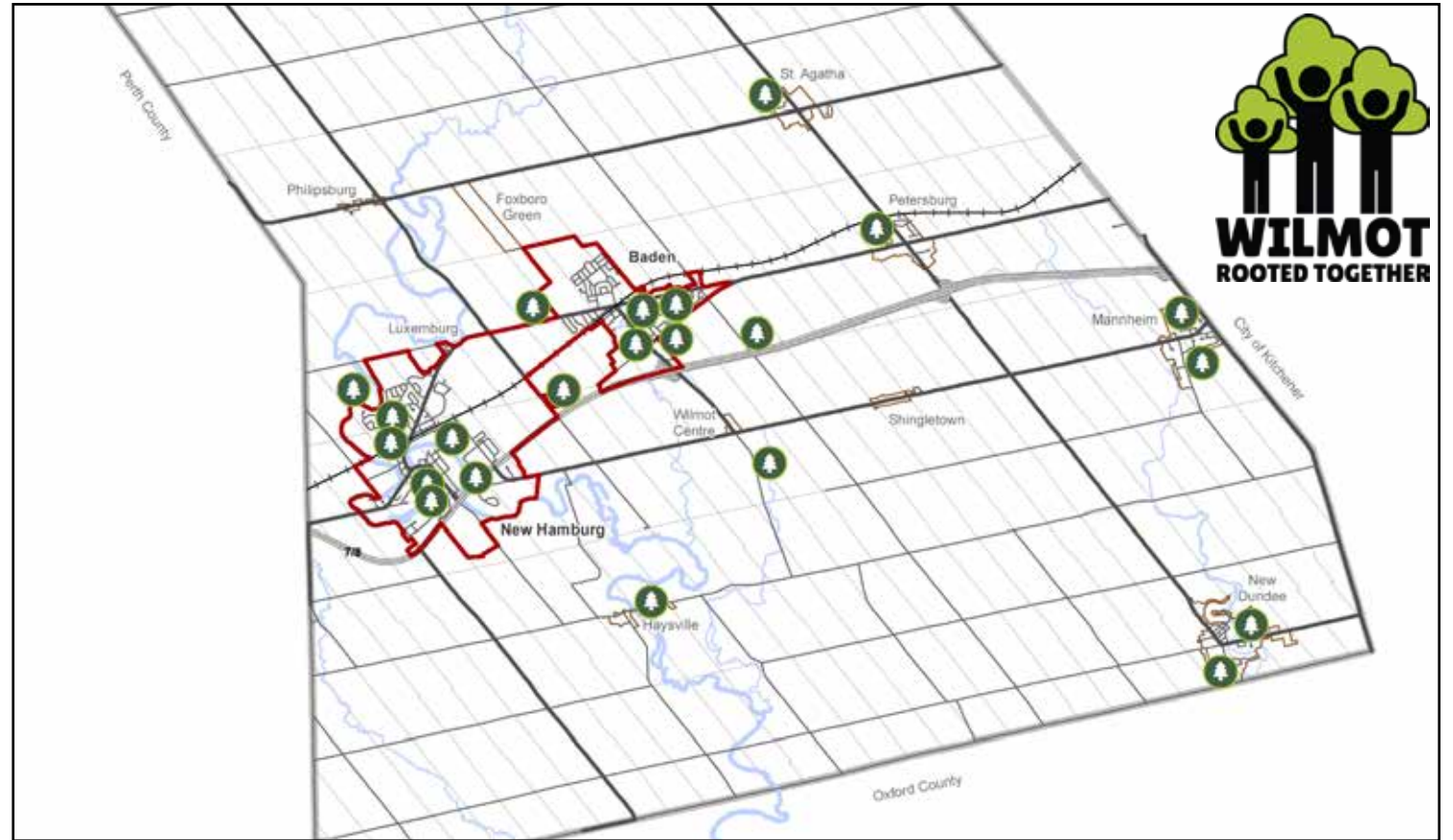
As trees grow, they add a ring to their trunk every year as they get taller and stronger. Garden Wilmot's project, Let's Tree Wilmot (LTW), is growing, adding a new ring to advance our goal of restoring and growing Wilmot's tree canopy.

Since 2020, we've invited Wilmot residents to come to dozens of planting days and added nearly 7,000 trees to our tree cover. The township has given 1,280 trees to residents to plant at their homes. Other groups have been planting on our roadsides and private properties, so we are counting over 11,000 trees so far. A great start!

