

# STRATFORD **TIMES**

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## Local's sports centre dream dashed for now

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Local resident Alan Kasperski called his vision for the former Scotiabank datacentre on Wright Boulevard a monumental, city-changing one. He wanted to see the site morph into a national sports hub used for training and analytics for two of Canada's national sports organizations, Rugby Canada and Soccer Canada.

"It's a very big rock, it's a very steep hill," Kasperski said about the idea. "But so far nobody ... has said stupid idea. It's, 'Can you make it happen?'"

Now, the rock has gotten heavier and the hill steeper. Kasperski was just informed by the property's broker his letter of intent, with a whopping \$15.66 million offer, was not signed by the bank. Instead, it has signed the letter of intent from the City of Stratford, which is eyeing the property as the next Stratford Police Service headquarters. Speaking with the Times, Kasperski said the bank evidently believes the city has a better chance of closing that deal than his National Field Sports Training Centre (NFSTC), as he called it.

The NFSTC would be a worldclass hub for sports teams to attend and train in their off-seasons – as well as a place for locals to enjoy – Kasperski explained. His idea grew incrementally. It was first envisioned as a regional centre for rugby teams (being a lifelong rugby player himself), then for soccer teams as well. Then, after touring the Scotiabank site with engineers, space for sports medicine labs,

CONTINUED TO PAGE 5



(ALISON ROBINSON PHOTO)

**Coldest Night of the Year 2026** smashed its fundraising goal of \$200,000 this past Saturday — cementing Stratford as the second highest fundraising location in the nation. For more on this year's walk, see our story on page 9.

## \$47M, \$50M or \$65M? Council may make decision on GTR community hub

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stratford city council may be getting closer to a decision on the long-awaited community hub portion of the Grand Trunk Renewal (GTR) project.

During the GTR's second council workshop on Feb. 26, chief administrative officer (CAO) André Morin and guest speakers detailed options for council to consider regarding its keystone project. They examined constraints, costs, municipal capacity and decision sequencing, as well as the value of shared facilities.

Much of the discussion on the community hub surrounded a shared facility between the YMCA of Three Rivers and the Stratford Public Library – a well-established partnership model that has been a large part of the GTR conversation of recent years.

"Together the YMCA and the library can create space to provide a positive environment for young people," said Krista Robinson, CEO of the local library, in her presentation. "After school, youth can transition easily between study space, sports programs, leadership activities or just a safe space to be themselves ... We can re-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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# \$47M, \$50M or \$65M? Council may make decision on GTR community hub by end of next month

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

duce each of our capital and operating costs by working together. There could be shared program and meeting rooms, shared lobbies, washrooms, mechanical systems, joint custodial and maintenance staff and operations and a lower capital construction cost due to a single build.”

To that end, Morin presented three options and costs for a YMCA/library community hub.

The first (and most complex) option presented was to renovate and expand the current YMCA building on Downie Street, adding approximately 51,000 square feet of office space, pool additions, library space and childcare to create a near 70,000 square foot shared facility. That option would run the city back about \$49.9 million.

The second option would be to build a new 100,000 square foot facility adjacent to the UWaterloo Stratford campus on St. Patrick Street for a total of \$65.4 million. The third and cheapest option would be to build a 70,000 square foot facility in the same spot as the second option for \$47.3 million.

As with all the costs presented that day, Morin reminded council that all costs were high-level estimates with some unknowns still in play. Per a question from Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach, he clarified that the operating costs will most likely be similar for all three, although the operational capacity of a renovated Y (option one) would be more limited than new builds.

Historically, the GTR community hub was thought to be located within the superstructure; however, after a presentation to the now-disbanded ad hoc committee, city consultant Svec Group spoke about the exorbitant costs associated with such a strategy, prompting council to endorse pursuing a community hub outside of the superstructure and elsewhere on the 18-acre site.

While Morin did not detail uses for the superstruc-



ture, he did list some “Class D” estimate costs for refurbishing the superstructure: \$10.5 million for an open-air shell (50,000 square feet retained), \$18 million for partial shelter (50,000 square feet retained), \$39.7 million for a fully enclosed superstructure (75,000 square feet retained) and \$49.3 million for a fully enclosed superstructure (100,000 square feet retained).

Over the last 17 years \$29.3 million has been invested into the site by the city and its partners, excluding the adjoining transit hub on Downie Street. Most of that money came through debt and loan financing (a com-

bined \$26.8 million). As of the beginning of this year \$3.2 million is available and uncommitted in the project’s reserve fund.

The next workshop is scheduled for April 9 at 2 p.m. and is intended to have delegations from the community, deeper financial analysis, potential revenue sources and review options for consideration.

The matter is expected to be before council after that meeting, likely at the end of the month.

To view the whole workshop in its entirety, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWVBg7o9ABM>.

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[WWW.STRATFORDTIMES.COM](http://WWW.STRATFORDTIMES.COM)



The Shakespeare Optimist Club is again selling Cured Hams for Easter. They are \$20.00 for boneless or bone-in hams (3 & 4 lbs).

Pick up dates are Thursday, March 19 & 26 with some also available on March 10.

At the same time, in conjunction with the Tavistock Men’s Club, Sauerkraut will also be offered in 2-1/2 lb bags for \$5.00

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## BIA hosting job fair March 30

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

[stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

The Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) will host a community job fair on Monday, March 30 from 6-9 p.m. in the Stratford City Hall auditorium, offering job seekers the opportunity to connect directly with downtown employers in one convenient location.

More than 15 downtown retailers, restaurants and professional businesses are expected to participate, each looking to fill a variety of positions. Opportunities will include part-time and full-time roles, as well as seasonal and permanent employment, making the event ideal for students, career seekers and anyone looking for new opportunities.

The job fair will unite employers and applicants in a face-to-face setting where job seekers can learn about available positions, meet hiring managers and submit resumes directly.

“This job fair is about making connections,” said Jamie Pritchard, general manager of the Downtown Stratford BIA. “Our downtown businesses are preparing for a busy season and are looking for great people to join their teams. Bringing employers and job seekers together under one roof makes the process easier and more personal for everyone involved.”

Job seekers are encouraged to bring multiple copies of their resumes and be prepared to make a strong first impression with potential employers.

The event is free to attend and open to anyone seeking employment.

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# Paul Landers sworn in as interim police chief



STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

The City of Stratford has a new police chief.

Paul Landers was sworn in as interim police chief on March 3 in a ceremony at Stratford City Hall.

Landers brings 35 years of experience to the role, having first began his career in 1984 with the Haldimand Norfolk Regional Police Service. He went on to serve in London, Chatham-Kent and Strathroy-Caradoc – the latter of which he has been serving as its deputy chief of police since 2017.

“My career has been built on the belief that policing is ultimately about people, the members who serve and the commu-

nities we protect,” Landers told the Times in a written statement. “I value accessibility, fairness and collaboration. I believe trust is earned through consistent actions, open communication and visible leadership.

“As interim chief, my focus is on providing stability while strengthening relationships within the service and throughout the community. I am committed to maintaining high professional standards while ensuring our members are supported in the important work they do every day.”

Chief Greg Skinner announced his retirement from the service last month, finishing a 40-year career on March 2. In light of Landers’ swearing in, the service and the city are once again wishing him a happy retirement.

(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

In a swearing-in ceremony at Stratford City Hall on March 3, Paul Landers was officially made interim police chief, Landers (pictured here with Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma) brings 35 years of experience to the role, having first began his career in 1984 with the Haldimand Norfolk Regional Police Service. He went on to serve in London, Chatham-Kent and Strathroy-Caradoc – the latter of which he has been serving as its deputy chief of police since 2017.

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STRATFORD NISSAN



# Local's sports centre dream dashed for now

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

strength training, accommodations, a sports bar, kitchens, a sporting goods store and childcare spaces were deemed possible.

The lands of the site (which Kasperski says is about five to six acres) were the only hurdle, according to him. Because of the acreage only one full field and a couple half-fields would be possible; however, after speaking with the neighbouring farmer, a potential deal is in the works to supply enough land to put in four full fields and a year-round stadium bubble.

Kasperski issued a letter of intent for the property with the bank, an offer of \$15.66 million for the 100,000 square foot space, \$1.6 million more than its \$14 million asking price.

From conversations he has had, renovations could cost between \$40-50 million. Along with additional assets, outfitting and land acquisitions, Kasperski could see the NFSTC costing about \$60 million all-in, though acknowledged that the project is fluid.

While he doesn't personally have the capital to purchase the building, let alone to see the project through com-

pletely, he said that he has had serious conversations with both the bank and potential investors that are interested in the project.

As a regular citizen of Stratford, Kasperski said that moving such a huge project forward without financial backing yet was daunting, though was confident that investors and other partners will see the vision and potential of the site.

Now that plans are moving forward with the city, Kasperski's dream of the NFSTC rests on council's shoulders. Should they move forward with putting the police station at the site, he would have to look elsewhere and build from the ground up (estimated to cost about \$100 million). If council decides to go in a different direction, the bank may re-assess his proposal.

Speaking frankly, Kasperski said that he does not believe the site to be a good location for police headquarters. As well, as the NFSTC the property would remain a "taxpaying, professionally staffed and vibrant commercial hub," netting a projected \$380,000 in taxes for the city and a \$5.5 million economic

ripple in the community.

Prior to hearing the most recent news about his letter of intent, Kasperski was adamant about the vibrancy of his vision.

"I'm not even going to put myself in the same category as Tom Patterson," Kasperski said. "But he had this vision of theatre in Stratford about 70 years

ago ... I can see a national training centre in Stratford being a real (asset). There's the culture aspect, there's what Stratford's about, and a national training centre for Rugby Canada, for Soccer Canada would add a whole other level, another component to what Stratford is all about."

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# Tree Power program nears 1,000 trees planted in Stratford over five years

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

When Stratford residents pick up their trees this spring through the Festival Hydro Tree Power program, the city will be edging closer to a significant environmental milestone – nearly 1,000 new trees planted in just five years.

Launched in 2021, the partnership between the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) and Festival Hydro is now in its fifth year. According to UTRCA communications and marketing specialist Emily Chandler, the program has consistently sold close to its annual allotment of trees.

“In Stratford, we’re usually around 150-200 trees each year,” Chandler said. “So quick math – five times 200 – we’re just under a thousand trees. When you think of the City of Stratford having added 1,000 trees, that’s pretty huge.”

Tree sales for the 2026 program open Monday, March 2 at 9 a.m. through the UTRCA’s online shop at <https://shop.thamesriver.on.ca/product/festival-hydro-stratford-tree-power/>, with pickup scheduled for Saturday, April 18. Trees are \$30 each.

This year, 10 native species are available for locals to plant in their yards: American Sycamore, Basswood, Bur Oak, Hackberry, Paper Birch, Red Oak, Sugar Maple, Tulip, White Spruce and White Pine.

Chandler said the program has evolved slightly over the years to include more evergreen options, which have proven popular.

“We have some that are always favourites like tulip trees and sugar maples, but the white spruce and white pine seem to sell out right away,” she said. “Some people plant those for privacy along a fence line, and they also offer different habitat benefits and different growth rates.”

While the program was initially created with energy efficiency in mind – strategically planted trees can reduce heating and cooling costs for homeowners – the environmental benefits extend well beyond that.

“There’s really no downside to planting a tree,” Chandler said. “You create habitat for wildlife, help reduce soil erosion and flooding, improve air quality and add aesthetic beauty to your yard.”

She noted trees can play a key role in stormwater management, helping absorb rainfall and reduce runoff that can otherwise damage infrastructure or contribute to localized flooding.

Festival Hydro has supported the program from the outset and continues to sponsor it annually.

“As we work to achieve the goals of Festival Hydro’s latest strategic plan, we remain committed to building a more sustainable and resilient energy future,” said Jeff Graham, president and CEO of Fes-



(UPPER THAMES RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY PHOTO)

**The Festival Hydro Tree Power program returns for its fifth year with online sales of 10 species of native trees available for purchase online beginning March 2 at 9 a.m.**

tival Hydro, in a press release. “Supporting the UTRCA’s Tree Power Program in 2026 reflects our focus on practical environmental action that delivers real benefits for our community. Tree planting reduces carbon, improves air quality and strengthens the neighbourhoods we serve.”

Beyond financial support, Festival Hydro staff also volunteer on tree-pickup day

each year.

“They show up rain or shine,” Chandler said. “The volunteers are excited, the residents picking up their trees are excited – it’s just a really positive day.”

With close to 1,000 trees planted through the program since 2021, Stratford’s urban canopy is steadily growing one yard at a time.

# Stratford House of Blessing looking for volunteers painting bowls for Empty Bowls fundraiser

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Stratford House of Blessing Food Bank is looking for painters of all skill levels to help out with one of their largest fundraisers of the year.

About 600 bowls need to be painted for the Empty Bowls fundraiser before the fall event. Stratford House of Blessing is running drop-in paint sessions from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at their facility on 423 Erie St.

Individuals and groups like a bunch of friends or coworkers looking for a team building activity are welcome. House of Blessing can also arrange for painting sessions outside of work hours.

Aaron Balzer, resource coordinator, said the painted bowls part of Stratford’s event, which guests can take home, are unique to other Empty Bowls fundraisers that feature handmade bowl donations from a local potter.

“It’s really fun because you get different artists coming in, different people with different styles, different skill levels and you get all these unique one-of-a-kind bowls and there’s something for everyone, I found,” he said. “There’s a bowl there for each person. It’s going to speak to you - it’s going to grab

your attention and someone’s going to enjoy it.”

Empty Bowls is one of the largest fundraisers for Stratford House of Blessing, raising over \$44,000 from its 2025 edition. Fundraising events like it to keep the shelves well-stocked are vital during a time where many are struggling to keep up with the high cost of living.

“Food banks have just become busier and busier and kind of more and more essential to our communities, unfortunately, due to the cost of living is high and more and more people are finding it hard to make ends meet,” Balzer said. “We’re able to step in and help bridge that gap when things are tight and when someone is facing food insecurity.”

In addition to being a unique piece of art for the home, the painted bowls from Empty Bowls also serve as a call to action.

“They also represent the idea that there are people, right here in our communities, in our neighbourhoods who have empty bowls and empty shelves and empty fridges, and it’s just a reminder of that as well that when we are able to give, that we should give,” Balzer said. “We all have times in our lives where we need help and we all have times where we can help and I think it’s a reminder that when we can help, that we need to do that.”



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

**Stratford House of Blessing is bringing back their Empty Bowls painting sessions. About 600 bowls need to be painted ahead of the fall fundraiser.**

Empty Bowls will be held at the Stratford Rotary Complex on Nov. 6.

For more information, send an email to [volunteer@shob.org](mailto:volunteer@shob.org).

# Off the Wall's Creative Sparks March Break workshops open for registration

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

High school students interested in the arts can now register for Off the Wall's Creative Sparks March Break one-day courses, running the week of March 16-20. Each course runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is suitable for mature high school students looking to learn more about what happens backstage.

The March Break camps are supported by a grant from the Community Grants Program Fund, held at the Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation, and are designed to inspire the next generation of theatre artists.

"As we all know, there are many more backstage careers than there are on-stage careers during any production, so we wanted to make them accessible to students," said Michele Boniface, volunteer at Off the Wall. "We decided to apply for the grant and we were lucky to receive it."

This year, Boniface said Off the Wall is looking to attract more local students to really showcase to local students what's available in the theatre town.

