

St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1290

Thursday, November 27, 2025

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Local boys to host eighth and final year of their annual toy drive



SHARING CHRISTMAS JOY

Porter Huffman and Colton Lawrence show many of the toys that will go to homes in need. This is the eighth and final year for the toy drive. To date, they have raised over \$40,000 for gifts, food and gift cards.

JENN NOBLE

Contributed Article

When Porter Huffman and Colton Lawrence first gathered loose Canadian Tire money from around their homes at age six, they never imagined a simple idea, "Let's help other kids have a great Christmas," would grow into a community tradition that would touch hundreds of families.

Eight years later, Porter, now a teenager with a slightly deeper voice, a full-

er schedule and bigger shoes, is stepping into the final season of Porter & Colton's Toy Drive, and he's determined to finish as strongly as they began, with kindness, gratitude and the joy of helping others.

What started as two kids and a handful of Canadian Tire bills quickly became a powerful local movement. Each year, the toy drive grew – more donations, more community partners, more toys stacked high in shopping carts and more people helped by the boys' enthusiasm.

(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

CONTINUED TO PAGE 10

Town of St. Marys officially adopts 2026 budget with 3.88 per-cent levy increase, inclusive of growth

St. Marys budget adopted just nine days after mayor tabled his budget on Nov. 11

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Though, under the newly expanded Strong Mayor Powers granted to St. Marys by the province earlier this year, there was no passing of an official budget bylaw as there has been in years past, the Town of St. Marys has officially adopted its 2026 budget with 3.88 per-cent levy increase, inclusive of growth.

During a special meeting of council Nov. 18, councillors had the opportunity to review and recommend amendments to the budget tabled by Mayor Al Strathdee on Nov. 11 – a budget that largely resembled the draft budget presented by staff at council's first budget meeting Oct. 21.

"In the press recently, in Stratford, there was a suggestion that I'd been burning the midnight oil and making some amendments to reduce the tax rate, and I want to make it very clear for council and the public that we made a very strong statement that we would work collectively and cooperatively on this budget," Strathdee said, referring to an article on the mayor's 2026 budget published by the Stratford Beacon Herald Nov. 14. "Council has met several times to talk about strategic initiatives as well as targets for fiscal responsibility, and that's what we laid out for staff. Staff has made the budget in total, and we have asked them to meet

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

CB

Owen Lewis-Havard

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COMMUNITY

Town of St. Marys officially adopts 2026 budget with 3.88 per-cent levy increase, inclusive of growth

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

our goals and targets as we moved along.

“We have made a strong statement to the provincial government that we are not in favour of the current system of the Strong Mayor Powers. We believe that we have done everything that we can to improve housing in this community with the tools given to us, and we continue to work collaboratively as a council.”

The mayor’s budget included a few updates and minor changes, including those discussed by council at its first budget meeting, leaving the levy increase at roughly \$10,000 less than what was initially presented by staff.

That levy increase, \$817,551, represents a 5.2 per-cent jump from the roughly \$15.7-million budget for 2025 to next year’s roughly \$16.5-million budget. Factoring in the town’s estimated \$200,000 in growth to the tax base, that leaves the net levy increase at 3.88 per cent, under council’s target of four per cent.

The mayor’s 2026 capital budget, as presented at the beginning of the Nov. 18 meeting, also included some minor changes, leaving it at \$8.3 million in new spending, all of which is funded from reserves, grants and other funding sources that do not have a direct impact on next year’s levy.

During the Nov. 18 meeting, six of St. Marys’ partner organizations presented their budgetary asks for 2026. They included:

- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority – \$281,567 for operating costs and \$158,764 in capital costs for work on the St. Marys Floodwall and the town’s portion

of work at the Wildwood and Pittock dams;

- St. Marys Healthcare Foundation – \$100,000, up from \$75,000 in 2025, towards doctor recruitment and retention, as well as to help the foundation pay for the St. Marys Memorial Hospital’s new, \$650,000 x-ray machine;

- St. Marys Station Gallery – \$10,000 to help fund operations, including a newly expanded art-education program, at the gallery;

- Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum – \$5,000 towards the \$10,000 cost of a condition assessment for the hall of fame and museum grounds, baseball diamonds, equipment and buildings, and a portion of the nearly \$27,000 cost to re-fence the ball diamonds;

- St. Marys Public Library – Roughly \$686,000 to support services and programs, including adult learning, at the St. Marys Public Library; and

- St. Marys and Area Mobility Service – \$130,000 to support operations and \$25,000 to support the capital replacement of an accessible van at a total cost of \$140,000.

While the majority of these external expenses were already included in the mayor’s 2026 draft budget, councillors had the opportunities to amend the budget to include an additional \$25,000 for the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation, to support the cost of the new fencing at the baseball hall of fame and to include \$25,000 to support the purchase of a new accessible van by the mobility service.

Ultimately, councillors voted to include the extra funding for the mobility service

and the health-care foundation but opted not to support the new fencing at this time.

“Because we’re spending the money to get an assessment of the entire facility, and the results from that may show the top priority is completely different than the fence, I’m just not sure if the money would be spent at the right place,” Coun. Jim Craig-mile said.

Town CAO Brent Kittmer told councillors the results of the condition assessment will allow the town and the hall of fame to develop a proper, 10-year capital forecast that will give both organizations a better idea as to where town money should be spent next year or in future years. Should there be urgent needs identified following the assessment, council will have the opportunity to support any capital projects to address those needs.

Also during the Nov. 18 budget meeting, council approved the creation of a new reserve fund and policy that will allow council to set aside funding for the Community Commons project at 14 Church St. N. To that end, council approved the transfer of \$73,000 to that reserve in 2026.

Neither of the council amendments to the budget or the money set aside for the Community Commons project had an impact on the 2026 levy as all funding will come from town reserves or planned transfers to those reserves.

By the end of the meeting, councillors indicated they had no additional amendments

they wanted to make to the budget, allowing council to pass a resolution under the Strong Mayor Powers legislation shortening their amendment period from 30 days after the mayor tabled his budget down to seven, meaning council had effectively approved the budget as of midnight Nov. 18.

Strathdee then issued a mayoral decision under his Strong Mayor Powers reducing the 10-day period in which he would have the opportunity to veto any of the councillor amendments down to one day, and the budget was deemed officially adopted as of Nov. 20.

“It feels like it’s an adversarial thing now as opposed to a cooperative thing and it just feels awkward,” Coun. Rob Edney said of the new budget process under Strong Mayor Powers. “I just want to voice that I’m also opposed to the way the budget (was done). I’m not opposed to the budget we’re presenting; I’m just opposed to the format. It just seems like too much work. We’ve always worked well together as a council and previous councils as well, and it’s just odd that the province would want us to have an adversarial sort of approach to this.”

“The whole budget process could become controversial,” Coun. Marg Luna added. “I have this little fear that, depending on who’s sitting in the (mayor’s) chair in the next four years after the election, the whole thing could become controversial and all these plans that we’re talking about could all be for not.”

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7 Day Forecast

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Wednesday Nov-26th	Thursday Nov-27th	Friday Nov-28th	Saturday Nov-29th	Sunday Nov-30th	Monday Dec-1st	Tuesday Dec-2nd
Snow & rain 6 OC Feels like 1	Light snow 1 OC Feels like -6	Flurries -1 OC Feels like -7	Light snow -1 OC Feels like -3	Snow & rain 1 OC Feels like -4	Sun & cloud -2 OC Feels like -5	Cloudy -3 OC Feels like -8



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St. Marys Museum to mix holidays with history at upcoming open house

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

The St. Marys Museum is inviting locals for festive treats and valuable gift ideas at next month's annual open house.

On Dec. 7 from 2-4 p.m., locals will have the opportunity to explore the museum's offered activities at a drop-in holiday open house. A scavenger hunt and a craft station will be provided for the kids, while adults can place bids at the silent auction, win door prizes and enjoy holiday treats.

Curator assistant Emily Taylor said a certificate for a private ghost tour with Stratford Walking Tours will be featured at a value of \$128. The museum is currently accepting donations for the auction.

Historical publications will be available at the museum's gift shop, along with details on purchasing a Friends of the Museum membership.

"We like to think of this open house as a complementary event to the other holiday programming happening in the community," said Taylor. "This has been a long-running program that the museum has been

doing, and we think it's important to have this on a weekend so people can come while they're off work."

The "Capturing Christmas" exhibit will be on display during the open house, showcasing past photographs of community holiday celebrations.

"It's important to celebrate the season and bring people together," said Taylor. "Many in the community feel it's just as important to honour the history of St. Marys, to learn, teach and engage others in our past."

Along with participating in holiday activities, locals will also have an opportunity to explore current exhibits and the museum's Victorian-style school room, used for educational programming and mock school lessons that were taught during the era.

The open house will allow locals to voice their interests on what they would like to see included in the museum's future programming. Taylor said that the museum is interested in running a survey for the new year to analyze what locals would like to see featured in the 2026 program schedule.



Emily Taylor, curator assistant at the St. Marys Museum.

(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

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EDITORIAL

Early budget adoption puts St. Marys in a good spot heading into 2026

GALEN SIMMONS
Regional Editor

It's no secret I'm not a fan of the province's Strong Mayor Powers.

Having the power to appoint key officials, veto bylaws and set the budget in the hands of one person is bound to lead to abuses of power – and in some Ontario municipalities, it already has, or at very least, it has sewed discord and mistrust between councillors and the mayor.

In Cambridge, the legislation introduced to that city two years ago left councillors confused recently as to how and when they were to propose amendments and debate Mayor Jan Liggett's Strong Mayor's budget, with some "failing to meet the criteria" necessary to present their amendments at a recent meeting.