Our new campaign, Wilmot Rooted Together: a tree for everyone, is a project to encourage the planting of trees on private land to further increase our township's tree canopy. We will be keeping count of all the trees being planted by LTW, the township, other groups and most importantly, by you, the public. Our goal is to match the number of trees planted to the township's population – a tree for everyone by 2030, LTW's 10th anniversary.

Why are we doing this? LTW has been busy planting on our public lands but most land in Wilmot is privately owned, so to effectively increase our tree canopy, we need your help. Trees grow in communities with roots intertwined to give support and also share resources. Wilmot Rooted Together is about creating those same connections – neighbors working together to plant trees and strengthen our community for generations to come.

There are many reasons to add trees or shrubs where you can. From supporting biodiversity and providing wildlife



(PHOTOS COURTESY OF LET'S TREE WILMOT)

A map of trees planted by Let's Tree Wilmot and its volunteers and the Wilmot Rooted Together logo.

habitat to cooling the air in summer, reducing winter winds, dampening traffic noise, enhancing beauty and increasing property values, the benefits of trees are far-reaching.

While we prefer people to plant native trees and shrubs that best support our environment, we'll count all new trees and shrubs. Why the native tree/shrub preference? Our native pollinators, birds and others have evolved alongside our native

flora, which provides all the ingredients needed to raise their young and feed themselves.

Take the Monarch butterfly, for example; no milkweed means no Monarchs. Monarchs need this keystone species to survive. An oak tree is a keystone species for 400-500 species. A ginkgo offers no similar benefits to our local wildlife.

Go out and buy and plant a tree or more. Let us know! Go to our website

LetsTreeWilmot.ca/Wilmot-Rooted-Together and let us know how many trees you have planted this year. We are all in this together.

Not sure what is native tree or shrub? Our website, LetsTreeWilmot.ca/Wilmot-Rooted-Together, has lists of recommended native trees and shrubs that are suitable for our soils and climate.

We are counting on you!



Volunteers with Let's Tree Wilmot at a tree-planting event earlier this year.

Dancing your way to fitness and fun

HEAPS OF HEALTHY TIPS

By Mercedes Kay Gold



Living a happy holistic life is the ultimate goal. Wellness experts may vary in the number and top habits for good health, but we all agree that exercise is essential.

Dancing checks two big boxes for this fitness and diet guru; physical and mental health. Albert Einstein said it best. “We dance for laughter, we dance for tears, we dance for madness, we dance for fears, we dance for hopes, we dance for screams, we are the dancers, we create the dreams.”

As a certified personal trainer, I see dancing as a fabulous, full-body workout, building muscle and bone strength from tiny tots to seniors. Dancing is blood pumping, heartrate elevating, old-fashioned fun for all ages.

Dancing is generally considered joint-friendly and a lot kinder on knees and hips than pounding the pavement running. Dancing increases the range of motion, flexibility and circulation. From youngsters to those getting on in years, dancing builds confidence and coordination. In ageing

adults, cognitive decline is normal, and learning new steps stimulates neuroplasticity and boosts brain volume.

Fall in love with tap, ballet, line, salsa or ballroom; all are total brain-boosting workouts. From solo swaying to time well spent in a social situation, dancing is magically mood enhancing. Depending on the type of twinkling your toes, time spent and intensity, dancing burns between 150 to 300 calories an hour.

Did you know that New Hamburg has been home to a world-class dance studio since 1986? With over 35 years’ industry experience in a multitude of roles, dancer, teacher and choreographer Donna Bender wanted to pass on her passion for dance while still providing quality dance training and education from age two to adult.

The studio celebrated its 40th year anniversary this past May, marking the day with a beautiful celebration of dance, family and friendships at the University

of Waterloo in the Humanities Theatre. There is no shortage of rave reviews for Bender and her team. It’s not at all surprising that dancers of all ages and levels travel from Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge and even Stratford and Woodstock to our quaint town to train.

The 2026 academic year is about to wrap up and with summer camps ready to kick in, there’s still time to register your mini love. Children ages two to four will learn basic movements of ballet and tap in the “Magical World of Dance.” Kids over five can stay for half or full days, letting their feet tell a story.