"We have people coming from all over. Last year at this Creative Sparks workshop we had people from Ottawa, Windsor, St. Catharines, Aurora," she said. "They were from all over the place, and we were quite astounded, and yet not as many students were from our local schools. We'd like to attract more young people from our community and make them aware of what's



**Picasso Painters makeup specialist Georgie Steel applies gore makeup to student Caity Hillier at Off the Wall's Creative Sparks March Break camp for students in grade 9 or older.**

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

available in our town." These one-day workshops introduce participants to backstage skills. All workshops will be introductory, non-competitive and fun for participants.

"You can sign up for one course or all five courses," said Boniface. "That way students can choose which courses they'd like to take. If you are interested in working with your hands, or someone may be more interested in makeup, there's some-

thing for everyone."

On March 16, students will learn about how to make food props. This one-day course is led by award-winning designer Deb Erb. Students practise a variety of techniques and discover commonplace materials used to create lifelike faux food.

"This course will teach you how to fabricate props with the use of the various materials," said Boniface. "Students will learn how to build small props, but these

skills can then be used to fabricate other, larger props too."

The popular course on special-effects makeup is running on March 17. Students will learn from Picasso Painters makeup specialist Georgie Steel, who will lead participants into gore galore – creating realistic scars, lacerations, burns, bullet holes and bruising.

"Makeup seems to be our most popular workshop," said Boniface. "Gore makeup, that is lacerations, wounds, scars and bullet holes, really appeals to a high school student, so this course is a great introduction to the whole area of makeup."

On March 18, Hudson Valley Performing Arts Laboratory founder Elizabeth Dahmen will teach the introduction to stage directing, which focuses on planning, including script analysis, vision-setting and collaboration with a design team.

The March 19 class will teach students about stage management. This class is taught by Stratford Festival company manager Hilary Nichol, who gives students practice calling the show from the booth and other stage-management responsibilities.

Lastly, on March 20, students interested in sound design will learn from composer and designer Joe Lapinski. Students will build a basic sound system, record sound effects, voice-overs and music and assemble the elements into a cohesive design.

For more information or to sign up for the Creative Sparks workshops, visit [www.stratfordoffthewall.com](http://www.stratfordoffthewall.com)

## Avondale launching Community Conversations series for building resilience

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

After introducing Michael Ungar and his teachings on resiliency in children to Avondale United Church, the church is partnering with the Kiwanis Club of Stratford, the Huron Perth-Centre of Children and Youth and the Canadian Mental Health Association Huron-Perth for a new series.

The first "Community Conversations: Building Resilience in Children, Youth and Adults," will be held over Zoom on March 25. The event will start welcoming participants at 6 p.m. and start at 6:30 p.m.

The virtual event will begin with a short video featuring Ungar's teachings, followed by participants discussing what they learned with their group in a breakout style session, and end with groups discussing what they learned and ask any questions they have for a mental health professional.

The event series follows other Avondale events featuring lessons on building resilience in children and youth from Ungar's book *I Still Love You* and his list of nine things all children need to be resilient. In October 2025, Ungar himself had a virtual visit with Avondale United

Church and members of the community.

"We know that one of the powerful things that he brings is his research and interest in why is it that some people somehow manage through great adversity," said Terri Sparling, member of the Avondale congregation and retired CEO of the Huron Perth Centre for Children and Youth. "While much of his work is about kids and families, it's actually concepts that can be applied to adults as well. Instead of asking what is wrong in someone's situation, he's always looking for what has helped them."

There will be two additional Community Conversations events scheduled at a later date this calendar year.

"Building resilience is a life-long endeavour. It is a skill that does not become obsolete at the age of 18," said Avondale's community engagement coordinator Aleah Graff. "Everyone could use tools in their resilience, whether they're eight years old or 80 years old, so hopefully making this a series, participants will learn a variety of skills through a variety of resources and a variety of professionals."

Online registration for the free event will be open until March 23 via <https://tinyurl.com/3yx3eujj>. For more information on the event, contact Graff by calling 519-271-7946.

## Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. What actor starred in *Ace Ventura*?
2. What is the capital city of Iran?
3. What does MAID stand for in medical terms?
4. Which Renaissance artist painted "The School of Athens" in the Vatican?
5. In *Children of Men*, what event has made humanity desperate?
6. The Danube River flows into which sea?
7. Which hormone is produced by the pineal gland and helps regulate sleep cycles?
8. A Phon is a unit of what?
9. What is the highest-rated daytime talk show in American Television history?
10. What country do the Galapagos Islands belong to?

This week's answers are found on pg. 27

# Stratford Beard Growers



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The 64th annual Stratford Beard Growers event wrapped March 1 with plenty of prizes and follicles to go around. From left to right (back), Beard for Life – Ray Ackersviller; Best Moustache with Beard – Steve Morris; Bushiest Beard – Steve Trotter; Grand Champion – Charlie Dunsmore. From left to right (front), Bowling Singles Champion – Larry Palmby; Best Effort – Coby Bernier; Best Trimmed – Griffin Zehr and Most Colourful – Tyler Cook.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Bowling team champions Cory Bernier, Steve Morris, Gord Howe and Colton Zehr. Having wrapped the Beard Growers' 64th year, organizers hope its 65th will be one to remember, allowing the organization to grow and flourish like their beards. Organizers told the Times that to do that they need help from the area to bring numbers up.

# History of Dryburgh Wood Planes archived with Shakespeare's Darryl Ehnes and Stratford's John Huiser

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

There are many collectors in the area who have in their possession many and various forms of antiques. From automobiles, to tractors, to old construction tools and something known as wood planes.

No, they are not something you fly, but a tool that many carpenters worked with in past centuries – and still do to this day.

In the North Easthope Township area of Perth County, John Dryburgh made these carefully handcrafted wood planes from his own blueprints. They were used to build many area century homes, along with churches and municipal buildings in area counties of Perth, Oxford and Waterloo.

Even though John Dryburgh later settled

on Lot 29, Concession 10 of the township, he really started his business in 1837 in Dundee, Scotland. In 1856, after training many other wood plane makers, he moved to Toronto, and later to North Easthope Township, west of Hampstead in 1858 to 1881.

The Dryburgh Farm was sold in 1881, and his two sons, John Jr. and William, moved to Bright in Oxford County and continued the art of making these planes up to 1905. Their father John, after selling his North Easthope Farm, moved to Manitoulin Island, and took all his own blueprints for making Dryburgh Wood Planes with him.

The rest is certainly history, and much of that history is archived with locals Darryl Ehnes and John Huiser, of Shakespeare and Stratford, respectively.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

North Easthope's Jim Campbell and Shakespeare's Darryl Ehnes look over Ehnes' collection of 43 Dryburgh Wood Planes.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford's John Huiser, who still owns farms south of Fairview in Oxford County, is shown as an exhibitor at the recent 30th annual Heritage Show in St.Mary's. He started his collection of Dryburgh Wood Planes 40 years ago and now has an amazing 115 in his collection.

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# Stratford succeeds fundraising goal for Coldest Night of the Year, top-second fundraising municipality in 2026

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Stratford's Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) walk once again surpassed its fundraising goal.

The annual fundraiser was held near Lower Queen's Park on Feb. 28 with 474 walkers, 69 teams, and 13 volunteers participating. As of March 1, more than \$220,136 has been raised for the Stratford Connection Centre and Shelterlink Youth Services.

"I'm just really proud of Stratford that they've turned their compassion into action. It's one thing to believe in the cause but it's even better to action and fundraise for the cause so that change can be made and the important services can be sustained," said Sonya Heyen, United Way Perth-Huron's manager of resource development and communications.

CNOY walks are held all across Can-

ada on the last Saturday of February to raise money for local shelters for those facing homelessness. Stratford is the top-second fundraising municipality in all of Canada for CNOY, with Kitchener taking the top spot raising funds for the Ray of Hope Community Centre. In 2011, Kitchener was one of the first-ever charity partners for CNOY, along with Toronto's Sanctuary Ministries and Yonge Street Mission.

The fundraising walk has had more and more participants over the years across Canada. Stratford has participated for 12 years.

"It grows every year and we're just really proud that the people come back and they invite their friends and it's a great cause too," Heyen said.

Donations will still be accepted throughout the month of March. To make a financial donation online, visit <https://cnoy.org/location/stratford>.



Victoria Boehm and Chris Howlett.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)



Hunter Johnson and Brody Twamley.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)



The Chill Chasers 2026 team was the top Stratford fundraising team and raised more than \$16,000.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

## STRATFORD TIMES

## Pick Up Locations

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Expressway Ford  
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Stratford Mazda  
7-Eleven - Erie St  
Joe's Diner  
The Urban Barber  
Erie Convenience  
Mr. Sub  
Balzacs Coffee  
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario  
New Orleans Pizza

Zehrs  
Food Basics  
Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier  
Festival Marketplace  
Stratford Nissan  
Stratford Subaru  
Stratford Honda  
Quality Festival Inn  
McDonald's - Ontario St.  
Papa Johns  
Fore Everyone Golf  
WalMart  
Stratford Motor Products  
A&W  
Toner & Ink Shop  
Rutherford Funeral Home

Athens Greek Restaurant  
Stratford Legion  
Gino's Pizza  
Rosso's  
Buzz Stop  
Union Barber  
Mornington Variety  
Split Rail  
Stratford Rotary Complex  
Agriplex  
No Frills  
Cozyn's  
Sebringville Esso  
Dave's Diner - Sebringville  
Stratford-Perth Museum  
Sobey's

Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron  
Circle K - Huron  
West End Pharmacy  
Tim Hortons - Huron  
Stratford Hospital  
Video 99 - Erie St  
Jenny Trout  
Stratford Medical Pharmacy  
Stratford Chamber of Commerce  
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Daisy Mart  
Foodland  
Stratford Variety  
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Stratford Place

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Blowes Stationery  
Stratford Tourism  
Coffee Culture  
Stratford Public Library  
The Parlour Restaurant & Inn  
Dick's Barber Shop  
The Livery Yard  
Town Crier Marketing  
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Avon Pharmacy

# Order of Canada member, retired nurse recounts horrible conditions of Cuban hospitals after mission trip

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

If readers ever want to know what conditions are like in third world countries, talk to Jean Aitcheson, a retired Perth County farmer from Downie Township, a former registered nurse at Stratford General Hospital and a member of the Order of Canada.

Aitcheson has spent a lifetime volunteering her medical knowledge in many countries around the world including Africa. She was one of the many Canadians repatriated from Cuba only recently.

Aitcheson was one of six women on a one-week mission team to Matanzas and Havana, Cuba, leaving on Feb. 7 of this year. The women were members of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church, taking financial resources, educational and medical supplies and medications to partner with churches in Cuba.

The team was able to visit all of the churches and deliver supplies, before their airlift return flight on Feb. 14, from Varadero, Cuba to Montreal. A flight to Toronto was impossible because of cancellations, so the team travelled by train to Toronto and then home.

Speaking with the Times after returning home, Aitcheson said the team was prepared for poor conditions, loss of power, mosquitoes carrying dengue and Chiku-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)  
Perth County farmer, retired nurse and Order of Canada member Jean Aitcheson (right) shows surgical instruments to Cuban hospital administrators while one of the surgeons checks out a tuning fork.

ngunya diseases. She said they never saw a mosquito due to the very cool weather, enough fuel had been secured for the tour, while food and pure clean water was provided.

But, she said, that was not the case for



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)  
A retired pediatrician in Havana shows their medicine cabinet that has to treat thousands of Cubans.

the people of Cuba, which is much worse in the rural areas. Power is provided for only a few hours a day, time unknown. Gasoline is very scarce. In the whole week, they only saw one gas station open with huge lines of cars, motorcycles, Moto taxis to get a ration of gasoline – which was 20 litres for an old Russian Lada car, or a 1940s or '50s American car, with very few newer vehicles around.

There are so few vehicles on the road and there are no national buses or even city buses in Matanzas and only a few in Havana. She said they saw many people standing on the side of the road waving money, hoping for a ride.

Water is contaminated and only 60 per cent of the water from source is delivered to the taps in homes. Broken water lines are everywhere, where the water bubbles up out of the road, creating deep potholes and flooding the street and surface water contaminates the water in pipes.

Food is very scarce. In the '60s, '70s and '80s, Cuba had a thriving, agricultural economy, but now 90 per cent of the food is imported.

Scarcity of fuel, ancient equipment that is broken down, no seeds and no fertilizer mean no agriculture. A rural family might have a few chickens, a pig and some vegetables, with families using a horse and cart or a box on a bicycle to distribute what they can grow.

Cuba was once the sugar capital of the world. After the revolution, Russia provided petroleum products in exchange for sugar. Sugar is now imported with sugar-cane used as animal feed.

Aitcheson said they saw rice fields, a staple in the Cuban diet, along with black beans, and small plots of sweet potatoes, yucca, onions, carrots, peppers and tomatoes, but not in the quantity to feed the population.

Her delegation used U.S. dollars to purchase food, but the local population gets food stamps to buy rations in their stores.

Where the stores were stocked every week or month with supplies, now only come every few months, so even with some pesos, there is little to purchase after waiting in line.

Tourism has been the engine of the economy in the past, providing foreign currency to purchase necessities. The 75-year embargo of U.S. products entering Cuba has gradually devastated the island country, but the refusal of the U.S. to allow any country to provide petroleum products is devastating.

The team took 12 50-pound suitcases, most of them filled with medications and supplies, from the Stratford Mission Depot located on a floor of the St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, on Church Street in Stratford. Three suitcases of consumable medical supplies like wound care, syringes and operating room instruments were taken to a paediatric hospital where the top administrators and chief of staff met their delegation on short notice. They were particularly thankful for just a paediatric stethoscope and a bottle of medication called Tranexamic Acid, used to stop bleeding during surgery.

Patients here in Canada would receive that medication preoperatively as a precaution, but the orthopaedic surgeon in Cuba, said "it would only be given if the patient was bleeding out, because that was the only bottle they had."

Hospital staff worked 24-hour shifts and 72 hours off. There is no fuel for staff to travel, no accommodation or food for off hours, and there is a shortage of the three different levels of nurses.

All of the medications were given to the churches, the centre of the community, that not only have worship, but also a purified water system, feeding programs, social gatherings and support for children, youth and the elderly for the communities around.

The churches have a medication cupboard and a nurse or retired medical professional, who dispenses medications in accordance with a doctors prescription, all services without charge. The medication shelves in pharmacies and hospitals are bare.

In summary, Jean says the Cuban people are resilient and help each other, but the situation is deteriorating quickly. She says everyone can help.

"Please consider giving the Stratford Mission Depot your leftover medical supplies, air casts, canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs and medications, and they will find a way to get them to Cuba," Aitcheson said. "Financial contributions are also welcome in order to buy medical supplies to send to Cuba."

Aitcheson said there is a private plane taking medical supplies at the end of March and they are hoping the airlines will take humanitarian supplies, once routes do open up again. She says they accept supplies at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church every Tuesday morning from 9 a.m. to noon.

"The Cubans will thank you for all that's given," Aitcheson said.

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# Flavours of Home dinner to spotlight Congolese stories and cuisine at Foster's Inn

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Stratford diners will have a chance to explore the flavours, music and stories of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) later this month as the Provocation Ideas Festival launches its 2026 Flavours of Home dinner series at Foster's Inn.