In Springwater Township, a petition by several councillors to have Mayor Jennifer Coughlin revoke two decisions she made using her Strong Mayor Powers earlier this month – one involving the firing of township legal counsel – fell flat after the mayor declared the meeting "out of order," nullifying the resulting motion passed by council.

In Orillia, Mayor Don McIsaac exercised his Strong Mayor Powers to shut down a councillor-supported amendment to his 2026 budget that would have added \$700,000, a one per-cent increase to the levy, for faster road and sidewalk repairs. Council had voted 5-4 in support of the budget amendment before the mayor rejected it.

In St. Marys, though, town staff, Mayor Al Strathdee and councillors demonstrated how a fully collaborative budget process – similar to the process undertaken before Strong Mayor Powers were introduced to the town earlier this year – could result in the fastest and most-efficient budget approval I've seen in more than a decade reporting on municipal budgets.

Despite being without a full-time treasurer after former treasurer André Morin left the town for the CAO position in Stratford earlier this year, leaving the process in the very capable hands of deputy treasurer Spencer Steckley and CAO Brent Kittmer, town staff was able to present a draft 2026 budget that met council's target for a levy increase of four per cent or less at council's first official budget meeting on Oct. 21.

Over a relatively short, five-hour budget meeting, council reviewed the staff budget and had the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and propose changes, including the approval of two new staff positions. Then, in accordance with the Strong Mayor Powers

legislation, Strathdee had staff incorporate those changes into what would become his mayor's budget before officially tabling it on Nov. 11, and giving councillors the chance to review it and propose further amendments at their second budget meeting on Nov. 18 after hearing budget requests from six of the town's external partners.

After councillors made two amendments adding \$25,000 to their contribution to the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation and \$25,000 to support St. Marys and Area Mobility Service's planned purchase of a new accessible van, council voted to shorten the 30-day period in which they could propose additional amendments down to just seven days, while the mayor, in turn, shortened the period in which he could veto councillor amendments down to one day, telling councillors he had no intentions to use his veto power.

In the end, this legislative maneuvering made possible by town staff and the mayor's commitment to working with council on the budget allowed for the passive adoption of the mayor's 2026 budget on Nov. 20, less than a month after the town's first official budget meeting.

To put that into context, I've seen budgets adopted in December, January February and March. I've even seen budgets adopted as late as June or July. Until now, I've never seen a budget process take less than a month and just eight hours of deliberation around the council table to complete. Now, with the budget completed, town staff are free to begin preparing requests for proposals and receive bids from contractors before demand from other municipalities begins to ramp up, allowing the town to get a headstart, and perhaps more competitive pricing, on its 2026 capital plan.

With St. Marys' staunch rejection of Strong Mayor Powers and its commitment to maintaining the democratically elected powers of council as a whole, the completion of the 2026 budget process in record time should be proof that councils in smaller communities can work together to achieve great things.

We don't need a strong mayor to improve efficiency. We just need the right people around the council table who prioritize the best interests of those they serve and a passionate and engaged municipal staff to support them.

In St. Marys, I believe we have those people, but what happens if there comes a time when we don't? If we find ourselves with a mayor who prioritizes their own agenda over the best interests of the people they serve, we could be looking at a very different scenario.

Bravo	Boo
We have 4 Bravos this week. 1) Bravo to the happy table of singers that entertained the room at the Legion meat draw on Saturday. 2) Bravo to the town for getting the dip in the road filled in on main street by Video 99. It is appreciated. If we can get some of those manhole covers raised a bit that would be a great Christmas treat! 3) Bravo to the lady who "paid it forward" towards my birthday lunch in Thorndale Family Restaurant. Thank you! 4) Bravo to the volunteers and the firefighters for putting up and taking down the Legion Banners.	We have 1 Boo this week. 1) Boo to the person driving their car through the parade on Friday.
*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered. Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.	

Quote of the Week

Thank you for another fabulous Merchants' Open House weekend. It was a great kick off to the holidays. We truly appreciate all the support from our local community and out-of-towners alike! A special thank you to all the volunteers that make this weekend possible. We are all prepared to serve you for the rest of the season, including offering evening shopping every Thursday from participating retailers until the end of the season. Happy Holidays St. Marys!

- BIA member Lisa Fewster on another successful Merchants Open House Weekend.



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St. Marys Independent

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St. Marys Independent

Thoughts of the Week
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395 Queen Street West

Don't let yesterday take up too much of today.

Every day brings gifts, Don't be afraid to untie the ribbon.

The secret of getting ahead is to just get started.

Ideas are easy, execution is everything.

SMCP's *Boeing, Boeing* auditions getting ready for takeoff

EMILY STEWART

Independent Reporter

The St. Marys Community Players (SMCP) is hoping locals get on board for their production of Marc Camoletti's *Boeing, Boeing*.

SMCP will host auditions for the spring production at St. Marys Presbyterian Church on 147 Widder St. E at the main entrance on Dec. 5 at 6:30 p.m., Dec. 6 at 1 p.m. and Dec. 7 at 1 p.m. *Boeing, Boeing* will take flight at the Town Hall Theatre from April 23 to May 9, 2026.

Boeing, Boeing introduces audiences to Bernard, a sly and suave American architect living in Paris with three fiancées, all who happen to be flight attendants. He had a schedule down so he could see all three without their arrival times overlapping, that is, until *Boeing* changes the flight time to Paris with a new jet and all three fiancées arrive at the same time and chaos begins.

"It's going to be laugh-out-loud, constant chaos trying to hide the identities of each other because the three stewardesses don't know about each other, so it does come to a funny end," said Gregory George, SMCP's marketing and communications lead. "It's going to be a great time."

George added *Boeing, Boeing* is likely one of the most produced French plays worldwide, with several versions translated into English. SMCP will present the version translated by Beverly Cross and Francis Evans.

"I think our audiences are going to really enjoy a typical farce, people falling down, lots of up and down, out on couches and doors slamming, and all of that kind of stuff, so it's going to be a lot of fun," he said.

Stratford's Ralph Small, who has an extensive background in film and televi-



sion, will be directing and Read Paxton and Stephen Brockwell will be producing. Set designer Ray Dirkson is creating a set with seven doors the actors will be popping in and out of, as well as three bedrooms, a kitchen and an additional room.

SMCP is particularly seeking their Bernard for their *Boeing, Boeing* production.

"He has to be suave and somewhat of a bad guy who's trying to hold the schedules together, so Bernard is the key to the success of this production," George said.

SMCP is also looking for someone to portray Gretchen, a German stewardess and Bernard's third fiancée.

Anyone who would like to audition for *Boeing, Boeing* can send an email to info@stmaryscommunityplayers.ca with "BOEING BOEING" in the subject line, and an indication of which character they would like to play. There is no need to prepare a monologue, as auditions will involve script reading as individuals and as pairs.

"Just bring your energy, dive in and fasten your seatbelts, put your seat table in its upright position and get ready to go," George said.

STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news
from the Town of St. Marys



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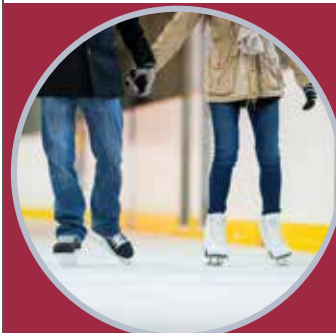
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- Holiday Light Tour: Nov 28 - Jan 1
- GivingTuesday: Dec 2
- WinterLights Night Market: Dec 5 - 6
- Horse & Wagon Rides: See various dates on website
- Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan: Dec 13

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Overheard at the Coffee Shop

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Kudos to the St. Marys Kinsmen on another successful Santa Claus parade!

Anyone else feeling let down watching the Leafs after the success of the Jays?

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others? Either email them to us at info@stmarysindependent.com with the title "Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519-284-0041 or drop by the office to let us know!



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Senior of the Week



Our senior of the week is Dr. Larry Joosee. Dr. Larry was born in Oakville and grew up in Grimsby. He has been married to his wife Patsy for 47 years. They have two children, Matthew and Sarah. They have three grandchildren Colin, nine, Rita seven, and Oaklen two and one more on the way in January. He loves to garden, travel and cheer for the Blue Jays. Dr. Larry started working for the St. Marys Vet Clinic 44 years ago right after graduation and has cared for so many pets over the years.

If you would like to nominate someone for Senior of the Week, contact us at 519-284-0041 or info@stmarysindependent.com.

Community rallies behind the Campbell family

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

The old saying, “When it rains it pours,” is very real and no one knows that better right now than Chris Campbell and partner Emily Montgomery.

Those who follow Campbell’s business, Chris Campbell’s Catering, online will be up to date on what has been happening in his world and, amazingly, Campbell is still smiling and trying his best to stay positive.

Campbell and Montgomery welcomed baby August into the world on Oct. 8. August was a premature birth and had to stay in the NICU for 29 days after he was born. The new parents were then able to take him home however, a week later, August had a setback where he had to be put back into the hospital at the pediatric critical care unit in the London Health Sciences Unit.

The family has a long road ahead but they’ve been getting support from Ronald McDonald House and support from a Go Fund me fundraiser. The couple is not able to work right now and say they’re appreciative of all of the help they are receiving from the community.

On Nov. 22, to add to Campbell’s stress, his food truck was stolen. The truck has been recovered, however there is some damage inside. As Campbell was meeting with the Stratford police to discuss the theft of his food truck, his SUV was broken into at the Ronald McDonald House parking lot. Luckily, there was video surveillance but he isn’t likely to see anything that was taken returned.