Tap, ballet, jazz, hip hop and even acro afternoons are part of the camp experience. There’s something for everyone. Crafts and an awesome array of activities will keep your little one entertained. No need to pack lunches, mom and dad. Hold onto your hat, there will be a performance on the last day, promising to be “Wonderfully Wicked.”

Looking to grow as a dancer? Join Bender, in-house and guest teachers for an intensive, power-packed week of “Groundforce Technique Conditioning” classes, four full days geared towards advanced dancers who regularly train multiple hours weekly. This camp offers a mix of classical ballet, jazz, contemporary, hip hop, jumps and turns, musical



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Dancer, teacher and choreographer Donna Bender of Centre Stage Dance Studio in New Hamburg.

theatre, floorwork drills, and even improvisation skills.

For grownups, get your groove on once a week every Tuesday in July. Beat the heat with an open-level tap class. Not quite ready to embrace your inner Gene Kelly? The studio offers Pilates every Thursday morning from July through the end of August. Pilates is an all-over body workout increasing strength, endurance and flexibility. Core strength and picture posture perfection is the tell of Pilate lovers.

Looking to have fun, make friends, get in shape or help make your child’s competition dreams come true? Bender and her team are here to support, guide and make sure your mini talent gets world-class training. Camps run all summer long.

Centre Stage Dance Studio is conveniently located at 73 Hincks St. Unit #3 in New Hamburg. For more information, visit their website, centrestagedancestudio.ca, or follow on social media @centrestagedancestudio.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Significant commitments to a downtown core’s value!

Throughout the ‘80s, my wife and I lived with our two young children on Good Street in New Hamburg. Murray’s offered a value-added service for its customers. You could submit your shopping list for anything in their store for later pickup at your mutual convenience.

One cheque got you all your items, pre-packed and ready for pickup. Access to and egress from the rear, off-street parking area at the back door could get quite chaotic some evenings with everyone coming and going.

When my wife and I returned to Wilmot in the early 2020s, we noticed that the Murray family had invested significantly in the restoration of the storefront and the historic streetscape appearance. It was with a degree of nostalgic sorrow that we participated in the goods’ dispersal and closing of Murray’s due to a confluence of unfortunate family circumstances – the result being the empty eyes of the building looking out onto Peel.

The closing of the variety store added to a sense of wariness about foot traffic and for the town core’s viability. However, Greg Voisin built two retail areas with Sobey’s and Dollarama as their anchors. The Patels renovated the Guardian Drug Building. The Cressmans converted a dry cleaner area into an expanded Puddicombe venue. They also acquired and updated what was once a car dealership into a retail and off-street parking space for their downtown customers.

“The Murray Block” project will be, I think, Marie Voisin’s fourth local application of her history and architecture appreciation skills. She renovated and expanded the Scott House as the family residence for herself and her husband. She is the majority owner of a heritage farmhouse, officially designated by Wilmot Township as being of historic significance. Her resources, skills and personal commitment will ensure that property’s continued integrity.

Marie and her company executed a major restoration of the old Imperial Hotel, a corner anchor on Huron. We can be confident that Marie’s focus in this latest project will ensure the continuation of the historic façade on Peel. Greg Voisin’s Rolodex should help fill the store fronts.

Some of us have lobbied Wilmot Township to expand and diversify the tax base from a major dependence on agricultural and residential assessment toward a larger commercial and industrial tax base – like our comparators. The strong commitment of these three local families in “The Murray Block” project will ensure that not only is empty commercial space being backfilled, but also a local presence, a local commitment is evident.

Thank you to the three families for their commitment to maintaining the value of the New Hamburg downtown core!

Barry Wolfe,
Baden

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Plattsville’s 175th celebration a huge success

Wow. What a day!

On behalf of the Plattsville 175 executive committee, thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate this incredible milestone with us.

From the Firefighter Breakfast in the morning to the spectacular Drone Show that lit up the night sky, and everything in between, the day was filled with laughter, memories, community spirit and hometown pride.

We were blessed with perfect weather, attendance far beyond what we imagined and a level of community support that truly showcased what makes Plattsville such a special place. Whether you attended an event, participated in the parade, visited vendors, enjoyed the entertainment,

volunteered your time, or simply stopped by to be part of the celebration, thank you.