Set for March 19, Flavours of Home: Congolese Stories and Cuisine pairs newcomer cook Esperance Nyantungane with the Foster's kitchen team for an intimate, 60-seat culinary storytelling experience.

"Flavours of Home is an intimate culinary storytelling series where food becomes a pathway into the lives of Stratford's newest residents," said festival founder Mark Rosenfeld. "Each event pairs a newcomer with a Stratford restaurant to co-create a menu inspired by their region of origin. As the meal is served, guests are invited into the story behind it

– how these dishes shaped a life, carried across borders and found new meaning in a new home."

The March 19 event focuses on Congolese culture through Nyantungane's cooking and family story. Born in South Kivu province in eastern DRC, she and her husband, Shinga, fled escalating violence and persecution in 2012, spending four years in a refugee camp in Burundi before being accepted to Canada. The couple eventually settled in Stratford in 2019, where they are now raising their seven children.

Rosenfeld said the idea for this particular dinner grew out of local connections. Through Margaret Smart, executive director at the Local Community Food Centre, he was introduced to Peter and Liisa Farrugia, close friends and supporters of Nyantungane's family.

"Esperance is an extraordinary cook and was excited to share the flavours and

traditions of the Democratic Republic of Congo with the Foster's Inn culinary team," Rosenfeld said. "For many Stratford residents, Congolese cuisine will be completely new, which makes this a rare opportunity not just to taste unfamiliar dishes, but to learn the history and meaning behind them from someone who has lived that story."

Nyantungane's menu is described as rich, vibrant and deeply rooted in Congolese tradition, featuring dishes such as ndangala (crispy small fish), Congolese-spiced grilled beef skewers, cassava, ugali, roasted chicken, slow-cooked beef and warm mikate beignets. Throughout the evening, she will share the stories behind the food and her family's journey to Stratford, accompanied by short video clips of the family singing and dancing.

"Guests will experience a delicious, authentic Congolese meal they're unlikely to

find anywhere else in southwestern Ontario, and the story behind it," Rosenfeld said. "It's an evening of flavour, resilience and human connection – one that reminds us how food can bridge experiences and bring a community together."

Flavours of Home: Congolese Stories and Cuisine takes place Thursday, March 19 at Foster's Inn, 111 Downie St. in Stratford. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. with dinner from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Tickets are limited to 60 seats and can be reserved at: <https://tables.toasttab.com/fosters-inn-111-downie-street/experience/foster-s-presents-flavours-of-home>.

The event is the first of three Flavours of Home dinners planned for this spring, each highlighting the food and stories of Stratford's newest neighbours.

Details on Stratford's 2026 Provocation Ideas Festival lineup will be published in a future edition of the Stratford Times.

## Doors Open Stratford returns

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

[stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

The City of Stratford and Destination Stratford invite residents and visitors to experience Doors Open Stratford, returning after 10 years on Saturday, April 18 and Sunday, April 19, 2026.

Doors Open Stratford is a free community event celebrating the city's unique cultural and heritage sites and stories. Throughout the weekend, attendees are invited to explore locations across Stratford, including sites that are

not normally open to the public or that typically charge admission.

The event will feature special programming such as guided tours, historical exhibits and behind-the-scenes experiences. Participating locations include Stratford City Hall, the Perth County Courthouse, Stratford-Perth Archives, Stratford Perth Museum, Gallery Stratford, along with eight additional sites throughout the city.

Doors Open Stratford takes place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Some participating locations will offer modi-

fied hours and visitors are encouraged to review individual site details in advance when planning their visits.

A complete list of participating sites, including accessibility information and individual site hours, is available at [stratford.ca/doorsopen](http://stratford.ca/doorsopen). Information about volunteer opportunities can also be found on the event webpage.

Doors Open Stratford is part of the province-wide Doors Open Ontario program, presented by the Ontario Heritage Trust, which encourages communities across Ontario to open their doors and celebrate local heritage.

### Two Love Poems

(on the occasion of hosting Poetry Stratford Live!  
@ The Bunker in February, the month of the heart)

#### Incidental Kindness

You are so kind to sit there  
with your hair like that  
your face toward the window  
and the little town  
like a porpoise  
breathing its soft  
and easy bubbles  
over the rainy harbour.

#### Per Jeannie in Toscano

I  
no longer  
write the poems.  
When silence veins the  
milky hills and all the world is still, you  
become my music and  
my wine and the  
poems write  
me.

David Stones, Stratford Poet Laureate

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# COBS Bread fundraising campaign supports Local Community Food Centre

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

A recently opened Stratford bakery is inviting residents to help support food security programs through its annual fundraising campaign for the Local Community Food Centre.

COBS Bread Stratford, located at 1067 Ontario St. with an exterior entrance of the Stratford Mall, is currently collecting customer donations in store, with funds supporting the organization's programs, including community meals, food education and food access initiatives.

Operations manager Jerry Arai said the campaign is part of a national tradition across the company.

"Every COBS Bread across the country does this every year, raising money for a local charity," Arai said.

This year, the Stratford location selected the Local Community Food Centre after owner Sara Lisk connected with the organization while preparing to open the business in the city.

"The Local was one of the first organizations my wife met with when we were looking at opening in Stratford, and she was really touched by what they have going on there," Arai said.

"She was invited to a community meal, and it brings all kinds of people from all walks of life together to share a meal and build a sense of community. That really resonated



**Jerry Arai, operations manager, and Caylie Butcher, sales team leader, place the \$2,500 milestone sticker on the donation tracker at COBS Bread Stratford Feb. 26 during the bakery's fundraising campaign for the Local Community Food Centre.**

throughout the month. The campaign began in early February and runs until Saturday, March 7, when the bakery will mark its official Donation Day. On that day, \$2 from every six-pack of hot cross buns sold will be donated to the Local, in addition to customer contributions collected

throughout the month.

Arai said the community has already responded strongly.

"Stratford is a very generous community. We haven't even made it to the big day yet and we're already halfway to our \$5,000 goal," he said.

Beyond the annual fundraiser, the bakery also contributes through its end-of-day giving program, which donates unsold bread to local organizations each night.

"The biggest way we see need is through that program," Arai said. "Whatever we don't sell at night is donated to local charities – seven nights a week."

The Stratford store opened in October 2024 and is part of a group of five locations operated by Lisk and Arai in southwestern Ontario.

Arai said community involvement is central to how they operate their business.

"The community is going to support our business, so you support the community right back," he said.

"We wouldn't be able to do what we do without the support of the communities we operate in. It's only right that we support them in return."

He encouraged residents to consider contributing or learning more about the Local's programs.

"If you know the Local, then you know the good work they do," he said. "And if you don't, go check out one of their community meals – you'll get a great meal and meet someone new."

Don't miss the opportunity to support a good cause – donations are being accepted daily leading up to the big day on March 7, when the community is encouraged to stop by COBS Bread at 1067 Ontario St. and celebrate.

## Stratford Poet Profiles: Mark Hertzberger

AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Heidi Sander's Canada Is Our Poem contest is an initiative for Canadian writers to have their poetry recognized. In addition to a prize of \$1,000 for the winner, 200 poems were selected and published in the Canada Is Our Poem anthology.

One of these writers is Mark Hertzberger from Stratford. Hertzberger also writes for the Stratford Times as a monthly columnist. He said he started to appreciate the craft of writing in university but began to hone it after retirement.

"In my previous life, I was in HR, and I was doing conflict mediation and harassment investigations, which involved lengthy, really detailed, boring reports," he said. "It was a relief to be able to write poetry. I mean, I've written that since I was in university, but it's just nice to get back to it now that I'm retired."

Hertzberger has written two books, and his recent submission to the Canada Is Our Poem contest was titled "Timmy's in question," which is a humorous piece about the coffee shop. He said his poetry often reflects life observations and humour.

"Some of it is a little funny, some of it's a little bit weird," he said. "I like to read a lot of different kinds of books, but I tend toward horror novels and that kind of thing,



**Mark Hertzberger, whose poem "Timmy's in Question" will be featured in the upcoming Canada Is Our Poem anthology.**

so some of my stuff has some strange images in it. Others are just about life and observations that come to me in a particular situation. I never really have a theme that runs through all my poetry. I guess you'd say it's situation-specific."

Regarding "Timmy's in question," Hertzberger said he wanted to write something about how a company that is no longer fully owned by Canadians is still somehow considered so Canadian.

"Tim Hortons is sort of a gathering place for a lot of people, and it's sort of gone

downhill over the years," he said. "So I was kind of thinking, what's really Canadian about it? So this poem is a bit of a satire on some of these retail institutions we have that supposedly embody a way of life but, in fact, are just fabricated to sell watered-down coffee."

Hertzberger said he sometimes comes up with ideas while out observing people and situations. He likes to let ideas ruminate a bit before starting to jot them down. He said that sometimes he starts with a quote or line and often deletes the original idea after the poem starts to come together.

"It kind of gestates in my mind for a while until I get a handle on what it's roughly going to look like, and it'll often start with a line that I think of first," he said. "I'll put that line on paper, and I'll build a poem around that. Often what happens is, when I'm finished, I take the line out, because somehow the poem takes on a life of its own, and it's something totally different than what I thought it was going to be in the first place."

As a poet and writer, Hertzberger said he also appreciates helping other writers and, along with other local poets, the initiative Poetry Stratford Live was born. This poetry open mic at the Bunker Performance Lounge and Café in downtown Stratford offers poets of all backgrounds and skill levels the opportunity to showcase their

### Timmy's in question

Tim Hortons: uniquely Canadian.  
But why?  
Do maple trees shade the store?  
Are they tapped to flavour the glaze?  
Do baby beavers cavort in  
the lemonade cooler?  
Does the noble moose have  
collapsible antlers to better access  
the drive-through window?

This much is true:  
I did once see a dead goose in the parking lot and,  
if you listen,  
you might hear the cry of a loon at the next table.

Mark Hertzberger

poetry on stage on the last Thursday of every month.

For more information on Poetry Stratford Live at The Bunker, visit [www.bunkerstratford.com](http://www.bunkerstratford.com).

Stratford Poet Profiles is an ongoing series by the Stratford Times, casting a spotlight on some of the Stratford poets who submitted to Heidi Sander's Canada Is Our Poem contest. An upcoming anthology with selected works from the contest will be released in the spring.

# On Stage Dance returns from Hamilton competition triumphant

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

It's been a gruelling few weeks for the dancers of On Stage Dance Studio as competition season is well underway. This past weekend was their second competition. The LNK by Dancefest competition held in Hamilton saw 715 dancers gather to perform their best.

Having reviewed the Richmond Hill judges' remarks on video back at the studio, the dancers did their best to incorporate improvement into their routines to perform in Hamilton. All divisions continue to be well represented by the studio with high achievements at both competitions so far.

"This competition was at the MacIntyre Performing Arts Centre at Mohawk College in Hamilton. This is early in the season so the group is smaller but there were 715 dancers in this competition," explained Meghan Seaman, owner and artistic director of On Stage Dance Studio.

The routines performed were in the styles of jazz, ballet and contemporary to name a few. When going to competition, the routine is worked on in studio, then performed at each event. They do not change routines in between events; they stay the same.

"They will perform the same routine for the entire season, then once the routine is done it kind of goes away. The routines usually don't come back as our choreogra-



(MEGHAN SEAMAN PHOTO)

The Junior Jazz group "Pop Swish Ooh" were winners of the junior division Standing Ovation Award, among the most prestigious of the LNK Dancefest competition held in Hamilton.

phers are amazing, they come up with 100 new routines every year," said Seaman.

At this event, the results continue to be uplifting.

"Similar to the first competition, across age divisions and across dance styles, which as the studio director makes me very happy because it shows that our dancers are able to perform a wide range

of styles, they are very well rounded, just having that versatility is such a benefit to them as dancers and performers," said Seaman.

The junior jazz group, "Pop Swish Ooh," comprised of dancers aged 10 and 11, were winners of the Standing Ovation Dance Off. "It was very exciting for them to win this big award," said Seaman.

The senior ballet group of 18 dancers called "Tarentalla," comprised of dancers aged 14 to 18, were awarded the highest ballet score of the entire competition. Ballet is a really challenging style to begin with, but with 18 dancing together with a tambourine prop, the win proves the excellence in their training so far.

Other overall high score soloists were Madison (last name withheld), Yeva Goad and Callie Fewster. There were many Overall Top placements by duets, trios and groups. Three dancers received scholarships to workshops, including Nathan Hodgson (NY workshop), Madison (CREO workshop) and Brooklyn Vandenberg (CREO workshop).

"That's always nice that they get called out, that the judge recognizes them and it's nice to win a prize that can help further their training," Seaman said.

Choreography awards went to Shaina Wood, Danielle Mascolo, Meghan Seaman and Top Choreography of the competition was awarded to Shaina Wood for her contemporary routine "In Purgatory."

After three back-to-back events, the dancers get a bit of a respite as the next competition is not until March 26 in Cobourg which will be an adventure as they have not performed there before.

For more information about On Stage Dance Studio, or to explore the Spring and Summer programs being offered, visit [onstagedance.ca](http://onstagedance.ca).

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# Shane Cook and the Woodchippers appearing for Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts benefit concert

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts (KFPA) is pleased to announce the appearance of Shane Cook and the Woodchippers in Stratford for a benefit concert Friday, March 27 at Avondale United Church.

The multi-nominated and highly talented four member group is comprised of Emily Flack (of the band Leahy) on piano, vocals and dance, Joe Phillips (Art of Time Ensemble) on double bass, guitar, vocals and dance, five-time step dance champion and Stratford local Kyle Waymouth on guitar, tenor banjo and dance and, finally, Shane Cook on fiddle.

Cook comes from a long line of fiddlers and musicians in his family. His dad and brother are fiddlers. His grandmother came from 11 siblings and 10 played music in some form or another, so it has always been a part of his life. He began fiddle lessons at the tender age of seven and went on to win fiddle championships internationally.

Members of the band have played together for years in various forms but finally came together to form a band, the Woodchippers. The skillset is stellar with each one experienced in leading concerts on their own but together they are intimately connected.

"What's kind of fun with this band is we could step out and do a totally different concert every night with one or another leading it," said Cook. The show promises to be lively and ener-



(ANDREW COLLINS PHOTO)

Prepare for a fun and energetic performance as Shane Cook and the Woodchippers take the stage on March 27 at Avondale United Church.

getic with great Canadian music and step-dancing relying on traditional and original tunes to entertain the audience.

The setlist will include music from their 2022 award nominated album, *Be Here for a While* as well as traditional fiddle music from across Canada. There will be some new material as well.

"That's one of the amazing things about playing with these three musicians is that none of us are ever happy to settle into an exact arrangement. We all like to improvise and try new

things. One of the things that I like to do is go out on stage and not tell them about a particular medley of Canadian fiddle tunes or Celtic fiddle tunes and just call keys to them as we go and watch them all communicate with eye contact or other physical gestures and just play off one another and let an arrangement form on the fly. It's a lot of trust. We all know each other so well and it's a blast when it happens," shared Cook.

He sees in his students how wonderful it is to work towards something like the Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts. It's harder to find

an outlet for kids to perform so the KFPA is a great opportunity. Having the feedback, seeing other kids, performing in front of an audience are all important elements in the development of a musician.

"I grew up going to fiddle contests and the competition part of it was great, it was wonderful to go through that and feel the pressure and how to handle that, but when I look back it's also the lifelong connections I've made with people through competition that's been really important to me. It's something every young player should go through," said Cook.