“I can’t make this up,” Campbell wrote in a post to Facebook recently. “They should make a movie of our life right now. We are so blessed by everybody that is helping us via Go Fund Me and e-transfers. All of you are the reason why I have not completely lost my mind.”

Some good news; baby August is now up to six pounds and 4.3 ounces, and is starting to get stronger. As hard as it is to imagine, two thefts on the same day



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Chris Campbell and Emily Montgomery snuggle baby August.

in two different places, Campbell remains grateful and knows being there for August is his number one priority.

“I love St. Marys,” he added. “The community has been a saving grace for us and I can’t even express how much the support has lifted an immense weight off our shoulders and how much I wish I could hug each and every one. Thank you.”

To support the Campbells in their time of need, visit the Go Fund Me fundraiser at <https://gofund.me/2c-9c642fb>.

Weekend Quiz

- What is the street address of the White House?
- What kind of dog is Scooby-Doo?
- The practice of drawing electoral district boundaries to give one political party an advantage is called?
- What is the main body of an aircraft called?
- What is the largest country in Africa by area?
- What does DNA stand for?
- Who is Katy Perry currently dating?
- What is Warren Buffett’s company called?
- Who is Bluey the dog’s sister?
- True or False. A group of geese is called a gaggle.

By Jake Grant

This week’s answers are found on pg. 39

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Christmas at McCully's

Christmas Trees have arrived

We have fresh cut Balsam and Fraser Fur ranging from 5' to 9' tall. Prices start at \$47.50

Photos with Santa

Lucid Musings Photography will be back at McCully's for family Christmas photos on Dec. 6/7 and 13/14 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Cost is \$15.00 and a donation to the local Foodbank.

Fresh Christmas Turkeys

Call the store to order your fresh turkey. Orders must be in prior to Dec. 10th. Turkeys range in size from 12 lbs to 24 lbs. (approximately). We also have frozen farm raised roasting chickens in the freezer.

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Experience the magic of the holidays in St. Marys

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

The Town of St. Marys continues to sparkle throughout the season, illuminated by the WinterLights display and the annual Holiday Light Tour.

Each evening from 5-11 p.m., Milt Dunnell Field glows with festive lights, and residents and visitors can experience the magic on a horse-drawn wagon ride. Rides are offered on Dec. 5 and 6 from 5-8 p.m., as well as Dec. 13, 20 and 24 from 6-8 p.m.

This year's Holiday Light Tour features beautifully decorated homes spread across town. To join the tour, download and print the map at www.discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays, or pick up a hard copy at any municipal facility. Participating homes will keep their lights shining until Jan. 1, 2026.

Back by popular demand, the WinterLights Night Market returns to Milt Dunnell Field on Dec. 5 and 6 from 5-8

p.m. Browse unique products from local vendors and artisans, enjoy free horse-and-wagon rides, warm up by the fire with roasted s'mores and savour tasty offerings from local food trucks. Plus, a free shuttle departs every half hour from Milt Dunnell Field to the King Family House, where children can hand-deliver their holiday letters to Santa.

The Coca-Cola Holiday Caravan Tour is coming to Milt Dunnell Field on Saturday, Dec. 13, from 6-9 p.m. Join in the holiday spirit and enjoy a cheerful visit from Santa. For a full list of holiday activities, visit www.discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays.

As the Town of St. Marys celebrates the spirit of the season, the town is inviting locals and their loved ones to join in the festivities and make lasting holiday memories. Stay connected for the latest event updates, special announcements and helpful reminders by following the Town of St. Marys on Facebook, Instagram and X for updates and reminders.

Open House at Country Roots Fresh Market



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

Country Roots Fresh Market held their Christmas open house on Nov. 15. They had many gifts for sale including fresh and artificial arrangements, and the vendors market in the greenhouse featured giftware, baking, preserves and frozen foods. Pictured above are employees Abby Jeffery, Hannah Bickell and Izzy Reid.

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St. Marys actor, Alba Evora Weiler, shines at The Grand Theatre

WENDY LAMOND

Independent Reporter

When I sat down with Alba Evora Weiler to learn about her current role as Elsa in *Disney's Frozen* at the Grand Theatre, my first thought was, "This girl is going places."

She was very well spoken, informative but what caught my attention more than anything was the love and passion she has for performing and being part of something magical.

Weiler started performing at the young age of seven in a small role in a TV show called *In the Dark*. Since then, she has been in the TV series *Under the Banner of Heaven* and *Borje*. At the age of 10, she got involved in musical theatre and absolutely fell in love with it. The love of theatre took her out to Calgary where she played Nina Barron in the play, *Beaches at Theatre Calgary* and then back to The Grand Theatre where she played Brigitta in *The Sound of Music*.

Weiler is represented by talent agent Sav Murthy through the Noble Coplan Talent Agency. When *Disney's Frozen* was announced at The Grand, Weiler was very excited for the chance to audition. Thanks to her previous performance at the Grand, she was able to



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Talented Alba Evora Weiler plays the role of Elsa in *Disney's Frozen* at the Grand Theatre. On now until January 4th

keep calm as she knew many people in the room. Weiler received a call-back with all the other called-back Elsas and Annas. In groups, they had to

perform a whole scene and execute the songs.

About a week later, Weiler's parents gave her a present saying they wanted to express how good she was doing at a new school. What they gave her was an Elsa doll, and that is how Weiler found out she got the role. They found out at the end of September and rehearsals started on Nov. 4.

It was a hectic schedule with rehearsals taking place every day ex-

cept Mondays, from either 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 3-6 p.m. and on weekends from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Once rehearsals finished, the cast started performing with bare-minimum props leading up to tech week. At that point, they started performing on the stage with the real sets, perfecting technical aspects like lighting, sound and special effects that include quick costume changes.

The cast has become like a family after spending so much time together.

"What I like best about performing is that you get to see things that take place behind the scenes that the audience doesn't get to see and how it all comes together," Weiler said. "It is great to see the difference from the start to when it all starts to run smoothly."

"There is something so magical about having a room full of people cheering for you at the end".

The show started at the Grand on Nov. 18 and, due to popular demand, it has already been extended to Jan. 4. Weiler shares the role of young Elsa with actress Kylie Prouty. It is double cast to keep the schedule manageable for the students. Weiler is part of the Reindeer Cast.

What's next for Weiler? She just likes going with the flow and if there is a musical theatre audition that comes up that she really wants, then she will go for it and has no problem with travelling.

"Everyone should definitely come to the show. It is so good, and you won't regret it," Weiler said.

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Local boys to host eighth and final year of their annual toy drive

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Over the years, Porter and Colton have raised over \$40,000, providing Christmas gifts, food support and gift cards to families throughout Lucan, St. Marys, Ailsa Craig and the surrounding areas. Their efforts even

earned them a place on the 2024 Town of Lucan Biddulph Mayor's Honour Roll.

But beyond awards and dollar amounts, it's the people they've met, the families helped, the volunteers who lifted them up and the commu-

nity that worked beside them that has shaped their journey most. Also, a big part of the boy's adventure has been Colton's mom, Lyndsay.

If the toy drive had a home away from home, it would be the toy aisles of Canadian Tire in St. Marys.

Across four ownership teams, the store has been a pillar of generosity. Discounts, support, guidance and encouragement have helped the boys stretch every dollar into as many toys as possible. A standout figure at the St. Marys Canadian Tire has always been Shannon Clifford-Rooney, who has remained a dedicated advocate through every transition. Her ongoing enthusiasm and commitment have made her one of the toy drive's most influential long-term supporters.

The boys' biggest donation to date and one of the highlights of the 2025 campaign came when Forbes Waterloo Mazda donated \$2,500, naming the boys their 2025 Mazda Legends. Representatives Kevin Sholdice, Anna and the Mazda Canada team surprised the boys with the honour, pushing them over their 2024 Fund-raising goal of \$13,000.

The recognition is one of several memorable experiences the boys have received over the years, including an

appearance at the Night of Heroes Fashion Show run by Community Living London and several interviews on AM 980 with broadcaster Mike Stubbs.

Throughout its eight-year run, Porter & Colton's Toy Drive has gained support from a wide range of community groups, organizations, and individuals including:

- Lucan Lions
- Lucan Small Businessmen
- Lucan Legion Branch 540
- Nicholas Smith Memorial Group
- The River Bend Bottles Collection

Hundreds of residents have also contributed through bottle drives, toy donations, Canadian Tire Money and e-transfer contributions.

Though 2025 will mark the final year of this charitable initiative, it's Porter's hope this legacy of kindness and community service inspires others for years to come.

For anyone interested in donating to support the toy drive's final season, donations are being accepted through the charity's Facebook page, "Porter & Colton's Toy and Food Drive." Triangle Rewards points may also be donated at Canadian Tire St. Marys checkout counters at the time of purchase.





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Canadian fiddle champion Scott Woods and his band bringing Christmas Hoedown to Stratford and Ailsa Craig

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Local fiddle fans and those who enjoy Christmas music or a good, old-fashioned variety show will have two opportunities next month to catch Canadian fiddle champion Scott Woods and his band perform their Christmas Hoedown.

With shows scheduled for St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Stratford at 2 p.m. Dec. 14 and the Ailsa Craig Recreation Centre, just half an hour down the road from St. Marys, at 7 p.m. Dec. 16, the Christmas Hoedown promises two hours of toe-tapping family fun sure to set the holiday season off on the right foot.