A special thank you goes out to our volunteers, sponsors, community groups, performers, vendors, emergency services and organizing committee members. Events like this simply do not happen without the dedication and generosity of so many people.

The community spirit on display throughout the day was beyond compare and is something we can all be proud of.

Thank you for helping make Plattsville’s 175th Anniversary Celebration a day we will never forget!

Denise Tew,

Plattsville and District
Heritage Society

The plusses of a small-ship ocean cruise

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO

By Paul Knowles



I will admit we approached the trip with a bit of trepidation. We were invited to sail on the “Viking Sea,” one of Viking’s fleet of 15 ocean ships.

The trepidation had nothing to do with Viking, per se. We have done several river cruises with Viking and have nothing but the highest praise for those experiences. But river-cruise ships host fewer than 190 guests, while the newer, ocean-going ships carry just over 900 passengers.

So, was this significant increase in travellers going have a negative impact on our experience?

What we found was the experience is quite different, but honestly, no less enjoyable. I had a lengthy conversation with the Viking Sea’s Hotel general manager, Bogdan Stefanescu. He knew that my previous Viking trips had all been on European river cruises, so he was curious; did I prefer river cruises or this Mediterranean ocean cruise?

My answer was, “Yes.”

I know that many of my readers will have experienced river cruising, on Viking or one of the other highly reputed river-cruise companies. But most may not have tried the ocean-going option – it’s relatively new. So, here’s my take.

There are advantages to both options. River cruises usually find you moored right next to the town or city you are visiting, and you can easily walk into the town. On both river and ocean cruises, Viking offers an included excursion every day, as well as options for upgraded excursions. My feeling was we spent more time on coaches simply getting to the excursion destination on the ocean cruise. But the tours are almost always excellent.

The ocean ship is of a size that means it must dock in larger ports, and the view from your balcony is likely to be industrial docks or container yards.

River cruises are very personal. You’re up close and interacting with your destinations with your fellow passengers and with the Viking staff.

When it comes to the staff, that doesn’t change on the ocean ship. Incredibly, within a day of being on board, several staff members were able to call us by name when

we encountered them. And the proportion of staff to passengers is amazing – the Viking Sea had 464 crew members serving 907 passengers, according to Stefanescu. His title, “hotel general manager,” may be slightly confusing, but he is actually responsible for everything except actually running the ship (that’s done by the captain), which means more than 400 of the staff members are in the hotel general manager’s reporting chain.

When we first saw the ship, our initial reaction was, “That’s a big boat!” And yes, it is a lot larger than the longships on the river. But Stefanescu told me that if the Viking Sea and its sister ships were part of another cruise line, they would be designed to hold a lot more passengers. Viking deliberately designed the craft with an enormous amount of common space – the ship never felt crowded and there was plenty of space for quiet relaxation. Stefanescu told me, “The ship always feels comfortable.” I agreed.

The river cruise ships have one main lounge/bar where you will often find a pianist or other solo performer.

In contrast, on the Viking Sea, from late afternoon on, there were many wonderful options. One day, we enjoyed five different musical acts: a folk guitarist/singer entertaining al fresco diners on the rear deck; a string duet in the soaring atrium; a classical pianist; a brilliant ABBA tribute quartet plus band in the spacious Star Theatre; and the Viking Band, a six-person, kick-ass combo in the pub called

Torshavn.

Dining options were similarly varied and always excellent. There were two “reservation only” restaurants – one an Italian eatery, the other a “Chef’s Table,” as well as a brilliant buffet restaurant, a more formal restaurant and some casual eating spots. And almost every day brought special options in the buffet – a mussel and lobster night, a paella night, a pasta night and so on.

Stefanescu knows his ship like the back of his hand. He’s been part of Viking’s ocean-going program from the beginning.

“I was part of the launch of the first ever ocean ship, the Viking Star, in 2015,” he said.

In total, he’s spent 30 years at sea. He adds that he has been on the Viking Sea for the past 10 years. “She’s amazing,” is his perhaps biased assessment. Amazing, yes, but he won’t use the word “luxury” – although I might argue that would be justified. “The word is ‘comfort,’” he explained. “We never use the word ‘luxury.’”

And that comfort is built into the design of the ship, the attention paid to every detail and the unique elements like the thermal. But what stands out most is the astonishingly good service.