Cook is pleased to return to Stratford for this concert. He has appeared with the Stratford Symphony Orchestra and through Stratford Summer Music as well as with other artists.

"It's always great to come back to Stratford. I love seeing friends and family, but also people that knew my parents and grandparents who after the show come and have these stories to tell that otherwise I would never hear. Stratford is a wonderful town, and I appreciate every chance to come that I get," Cook said.

This is a great opportunity to catch the band before they head off to Aberdeen, Scotland in June for the North Atlantic Fiddlers convention, an event that happens every couple of years which shares hosting duties between Canada, Scotland and Ireland.

Tickets for the benefit concert are available online at [kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/events](http://kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/events) and are \$35 or \$10 for children 12 and under making this an affordable family concert.



## COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, March 11	Ladies Auxiliary Lasagna Luncheon. \$16 call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservation
Friday, March 12	Sausage, sauerkraut and fries. \$13 or 2 for \$25. Takeout 5-5:30, Dine-in 5:30-7:30 p.m. NO advance tickets needed. Call Dave 519-703-6544 to arrange take out
Friday, March 27	Friday Night Euchre, \$20 per team. Call Dave 519-703-6544, Anne 519-301-0914 or the Legion 519-271-4540 to register your team
Sunday, March 29	Easter Buffet, Ham and Scalloped Potatoes salad and dessert bar Dine in ONLY, 5:00 p.m., \$30 adults, \$15 6-14, 5 and under eat free Call for reservation Frank 519-271-9669 or Legion 519-271-4540
Wednesday, April 8	Ladies Auxiliary Luncheon, TBD. \$16 per plate. Delivery available for an additional \$2. Call Mary Helen 519-273-1389 for reservations.
Thursday, April 16	Chili with local beer / liquor tasting. Details to follow at later date
Sunday, April 19	Chicken Divan Supper. Served with potatoes, vegetables and dessert. \$25 per person Take out 4:30 - 5:00 p.m., Dine in 5:00 p.m. Call Frank 519-271-9669 for reservations
Friday, April 24	Friday Night Euchre, \$20 per team. Call Dave 519-703-6544, Anne 519-301-0914 or the Legion 519-271-4540 to register your team

Tuesday Morning Buddy Check, 10:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. OPEN to all Veterans  
Widows and First Responders

Friday Afternoon Weekly Social 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Saturday Afternoon Meat Draw doors open at 2:00 p.m., meat draw starts at 4:00 p.m.

804-B Ontario St., Stratford N5A 3K1  
[stratfordlegion008@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordlegion008@gmail.com)

## Mike's Bowling Lanes bowlers bring home Ontario Winter Games gold

NICHELE BUTCHER-BONTRUP

Guest Contributor

The Stratford bowling community is celebrating in a big way after athletes representing Mike's Bowling Lanes delivered a gold medal performance at the Ontario Winter Games held this past weekend in Orillia Feb. 26-28.

Competing against some of the province's top youth bowlers, the Mike's Bowling Lanes youth bowlers' team of Dominic Boyles Keating, Jocelyn Gethke, Owen Martin, Claire Turner, and Wiatt Robinson showcased skill, focus, and determination on the provincial stage. Their hard work paid off as they captured gold medals, marking a proud moment not only for the athletes and their coaches but for the entire Stratford bowling community.

The Ontario Winter Games is known for bringing together elite young athletes from across Ontario, offering a high-level competitive experience and a stepping stone toward future provincial and national opportunities. For the bowlers from Mike's, the event was a chance to demonstrate months and in

many cases years of dedicated training.

From strong opening frames to clutch shots under pressure, the team maintained composure throughout the tournament.

Families, friends, and supporters followed the competition closely, cheering from home and celebrating updates as the results rolled in. The victories highlight the continued strength of youth development programs at Mike's Bowling Lanes and reinforce the centre's reputation as a hub for competitive excellence. The team showed hard work, dedication, and represented their community with pride.

As the gold medalists return home, they do so not only with hardware around their necks, but with memories that will last a lifetime. The team congratulates the athletes and coach Josh Eldridge of Mike's Bowling Lanes on an outstanding achievement at the Ontario Winter Games and for making Stratford proud.

For more tournament results, weekly scores and updates, check out the Facebook page of Mike's Lanes Five-Pin Bowling Association or Mike's Bowling Lanes.

# Be a part of the Oscars with Stratford Film Festival's Oscar-nominated shorts marathon

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

On March 14, just one day before the Oscar Awards ceremony, the Stratford Film Festival (SFF) will be screening the 2026 Oscar-nominated short films again this year. This fan favourite event will feature the nominated films in the categories of animation, documentary and live action.

Short films are among the most difficult form to create in a less than forty-minute time constraint. Every story takes the audience on a journey with the beginning, middle and end in an original and compelling way. A short film must take this journey in a more focused and succinct manner which presents its challenges.

"It can be a gift to a filmmaker because sometimes you want to zoom in on something. There's one film, 'The Devil is Busy' that's zooming in on one woman. Another example would be 'Armed Only With a Camera - The Life and Death of Brent Renaud' because it's the story of the first journalist who was killed in the Ukraine war," explained Megan Smith-Harris, SFF director.

"For me, we'll zoom in on an important subject matter, and it's almost like having a lens and just zooming right in and watching a story unfold with more intense focus."

The films to be screened will be the best of the best in their field from around the world dealing with provocative and challenging subjects. There will be charm, hu-

mour and hard-hitting subjects to explore.

Two of the nominated films are Canadian. One is "The Girl Who Cried Pearls," a stop-motion animated short directed by Chris Lavis and Maciek Szczerbowski who have been nominated for an Oscar before. This film is narrated by Stratford resident Colm Feore who is expected for a Q-and-A either by Zoom or in person, depending on his schedule.

The other Canadian film is the documentary short, "Perfectly a Strangeness," directed by Alison McAlpine where in a luminous desert landscape, three donkeys encounter an abandoned observatory and the cosmos in a mix of narrative storytelling from evocative drama to farcical satire.

The marathon will be divided into three categories of animation at 11 a.m., documentary at 3 p.m. and live action at 7 p.m. It should be noted that the animation short films are not intended for children under the age of 14. The documentary category is traditionally very serious and this year is no different. The live action category is also intended for an audience of 14 and over.

"That's another reason for a short film because sometimes people wouldn't be able to take a full-length film on a certain subject but they can take a chapter of it in a smaller dosage," added Smith-Harris.

Oftentimes, a short film can be a proof of concept for the development of a feature-length film.

The schedule of the screenings has been



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

**Live action short film nominee "A Friend for Dorothy" from the United Kingdom is about the unlikely friendship that blossoms between a lonely widow and a teenage neighbour.**

padding so that those that wish to attend the entire marathon will have time to explore downtown or get a meal and beverage. It also allows for post-screening discussions, which Smith-Harris encourages wholeheartedly. Community and conversation is the driving force behind SFF.

The marathon will be at the Stratford City Hall auditorium March 14 and will be dressed up in style to honour the Oscars. There will be ballots so that attendees can

vote for their favourite film in the category so that you can compare to the actual results the next night.

Tickets to each screening is \$20 and for the full marathon of three categories is \$40. Tickets will be available at the door unless previously sold out online at stratfordfilmfestival.com. Also on the website is a full list of nominees with a synopsis for each film. Each screening runs around two hours.

## Wedding décor swap market coming to Stratford

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

Couples planning their weddings – and anyone searching for unique event décor – will have a chance to browse bargains and inspiration at an upcoming wedding market in Stratford.

The Wedding Market, an indoor wedding décor sale, takes place Saturday, March 7 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Grayson Mills Weddings & Events, 114 Erie St.

The event will feature vendors, local sellers and pre-owned wedding items ranging from candle holders and linens to decorative accents and styling pieces, with free admission for visitors.

Organizer Rebecca McCracken said the idea grew naturally from her background in the wedding industry and her current role as venue manager at Grayson Mills.

"I actually founded the Ontario Wedding Swap and Sell 18 years ago, which grew into the largest Facebook group for swapping and selling wedding-specific items," she said. "After stepping away during the pandemic, coming back into the wedding world felt like returning to my roots."

McCracken said the market is designed to help couples both save money and reduce waste by giving décor a second life.

"Buying pre-loved décor helps couples have more of a budget because they're buying things that are not full price – sometimes almost new items – so it definitely helps them save money in the long run," she said. "It's also so good for the environment. You're reusing loved items and giving them new life again."

Sustainability has become an increasingly important consideration for couples planning weddings, she added, with many looking for creative ways to reuse or repurpose items.

The market will also include local wedding businesses, in-

cluding Stratford bridal shop Odette Bridal, which is sponsoring the event and offering a \$500 gift certificate giveaway.

McCracken said visitors can expect a relaxed, treasure-hunt atmosphere where inspiration often comes from seeing items in person.

"Sometimes unless you visually see things, it's hard to imagine them," she said. "Being able to touch items and see sizing makes such a difference."

With more than 20 years of experience in weddings, décor and florals, McCracken said she enjoys helping couples discover pieces that match their vision.

"If couples aren't sure what they're looking for, I'm happy to walk around with them and talk about their vibe and help them pick pieces," she said.

The timing of the market also aligns with the start of wedding season, when many newly engaged couples are beginning to plan.

McCracken said she hopes the event creates opportunities for connection as well as shopping.

"We're just excited to have everyone out," she said. "There will be great bargains, conversations, inspiration – and lots of fun."

Parking is available at the venue and nearby municipal lots. Attendees are encouraged to bring cash and reusable bags or boxes for purchases.

Vendor and seller spaces are still available, with organizers welcoming both businesses that cater to weddings and individuals looking to sell pre-owned décor items.

McCracken said the market is expected to return next spring, offering couples getting married this year the opportunity to participate in the same eco-friendly cycle by reselling their décor items. If the inaugural event is successful, she added, the community may also see another wedding market

as early as this fall.

The Wedding Market runs Saturday, March 7 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Grayson Mills Weddings & Events, 114 Erie St. Admission is free.



Director: Martin Mans  
 Pianist: Martin Zonnenberg  
 Organist: André Knevel  
 Soloists: Menze Feenstra & Joshua Overbeek

**HOPE CANADIAN MALE CHOIR PRESENTS**  
*Worthy is the Lamb*

Thursday March 12, 2026: Copperlight Church  
 142 Ontario St, Stratford

Friday March 13, 2026: Canadian Reformed Church  
 575 Shaver Rd, Hamilton

Saturday March 14, 2026: Pathway Bible Church  
 1136 Vansickle Rd N, St. Catharines

Doors open at 7pm • All concerts start at 7:30pm

**Tickets:**  
 Adults \$20 in advance • \$25 at the door  
 Kids free • Youth (age 10-14) \$10  
 Cash & card accepted at the door  
 Tickets found on our website or email/call us!

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# ONE CARE hits halfway mark toward \$500k goal

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

ONE CARE Home & Community Support Services is thrilled to announce that after less than a year, the Driven to Care campaign has officially surpassed the halfway mark of its \$500,000 fundraising goal. This is an exciting milestone made possible by the extraordinary support of our community.

“Passing the halfway point is an incredible achievement and a powerful reflection of the caring spirit in our community,” said Stephanie Ellens-Clark, executive director of ONE CARE, in a media release “Every gift, large or small, is helping ensure that transportation is never a barrier to care.”

Launched to address the growing need for safe, reliable, and accessible transportation across Huron and Perth Counties, the Driven to Care campaign is focused on both purchasing accessible vehicles and maintaining its existing fleet which help older adults and individuals with health challenges stay connected to essential services and their communities. Accessible transportation should never be a barrier, but rather a bridge, to empower every senior and adult with health challenges to travel freely, safely, and with dignity. As a trusted mobility partner and community connector, ONE CARE goes beyond transportation to link people to the care, services and experiences that sustain independence, wellbeing, and belonging.

Thanks to generous donors, sponsors, 50/50 ticket purchasers and event participants, the organization has already purchased one accessible vehicle, which is now on the road serving clients. ONE CARE is also in the process of acquiring a second new vehicle, expanding its ability



Stephanie Ellens-Clark, executive director of ONE CARE Home & Community Support Services, pictured next to driver Bill Branderhorst.

to meet rising demand.

ONE CARE's capacity to deliver rides has faced a reduction in the number of trips it is able to accommodate due to vehicles being off-road for inspections and repairs or due to vehicles reaching the end of their lifespan. As such, there is a dire need to acquire new vehicles to protect the longevity of this vital program. Every day, the program's accessible vehicles travel hundreds of kilometres transporting clients. In rural areas where public transportation is limited or non-existent, reliable modes of travel are not just convenient – they are essential. Accessible transportation plays a vital role in helping clients attend medical appointments, access groceries and meals, and remain social-

ly connected. Supporting ONE CARE's transportation service means investing in a stronger, better-connected community for everyone.

While this milestone of passing the halfway mark to the fundraising goal is worth celebrating, the work continues. The transportation program still requires further funding to purchase new vehicles and maintain its current fleet, and is in need of community support through the recruitment of volunteer drivers. Both will help ensure the service is able to meet the growing needs of our rural communities by providing essential, life-changing means of travel to those in need.

“I like to think of myself as a vintage driver, driving a vintage van,” said Bill

Branderhorst, a tenured ONE CARE driver. The particular van Branderhorst is referring to is 10 years old and has over 574,000 kilometres under its belt.

“When vehicles reach this stage of their lifespan, like many things, age is not on our side. Vehicle servicing needs to happen more frequently, parts need replacing, you name it – and all of this takes money and precious time that could otherwise be spent on the road transporting clients.”

Community members who would like to help push the campaign closer to its \$500,000 goal can:

- Make a one-time or monthly donation
- Purchase monthly 50/50 tickets in support of ONE CARE
- Participate in upcoming fundraising events throughout the year
- Sponsor a vehicle (\$20,000+ donation) to have your business name proudly displayed on a ONE CARE vehicle
- Donate your car through Donate a Car Canada

After a successful first iteration of ONE CARE's Steps for Seniors fundraiser, the walkathon continues for its second year taking place on June 13, 2026 in Stratford and June 14, 2026 in Clinton. Proceeds garnered from ONE CARE's annual walkathon will be put directly towards the Driven to Care campaign. Every dollar raised stays right here in Huron and Perth Counties, helping neighbours support neighbours. Support from the community for this vital service reflects the values of rural Ontario: looking out for one another and making sure no one is left behind.

For more information about the Driven to Care campaign or to make a donation, please visit [onecaresupport.ca](http://onecaresupport.ca) or contact Lindsey Martchenko at [fundraising@onecaresupport.ca](mailto:fundraising@onecaresupport.ca).



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The City of Stratford is taking a different approach to its annual swan release going forward. At the direction of the board of park management, the birds will now be returned to Lake Victoria from their winter quarters as soon as it's appropriate. The determination will be made each year based on factors like water levels, weather and mating patterns. The goal is to reduce the stress on the swans as much as possible as they make their seasonal return to the open water.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Popular downtown café Revel was packed Friday, Feb. 27 for Coffee with a Cop with Const. Darren Fischer, Const. Wanda Hughes, and most importantly Dusty, the Stratford Police Service's facility dog. Organizers shared this photo and said it was great opportunity to share a coffee and conversation with members of the community. Anyone who missed this most recent Coffee with a Cap can keep an eye out on the service's social media channels to find out when the next one will be.



# BLACK AND GOLD

*Edition*

She's destined to the jail cells  
made of misogyny,  
chained in inequality,  
installed in society.