"It's been really well-loved; everyone just gravitates to it," Woods told the Independent during a pit stop on the Alberta leg of his cross-country Christmas Hoedown tour. "We started on Nov. 1, which is really quite early for a Christmas show. I was worried it was the day after Halloween; people might not be ready to get into the Christmas spirit. But actually, it was the opposite. The crowds have been great and they absolutely love the show, and they go home singing 'Jingle Bells' and all their Christmas favourites."

"The show that we build is a real variety show. You don't have to be a fiddle fan by any means or a country music fan. That's sort of the flavour that the Christmas music takes when we present it, but it's certainly a Christmas show – a family variety show. ... There's some fast, fun stuff, costumes, lots of humour and some serious Christmas stuff as well with songs and an inspirational story. There's really something for everybody, even the kids."

To help bring this show to life, Woods is backed by a

stellar group of artists including his sister, Kendra Norris, on piano, fiddle and vocals, three-time Canadian open step-dancing champion, drummer and fiddle player Leo Stock, Canadian Country Music Awards Guitar Player of the Year Steve Piticco on guitar and vocals, and renowned husband-and-wife bluegrass duo Nadine and Gary Boles – Nadine Boles on acoustic guitar and vocals and Gary Boles on bass and vocals.

Woods says each member of the band brings something unique and entertaining to the show, from Stock's lightning-fast feet as a world-class step dancer to Nadine Boles' hauntingly beautiful vocals that bring depth to Christmas favourites.

And while the show is reminiscent of a traditional Christmas concert, there are newer elements that highlight the multitude of talents of the artists on stage.

"Our musical arrangements are pretty retro, they're pretty old time. We dress with matching outfits on the stage like old-time bands used to back in the '50s and '60s, and we still incorporate high-tech. We have a great sound and lighting system, and we have GoPro cameras on the stage and big-screen projection so you can see Leo's feet up close and personal on the big screen while he's dancing, and Steve's fingers while he's playing guitar, and my fingers when I'm playing fiddle. We have other visual images that enhance the songs and the stories we're telling."

"It's a real fun, kind of retro but modern approach to Christmas music," Woods said.

For more information and to purchase tickets for the Stratford show, visit scottwoods.ca/event/stratford-on-christmas-hoedown/. For more information and to purchase tickets for the Ailsa Craig show, visit scottwoods.ca/event/aisla-craig-on-christmas-hoedown/.



(PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT WOODS)

Canadian fiddle champion Scott Woods and his band are bringing their Christmas Hoedown show to Stratford on Dec. 14 and Ailsa Craig on Dec. 16.

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SPOTLIGHT ON ARTS & CULTURE

‘A Light in the Dark’: Paul Nicholson’s lifelong dialogue with colour, nature and the human impulse to create



(DUNCAN MACDONALD PHOTO)

London Artist Paul Nicholson opens his “A Light in the Dark” exhibition at St. Marys Station Gallery Nov. 29.

DUNCAN MACDONALD

St. Marys Station Gallery Executive Director

As winter’s darkest stretch settles over southwestern Ontario, the St. Marys Station Gallery is preparing to open an exhibition that feels like a much-needed antidote.

“A Light in the Dark,” featuring the work of London-based artist Paul Nicholson, arrives with the promise of bold hues, nature-inspired forms and an artistic philosophy steeped deeply in the simple yet profound human desire to make things.

Nicholson, who has been creating art since childhood, describes himself as a nature-loving artist who has never stopped experimenting. His body of work spans acrylics, oils, watercolour, ink, collage, assemblage and postcard-sized explorations. His themes – flowers, birds, maps, landscapes, self-portraits, abstracts, fruit with halos – form a vast visual diary that spans decades. Some pieces spring from sudden inspiration; others emerge from leisurely pattering, as he calls it. But all share a defining characteristic: an unapologetic embrace of colour.

“I love colour,” Nicholson says, summing up both his aesthetic and the role his work will play in a midwinter exhibition. “This show will run through the winter solstice and the darkest days of the year. We need an antidote to all of that darkness.”

This impulse toward brightness is hardly stylistic alone. It speaks to the emotional dimension of Nicholson’s practice – a practice he describes as both instinctive and enduring.

“I think making art is part of the human condition. I am, therefore I make,” he said. “I’m glad this impulse hasn’t atrophied.”

Though Nicholson has produced thousands of works over the years, much of it has seldom been seen by the public. He has sold pieces and exhibited in galleries, but he admits he was long unmotivated to share widely. Many of his pieces were made for himself or gifted quietly to friends and family. Most, he notes, simply “live in boxes.”

In 2018, that private archive reached what he calls “a fever pitch.” He culled hundreds of works – entire boxes of them – creating space both literal and mental. Yet he continued to produce. Art was simply something he did, as essential as breathing, regardless of whether the world looked on.

Now older, he finds himself less concerned about whether viewers can “decode” the autobiographical symbols within his images. This shift has opened the door to exhibitions like “A Light in the Dark,” where he shares work that once might have remained unseen.

Nicholson’s current body of work can be traced back to the 1980s, when he became more disciplined about creating. But despite that discipline – or perhaps because of it – his practice remains fluid.

“I always have my paints and other art materials close at hand,” he said. “They are an ever-present reminder that it’s always a good idea to make art.”

He now produces hundreds of small-scale works each year. Sometimes he falls into a painting rhythm; other times, a collage-making “kick.” He works from life, from photographs, or from any image that strikes him as visually compelling. His technique is layered: first a drawing, sometimes resembling a colouring-book outline; then a base coat; then a second, more refined round of paint; and finally, once dry, touches of ink to sharpen details or create texture.

He recently painted a series of cos-



(DUNCAN MACDONALD PHOTO)

A work in progress by London artist Paul Nicholson.

mos flowers – examples he uses to describe his process. The progression from sketch to finished piece reveals the care and intention behind what can initially appear spontaneous.

Nicholson’s artistic lineage is eclectic. He draws inspiration from artists working in radically different media and at dramatically different scales. The collages of Nick Bantock, Joseph Cornell and Jiří Kolář influence his own love of paper and assemblage. The beauty and technical skill of painters like Frederic Leighton appeal to his sensibility even if his own work diverges from academic styles. He admires Paterson Ewen’s focus on weather and nature, Cliff Eycland’s tiny-format paintings and the virtuosity of watercolourist Liane Bedard.

He notes, cheerfully, that when he once asked ChatGPT to describe his style, it called it “post-impressionistic.” While not consciously aligned with any movement or manifesto, Nicholson acknowledges that artists inevitably absorb ideas from what they read, see and admire.

For Nicholson, art is not an optional practice but a fundamental human one. He frames it not solely as visual art, but as part of a broader creative impulse.

“People have made art across millennia and in every culture. It’s what we do,” he said. “If we aren’t expressing ourselves creatively, people are lacking something that is foundational.”

He emphasizes that creative output need not be monumental to be meaningful. Painting, singing, dancing, knitting – any form of making, he argues, satisfies a human need and enriches a life.

Visual art, he says, can play an essential social role as well; transporting viewers to a peaceful mental space, or, in the case of politically charged work, shifting public consciousness. He cites Picasso’s “Guernica” and the works

of Banksy as examples of art that has shaped conversation and worldview.

Nicholson’s journey began in London, Ont., where he still lives. His parents encouraged his interest early, enrolling him in classes at the local museum and fostering a home environment where visual art mattered.

“I liked making art as a kid, and I just never stopped,” he said.

He still owns some of his earliest pieces from the 1960s – bird paintings that foreshadow not only his adult aesthetic but his ongoing passion for birdwatching.

Though he never formally studied fine art or art history, Nicholson has immersed himself in both subjects through reading, gallery-going and personal exploration. Even during the busiest periods of his life – raising children or managing work demands – he rarely stepped away from creating for long.

“If I have a show, I’ll paint every day,” he said. “It’s never a chore.”

As “A Light in the Dark” prepares to open, Nicholson and curator Duncan MacDonald aim to bring a burst of warmth and brightness to St. Marys. The timing is deliberate; as daylight dwindles, Nicholson’s love of colour becomes more than an aesthetic choice – it becomes a gesture toward joy and resilience.

In a season defined by scarcity of light, Nicholson offers abundance. Not answers, not grand theories – just colour, nature and the steadfast belief that to create is to be human.

“A Light in the Dark” by Paul Nicholson opens at the St. Marys Station Gallery on Nov. 29 and runs until Jan. 17, 2026. For more information on what is happening at the gallery, visit www.st-marystationgallery.ca.

Festive creativity is the focus during and after the holiday season at the St. Marys Station Gallery

ALEX HUNT

Independent Reporter

Holiday-themed programming, soirees and a new art exhibition will keep art lovers entertained until Christmas, followed by a unique 2026 chapter for the St. Marys Station Gallery.

Curator and director at the St. Marys Station Gallery Duncan MacDonald is excited to bring “A Light in the Dark,” a new exhibit featuring the works of London-based artist Paul Nicholson. The exhibit will run from Nov. 29 to Jan. 17, 2026, giving locals a chance to explore Nicholson’s trademark style of colour, nature and beauty.

MacDonald promises the exhibit will transport visitors into a world of colour and playfulness, where attendees will have a variety of inexpensive pieces to purchase from.

A festive soiree will take place at the gallery on Dec. 19 from 6:30-8:30 p.m., allowing community members to immerse themselves in Nicholson’s exhibit while socializing and enjoying refreshments.

Holiday-themed programming is also a focus for MacDonald, who runs five classes a week.

“I plan our programs around what’s happening in the community. For Re-

membrance Day, we focused on that, and we did the same for Thanksgiving,” said MacDonald. “We’ll be continuing that approach over the holidays as well.