Not only do the 464 crew members consistently go out of their way for the good of their guests; they also consistently collaborate and support each other. No mean feat, considering the crew during our cruise came from 47 different countries.

Stefanescu noted that Viking does not make political statements or take political stands, but he did agree that such international cooperation may offer some reasons for hope in a fractured world.

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.



The Viking Sea, one of Viking’s fleet of 15 ocean-going ships.



Pasta night in the World Café.



Beverage manager Vladan Krstic doing what he does best!



Featured shows including an excellent ABBA tribute.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Opinion: Taxpayers in EZT left in the dark over status of enhanced OPP officer

CHASING A STORY

By Lee Griffi



You will find a story in this week's Gazette about what we believe is the absence of an enhanced OPP officer in East Zorra-Tavistock.

The role has been around for about seven years now, and it's something we don't hear much about because it has been functional and people who spend time driving around see a cruiser with a radar gun at the ready, manned by the same officer.

But what has allegedly happened, over what period of time we don't know, is a complete

lack of public accountability.

Coun. Brad Smith brought forward a notice of motion asking the township to find out how many hours the officer worked in 2026. If the OPP's response to that question from the township is anything close to the one I received, they simply won't find out.

Smith said an officer told him the township was not being billed during the officer's absence. I asked the OPP how often EZT was invoiced and that question was not answered. I asked EZT

CAO Karen DePrest the same question, and no answer was supplied.

Look, there is no bigger supporter of police than me. I write OPP and Woodstock City Police stories in the Gazette and Woodstock Ingersoll Echo as often as I can. But my Spidey sense always tingles if I don't get a response when taxpayers dollars are involved.

You, East Zorra-Tavistock residents, pay for the enhanced officer directly through your property taxes. Do you want an explanation? If there has been no officer for months, why not? Another question that should be answered.

There are two sides to this story. As you can see, the OPP would not admit or deny to not having the officer working, but a member of the Oxford OPP told deputy mayor Brad Smith this is indeed the case, which is why he brought forward the motion.

I applaud him for that and to be honest, members of this council need to work a bit harder at council meetings. It is yet to be determined who is running again, though incumbents Mayor Phil Schaefer, Coun. Scott Rudy and Coun. Jeremy Smith have put their names forward to date.

What's worse? Not being provided a service contracted for, or telling people the service is no longer available? What I can say is I have spoken to many of my sources who live outside of Tavistock, Innerkip, etc. When drivers don't see police, they speed up. So, I ask, why not be transparent?

I reached out to EZT Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Gillespie for comment on the story. I have not received a response. He is a member of the joint Oxford OPP Detachment Board 2, a kind of police service board that critics, including me, say provides less transparency for municipalities

paying for OPP services. Have a look at the agendas and meetings for it. There is little to no information available.

I don't know what township staff or Schaefer know about the situation, or if they know anything at all. I suspect EZT will get the same response as I did – word salad. The only way they may find out how long they have been without the enhanced officer is to do the math when the next invoice is sent.

My last point is this; I have the utmost respect and confidence in the frontline officers we have patrolling the roads in East Zorra-Tavistock. In light of the recent police shootings, we all owe them a debt of gratitude for doing what they do each and every day. I may not live there any more, but I come back often and I find the lack of transparency by the Oxford OPP disappointing. I hope we get some answers sooner rather than later.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR - JUNE/JULY/AUGUST 2026

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

5 Corners Summer Sips - Tavistock Fall Fair Fundraiser **2 p.m. to Midnight**

Get ready for a full-blown summer party with craft brews, food trucks and live music. Family-friendly event. Kids 12 and under free. Visit <https://www.zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/5-corners-summer-sips> for tickets. Early bird ticket special until June 1.

*Tavistock & District Recreation Centre
1 Adam St, Tavistock*

Explore Downtown New Hamburg's Pageant of Trees with Louis

1:30 - 3:00 p.m.

There is a pageant of a wide variety of tree species, and some of them are spectacular! Stroll along the sidewalks to see dozens of different trees. If we're lucky, we can enjoy the fragrance of the Little Leaf Linden flowers. Registration and Details: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/o/lets-tree-wilmot-34384003923>
*Kirkpatrick Park
122 Wilmot Street, New Hamburg*

SUNDAY, JUNE 28

Block Party Sunday **11 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

Join us for an outdoor service at 11:00, followed by a Free BBQ, Cotton Candy, Games, Bouncy Castle, and more! This FREE, family-friendly event is for everyone in the community. For more information, find us online: www.facebook.com/tavistock.church
*Tavistock Missionary Church
77 Mogk St, Tavistock, ON N0B 2R0*

MONDAY, JUNE 29

Food Trucks at Grace United Church Tavistock

4:30-7:30 p.m.