So many claims, yet  
so little loyalty.  
All bark, no bite,  
that benefit's minority.  
Appeal of the people—that's all that matters,  
but not if you're a person with XX factors.

Countries like yours  
rebuke women in ours:  
educated  
empowered,  
equipped.

Borders of countries  
conceal their screams.  
Wedded at nine,  
mother at fourteen.

Beat until the day they die,  
by men who claim  
they "have the right."  
Not one word spoken out  
in defence of their  
hollowed souls  
and bruised bodies.

The value she holds  
lies in the country she's birthed,  
the education she learns  
the healthcare she's worth.  
She is your mother,  
your sister,  
your daughter.  
The one to bring you into this world,  
the one who'll come after.

Half the population,  
zero consideration.  
The anger in her belly  
fuels the fire  
—the desire  
for the dreams  
she's never dreamed,  
The life she could have lived,  
scorched to ash and ember.

How close are you to crushing our dreams?  
To stealing our rights?  
To plotting your schemes?  
Though much progress has been made,  
how long will it last?  
When all that it takes,  
is one flame  
and one match.

— *Untitled*, by Black and Gold Correspondent Sivan Courtney

## 'Not what you did but why you did': An important mindset from local Olympian Julia Wilkinson

NANAKO UENO

*Black and Gold Correspondent*

With the conclusion of the Milano-Cortina 2026 games, the Black and Gold edition interviewed a past Olympian in swimming, Julia Wilkinson from Stratford, Ont. We interviewed her focusing on the transition from her athlete career to her new phase.

Wilkinson is a swimmer who competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2012 London Olympics. She was born in Stratford in 1987.

She had been a member of the national swimming team since 2006 and represented Canada at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, where she broke the Canadian record in the semifinal of the 200 metre individual medley and reached her first Olympic final.

She also has been a member of four Canadian record-holding relay teams, has an NCAA title and earned six medals on the international stage, which includes three bronze at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in 100 metre backstroke, 200 metre individual medley and four times 100 metre medley relay. After her career as an athlete, she shifted into broadcasting, journalism and marketing.

Wilkinson started swimming when she was eight and set the Olympics as a family dream. She said she especially got a lot of support from her parents. Being an athlete and being part of something so huge was an amazing experience to represent Canada and was an honour for her to do something behalf of the country.

Feeling determined as a swimmer, she had to find her new identity after retirement. When she was an athlete, Wilkinson loved being around athletes understanding their stories. She was interested in the person behind the results they achieve. This made her interested in telling stories and making people emotionally connected with athletes or brands. The interests made her move towards marketing and journalism helping people tell their stories. She did not know if she wanted to do those things from the start and at first felt nervous trying a new thing from scratch. However, supports from previous athletes taught her what was needed for the next phase of her life and her motto, "Not what you did but why you did," gave her strength to challenge. When she was an athlete she felt defined as a swimmer but learning what made her a good athlete could make her a great something-else helped her understand what will be next for her.

Wilkinson would like to tell athletes that they are not defined by what they did but by all the characteristics inside them which helped achieve what they did. It means no one could take away their effort or the courage they have made. She encourages athletes to find the next podium that life provides – not only in the Olympics, which is a scary but exciting challenge.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)  
Julia Wilkinson of Stratford competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2012 London Olympics and has words of wisdom for returning athletes from the 2026 Milano-Cortina games in Italy.

As an athlete, Wilkinson felt not bringing home a medal was a failure. Although it did not turn out how she wanted, she thinks it is worth it to do it over again because she cherishes the experience and journey it has provided, rather than its destination. She wants people who are unsure about challenging new things to know it might not turn out how you thought, but could turn out better.

Overall her story shows the Olympics was just a chapter of her life. It doesn't provide only medals to athletes, but the experience. Her experience as an athlete and the transition taught her an important lesson. With younger generations constantly catching up, it is a challenge to remain at the top of the Olympic stage for years and it is important to think constantly about their future.

If more athletes try to find a new interest and aim for their next podium, they will surely have a great start of a new phase after their career as an athlete, just like Wilkinson did.

**Submit your letter to the editor to us!**  
Call 519-655-2341 or email [stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

# STRATFORD **TIMES** SPORTS

## Frayne reaches 150-game milestone, Warriors' offence sputters in weekend losses

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

This week, another player from the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors reached the 150-game mark. Team captain Haden Frayne became the 23rd player in the organization to achieve this feat during the game against the St. Marys Lincolns on Feb. 27.

An elated Frayne says he's grateful for his entire junior hockey career with the Warriors.

"Yeah, it's been an amazing four years here. For me, I've loved every second of it, from the coaching staff to the management. The friendships I've made are for a lifetime. I've been really enjoying my time here," Frayne said.

Three longtime teammates of Frayne – Jonas Schmidt, Joseph Curtin and Rhyse Brown – shared their thoughts on their teammate.

"He's been a pleasure to play with ever since minor hockey. We played together in the Huron-Perth Lakers program. I love Rayner. He's a great teammate, someone who will go to war every night, and he's a great person to have on our side," Schmidt said.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

**Stratford Warriors defenceman Haden Frayne fires his shot from the blueline against the St. Marys Lincolns at the Pyramid Recreation Complex on Feb. 27.**

"He's an awesome, awesome player. Really happy for him to play the 150th game, and no better guy to have as a captain. So happy for him," Curtin said.

"Yeah, obviously, I came in here my first year. It was Rayner's first year as well, and I became good friends with him, and I'm glad that I got to spend these four years with him. One-hundred-fifty games for him is a big milestone," Brown said.

"I mean, he works hard night in, night out. That's especially why he's the biggest leader on our team, and shows up for the guys, protects everybody around him."

Brown, who joined the elusive milestone club back on Dec. 14, offers advice to Frayne on his milestone game.

"I think you just have to take it all in. I mean, being a hometown boy, I would be super appreciative of him and grateful to him," Brown said.

Head coach Dave Williams praises the Stratford native for his contribution to the

organization.

"I mean, I think it's great as a local guy. I'm sure when he was a youngster, he came here and watched a lot of teams before he had the opportunity to play here. And from day one, he's come in, and he works incredibly hard every day he comes here, you know, from the time he started at 17 'till today, he's a 20-year-old captain," Williams said.

"He exemplifies everything that we would want in a player, you know, with respect to work ethic and being a great teammate. And, you know, no guy in the dressing room wants to win more than he does."

The fourth and final regular-season installment of the "Battle of Highway 7" took place at the jam-packed Pyramid Recreation Complex at St. Marys on Feb. 27.

Drew Hodge put the Warriors on the board 7:30 into the first period with his fourth goal of the season from Aaron

Green and Cruz Ferguson. Starting netminder Noah Bender stonewalled the Lincolns with 13 saves to preserve the 1-0 Stratford lead through 20 minutes.

The Warriors looked to add to their lead in the middle frame but were unable to carve out another goal thanks to the stymied St. Marys defence and goaltending. Bender continued to put on the goaltending clinic until the Lincolns solved the netminder in the closing seconds of the middle frame and tied the game at one apiece heading into the final period.

In the third period, the Lincolns completely took over the momentum and the game. The Lincolns took the lead on the quick powerplay strike at 5:53 and cemented the victory with a breakaway, sharpshooter goal with 2:21 remaining.

Bender stopped 26 of 29 shots in the loss.

Following the loss to the Lincolns, chances of achieving a top-two playoff seed are now quite low. However, there remains a possibility of securing home ice advantage in the first round.

Williams commented on the defeat after the playoff-style game.

"I thought we competed and battled hard. They're a very good hockey team and there's not a whole lot of room out there. We could have done a better job with some of the chances we did get; a team like that usually doesn't give you a lot," Williams said.

"Thinking back to the second period, we had, I think, three odd-man rushes where we didn't get a shot on the net, and three or four where we didn't get a shot on the net. In the third, we got to find something off that power play, for sure. Even finding some momentum out of that, but yeah, it's the type of game that you expect in here. Disappointed that we didn't get the win, but I thought our guys competed hard."

Stratford aimed to end the weekend and February on a high by travelling to Strathroy to face the Rockets at the West Middlesex Arena on Feb. 28.

Strathroy opened the scoring at 5:21 of the first period. Late in the period, Dax Vader responded for Stratford with his sixth of the season, assisted by Curtin and Coen Galbraith. The Rockets retook the lead early in the second period, only for Quinn Kipfer to tie the game at the midway point of the middle frame with his 14th of the season, assisted by Aaron Green and Will Coward.

The score stood at 2-2 until the middle of the third period, when the Rockets scored the decisive goal and secured an insurance goal with 3:19 remaining.

Gage Hurst made 18 saves in the loss for the Warriors.

The Warriors' offence struggled, and they were outscored 7-3 in both losses.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 23

### Stratford Warriors

#### 2025-26 Stats

(as of March 2, 2026)

Player	Pos	GP	G	A	PTS
Jonas Schmidt	F	37	20	19	39
Colin Slattery	F	41	12	24	36
Max Wildfong	F	46	20	14	34
Quinn Kipfer	F	42	14	20	34
Coen Galbraith	F	46	11	20	31
Will Coward	D	43	3	22	25
Lucas Minard	F	45	12	12	24
Evan Arnold	F	39	14	9	23
Aaron Green	D	40	9	13	22
Joseph Curtin	D	47	4	17	21
Dax Vader	F	44	6	13	19
McQuen Haylock	F	46	5	14	19
Drew Hodge	D	47	4	15	19
Haden Frayne	D	43	4	13	17
Dominic Marshall	F	47	11	5	16
Grady Murphy	F	42	9	7	16
Rhyse Brown	F	42	4	9	13
Cruz Ferguson	F	16	7	3	10
Jaxon Broda	D	17	2	7	9
Mateo Craievich	D	35	0	8	8
Colten Brenzil	F	2	1	0	1
Cody Billings	D	1	0	0	0
Goalies	Record	GAA	SV-%		
Noah Bender	17-10-0-1	2.63	0.903		
Gage Hurst	12-1-3-1	2.19	0.895		

### GOHL Western Conference Standings

(as of March 2, 2026)

Team	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
Elmira Sugar Kings	35	9	2	1	73	219	128
Chatham Maroons	34	8	2	3	73	229	140
St. Marys Lincolns	35	11	2	0	72	198	113
London Nationals	32	14	1	1	66	217	161
<b>Stratford Warriors</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>127</b>
LaSalle Vipers	24	21	3	0	51	177	173
Strathroy Rockets	24	21	2	1	51	177	177
St. Thomas Stars	22	22	2	1	47	178	179
Waterloo Siskins	20	22	4	2	46	142	145
Listowel Cyclones	19	26	2	1	41	139	159
Komoka Kings	16	30	2	1	35	160	213
Sarnia Legionnaires	0	47	0	0	0	79	319

# U18 Warriors open postseason against London

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford U18 AA Warriors began their postseason play as they faced the London Jr. Knights White in the semifinals of the ALLIANCE U18 AA-A Bristol Playdowns.

Head coach Riley Mathieson says that if the team can stick to their gameplan, they have a shot at advancing to the finals.

"We finished our regular season strong last Saturday, like we discussed when we last met there. And you know, I think if we continue to do the things that got us that win Saturday, we should be successful to start off the series. It's not going to be easy, but we'll have to stay disciplined. We'll have to keep our heads down and keep fighting, regardless of what the score is, regardless of what happens. It's nice if you got home ice to start off, and we're here Saturday night, it's supposed to go in down there," Mathieson said.

"The message is the same. It's been all year, discipline, urgency, compete and just the want, the want to get the job done. And I think if we come with those three things, we'll be successful and competitive in any game. But you know, if we have a hard time doing that, then we could be a hard series for us to be successful in, but I think that it's definitely one that we can achieve the goal we want to."

In the series opener at the Stratford Rotary Complex on Feb. 28, London scored in the final minute of the first period and defeated the Warriors 6-0.

Game 2 took place at the Western Fair Sports Centre in London on March 2.

Charlie Halloway scored for the Warriors, putting them on the board for the first time this postseason three minutes into the game. London then equalized at the midpoint of the first period during the final moments of their 5-on-3

power play a few minutes afterward.

After Jr. Knights White took an early lead in the second period and extended it, Halloway scored his second goal with 9:44 left in the middle frame, bringing the Warriors within one. London quickly responded less than a minute later, but Halloway completed his hat trick with 7:20 remaining, reducing the deficit again. London then increased their lead for the third time in the game, scoring with 59.9 seconds left in the middle frame to lead 5-3 at the end of the second period.

Early in the third period, Stratford narrowed the score when Josh Goodhue took a shot from near the blueline, which luckily bounced off a London defender's skate at the front of the London net and went in.

In the final moments, Owen Chambers seized the rebound in front of the London net to equalize with a 5-5 score. Less than five minutes remaining, Noah Kaye scored the winning goal when his shot hit the left post and went into the net. From there, Stratford contained the quick London offence and preserved the win to even the series at one apiece.

Following the game, Mathieson liked the team's resilience after a tough Game 1 loss on home ice a few nights before.

"It showed a lot of character from our group to come back after a disappointing effort Saturday night, to go down 1-0 in the series. I thought we responded really well tonight to tie up the series and bring the effort that was required, especially in the third, going down two into the third, we came back and got three and held them off the sheet there," Mathieson said.

"So I was, I was very impressed with the effort from our group and very happy with the outcome."

Kaye explained to the Times the sequence that led to the game-winning goal.

"We had actually been planning up before that. Rylan

DeBoeck was looking for that cross-ice pass all game, you know, we just try to find each other and go far pad. I was looking for that far side and just found the right hole," Kaye said.

Game 3 is set for Rink A at the Stratford Rotary Complex on March 5, while Game 4 will be held at the Earl Nichols Arena in London on March 6.

**ALLIANCE AA-A Bristol Playdowns Semifinals – (2) Stratford Warriors vs. (3) London Jr. Knights White**

Game 1 – London 6 vs. Stratford 0

Game 2 – Stratford 6 vs. London 5

Game 3 – London vs. Stratford (Rotary Complex – Rink A) March 5, 9 p.m.

Game 4 – Stratford vs. London (Earl Nichols Arena) March 6, 8 p.m.

Game 5 – London vs. Stratford (William Allman Memorial Arena) March 8, 5 p.m., if necessary.

Game 6 – Stratford vs. London (Western Fair Sports Centre – Chik-fil-a Rink) March 9, 8:15 p.m., if necessary  
*Series tied 1-1*

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# MINOR SPORTS **SCRAPBOOK**



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Mackenzie Brown advances the puck up the ice during the U11 A Stratford Aces game last Thursday.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Archer Ehgoetz sends a shot flying on goal during last Tuesday's U12 Stratford Warriors game.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Charlotte Hunt loads up a shot on target during last Tuesday's U13 C Stratford Aces game.



(PAIGE CAMPBELL PHOTO)

Cale Klumper blasts a shot towards the net during the U13 Stratford Warriors game last Friday.

## Irish season reflected

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Irish season concluded with game four of the NPHL Metropolitan League Quarterfinals on Feb. 22. Initially marked by optimism and close competition for the top spot, the season experienced significant player turnover midseason. Coupled with inconsistent results in the latter part of the regular season, Stratford finished third-place in the South Division of the Metropolitan League.

Veteran Irish equipment manager Bevan Mathieson credited owner/head coach Marco Alexander with staying the course to keep the team competitive.