“What I’ve found fascinating about these programs is that the kids can focus on something for two or three hours without a screen in front of them or the influence of their peers. In a world so dominated by technology, it’s really helping them build confidence in themselves.

For the adults, MacDonald says creating art provides them an opportunity to slow down, socialize and build friendships, which culminate in a rewarding and cost-friendly experience.

From Jan. 17 to March 7, 2026, MacDonald will run the gallery’s next show called, “The Art Olympics,” which will feature pieces by local children who participated in the gallery’s 2025 programming.

“With the Art Olympics, I’ll be inviting a jury of people to judge and rank the work; it’s meant to be a playful show,” said MacDonald. “There’s been so much amazing art created in this space, and it’s incredible to see how far people have come since they first started. It’s really a group show that celebrates their growth.”



(ALEX HUNT PHOTO)

Duncan MacDonald, curator/director at the St. Marys Station Gallery.

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Kinna Sohna celebrates 25 years of craftsmanship and ethical fashion in Stratford

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Independent Reporter

Kinna Sohna, the boutique space at 55 York St. in Stratford, is celebrating 25 years of traditional craftsmanship and ethical fashion with 15 per cent off most items from Dec. 4-7.

Kinna Sohna translates to “how beautiful” or “how handsome” in Punjabi – a fitting name for a shop built around handmade artistry. Owner Sartaj Kaur moved her boutique from Toronto’s designer district to Stratford eight years ago. With the rising financial pressures of the city, she knew it was time for a shift and set her sights on finding the right home for her work. Stratford ended up being exactly that.

“I really was just following my heart,” said Kaur. “I wanted to leave Toronto. I wanted to be in a small town. This location became available and some of my customers from here kept saying I should move to Stratford, and it worked out for me; the timing was just right.”

In her 30s, after stepping away from the corporate world, Kaur found herself drawn to textiles. She began exploring the craft more deeply, learning everything she could about fabrics, production and the global textile landscape. Coming from a family with a strong business background, she knew entrepreneurship was where she was headed – but doing it ethically was non-negotiable.

“I wanted to do something creative,” she said. “I would talk to anybody who was doing what they loved. I talked to them and asked, ‘How did you get to do what you loved?’ to learn from them. I started this business when I was 35, so I did a lot of soul searching. I went through the book, *Artist’s Way*, about three times. A book that really impacted me was *Creating a Life Worth Living*. I spent a lot of time figuring out what gives me joy.”

Today, her clothing line is produced through an ethical textile cooperative in India, where artisans earn



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

Kinna Sohna owner Sartaj Kaur stands inside her Stratford boutique, surrounded by the handcrafted, fair-trade garments and textiles she designs and sources from artisans across the world.

fair wages, have democratic input and have access to essentials like health care and clean water. Kaur chooses her partner communities based on personal experience and meaningful relationships, travelling yearly to work and learn alongside the makers themselves.

“I feel like I’ve been successful all this time because I’m present while all of the work is being done,” she said. “I’m (in India) on the floor, packing boxes and I get to be there while they’re sewing. I buy the fabric

and sometimes I’m the one going to the block printers and bringing fabric to them.”

Kinna Sohna offers something rare: slow-fashion pieces created with intention. The clothing is vibrant, unique and thoughtfully designed – a mix of bold patterns, memorable colours and timeless silhouettes. Kaur says the shop is for anyone looking to elevate their style while still being mindful of what they’re purchasing and where it comes from.

“My stuff is truly slow fashion – it’s sustainable,” said Kaur. “There’s the person who washes the fabric, the person who prepares it for printing, then the block printer, then another person washing it again and someone else laying the fabric out in the fields. There are so many people involved – the ones I buy buttons and thread from, as well as the embroiderers themselves. It’s almost like supporting a whole village.”

Most pieces in the store are designed by Kaur and crafted from natural, handmade fibres. The collection includes clothing for both men and women, ranging from XS to 4XL, with each item created as a one-of-a-kind piece.

The shop also carries globally sourced carpets, handcrafted jewellery and other artisan-made items. Everything in the store – every pattern, print, stitch and textile – comes with its own story.

Kaur is deeply involved in every step of the process and is on site to help shoppers find the right fit, colour and style. Her knowledge of the craft, paired with her personal approach, is part of why her customer base has stayed loyal over the past 25 years.

Being a woman in business hasn’t always been easy, Kaur says. From selecting textiles abroad to unpacking new arrivals in the shop, the work is hands-on and often labour-intensive. But the reward is in seeing people wear and cherish pieces that are made to last.

In a culture dominated by disposable fashion, Kinna Sohna offers something different – clothing meant to be loved, cared for and passed down through generations.

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Perth County council approves phased-in pay raise for warden, deputy warden and councillors

Phased-in approach to begin with new slate of councillors in 2027

GALEN SIMMONS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As of 2027, after next year's municipal elections in all four of the county's lower-tier municipalities usher in new councils, members of Perth County council will begin seeing an increase to their base pay.

Based on a market review of pay for the wardens/mayors, deputy wardens/deputy mayors and councillors of 11 comparator municipalities – Lambton, Lennox and Addington, Dufferin, Grey, Bruce, Middlesex and Peterborough counties, as well as all four of Perth County's lower-tier municipalities – Marianne Love of ML Consulting recommended the county increase the base pay for warden, deputy warden and councillors to the 45th percentile of its comparators – the same percentile target used by the county to adjust pay for non-union management staff.

"The 45th percentile is ... the dollar amount where 55 per cent of the (comparator pay) values are above and 45 per cent are below," Love said. "So, this is not the highest, this is not the lowest, it's not the middle; it's below the middle of that group. ... The base-pay rates for the council elected officials in the County of Perth are low, and it's something for council to consider as you move into the next year of council."

In 2025, the warden is paid a base salary of \$31,614 and councillors are paid \$14,490 with no distinction for the position of deputy warden. Following her remuneration review, Love recommended increasing the warden's base pay to \$39,606 plus inflation and cost of living adjustments (a 25 per-cent increase); increasing the deputy warden's pay to \$25,114 plus inflation and cost of living (a 73 per-cent increase); and increasing councillor pay to \$22,771 plus inflation and cost of living (a 57 per-cent increase).

While councillors saw the need to increase council pay, each spoke in favour of reducing the impact of a council pay increase on the taxpayer, opting for a phased-in approach from 2027-2029.

"It probably does need to be adjusted and, if you're going to adjust it, I think you have to phase it in over a period of time; I don't think it's something you can do in one or two years," said Coun. Walter McKenzie, who represents West Perth on county council. "I think you have to phase it in even over a whole term of council. There's no question, as it's been said, (Perth County has) the lowest (pay) of all the (comparator) counties, so that tells you something."

"I think to continue to get quality representatives on council, you've got to (pay them) properly."

Ultimately, council voted in favour of the pay increase beginning with 50 per cent of the total increase in 2027 to bring council pay in Perth County closer in line with other counties, and then 25 per cent of the increase in 2028 and the final 25 per cent in 2029. Council opted to phase the pay increase over three years instead of the four-year term of lower-tier councils so the increase will be fully implemented before the next review of council pay set for 2030.

Though Love did not recommend any increases to council benefits, allowances and meeting or event per diems, councillors had a few suggestions of their own.

"The professional development (allowance) was set maybe 10 years ago next year, in 2016, and obviously, the hotel rates, the registration rates have increased," said Coun. Jerry Smith, who represents Perth East on county council. "That would be the spot where I think an increase would be needed."

"I think if we increase anything, I would like to see the per diem increase if we go to an event because for all of us, especially if you work for another person, if you give up that pay and if you have a family, some of the councillors can't afford to do that," added Coun. Rhonda Ehgoetz, also a representative of Perth East. "If they only get, say, \$130 from us or \$240, whatever it is, they're actually leaving their full-time job. They're making, I'm sure, more at that job in that same time period. I'm wondering if we should just be upping that."

Currently, the warden is provided a maximum of \$6,000

per year and councillors are given a maximum of \$4,000 per year toward professional-development costs. All members of council are offered per diems for conferences, workshops and other training events at \$210.18 for a meeting that lasts over four hours and \$138.84 for meetings under four hours.

Council voted to have staff review the professional development and per diem rates with Love's assistance to determine potential increases to both.

St. Marys United Church

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Dec 2

COCA-COLA HOLIDAY CARAVAN
Dec 13 | Milt Dunnell Field | 6 - 9 PM

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Nov 28, 2025 - Jan 1, 2026
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More than \$7,000 raised by the St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxilliary in October



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxiliary members Joyce Mulholland, Colleen Smith and Vivian Reid are with Arlene Lanting, manager of the hospital's inpatient and ER department, displaying the negative pressure wound vac.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
Peter Westelaken and Eddie Powers of DDB Carpentry have been taking advantage of the good weather to work on the hospital's gazebo.

JANIS FREAD
Contributed Article

We surpassed our goal! Our three fundraising events in October raised over \$7,000, which enabled the St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxiliary to fulfill our commitments for 2025. A big thank you to all who supported the bake sale, The Stitch Market and the Bingo.

Due to the reasonable weather recently, DDB Carpentry has been able to erect the new siding and has the window

framing in place on the gazebo, ready for a spring 2026 opening. This project has been generously supported by the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation and a donor from the community.

The Auxiliary's other commitment was the negative pressure wound vac, which is a medical device that uses controlled suction to help heal wounds by creating a moist, protective healing environment. The machine speeds up the healing process for chronic, acute and surgical wounds.

With the generous support of Jackson's Pharmacy, the Auxiliary was again able to replenish the patient care kits which provide toiletries for in-patients. Jackson's also donated another basket of cuddly stuffies, which are given to children waiting in the ER who may need extra comfort.