Pablas Street of India, Swat, Fo Cheezy
Donations to TAP, Tavistock Assistance Program
116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

THURSDAY, JULY 2

East Zorra-Tavistock Council meeting **9 a.m.**

*Council Chambers
89 Loveys Street East, Hickson*

TUESDAY, JULY 7

Wellesley Council meeting **6:45 p.m.**

*Council chambers
4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill*

THURSDAY, JULY 9

22nd Annual Childhood Cancer Fundraising BBQ

11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Call 519-634-5852 or email sales@bechtholdhome.com. Call or email to place order for pick up by July 7
1239 Notre Dame Dr, Petersburg ON

FRIDAY, JULY 10

Optimist Club of Tavistock Friday Night Fries **4:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

*Optimist Food Trailer
Tavistock Optimist Park*

MONDAY, JULY 13

Food Trucks at Grace United Church Tavistock

4:30-7:30 p.m.

SWAT, Pablas Street of India, Beavertails
Donations to Grace United Church
116 Woodstock St. S. Tavistock

TUESDAY, JULY 14

Perth East council meeting **7 p.m.**

*Council chambers
25 Mill Street East, Milverton*

SATURDAY, JULY 18

Tavistock & District Historical Society Museum

1-4 p.m. (other times by appointment)

Email: info@tavistockhistory.ca or call 519-655-3334. All welcome.
37 Maria Street, Tavistock

TUESDAY, JULY 21

Free Caregiver Connection peer support groups

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Worried about your child or youth? Parents and Caregivers for Mental Health (PCMH) offers free peer support groups for caregivers, in person, virtual, or hybrid. Visit family.cmho.org or email oxfordcounty@pcmh.ca for more information.

*Revel Realty Woodstock,
111 Huron Street, Woodstock*

THURSDAY, JULY 23

Pic-nic In the Park

Lunch : 12:00 to 1 pm from Tavi Chill
Music & Dancing : 1.30 to 3.30 pm

Entertainment : Dianne & Gary The Cavaliers, with Steve Todd. Bring lawn chairs. For tickets and more information, call Don Junker (519) 535-7052

*Queens Park Pavilion,
1 Adam St, Tavistock, ON*

MONDAY, JULY 27

Wilmot Council meeting **6-7 p.m.**

*Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road W., Baden*

FRIDAY, AUGUST 7

Optimist Club of Tavistock Friday Night Fries **4:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

*Optimist Food Trailer
Tavistock Optimist Park*

EVERY WEDNESDAY

TOPS - Taking off Pounds Sensibly **Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m.**

Contact Cathie 519-662-9273
St James Church, Baden

Euchre Night

Wednesdays at 7 p.m.
*New Hamburg Legion
65 Boulee St., New Hamburg*

FREE SENIORS ACTIVITIES

Tavistock Seniors Pickleball

Monday, Wednesday & Friday 12-4 p.m.
Contact: Don Junker 519-535-7052
Tavistock Memorial Hall, 1 Adam St.

FREE SENIORS ACTIVITIES CONT

Tavistock Seniors Card Games **Monday drop in 1-4 p.m.**

Contact: Bob Routly 519-301-2118
Tavistock Memorial Hall, 1 Adam St.

VON Senior Exercise Drop-In Standing Class **Tuesday and Thursday 9-10 a.m.**

To register contact 519-539-1231 ext. 6319
Tavistock Memorial Hall, 1 Adam St.

VON Senior Exercise Drop-In Sitting Class **Tuesday and Thursday 10:25-11:25 a.m.**

To register contact 519-539-1231 ext. 6319
Village Manner, 98 Woodstock St., Tavistock

TAVISTOCK & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM DISPLAYS

Museum Display: "The Glasgow Warehouse" **Can be viewed anytime**

*Tavistock Home Hardware (Front window),
24 Woodstock Street S., Tavistock*

Museum Display: "Heritage of Hickson Post Office"

Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30 am-4:30 pm
runs until July 13

*EZT Township Administration Building (lobby),
89 Loveys Street, Hickson*

PLATTSVILLE & DISTRICT HERITAGE SOCIETY

Plattsville & District Heritage Society exhibit "Holidays & Celebrations That Bring Us Together"

June 6 to September 19 | Saturdays 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Donations accepted. Refreshments. Contact plattsvilledistrictheritage@gmail.com or call 519.535.1417.