"The team had a season of ups and downs, one that saw us only able to ice our full contingent of guys just twice during the regular season, we came off a championship run but also had a lot of turn over,

with it being senior hockey guys have demanding jobs or are starting young families, losing the likes of Graham Brulotte and Cameron Stokes to name a few on the front end and a couple key contributors to last years success in Mitchell Casey and Ryan O'Bonswain on the back end it made Marco's job of recruiting talent a little tougher. I think he did a great job of filling the holes with the necessary talent to repeat as champions," Mathieson said.

"That being said, as we got stronger, so did all our competition, which is why this SR league is one of the best around. I think the word 'underachieved' will stick in the back of some guys' minds, not because we weren't as successful this season, but because of how much they care and want to win. Did we accomplish our ultimate goal? No, we simply didn't win a championship, but the guys showed up every night and gave their best effort. It was a brotherhood

in that locker room, one that I would go to war with any day and for that, I think this season was a success."

Regarding next season, Mathieson doesn't think there is a great need for adjustments for the team to get back into championship contention, but he cited the level of commitment needed from the players to play with the team.

"I don't think there is too much more that needs to be done to get back to the standard of raising banners to the Allman rafters. It will start by locking down a large number of returning players. I think we have the right nucleus in the room. It's about surrounding them with quality pieces to help get the job done. This league evolves yearly: older guys moving out, younger guys coming in, people deciding to return from overseas or give up the idea of chasing the NHL dream to continue playing competitive hockey," Mathieson said.

"I think Marco and the staff do an incredible job of making Stratford a destination for guys who want to come play. The history of our arena, the way the guys are treated from top to bottom, there is no better place in this league. It will, however, take a solid off-season of recruiting players, showing them the quality of play in this league and ensuring they come ready to play when the puck drops in October.

Mathieson says there's the high calibre the NPHL has to offer, and hopes fans can come to the Allman Arena to see how the team bounces back to the championship-level quality they come to support.

"I can't stress enough how much talent there is in the NPHL from top to bottom. It's a league that is growing in many parts of Ontario. Come out and enjoy some high-flying Irish hockey and watch us get the standard back to where it was," Mathieson said.

# Bowling League High Scores

**Mens**

Tyler Cook 328-880 triple  
 Kyle Turner 829 triple  
 Steve Mitchell 328

**Ladies**

Brooke Louwagie 306-720 triple

**Monday Seniors**

Steve Van Klooster 242, 225-666 triple  
 Marie Huitema 210

**Tuesday Morning**

Helen Fulton 220

**United League**

Steven Walker 231, 237  
 Paul Boyd 207, 210- 698  
 Autumn Stadtlander 228, 255- 689  
 Nichele Butcher 217

**Youth Bowling Scores**

Bowlasaurus  
 Evangeline Butcher-Bontrup 134  
 Owen Farthing 125  
 Theo Brown 100

**Pee-Wee**

Lincoln Butcher-Cassidy 116  
 Coen Everitt 116, 112-284 series  
 Grey Davidson 235 series  
 Rowan Eckert 135-202 series  
 Addi Kollman 262 series

**Bantam**

Stella Hurley StPierre 124,108-317  
 Caleb Luckhardt 163  
 Kayleigh Heegsma 195, 199-542 riple  
 Serenity Robb 160  
 Ella MacDonald 165  
 Roland Rains 168-456 series  
 Annika Klomp 124

**Junior**

Mckenna Morris 165, 192-499 series

Anna Ward 179, 200, 234-613 triple  
 Arik Scheuermann 223-503 triple  
 Brianne Bauer 157, 177, 165-499 triple  
 Lauren Furtney 171, 177-496 triple  
 Hayden Martin 165, 174-505 triple  
 Ryan Scheerer 154, 256-525 triple  
 Charlee Kayle 163  
 Brent Louwagie 160  
 Sydney Shillolo 161, 167-476 series  
 Myla Douglas 152, 163-478 series  
 Austin Janmaat 160, 202-475 series  
 Hugo Black 175, 179, 216-570 series

**Senior**

Austin Bauer 204, 225-566 series  
 Austin Martin 188  
 Peyton Boyles Keating 171, 221, 329 (134 POA)  
 Jake Sipple 197-500  
 Sydney Smith 201  
 Zachary Clarke 182, 190  
 Dominic Boyles Keating 184, 195,204  
 Alex Ward 171, 173, 203-547  
 Wiatt Robinson 201, 191-521

Owen Martin 296 (106 POA), 252-677 tri-  
 ple  
 Claire Turner 217  
 Devon Deyoung 188  
 Issac Kroesbergen 186  
 Jocelyn Gethke 187, 191-551 series  
 Payton Petrie 218, 245, 274-737 series

**Special Olympics**

Derek Wray 209  
 Michael Ambrozic 1 54, 241  
 Nicolas Graham 168  
 Tiffany Keller 173,161  
 Meghan O'Donovan 177, 191-368 triple  
 Dan Noon 152  
 Leah Akroyd Snider 187  
 Norm Schenck 157, 168  
 Franny Hitchcock 182  
 Michael Hitchcock 172  
 Maddie Jenner 153  
 Jacob Kaufman 158  
 Andy Van Schaik 154

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# Lakers sweep the Canucks, punched ticket to the OHL Cup

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Huron-Perth U16 AAA Lakers moved on to the ALLIANCE U16 AAA Playdowns Semifinals following a series sweep of the Elgin-Middlesex Canucks.

On Feb. 24, the Lakers competed in the second opening-round game of the ALLIANCE U16 AAA Playdowns against the Elgin-Middlesex Canucks at Komoka.

After a scoreless first period, the Lakers took the lead in the second. Evan Miller netted his second playoff goal with an assist from Mathieu Lapan at 3:51. The Lakers extended their lead with 6:28 remaining when Blake Moore scored his first postseason goal, assisted by Luke Mclean and Declan McCotter.

Elgin-Middlesex narrowed the Huron-Perth lead to 3-1 with 3:36 remaining in the period. In the third period, the Lakers regained their three-goal advantage around the midpoint of the final frame. Ethan Bridges scored his first playoff goal, with assists from McCotter and Callum Brooks, on the powerplay.

The Canucks narrowed the gap again with under five minutes remaining, but Miller and Bridges each scored their second playoff goals, 54 seconds apart late in the period, securing a 5-2 victory and a 2-0 series lead.

Ahead of Game 3, head coach Jason Brooks mentions that while the team is satisfied with their 2-0 series advantage, they haven't yet performed at their best.

"I would look at the first two games and say we're really happy to have won, but we haven't been overly happy with how we've played. Full credit to Elgin. They've

worked their butts off, they've competed," Brooks said.

"We've been able to score some timely goals to find a way to get the wins. But I think we found a way to get timely goals, which definitely helped and, you know, set us up to put us in a position Friday night to hopefully get a win and close up the series."

Bridges says the team hasn't played to their standard but expected to battle to close the series.

"We've been all right, but we could battle harder, and we're still getting the W's, so that's great," Bridges said.

"We're just going to battle harder against them. We've got to match their intensity because they're coming with us with intensity, and he's got to play to their level."

On Feb. 27, the Lakers looked to close their series against the Canucks on home ice at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

Elgin-Middlesex opened the scoring 90 seconds into the first period. McCotter scored his first postseason goal less than two minutes later on the power play, assisted by Miller and Wyatt Finch. Callum Brooks then scored two consecutive goals with 7:23 and 5:45 remaining in the first, giving the Lakers a 3-1 lead.

The Canucks tallied one late in the period, over two minutes before it ended, but Christian Circelli responded less than 30 seconds later, with a goal assisted by Brooks and Miller, restoring the Lakers' two-goal cushion before the contentious first period concluded.

The Lakers' offence picked up in the second period. Circelli, along with two more goals from Brooks in the final three minutes, gave the home team a command-

ing 7-2 lead heading into the third. Circelli added his third goal midway through the last period. The Canucks scored once more with over five minutes remaining, but the Lakers finished strongly and secured the series with an 8-3 win over the visitors.

Callum Brooks delivered a remarkable four-goal, five-point performance to secure the series-winning win. Additionally, four Lakers – Finch, Circelli, McCotter and Miller – each scored three points.

Jason Brooks expressed pride in the team's performance and emphasized the importance of qualifying for the OHL Cup.

"It's meant a lot for everybody, all the players, all the coaches. I mean, it was a goal from the beginning of the season, or even before the season, to have this group get to that opportunity, to get it to have a chance to play in the OHL Cup and to represent the Alliance, represent the Lakers organization at that event," Brooks said.

"But now we've got bigger things to deal with. We're moving on to round two and figure out who we're gonna face. But you know, the competition's gonna be really tough, so we just gotta get prepared and get ready to go."

Kipfer states he and his team are excited to move on to the next round and have qualified for the OHL Cup.

"It feels really good just to qualify for the next round with the sweep. You know, we had a couple tough first games, kept it a bit closer than we would have liked," Kipfer said.

"But I think today we really came and we did a job, and we showed that when we play the right way, we can really blow

teams out of the water. The OHL Cup is a special tournament. Everybody wants to make that, and making it feels really good."

The Lakers are set to compete against the Brantford 99ers in the upcoming round of the ALLIANCE U16 AAA Semifinals. Their semifinal series will kick off on March 6 at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

**U16 AAA ALLIANCE Quarterfinal Schedule (Huron-Perth Lakers vs. Elgin-Middlesex Canucks)**

Game 1 – Elgin-Middlesex 0 Huron-Perth 2

Game 2 – Huron-Perth 5 Elgin-Middlesex 2

Game 3 – Elgin-Middlesex 3 Huron-Perth 8

Huron-Perth wins series 3-0

**U16 AAA ALLIANCE Semifinal Schedule (Huron-Perth Lakers vs. Brantford 99ers)**

Game 1 – Brantford vs. Huron-Perth (Stratford Rotary Complex – Rink A) March 6, 8:30 p.m.

Game 2 – Huron-Perth vs. Brantford (Wayne Gretzky Centre) March 8, 3:45 p.m.

Game 3 – Brantford vs. Huron-Perth (Stratford Rotary Complex – Rink B) March 12, 8:45 p.m.

Game 4 – Huron-Perth vs. Brantford (Wayne Gretzky Centre) March 14, noon, if necessary.

Game 5 – Brantford vs. Huron-Perth (Stratford Rotary Complex – Rink B) March 15, 3:15 p.m., if necessary.

Game 6 – Huron-Perth vs. Brantford (TD Brantford Civic Centre) March 16, 8:15 p.m., if necessary

# Aces edge Lightning, seize series control over Lady Rangers

MICHAEL WILLOUGHBY

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Humphrey Fleet Service U18 AA Aces opened their second-round of the Tier II OWSA-Southern Playoffs series against the Kitchener Lady Rangers and continued their OWSA Provincial Playdowns against the Saugeen-Maitland Lightning.

On Feb. 26, the Aces headed to Grand River Arena in Kitchener for a match against the Lady Rangers. In the first game of the second round, Stratford and Kitchener finished in a 1-1 draw. According to the current playoff rules, the first team to reach four points moves on to the next round.

Aces head coach Sean Cameron shared his perspective on the series versus the Lady Rangers.

"Kitchener is a very solid team. They are extremely well coached. We got her a lot of respect for Kitchener. So our focus is to get a home game, get two points, and then go

back to their barn and hopefully go on to the next round. But you know, at the end of the day ... we keep saying, 'Why not us?' That's how we feel."

Stratford hosted the Lightning in Game 2 at the William Allman Memorial Arena on Feb. 28.

Josephine Binning opened the scoring for the Aces with a breakaway goal with 4:23 remaining in the first period. Early in the second period, the Lightning launched a breakaway, but Stratford's Sloan Cameron made the save. Saugeen-Maitland tied the game later in the period after forcing a turnover in the neutral zone and scoring on a breakaway.

With 4:45 remaining in the game, Stratford's team captain, Kylin Wilson, scored the winning goal. The Lightning applied pressure in the final minute with an extra attacker, but Cameron and the Aces maintained their lead to secure a 2-1 victory, keeping their championship hopes alive.

Following the game, coach Sean commented on the game and on what it meant to

coach at the historic arena in Game 2.

"It means everything to us. We talked about it at the beginning of the period, how historic this place is. I just grew up around the corner here from the Allman Arena, and it's a special place to me. I played here myself, and to have my two daughters on this team and my crew here, it means a lot to me. We beat a really tough team out there, battling it out to get a 2-1 win," Cameron said.

Both Sloan and Wilson praised the team for the way they won the game, which helped them get back in the series.

"It's huge. Saugeen has always been a rivalry. They're a great team. Gotta have some respect for them out there. Being in my last year and couldn't be prouder of these girls for pushing on for another game, to hopefully go to provincials, means everything," Sloan said.

"It's an unreal experience. Honestly, I wasn't sure if we had it, because at the start of the year, we had a better rough patch, but since the new year, we've come out, and we put in the work, and it's really starting to

show now," Wilson said.

The series finale is scheduled for March 7 at 11:30 a.m. at the Mildmay Arena in Mildmay.

On March 2, the Aces secured the series lead with a 4-1 victory over the Lady Rangers at Stratford Rotary Complex. Game 3, which will determine the series outcome, is scheduled for March 5 at the Grand River Arena in Kitchener.

**Stratford Aces vs. Saugeen Maitland Lightning (OWSA Provincial Playdowns)**

Game 1 Aces 1 Lightning 2

Game 2 Lightning 1 Aces 2

Game 3 Stratford vs. Saugeen Maitland (Mildmay Arena) March 7, 11:30 a.m.

Series tied 1-1

**Stratford Aces vs. Kitchener Lady Rangers (Tier 2 OWSA-Southern Round 2 Series)**

Game 1 Stratford 1 Kitchener 1

Game 2 Kitchener 1 Stratford 4

Game 3 Stratford vs. Kitchener (Grand River Arena) March 5, 8:30 p.m.

Stratford leads series 1-0-1

# SSC skaters compete at Forest competition



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Pictured in the photo on the left, from left to right, are Kylie Klassen, Annabelle Stewart, Kai Dias, Danika Lingard, and Reese Manzer, who competed at the Star One-Four skating competition in Forest Feb. 20-22. Manzer took home a silver medal in the Star-Three Group 11 division. Also in a Star-Three Group 11, Lingard claimed the bronze. Klassen and Dias both added bronze medals in their respective Star-Three Group Nines. Stewart finished with a solid fourth-place result. Pictured in the photo on the right, in the front row, from left, are Tatum McCallum Moesker, Adele McCutchen, Laura Neeb, Ella Rosendaal, and Izzy Pritchard. In the back row, from left, are Ellie Stewart, Olivia Cremmer, Bella McGurgin, Clara Robertson, and Hailey Graul. McCallum Moesker captured the gold in Star-One Group Seven. Neeb won gold in Star-Two Group Nine. McCutchen took the silver in Star-Two Group Six. Rosendaal earned silver in Star-Two Group Eight. Pritchard was the silver medalist in Star-Two Group Nine. Stewart picked up the silver medal in Star-Three Group 10. McGurgin took the silver in Star-Three Group 10. Graul earned silver in Star-Two Group One. Cremmer captured the bronze in Star-Three Group 11, and Robertson added a bronze in Star-Two Group Two. Not pictured were Isabelle Megens, who took silver in Star-Two Group Eight, and Rose Clarke, who brought home a bronze in Star-Two Group 13.