Plans are percolating for more ways to benefit our hospital in 2026, and our

new members are sharing some exciting new fundraising ideas! Watch for more updates. Best wishes for a very Merry Christmas from the St. Marys Memorial Hospital Auxiliary.

For updates on fundraising events or to become a volunteer, follow the Auxiliary on Facebook at The Boutique at St. Marys Memorial Hospital or email smmhauxiliary@gmail.com.

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Rae Announces over \$10 million for local municipalities through Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT

Staff Contribution

Combined, communities in Perth-Wellington will receive more than \$10 million through the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF) for 2026, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae announced in a press release.

Included in this funding is an increase of over \$700,000 from the 2025 OMPF. The OMPF is the province's main general assistance grant to municipalities.

"The Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund provides funding directly to our local municipalities, which can use the money to address pressing local needs," Rae said in the release. "I am proud that our government understands the importance of rural Ontario. This increased investment into our municipalities will provide them with the support they need to build our communities and attract new investments."

The municipalities in Perth-Wellington will see an average increase of over 7.5 per cent in their funding allocations this year. As detailed below, St. Marys will receive \$673,300 – up from \$624,300 this year (an increase by 7.8 per cent) – and Perth South will get \$490,700 – up from 455,800 this year (an increase by nearly 7.7 per cent).

For 2026, the OMPF will include an additional increase of \$50 million to provide a total of \$600 million in unconditional funding to 388 municipalities. The

Municipality	2025 OMPF Funding	2026 OMPF Funding	Additional Funding
North Perth	\$ 1,867,800	\$ 2,047,100	\$ 179,300
West Perth	\$ 1,088,700	\$ 1,182,300	\$ 93,600
Perth East	\$ 1,268,600	\$ 1,378,800	\$ 110,200
Perth South	\$ 455,800	\$ 490,700	\$ 34,900
St. Marys	\$ 624,300	\$ 673,300	\$ 49,000
Minto	\$ 1,521,500	\$ 1,579,000	\$ 57,500
Mapleton	\$ 1,048,000	\$ 1,133,300	\$ 85,300
Wellington North	\$ 1,483,600	\$ 1,585,400	\$ 101,800
Total	\$ 9,358,300	\$ 10,069,900	\$ 711,600

2026 OMPF funding as provided by the Ontario Ministry of Finance.

(CONTRIBUTED IMAGE)

\$50-million enhancement will be targeted to small, northern and rural municipalities and those with a limited property tax base. This funding will assist municipalities in providing critical municipal services to people across the province.

Ontario has been steadily increasing support to municipalities. From 2019-2024, key provincial support to municipalities grew by over 45 per cent. In 2024 alone, the government provided over \$10 billion to Ontario municipalities through key transfers, which include an additional \$1 billion through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF) over five years starting in

2022, nearly \$654 million annually through the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) and almost \$380 million to help 102 municipalities improve local transit through the 2024-2025 Gas Tax program.

The province is working with municipalities to build more homes for people and families. Ontario has invested over \$2 billion in critical housing and community-enabling infrastructure through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, complementing support already being provided through the Building Faster Fund.



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Annual Toy Drive held at St. Marys Canadian Tire



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

On Saturday, Nov. 15 the Salvation Army, in collaboration with the Stratford Police Service, held its annual toy drive at the Canadian Tire in St.Marys. Pictured left to right are Michael Tigani, foodbank support worker; Raelynn Marshall, family services worker; Const. Wanda Hughes and Jennifer Morris, Community Family Services manager.

From the council chambers to the kitchen



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

On Nov. 3 the community dinner was held at the St. Marys United Church with Mayor Al Strathdee and the town councillors providing a lovely meal assisted by volunteers. Pictured are Lorrie, Abby, Mayor Strathdee, Councillors Luna and Craigmile, Deputy Mayor Aylward, Sarah, Daniel, Shirley and Jenny.

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St. Marys Craft Show a resounding success



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

The St. Marys Craft Show was held on Nov. 15 with over 60 local and regional artisans participating. Pictured are Dorothy and Terry Davis who have been working with glass for over 30 years. They have made everything from stained glass lights, angels, Santas, suncatchers and many other custom-made items.



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

Many people from the Friendship Centre spend their time knitting, crocheting, and making crafts to put in this show. All the proceeds are donated back to the Friendship Centre to provide for the various programs they have. Pictured are Rose Feinweb, Margaret Teskey and Debbie Elming.

Stratford police and Perth County OPP launch annual campaign against impaired driving

ST. MARYS INDEPENDENT
Staff Contribution

The Stratford Police Service (SPS) and Perth County OPP recently joined forces to kick off the festive season with their annual holiday campaign against impaired driving.

On Nov. 20, the SPS and OPP launched

the campaign throughout Perth County, setting up in the City of Stratford, as well as the towns of Sebringville and Mitchell. This marks the kickoff of the annual Festive RIDE (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) Campaign that runs throughout the holiday season.

During the campaign, drivers should expect to see increased police pres-

ence as officers conduct RIDE initiatives 24-hours a day, seven days a week, in the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, Municipality of Perth South and throughout the entirety of Perth County.

The Festive RIDE Campaign is led by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and is a collaboration with all Ontario police services to keep roads free

of alcohol-impaired and drug-impaired drivers.

The Stratford police and Perth County OPP jointly remind everyone to do their part throughout the festive season and beyond by always driving while sober and never allowing anyone to drive while impaired by alcohol or drugs.

◆ ‘Jorie’s Odds & Ends’ ◆
An Afternoon of Eclectic Music: Folk, Gospel & Country

SATURDAY

DEC. 6TH 2:30 PM

First Baptist Church, 34 Church St. South



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Lee Pickel (Guitar, Vocals)

- with -

Rowan Pickel (Bass Guitar)
Eliana Pickel (Drums)

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SALE IS BACK!



SATURDAY | DEC. 6TH

10AM - NOON

First Baptist Church of St. Marys
34 Church Street South

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Custom painted rocks with anything you can imagine! Check out this crafter's website on... www.facebook.com/kcrocks.2025

Warmables, one of a kind flannel baby blankets, Elf on the Shelf accessories, and lavender eye pillows

Quilts of various sizes, reusable shopping/gift bags, receiving blankets, burp cloths, drool bibs, pillow cases, playing card holders, cell phone stands, chap stick/ lighter holders, as well as pocket tissue holders!

Lavender neck warmers, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, rings among other things!

COME ON OUT AND SEE ALL OF US ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29TH FROM 10-5!

Light refreshments available in sitting room. All crafters are able to do custom orders as well... just ask if you want something different than what you see at this show!

EVENT IS DOWNSTAIRS. NO WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY.

Apples for sale!



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTO)

This eye-catching display shows many varieties of apples, pears, and apple cider on sale at a booth set up in front of the town hall on Sunday, Nov. 23. Pictured above is Melody Arnhold selling some of her honey crisp apples grown and produced by Forest Hill Orchard located in Forest, Ont. under the ownership of Rod and Melody Arnhold.

Stonetown Arts hosts opening reception for annual show and sale



(CATHY ATWELL PHOTO)

Stonetown Arts hosted the opening reception for its 14th Annual Art Show & Sale Nov. 21. The show continues this week at Riverwalk Commons, 84 Water St. S., on Friday and Saturday (Nov. 28 and 29) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days.

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Making kids' ER visits 'bearable'



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Riddhi Patel and Marcy Taylor received some more teddy bears at the St. Marys Memorial Hospital ER department. The bears are donated throughout the year from the Teddy Bear Reunion that takes place every August. The money raised from that event supplies the hospital with these cute stuffies to help a child's visit to the ER be more calm and bearable.



(WENDY LAMOND PHOTO)

Christmas teddy bears have arrived at Cascade Cleaners. All the proceeds from the bears goes toward the Teddy Bear Reunion, which raises money to buy teddy bears for the hospital. A draw is being held at Cascade Cleaners for a large Teddy Bear. For details pop into the store and see Marlene.



PERTH COUNTY OPP



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Santa comes to Stonetown



(NANCY BICKELL PHOTOS)

The hour-long Kinsmen Santa Claus Parade was a huge success with people lining the route along James Street South and into the downtown area. Pictured upper right is Clara Marcaccio waiting patiently for the parade to start.





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St. Marys Independent **SPORTS**

U13 A Boys take home gold at Collingwood Silverstick

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The St. Marys Firefighters U13 A Boys St. Marys Rock captured gold at the Collingwood Regional Silver Stick Nov. 13-16.

With the win, the Rock will compete at the International Silver Stick in Michigan in January.

Throughout the tournament, the Rock did well under plenty of pressure and displayed a strong compete level, with head coach Merlin Malinowski highlighting the team's ability to overcome adversity.

"The boys were tested on the weekend for sure," Malinowski told the Independent. "We had some close games, which we hadn't had too many of this year. It was nice to see them face that adversity and overcome it. They didn't panic and they played well under pressure."

Malinowski also praised the team's depth for bringing a well-rounded game up and down the lineup.

"We have three equal lines where you are never nervous to send one out because they're just so well balanced," said Malinowski. "We have six really good defencemen who defend extremely well in their own end and move the puck quickly and accurately to the forwards."

St. Marys faced the Waterloo Wolves in the semi-final, and the Rock quickly got out to an early lead with Charles Coppins scoring five minutes before the end of the first. Waterloo fired back in the middle of the second, but with the clock winding down in the period, St. Marys struck back with captain Keaton Ward restoring the lead for the Rock going into the third period.