*Archive & Museum at Chesterfield,
816661 Oxford Rd 22, Bright*

SAUERKRAUT SALES

Tavistock Men's Club Sauerkraut Sales **Saturday, June 27, 11-2 p.m.**

2 1/2 lb bag @ \$5.00 per bag

Call (519) 655-3573 or email info@tavistockmensclub.ca

*Tavistock Men's Club building (rear) 78
Woodstock St N, Tavistock, ON*

HAPPY CANADA DAY!
WEDNESDAY, JULY 1

**The
Wilmot-Tavistock
Gazette**

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.
Contact: thewtgazette@gmail.com

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

- The Community Calendar allows non-profit organizations to promote their free admission community events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as contact information (ie phone number, email address or website).
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette offers the following options for promoting your community events:
 - Coming Events Word Ad (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
 - Coming Events Boxed Word Ad (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
 - Display Ad - Sizes begin at a Small Classified Display ad (3.3" x 2.5") - \$35 + hst

CLASSIFIED ADS

FOR SALE

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I will pay cash for antiques and collectibles. Coca Cola, Pepsi, any pop company, Brewery items Kuntz, Huether Labatts, etc. Old radios and gramophones, Wristwatches and pocket watches, Old fruit jars, Beaver Star Bee Hive etc. Any old oil cans and signs Red Indian Supertest etc Any small furniture. If you are moving or cleaning out stuff please contact me - 519-570-6920.

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This is Doug.

Doug is an avid social media user.

Doug sees a tweet about a local news event, but isn't sure that it's true.

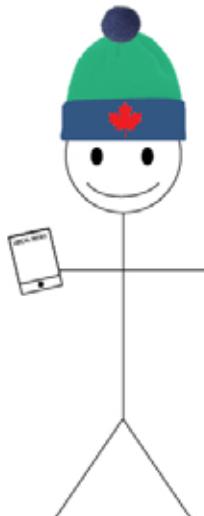
Doug checks the source and sees that the story came from a newspaper website.

Doug now knows he can trust the story.

Doug is smart.

Be like Doug.

#checkyoursources #newsmatters



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For Sale

FOR SALE: 1968 Volkswagen Beetle Convertible. VIN #158655397. Mileage 1686 miles. Coach built by Karmann in Germany. Yellow with a Black soft top. Chrome bumpers, running boards, front quarter vent windows, soft top & tonneau cover, vented decklid and dual "Pea Shooter" exhaust outlets. Body and paint in very good condition. Convertible top and tonneau cover are in "new" condition. Factory 2 spoked wheel with a 1/2 horn ring, and a Wolfsburg crest center cap. Floor vent. Factory VDO speedometer. Glass is in good condition including the glass rear window. Tires are 165 R15 86T Wide Track black walls in "new" condition. They are all mounted on factory chrome hubcaps. The engine is a rear mounted 1.5 litre horizontally opposed OHV air cooled 4 cylinder with a single carburettor. Aftermarket NAPA battery under the rear seat (factory correct). Engine bay is clean with new firewall insulation. Single exhaust system with dual chrome tip outlets in good condition. The trunk floor and surrounding carpet/panels are in very good condition. A full size spare tire with rim in very good condition, believed to be original. Undercarriage, floor boards are all in good condition. Safety Standards Certificate completed in July 2025 and disc brakes replaced at that time. Original owners manual available. Vehicle appraisal report completed in August 2025. Replacement value put at \$22,500 at that time by Collector Auto Appraisals in Kitchener. Used Vehicle Information Package states 2 previous owners, 0 liens. If interested, contact Tricia Wettlaufer at: tricia.wettlaufer@gmail.com



Quiz Time Answers

- 159 years old
- North American Beaver
- Sir John A. Macdonald
- Rocky Mountains
- Confederation
- Lacrosse & Hockey
- Battle of Vimy Ridge
- 1999
- Gord Downie
- Terry Fox

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