# SSC skaters compete at Belle River provincial competition



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Pictured on the left, from left to right, are Jaida Ford, Alexa Klassen, Mason Clemmer, Amy Schroeder, and Gracie Sutherland. Pictured on the right is Nicole Verhoef. The Stratford Skating Club competitors attended the Provincial Series no. 15 Lakeshore in Belle River Feb. 20-22. Clemmer earned a second-place finish in Star-Eight Men and third in Star-Seven O12 Men. Klassen came in sixth in Star Five O13 Women Non-Qualifying and 10th in Star-Five Artistic Group Four. Verhoef placed eighth in Star-Five O13 Group Three and 12th in Star-Seven Artistic Group One. Schroeder placed 10th in Star-Six Women Group Two, 11th in Star-Seven Artistic Group Two, and 15th in Star-Seven O12 Women Group Three. Sutherland placed ninth in Star-Five U13 Women Non-Qualifying. Ford placed 11th in Star-Five U13 Women Non-Qualifying.

# Warriors' offence sputters in weekend losses

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

es. Currently, they are ranked 9th in the league with 179 goals. After the game, Williams promised to focus more on the offence during the final week of the regular season as the playoffs near.

"I think we've got to keep focusing on trying to generate offence. We're missing

a couple of guys right now that we would count on to provide a little bit of that offence, but when that happens, that's an opportunity for other guys to step up and contribute," Williams said.

"The week of practice is really focusing on generating quality offensive opportuni-

ties and maximizing shots and pucks that we get in good areas, you know, I think stuff like that can be worked on in practice, and you know, trying to build some confidence scoring goals in practice for next weekend."

Following the two losses, the Warriors

are tied with the London Nationals for fourth place in the Western Conference. Stratford concludes its regular season with a home game against the Waterloo Siskins at the Allman Arena on March 6 and a road game against the Chatham Maroons on March 8.

# Editorial

## The end of an era: the final game



AMANDA NELSON

Times Reporter

Last Wednesday, I woke up at 6 a.m., squeezed in a quick workout, showered, cut up cucumbers and strawberries, fed the cat and gave myself just enough time to French-braid Hailey's hair before heading out the door for yet another volleyball tournament.

I grabbed Starbucks, as usual, picked up Hailey's best friend, Lyla, and another teammate, Tori, and we met the rest of the team at St. Mike's before making the hour-plus drive to St. Thomas.

This week's tournament, WOSSAA, would mean the girls would compete for gold and a chance to move on to the OFSAA championship in Cambridge later this month.

We arrived just in time. The girls rushed to the gym to stretch. I opened my laptop and tried to fit in a bit of work, including answering a couple emails and edit-

ing a story I wrote the day before just before the first serve.

I've sometimes spread my hours over evenings and weekends for years so I have rarely missed a game, tournament or team trip. I've become one of the "counted-on" parents who drives to games or tournaments across our region, and I love every second of it.

But this day felt different.

If the girls didn't win gold, this would be the final high school volleyball game of Hailey's life before she heads to university in the fall.

As I watched the first set, it hit me: I may be leaving another era of my life behind – and I hadn't even realized it.

I've watched these girls grow up together. I've seen them cheer for one another, pat each other on the back after mistakes and lift each other up when it mattered most.

They won their first match and had a four-hour break before the final. We found a pub, relaxed, shared stories and tried to steady our nerves before returning to face a team known to be nearly unbeatable.

The first set was tight – back and forth the entire time – but they lost 23-25. The second set slipped away the same way.

By the end of the match, you could see their hearts breaking.

No one on the bench, in the stands or on the court



(AMANDA NELSON PHOTO)

St. Mike's senior girls' volleyball team took home silver at their WOSSAA tournament last week in St. Thomas.

had dry eyes. Their coach, Mr. Kocher stood steady, but you could feel the weight of the game as the final 25 went up on the scoreboard. It wasn't because the score was slipping away and they wouldn't win gold; it was because this was going to be their last game together, ever.

These moments go by too fast. I've known these girls almost their entire lives. They love each other fiercely. They argue like sisters. They've rolled their eyes at me, and they've hugged me just as hard. I've watched them play their hearts out in every match on countless gym floors and yet here it is, the last time.

And just like that, it was over. Maybe Hailey will play recre-

ational volleyball at university. Maybe she'll coach beach volleyball in the summer as she has before. She also spent years playing competitive club volleyball with Stratford Volleyball Club.

But there's something special about school sports – about wearing your school name across your chest – that binds a group in a way nothing else does.

To the parents in the thick of it: I see you.

The packed lunches. The Lululemon bags stuffed with snacks. The early mornings and grumpy kids. The braiding of hair while she complains you're pulling too hard. The Tim Hortons drive-thru panic when you're cutting it close. The endless driving, gas

money and hotel rooms across the region.

It's exhausting.

And it's everything.

Because one day, there will be a last game.

Maybe not in St. Thomas. Maybe not for silver at WOSSAA. But there will be a final whistle, and you won't realize how much it matters until you're sitting there watching it pass.

Take the pictures. Take the videos. Stay a little longer in the parking lot.

These are the moments you carry with you.

Congratulations to the St. Mike's senior girls on your silver medal at WOSSAA. What a run. What a season. What a moment.

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**STRATFORDTIMES**

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6. Newspapers strengthen communities
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# Opinions

## As I See It From America: I apologize



**PATRICK D. BURK**

*Times Columnist*

I am wondering if now is the time that I apologize for what is happening in this world as it relates to our government. The past few days have been very scary and the rhetoric and words coming out of Washington, D.C. have been over the top and blustery. Keep in mind, a good friend of mine stated, “You can be against the tyranny of the Iranian religious-hacked government and in favour of the people of Iran and still be against this aggression.”

I feel that way as well. I am wondering about the innocents that are killed and hurt while bombs are dropping, and mis-

siles are striking city centres, schools and shopping facilities. I am afraid for those that just want to have simple lives, not be embroiled in the dictums of the religious leaders and providing for their families. No matter what anyone says, most Iranians would love to live a life free of tyranny and be part of an open and growing society. Most Iranian children are craving joy and peace. You can see it in their eyes.

I am wondering what the popular thought is in our dear Stratford. I am familiar with some Middle Eastern residents in your area and have spoken with many of them about living in Canada. I know that they are hoping that his attack will lead to democracy, greater freedom and perhaps a better life. I tend to sit by and look at the past. I see a fallen Afghanistan and a fractured Iraq. Both of those countries invaded and “changed for the better” by the United States only to be governed by ever increasing factions and gangs. It seems the United States can invade but rarely can help govern. Look at the mess in Venezuela.

As a United States citizen, I cherish and look at our constitution on a regular basis. A copy of it is on my desk at home. Okay, call me a nerd, but I have often glanced at a page of this amazing document and wondered about what our founding fathers were thinking. There are things that I would like to see changed, but the concept of the constitution and what it basically stands for is solid and still very relevant. I am not a big fan of the Electoral College or how the Supreme Court Judges are appointed for life, two things that I would change for sure, but the division of powers and how the country is supposed to govern are lined up and described perfectly.

I tend to look at war and conflict from the human perspective, lives lost and impacted as well as the cost of rebuilding and making improvements on a shocked infrastructure and business world. I am all too involved in business not to see the impact on the world economy, the increasing cost of gasoline and how that adds to a struggling economy that was not in the best shape prior to the invasion. I see chil-

dren missing out on schools and education and I see people struggling to just maintain a somewhat “normal” existence.

I also see lives lost and families mourning. I see young people on all sides being asked to sacrifice their lives for their country. I see suited men that have never served talking the big, loud braggart talk of how they are kicking the crap out of the enemy. In this case, I hear both sides being so obnoxious that I realize that they really do not care about the people, the children, the mothers and the fathers in both Iran and the United States. I see the bombs falling all over the Middle East, threats made of more attacks and people dying in countries that have nothing to do with this conflict.

I also realize that we were basically lied to. This had nothing to do with freeing the Iranians from an old and tired regime nor did it have anything to do with nuclear proliferation. This is from an old political playbook. It is simply a way to distract and to defer from other things that are tearing down this president’s effectiveness and weak and dis-

turbing government. It is a way to stand tall and say, “Look how big I am. I can bomb a country.”

So, I apologize. I am sorry if you don’t agree with me and I am sorry if all of this is just a bit too much. I am sorry that I cannot help in any way other than to express my opinion and I am genuinely interested in how all of you feel. I am sorry that our leaders in the United States are not trustworthy and often very childlike and I am sorry that our decisions are going to impact you in several ways.

You see, I am so in favour of having a free Iran, not having the strict religious control and letting people decide what they want to do with their lives, male or female. I am also in favour of not having religion as any part of the government. That part is in our constitution, that wonderful document that governs the United States, or at least it did until this last election. Let’s hope it does again after the next. Please accept my apology.

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

## Musings: Trusting the improbable



**MARK HERTZBERGER**

*Times Columnist*

Trusting others can be tough, especially if you’ve had childhood experiences that constantly set off warning bells. I was lucky. My parents always taught me to trust the intrinsic goodness of others. If I was ever lost or in trouble, they said, I should find an adult to help me. Fortunately, that trust was not misplaced, that is until I became part of the working world as an adult. There were two individuals, one in retail and one in non-profit, who betrayed me despite my having invested copious amounts of time, trust and goodwill in their projects. My wife Yvonne’s radar had im-

mediately kicked in with both of these egotists and she had warned me of her suspicions long before anything went off the rails. Unfortunately I had to learn the hard way. Something in me just couldn’t believe that anyone could be like that.

Recently, I received an email from a “literary agent” who claimed to have read my poetry book, *Crow’s Foot*. She referred to specific poems, quoted lines, and generally heaped praise on my “wonderful imagery” and “evocative turn of phrase.” And wouldn’t she just love to help me market my books worldwide and garner the fame and fortune I so richly deserved?

I wasn’t quite so naïve that a little red flag didn’t pop up almost immediately. However, I must confess that, just for a moment, part of me was eager to accept this wonderful tribute to my “genius.” I could see my future in neon lights: Book signings! World tours! Adoring fans! Jimmy Kimmel! The Leonard Cohen Memorial Award! (Actually, I’m not sure this last item even exists).

Of course, all of this was designed to appeal to my ego.

That’s why they are called “vanity presses.” A quick Google search revealed that this is a common scam targeting authors and enticing them to pay exorbitant fees for marketing their books. Now that the fraudsters have AI to do speed reading for them, their solicitations are packed with “genuine” details and can appear quite authentic.

A fellow poet had a similar experience, this time in an email apparently from a famous writer saying how much he was impressed with her book and how eager he was to help her get the recognition she deserved. Only one small problem: the famous writer had died ten years ago!

My wife Yvonne, who is a novelist, has also received many communications from a “Book Specialist” who described specific characters Yvonne had created and her novels’ “blend of epic stakes and “emotional depth.” The “specialist” then went on to offer her services to increase “discoverability.”

Scam artists don’t just appeal to our egos, either. It could be our fear that causes us to act before we think. Your credit card has been compromised? Don’t

worry – just click here, give us your banking details and we’ll fix everything for you.

Lonely? It just so happens that a someone on a dating app overseas has fallen in love with you and, amazingly, shares all of your interests and values. They are a potential soul mate! They’re broke, though, and really need to borrow the airfare so they can visit you in person. Helping them out could be the start of something big, which it might well be – just not the start of a love affair.

What if you get a phone call from your grandson? He sounds like he’s in serious trouble and needs you to e-transfer some money to bail him out. It’s definitely his voice on the phone. How could you deny his request? How heartless would that be? Problem is, it’s not really him. Artificial intelligence can now clone specific human voices very accurately.

Fear, greed, vanity, love, loneliness, hope – all are potential prey for the creatures in the virtual jungle. So, trusting or not, we have to exercise our due diligence. To use two clichéd phrases: “if it’s too good to be true, it

probably is” and “when it doubt, check it out.” If you’re asked to click on a link, go first to the online source – the official website of the supposed bank or corporation, or call them using their publicly listed number – not the one the scam artist has so thoughtfully provided in their email. And always get a second opinion from a trusted friend or family member before you click or call.

It’s a shame that this is the world we live in right now. It’s not that we should all become suspicious and standoffish. It’s just that we need to trust wisely and judiciously. Most of the jungle creatures out there are benign herbivores. It’s the carnivores we need to watch out for.

*Mark Hertzberger is a former social services supervisor, human resources manager, conflict mediator, and literacy practitioner. He has since freed his mind and now writes poetry and occasional opinionated columns. Mark has lived in Perth County for 27 years, the last 12 of which have been in Stratford where he resides with his wife, novelist Yvonne Hertzberger.*

# Opinions

## WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH ABUNDANCE



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Columnist

Life lately seems to bring surprises every day – with a feeling of random results that we don't remember asking for. Because Web-Crawling is concerned with climate, the filter this week is directed at current ideas that affect climate.

One is the abundance philosophy, the result of a book of the same name by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson. Because climate laws are also current ideas, we'll mention two: Ontario Bill 5 passed in 2025 and the federal bill, its kissing cousin, C-15, which has passed the House of Commons, and is headed for the Senate.

As we grasp for something solid to hold onto, the abundance message sounds eminently reasonable

to the western world. It encourages growth for innovation and to meet society's housing and energy needs; it also ultimately urges a framework of circularity and living within our means and resources. That's a tall order.

I once spoke with a company that had recently changed their products from cotton to polyester. When I explained that polyester was a fossil fuel product, the young man on the other end said "What, are you worried about climate change?" I was, I replied.

"You don't have to worry about that! Technology will save us!"

That credo makes the future look more enticing than the present, which sometimes seems mired in conflict between environmentalists, Indigenous concerns and development. A way out of this stalemate might be through unfettered innovation. Given the opportunity to create new and efficient answers to our roadblocks to progress, might be the answer.

According to Gillian Marcelle, a leader in economic development and international business, "Abundance is an outgrowth of ecomodernism, with the underlying idea that technology will save us. I find the concept admirable, but also unrealistic." Marcelle notes that enabling the dreams

of alternate energy alone would require massive amounts of raw materials in a world where we are already extracting 105 gigatons per year. A sustainable level is considered to be 50 gigatons a year.

We know what we need – a circular economy that doesn't waste resources, improved public transportation, more housing, particularly affordable, and available and affordable energy. There is no magic switch to accomplish those goals. They will take money, and especially public and political will. John Mulrow, one of the founders of Degrowth, notes that "The more exciting path is to get working on the social and technical innovations required for something humanity has never done: Shrink the global economy back within planetary limits." As those in precarious employment and the people living in countries where global warming is wreaking havoc on their health, their crops and their resources would most certainly agree. Social reforms have to be included in any solutions.

In my research, I kept running into one line. California professor Joshua Clover said "Money moves toward profit and if there is no profit, it does not move." That appears to be very much the case.

The disparity between incredible wealth and the rest of society is growing day by day. Trickle-down economics are clearly not working.

For my part, I've been tracking carbon in the atmosphere, which is climbing higher by the day. We are pretending not to notice. Carbon stays in the atmosphere for up to 1,000 years, so as we add to it, it continues to accumulate. Methane, which will be released massively if the peat bogs in the Ring of Fire are mined in Ontario, is a greenhouse gas that doesn't last as long as carbon but is 80 per cent more powerful at trapping heat. The Earth will grow ever hotter, and weather patterns more unstable. Insurance costs will skyrocket as companies cope with floods, fires and storm damage. Already we are coping with water shortages.