The Rock wasn't just scoring but playing elite defence with strong goaltending to back it up. Different players were showing up at different moments



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The St. Marys Firefighters U13 A Boys St. Marys Rock took the championship banner at the Collingwood Regional Silver Stick Nov. 13-16. Pictured laying on the ice, from left to right, are Matthew McCarty and Luke Savile. Pictured kneeling, from left, are assistant coach Deon Keller, Myles Havens, Gavin Santagapita, Theo Keller, Joey Brown, Attley Ehgoetz and Talon Nov. In the third row, from left, are goalie coach Harper Murrell, Jax Parsons, Nick Simons, Talan Ward, Owen Robertson, Emmett Parkinson, Keaton Ward, Liam Showers, Charles Coppins, Hudson Monteith, assistant coach Jonathan Ward and trainer Jeremy Savile. In the back row, from left, are assistant coach Mark Monteith and head coach Merlin Malinowski.

for St. Marys, a theme Malinowski emphasized.

"There were so many moments of different guys at different times stepping up and making outstanding plays. I could list every one of them, they all did it, and there were times where Matthew (McCarthy) made a big blocker save in the finals. Every game, it seemed to be somebody else stepping up and playing an awesome game; everybody played well."

In the third, the momentum continued

as Myles Havens gave the Rock their third goal of the contest, which proved enough as the Rock took down Waterloo 3-2 to advance to the final.

St. Marys faced the Southeast Surge in the gold-medal game, which started off a little shaky for the Rock, which went down 1-0 early in the first period. The Rock had a hard time getting past the Surge's goaltending, but eventually, they fought back as Nicholas Simons scored to tie the game at one apiece.

From there, the Rock added another

goal on the powerplay from Talan Ward as the game turned fully in St. Marys' favour. Havens scored an insurance goal in the third period, and the Rock took the game by a score of 3-1.

Malinowski praised the team's composure, positivity and mindset displayed in the final.

"We fell behind, but we had no sense of panic," Malinowski said. "I thought after the first six or seven minutes that we were the better team and we had the puck most of the time. It was three lines all contributing and playing hard, staying positive and playing as a team out there."

"What was scaring me a bit was the other team's goaltending, as he was stopping everything. I was wondering if we were ever going to break through on him, but we did with the two goals on the powerplay in the second period. Up until then, I thought it would just be a matter of time until we beat that goalie. It just lifts the whole bench and gives you some momentum, and that's the biggest thing when you can see you can get one by him. It puts more spring in your step."

The pressure of being the top-ranked team going into the tournament never caused St. Marys to fold as, like a diamond, the pressure made the team sparkle. Malinowski credited the team for their ability to handle the pressure.

"What I really was impressed by was that they played under that pressure and stayed as a group," Malinowski said. "They didn't fragment and go in different directions; they stayed together and stayed positive with one another. That was the big test on the weekend, and we hadn't faced that. So, for them to play under that pressure in a tournament where everyone was set out to get them as the number-one-ranked team in the province was good to see."

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U11 A Boys take gold at Welland tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

The Social Thirty-One U11 A Boys St. Marys Rock earned the top prize at the Welland Little NHL tournament Nov. 14-16.

Head coach Mike Johnson told the Independent the team displayed an impressive composure in a boisterous environment.

"We were playing in some small rinks with a lot of distractions, and they showed a lot of mental toughness and perseverance," said Johnson. "There were hour-long delays, inconsistent officiating and playing in the home rink of the team we played in the finals, which made it a pretty loud, chaotic environment, but they were able to overcome all those distractions and get the job done. They really are starting to mature and show some of those characteristics of resiliency and mental toughness and not giving up when things get tough."

That maturity, according to Johnson, was also displayed in individual moments throughout the weekend.

"Lincoln (Jennings) had a great back-check which was a game-saver in the dying second of our third game," Johnson said. "They were getting what looked like an odd-man rush off a broken play in the offensive zone, and he hunted the puck down, and the guy didn't get a shot off. Then, Nico (Thompson) had another back check like that in the final game. They were key because they showed they understood the importance of that little detail. Those two knew that was needed from them at that moment, and they committed to it and gave every ounce of energy they had to do it."

The Rock took on the West Seneca Wings in the semi-final, with the Wings jumping out to a 1-0 lead with the only goal of the first period. However, an explosive second frame saw St. Marys get three unanswered goals to go up by two heading into the third. Rhett Parkinson tied the game for the Rock at the 8:47 mark of the second before Ashton Ropp and Everett Crummer found the back of the net. Ropp later added his second of the game midway through the third, and Elliott Maddock backstopped



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The Social Thirty-One U11 A Boys St. Marys Rock won the gold medal at the Welland Little NHL tournament Nov. 14-16. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Ryan Pickel and Elliott Maddock. In the second row, from left, are Owen Simons, Kai Sherwood, Kyle Johnson, Jack Anderson, Lincoln Jennings and Nico Thompson. In the third row, from left, are Tucker Posthumus, Logan Masselis, Rhett Parkinson, Everett Crummer, Bode Keller, Myles Avey and Ashton Ropp. In the fourth row, from left, are Scott Crummer, Mark Jennings, Mike Johnson, Jaden Ropp and Mitch Watt.

St. Marys to a 4-1 win.

Johnson explained how their netminder helped get them through a rocky first period before the Rock settled into the game.

"We were a little flat coming out," Johnson said. "It was a morning game, out of town at a hotel, so you can imagine they didn't necessarily get the sleep they're used to, and so we were a little bit flat getting started, but Elliott (Maddock) made some huge saves in the first period to keep us close, and then we really got rolling in the second. We just skated the other team right out of the rink."

According to Johnson, strong offensive-zone pressure by each forward line coming out of the gate in the second got the team rolling.

"The line of Ashton (Ropp), Everett (Crummer) and Tucker (Posthumus) had a forechecking shift that really set the tone. Then, Kyle (Johnson), Bode

(Keller) and Rhett (Parkinson) followed it up with another good forechecking shift, and then Lincoln (Jennings), Nico (Thompson) and Owen (Simons) followed it up right after. Once all three lines all rolled through, it just built from there."

The win over West Seneca earned the Rock a spot in the gold medal game against the host Tigers from Welland. With just under nine and a half minutes left in the first, Kyle Johnson got the Rock out to a 1-0 lead, a goal that held up as the eventual game-winner thanks to what the bench boss called goaltender Ryan Pickel's best ever game.

"Ryan (Pickel) got through that whole tournament without allowing a goal, which was pretty special," Mike Johnson said. "Ryan was just laser focused. Any time there was a mess in front of him, he covered it up and gave up no rebounds. It was just easy and relaxing, no anxious moments on the bench

because everything that hit him was swallowed right up. He was in absolute control."

Kai Sherwood added an insurance marker in the second frame as the Rock cruised to a 2-0 victory.

Mike Johnson credited both the team's defencemen and the centres for playing pivotal roles in getting the win in the championship game.

"They were really shutting things down and moving the puck well, which created a lot of opportunities for us offensively. Our defenders, Jack (Anderson), Myles (Avey), Logan (Masselis) and Kai (Sherwood) have been working really hard at what we've been trying to get them to buy into in terms of the details of footwork, positioning and communication. We really ask them to be offensive catalysts by getting the puck, getting their heads up and making plays, and they're really doing a great job of it."

"Our centremen were massive in the finals," Mike Johnson continued. "They just dominated in the faceoff circle. The team we were playing was trying to run a couple of set offensive-zone plays that they'd had success with in the tournament, and our centremen really committed to doing what they needed to do to lock that down."

Mike Johnson reflected on the tournament, noting some impressive growth in the team's shorthanded play.

"Penalty-killing for us has been a challenge all year, and we got that tested quite strongly in two of the games, especially, but we did well. We got some key saves when we needed it and the players are buying into the system we're asking them to play and starting to understand it, which says a lot for 10-year-olds when you start asking them to think about a little bit of structure out there."

"We have a mantra – 'protect the house' – and we call the puck a bomb, and we don't want the bomb in our house," added Mike Johnson. "We've got a little structure built up around that little metaphor, and the kids all seem to understand it and work towards it, and it's starting to work."

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Community Liaison Committee

The next Community Liaison Committee Meeting will be held on **Thursday, December 11th** at 6:00pm at the St. Marys Municipal Operations Center. Members of the public who wish to observe are welcome to attend.

Residents who wish to speak in front of the Committee may submit a detailed request in writing to the Committee. The request will be considered by the Committee and approved prior to the meeting.

Please submit all requests, questions, and concerns for the meeting to kara.pelissero@vcimentos.com by **Tuesday, December 9th at 10am.**

Lincs upset by Cyclones; take Sugar Kings to the limit

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Independent Sports Reporter

Despite dropping two straight games, it's hard to imagine the St. Marys Lincolns having two more different games than they did on Nov. 21 in Listowel and Nov. 23 in Elmira.

After walking into Listowel and having one of their best outings of the season on Nov. 16, picking up a 4-0 win, the Lincolns were on the receiving end of a 4-0 shutout at the hands of the Cyclones, in a game head coach Jeff Bradley called "a complete no-show."

"Nothing went right," Bradley told the Independent. "The game prior (on Nov. 16), I thought, was one of our more complete games of the season. Then a week goes by and we show up (on Nov. 21), and we were there in person, but we didn't even have a handful of guys who wanted to play that game. It was incredibly disappointing. Not a single part of our game was in order."

A scoreless first period was followed by a three-goal second period by the Cyclones, with Jack O'Donnell scoring less than two minutes into the middle stanza. Bradley Wilhelm and Clark de-Boer also scored in the second, with Dylan Szymanowski finding the back of the net in the third. Goaltender Ethan Kowatsch made 28 saves to earn the shutout, and former Lincoln Thomas Paleczny earned a pair of assists.