Both Bill 5 and the federal Bill C-15 contain clauses that permit cabinet ministers to bypass governance structures, without any review by the public. These bills permit removal of the legal controls we have on unfettered growth, particularly environmental and Indigenous concerns. The federal Bill C-15 includes what is called the Henry VIII clause, (Part five, Division five), that enables complete sidestepping of the

laws of Canada (except the Criminal Code) for innovative development. In the next Web-Crawling, I'll return to those concepts. What happens when we remove the guardrails? Innovation? Probably. A return to a stable, just, prosperous and environmentally sound planet?

UPDATES:

Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of March 2, 2026: 429.60 ppm. Two weeks ago it was 429.23.

The Xerces Society, promoting invertebrates (insects) has come up with a list of New Year's resolutions. I'll be sharing them in UPDATES in 2026.

Transition landscaping plants to regionally-appropriate natives. Native plants use water efficiently because they are adapted to available resources in your region. They also provide habitat and food to native wildlife.

Provide nesting habitat for pollinators. Provide nesting resources and plants that give bees and other creatures a place to reproduce.

*Sheila Clarke is a Stratford advocate for the environment, of our community and of our planet. She is a member of CFUW Stratford, Stratford Climate Momentum, and the Perth County Sustainability Hub.*

## Lessons from Tumbler Ridge: Plight and peril for today's youth

LOREENA MCKENNITT,

Guest Columnist

It was heartwarming to see federal, provincial and Indigenous leaders gather in Tumbler Ridge, B.C. and witness the bonding and solidarity over the devastating tragedy which occurred there.

While it is important that we can see such unity of purpose, we must not lose sight of the greater context which informs this tragedy: the plight and peril in which so many youths live their daily lives.

While it is widely understood that childhood is not what it used to be when we used to come home when the street lights came on, many experts such as Jean Twenge, Jonathan Haidt, Dr. Leonard Sax or professor Henry Giroux speak to the pronounced degradation of circumstances in which children are now expected to function while mental health issues rise precipitously.

At an age when identity and a

sense of belonging are critical to any youth's emotional development and sense of security, these experts speak of the loneliness and alienation in an era of "connection"; of youth being "carpet bombed" with consumer culture; of attending industrial-sized schools with over-sized classes, where teachers struggle to know a student's name much less who they are as a person.

They speak of youth living in empty and unwalkable neighbourhoods bereft of nature, corner stores, parks or recreational facilities, or any way of being known and cared for by the immediate neighbourhood.

They speak to the bullying and sextortion which comes through social media; the addiction which comes with gaming, gambling and hard porn. Or the radicalization which comes with online violent extremist groups as may have been part of this event.

They speak of the human trafficking into prostitution and the

drug trade. And they speak of the particular plight of those who are marginalized such as Black, Indigenous, racialized or LGBTQ+ communities.

They speak of the malicious attacks on the sincere efforts to champion equal rights, inclusion or diversity. These attacks in turn have caused those from marginalized communities to cower in shame, feel utterly alone, without hope... and sometimes gravely desperate.

Most critically, they speak of the absence of advocacy positions such as the children's commissioners in provinces including Ontario and across Canada, or of a national child and youth strategy which, when in place, can pre-empt the worst things from happening.

While it is tempting to vilify the shooter or even gun culture in situations such as Tumbler Ridge, to do so would gravely underestimate the scope of the situation. As adults in society on

whom our children rely for their well-being, we are called upon to do better. Much better. These tragedies do not come out of nowhere.

Now is the time to make the needs of our children and youth a top priority through a vast array of measures which include urgently supporting online harms regulation; creating bespoke strategies; implementing children's commissioners; improving urban design; providing mentors; supporting organisations who make children and youth a priority such as the YMCA, service clubs, Big Brothers-Big Sisters or Roots of Empathy; making sports and the arts more universally accessible and offering struggling families more social support.

As we seek to find meaning in this devastating tragedy, it is important that we take stock of how our children and youth are living in this era. It begins by understanding what we as a species need in order to thrive. We

need to create a habitat that we would not cruelly deny any other species.

If it follows that it takes a village to raise a child, we must take great care that the village in which our children are being raised is an environment of kindness, inclusivity, empathy and compassion, and not subject to the world of online predators.

This story brings into view not only the incredible loss of life or the extra-ordinary bravery of the first responders, teachers and students. It reminds us of the importance of belonging and being accepted for who we are as human beings.

In the end, it reminds us how much we need each other.

It reminds us that by the grace of God, we are all Tumbler Ridge. Loreena McKennitt is an international, multi-platinum recording artist, a member of the Order of Canada, and founder of the Stolen Child Project and Wise Communities.

# COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

## STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

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

## CROKINOLE

Every Tuesday at the Agriplex in the Ritsma Room from 1-4 p.m. Ladies and gentlemen, fingers or sticks. For more information call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

## STRATFORD ASTRONOMY GROUP MEETINGS

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School, 240 Oakdale Avenue, Stratford

Rear parking lot off Matilda. Room # 1104 - 1st Tuesday of each month from September to June. 7-9 p.m.

We are night sky enthusiasts. Everyone is welcome to attend. See our website at <https://stratfordastronomy.com/> or call 519-275-4472 for more information

## LENTON LUNCH

Wed., Mar. 11; 12:00 Noon

Immaculate Conception RC Church

\$15.00 Speaker: Sarah McIntyre-Roy (CMHA Connection Centre)

## SAUSAGE, SAUERKRAUT & FRY NIGHT

Friday, March 12; 5:30 p.m.

Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

Join us for a great deal at 2 meals for \$25 or 1 for \$13. No ticket required. Take-out is available from 5:00 p.m. Please order take-out by Tuesday Mar. 10 by calling Dave at 519-703-6544.

## OXFORD PHILATELIC SOCIETY OXPEX & OTEX 2026 STAMP SHOW

March 21; 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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

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

Contact: dhfe@silomail.com

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

## LEARN2SHINE PERFORMANCE CLUB

Monthly on Sundays from, 2-4pm

Infinity Dance 451 Erie St.

Next meeting March 22. Suitable for everyone in the family aged 7 and up. A chance to sing, dance, say lines. Registration \$20+HST/person, with 15% discount if registering 3 or more. [www.mckinnamangement.com](http://www.mckinnamangement.com)

## SHANE COOK & THE WOODCHIPPERS

Friday March 27; 7 p.m.

Avondale Church, 194 Avondale Ave

A joyous musical journey through fresh, original fiddle tunes and songs., with all proceeds supporting the next generation of performers at Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts 2026.

Tickets \$35/adult, \$10/children 12 & under

[www.kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/events](http://www.kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/events)

## EUCHRE NIGHT

Friday, March 27; 6 p.m.

Legion, 804 Ontario St., Stratford

Enter your 2-person team for \$20 by calling Anne at 519-301-0914, Dave at 519-703-6544, or the Legion at 519-271-4540. Prizes for 1st to 3rd place.

# STRATFORD TIMES

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- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
  - Coming Events Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
  - Coming Events Boxed Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
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# STRATFORD TIMES

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Expressway Ford  
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Tim Hortons - Erie St  
Stratford Mazda  
7-Eleven - Erie St  
Joe's Diner  
The Urban Barber  
Erie Convenience  
Mr. Sub  
Balzacs Coffee  
Shoppers Drug Mart - Ontario  
New Orleans Pizza

Zehrs  
Food Basics  
Tim Hortons - C.H. Meier  
Festival Marketplace  
Stratford Nissan  
Stratford Subaru  
Stratford Honda  
Quality Festival Inn  
McDonald's - Ontario St.  
Papa Johns  
Fore Everyone Golf  
WalMart  
Stratford Motor Products  
A&W  
Toner & Ink Shop  
Rutherford Funeral Home

Athens Greek Restaurant  
Stratford Legion  
Gino's Pizza  
Rosso's  
Buzz Stop  
Union Barber  
Mornington Variety  
Split Rail  
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Dave's Diner - Sebringville  
Stratford-Perth Museum  
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Shoppers Drug Mart - Huron  
Circle K - Huron  
West End Pharmacy  
Tim Hortons - Huron  
Stratford Hospital  
Video 99 - Erie St  
Jenny Trout  
Stratford Medical Pharmacy  
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Stratford Public Library  
The Parlour Restaurant & Inn  
Dick's Barber Shop  
The Livery Yard  
Town Crier Marketing  
North End Pharmacy  
Annie's Seafood Restaurant  
Avon Pharmacy

# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Some quirky twists to a visit to Seville



PAUL KNOWLES

*Times Columnist*

The setting could not have been more pleasant. We were seated with some friends at a table in front of a tapas restaurant, a short walk from the impressive Seville Cathedral. We were sampling terrific local tastes, nicely complemented by a jug of sangria. Perhaps two jugs.

And then, within minutes of our being seated, a group of musicians wandered by, played for about 45 seconds, and then rather aggressively passed the hat among all of us partaking in al fresco lunches. Cute, we thought.

Except, perhaps four minutes later, another performing group did the same thing. And then another. Singers, drummers, jugglers and finally some rather talented acrobats. Between donating yet again, or trying to ignore the proffered collection hat, we barely had opportunity to eat!

So, am I knocking Spain's fifth-largest city, the capital of the beautiful southern Andalusia region? No. We enjoyed our visit to Seville. It just seems like everything here is kicked up a few intense notches from the more laid-back atmosphere we encountered in the communities we visited during our Senior Discovery Tours stay on the Costa del Sol.

For example: the cathedral, it-



The ornate Chapter House in the Seville Cathedral.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

self. The Seville Cathedral is overwhelming. It's the largest gothic cathedral in the world, and the third largest church after only St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican and St. Paul's in London, England.

The church's history dates back before the actual founding of the church – and if that seems confusing, it's because of the rich history of this region of Spain, which was once ruled by the Moors, who were muslim. So, the cathedral actually includes elements of the mosque that was built in the 1100s. After the Moors were defeated, construction of the cathedral was begun around 1401 and, as was typical of such grand projects, building continued for more than a century. The cathedral's belltower, known as the Giralda, was originally the minaret of the mosque.

Today, the cathedral (officially the Cathedral of Saint Mary of

the See), and the Moorish palace known as the Alcázar, are part of the historic centre of Seville, all designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Back to the cathedral itself; it's ornate, rich, full of art and stained glass. The Chapter House – where the monks and clergy once held meetings and heard readings from Scripture and the rule of St. Benedict – is lavishly decorated.

But perhaps the most striking thing in the Cathedral is an enormous tomb, which bears a plaque that reads, "Tomb of Christopher Colón; Remains with historical certainty (exhumation carried out in 2003)."

This is the impressive resting place of Christopher Columbus and therein lies a story. Columbus died in 1506 in Valladolid, Spain, the site of his original grave. But because of his important role in

Spain's history, his body was soon moved to Seville. But it did not stay there. In 1542, Columbus' remains followed the route of his own nautical adventures – it was taken by ship to what is now the Dominican Republic and interred in the Cathedral of Santa Maria.

But in 1795, when Spain lost control of the Dominican Republic, Columbus' remains were again on the move, this time to Havana, Cuba. There, he was re-buried in a very impressive tomb, and there he rested for about a century until 1899, when not only Columbus' remains, but also the entire elaborate tomb, was transported to Seville, and installed in the cathedral.

But the story doesn't end there. Some people argue Columbus' body never left the Dominican Republic, and even today, a box with an inscription indicating it contains Columbus' remains can be found

on that island.

So, the Spanish authorities decided to answer the question once and for all. In 2003, Columbus' remains were again disturbed, DNA testing was carried out and it was conclusively proven that the explorer was, indeed, now resident in the Seville Cathedral.

It must be noted that when you visit the cathedral, and Columbus' tomb in particular, he is lauded in a very politically incorrect manner. There is no hint that Columbus did not "discover" anything, because the Americas were already well populated by people, nor that his work led to the horrors of colonialization. It felt like we were back in the day when our knowledge of this bit of history was contained in the jingle, "In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Turns out, the story is a lot more complicated than that.

There is much more to see in this city that attracts several million visitors a year. One rather unusual site is "Spain Square," an impressive sprawling architectural gem, complete with fountains and canals. You would swear that it dates back centuries, but the whole thing was actually created in 1928 as the site of the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929, an event hosted by Spain. It was probably an attempt on the part of Spain to assert its role among all of the Spanish-speaking countries that were once colonies of Spain. I love the fact that it was used as a location for both a Star Wars movie and a Simply Red music video. I wonder what Christopher Columbus would think of Obi-Wan Kenobi or Mick Hucknall.

*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](mailto:pknowles@golden.net).*



The choir in Seville Cathedral.



The cathedral viewed through a historic archway.

# Crossword

**CLUES ACROSS**

1. Unit of dry measure
5. One who defies authority
8. Social media giant
12. Render holy
14. "Much \_\_\_ about nothing"
15. Computer manufacturer
16. Creed
18. Immoral act
19. Mountain pass
20. Winged nut
21. Don't know when yet
22. Elected officials
23. Corrupt tendencies
26. Popular adult beverage
30. Made a mistake
31. Morally correct
32. Type of whale
33. Portable conical tent
34. Native people of the Congo
39. More (Spanish)
42. Classroom implements
44. Cognizant of
46. One who tells
47. Free from bondage
49. Thick piece of something
50. Containing two adjacent nitrogen atoms
51. Removed from the record
56. Legendary singer Turner
57. Broke up the earth
58. Hunting expedition
59. Contributes
60. Unit of work or energy
61. Wreckage on the sea bed
62. Affirmative! (slang)
63. Witness
64. Scrape (Archaic)

**CLUES DOWN**

1. "\_\_\_ and flows"
2. Humble request for help
3. A position of leadership
4. Continent
5. Adherent of a particular religion
6. Things that can be eaten
7. Self-governing Netherlands territory
8. Long-tailed crow
9. Repeated
10. Bluish greens
11. Humanities
13. Someone who serves in the armed forces
17. Labor (Spanish)
24. Zero
25. Shared by involving three parties
26. Queens ballplayer
27. Consumed
28. Rest here please
29. Men's fashion accessory
35. American time
36. Sound unit
37. They \_\_\_
38. Soviet Socialist Republic
40. Places to play video games
41. A sudden attack of illness
42. When you hope to arrive
43. Charges
44. Actress Seyfried
45. A tributary of the Ohio River
47. Omit when speaking
48. Armored fish
49. Remain
52. From a distance
53. Adventure story
54. Geological times
55. Eat dinner

1	2	3	4			5	6	7		8	9	10	11		
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5				3				
								1
1	4	2			7			
6				9			3	
	7						4	9
	8	5	2			6		
	2	9	1				5	
	5							
				8		4	6	

Solutions on page 27

# CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire [stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

## OBITUARY



### JUTTA SIEBEL

Jutta Siebel, age 67, passed away suddenly but peacefully at home on February 17, 2026. Jutta was born in Perth, Ontario oldest child of the late Manfred and Erika (Wolfel) Siebel.

Jutta leaves her sister Heidi and her brother Ralf. She was deeply intertwined in the community through her work with L'Arche Stratford and other organizations. Her kindness and caring will be missed by many.

In keeping with Jutta's wishes there will be no formal service or celebration. We encourage people to remember Jutta in your own way. Memorial donations in Jutta's memory may be made to L'Arche Stratford or the Stratford Perth Humane Society. [www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com](http://www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com)

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

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5. Infertility
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8. Loudness
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10. Ecuador

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