Bradley gave full marks to the Cyclones, who were exactly as tough as the Lincolns knew them to be.

"We didn't respect our opponent," said Bradley. "We thought we'd roll in there and beat the 11th-placed team. We spoke about it in our pregame meeting that Listowel may not have the roster that the Sutherland Cup championship team had, but they work hard, they're very organized, they're very well-coached and because we owned that entire game a week before, they were going to do everything they could to win that game. I give them a lot of credit; they played great and we could not get a single thing going."



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Oliver Lacko scores his second goal of the game during the St. Marys Lincolns' 3-2 overtime loss on Nov. 23 to the Elmira Sugar Kings.

In the dying moments of the game, Lincs' captain Chase MacQueen-Spence inadvertently hit Paleczny into the boards from behind, earning a one-game suspension. Defenceman James MacGregor missed both games due to a two-game suspension, stemming from a late-game hit on Nov. 16.

Great effort in Elmira goes unrewarded in overtime loss

The humbling defeat to Listowel demanded a big response 48 hours later when the Lincolns took on the high-powered Elmira Sugar Kings, and while the Lincolns ended up falling 3-2 in overtime, Bradley was thrilled with his team's performance.

"I absolutely loved the way we played," Bradley said. "Right from the start, we came to play and that started with Lincoln (Moore), Owen (Voortman) and Devun (Colebrook). That line with (Jacob) Montesi and (Owen) Kalp set the tone for the next shift. Lincoln went out and hit a guy, and then Devun

hit a guy, and Owen hit a guy. It just set the tone for the next shift, which was the (Ryan) Hodkinson line, and they continued it and it was just one good shift after another."

The Lincolns controlled the majority of the play throughout the game and opened the scoring at the 7:39 mark of the first when Oliver Lacko put home a rebound after a strong wraparound play by Hodkinson, who earned an assist along with Kalp.

In the second, Alex Rossi fired a long-range shot that snuck by the glove of Brogan Colquhoun, who was otherwise sharp with 28 saves on the night.

Ryan Cornfield made his mark against his old team when he jammed home a powerplay goal to put the Sugar Kings ahead 2-1 later in the second. The goal came on a five-minute powerplay for Elmira, the result of a major penalty assessed to Luke McMillan for kneeing on Sam Ratcliffe.

Just two-and-a-half minutes into the

third, Lacko scored his second of the night, this time assisted by Ethan Weir and Jack Clarke, to tie the game 2-2. The game stayed deadlocked until the end of the third, sending it into overtime where another former Lincoln came up big as Kyle Morey fired home the game-winner.

Bradley talked about the ups and downs of the weekend, noting the performance in Elmira reassured the team the loss to Listowel wasn't who they were.

"I was talking to Pat (Powers) on Friday afternoon, and we went down the lineup and I talked about how much I love our team, and then we got beat like we did and you're sitting there Saturday morning or on the drive home thinking, 'Maybe we're not as good as I thought.' But then you have a game like we had in Elmira, and even though we lost, you see how they competed and you feel, 'No, we are good.'"

"In our pregame meeting, Mike (Herman) stepped up and said, 'There are guys underperforming in here, and it's time to step up and do your job,' and they did it, and credit to them," Bradley continued. "They wanted to win that game and they did everything they could to do it. I think it's something we can build on."

The Lincolns now stare down the biggest test of their season as they face the best team in the entire Greater Ontario Hockey League (GOHL), the undefeated Cambridge RedHawks who have won all 23 games so far this year, on Nov. 28. Bradley said the squad is excited for the challenge.

"We're looking forward to getting a chance against a top team in the league," Bradley said. "This Friday is a great opportunity for us. We showed against Listowel that if we are not engaged and ready to play, we could lose to anybody. We showed against Elmira that when we are engaged, we can compete with anybody. We'll put a gameplan together, and we know we're capable of doing it, but it's on the players to execute and to do it on a consistent basis."



Photos with Santa

Photos by Jayne Fuller at The Flower Shop and More Ltd.

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Thursday, November 27th 5 - 7pm

Thursday, December 4th 5 - 7pm

Thursday, December 11th 5 - 7pm

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Proceeds donated to the St. Marys Library Pantry. (Shop St. Marys this Christmas - extended hours every Thursday evening for businesses through St. Marys!)

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MINOR SPORTS

SCRAPBOOK



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Morgan Nairn skates in and releases a shot on net during the St. Marys Kinsmen U9 C Girls St. Marys Rock game last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Sonny Grose rockets a wrist shot on goal during last Saturday's Radar Auto Parts U9 LL Boys White St. Marys Rock game.



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Liam McCutcheon fires a shot on goal during the Nicholson Concrete U11 LL Boys Blue St. Marys Rock game last Saturday.



(TURNER ROTH PHOTO)

Ethan Cubberley sends the puck towards the net during last Saturday's Tremblett's Independent Grocer U11 LL Boys Red St. Marys Rock game.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Daxton Thistle jams home a goal during the Easy Lift Doors U13 LL Boys Blue St. Marys Rock game last Saturday.



(SPENCER SEYMOUR PHOTO)

Tristan McIntosh blasts a one-timer from the wing during last Saturday's St. Marys Buick GMC U18 LL Boys St. Marys Rock game.

Six St. Marys bowlers bowl in Provincial qualifier Youth Challenge



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured from left to right are Rory Brockman, Erin Slaney, Nathan McKeen, Natalie McKeen, Bridget Stevens, and Leia Slaney. On Nov. 23, the six St. Marys youth bowlers attended the Ontario Five-Pin Bowling Association Youth Challenge at Mike's Lanes in Stratford. The bowlers competed in the five-game scratch format tournament for the opportunity to represent the Grand River zone at the Provincials at Echo Bowl on Jan. 11. There were 15 boys and 25 girls entered in the tournament, with bowlers ranging in age from 12 to 18 years old. Nathan McKeen earned a spot on the men's team, placing third with an average of 206.4. Nathan also won a certificate worth \$550 to attend Bowling School next July for having the second-highest points over average in the tournament. Brockman made the ladies' team again, coming fifth while rolling an average of 198.8. Natalie McKeen, Leia Slaney, and Erin Slaney all attended this event for the first time this year, and all bowled their average. Leia placed 14th, Natalie placed 15th, and Stevens placed 22nd.

St. Marys Bowling Lanes hosts Fall Fling tournament



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Pictured from left to right are Sabrina Billing and Jesse Brockman. Billing scored a total of 970 over four games to win the Fall Fling Strike-13 tournament on Nov. 15 to win the tournament's top prize. Billing scored 225 or higher in each of the four games. Scott Rinn came in second place with 965, missing the top spot by just five points. Sophie Brockman rounded out the top-three finishes, scoring 953.

Yes, it's that time again —
Christmas is coming fast!

Share the Spirit of Christmas with the
St. Marys Independent

Get a head start on the season with the **St. Marys Independent's Christmas Greetings**, publishing **December 18** — a great way to wish the community a Merry Christmas and thank your customers for their support.

A portion of proceeds will be **donated to St. Marys Healthcare Foundation**, helping provide care and comfort to local families.

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What I Liked best about 2025: (a reply your baby might make)

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St. Marys Gives 2025

"Won't You Be My Neighbour"

GIVING TUESDAY IS ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025!

The following list are the Giving Tuesday events that have been shared with us (as of November 23). We encourage you to support these amazing initiatives. To find out more about a particular one please reach out directly to the business/organization and check their social media and the St. Marys Giving Tuesday facebook and Instagram pages. We will continue to share everything fabulous that is happening on Tuesday, December 2nd in the Town of St. Marys! Check the window at Meridian Credit Union and see who you can "Catch Giving". Keep making yourselves proud St. Marys!

AllRoads Dodge Chrysler Jeep Limited - "Fill the Showroom" gift and clothing drive for youth aged 12-17 for the Salvation Army

Brennan Baking Co. - Proceeds from sale of coffee & cookies on Giving Tuesday donated to the Rotary Hospice "Days of Care"

Bruce & Nancy White - Cooking Class Auction

Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum - Collecting new & gently used baseball equipment for donation

Cascade Cleaners - \$2 from every order on Giving Tuesday will be donated to the Salvation Army Food Bank

Community Living St. Marys and Area - Community Dinner Dec 1st

Country Roots Fresh Market - Preparing "Santa for Seniors" for Meals on Wheels. Requesting donations of small treats, baked goods, hand lotions etc. for accompanying gift bags.

Delmar Foods/Delmar Foods Food Factory Outlet - Year-round donation activities

FNF Ingredients - Donated the new lighting for the Green Bridge over Trout Creek

Friends of St Marys Public Library - Free skate at the Pyramid Recreation Centre 3:00pm to 4:20pm on December 23 & 30

Harris-Greig Automotive - Hosting a silent auction of various items with all proceeds going to the ALS Association and supporting Judy's sister Jane Nelson.

Holy Name of Mary Catholic School - Donations to the Salvation Army Giving Tree

Holy Name of Mary Social Committee - Sale of soup, turkey pot pie or apple crisp in a mug - proceeds go to the Library Pantry and Salvation Army Food Bank

Hyggeligt Fabrics - Encouraging charitable donations to the St. Marys Imagination Library

Jackie Cousins - Proceeds from book sales to the Salvation Army Food Bank

Joe's Diner - Rice Crispie square sales proceeds to A Child's Smile

Kingsway Lodge/Fairhill Residence - Collecting new men's, women's and children's underwear for the Community Closet

Little Falls Car & Pet Wash - Donation to Optimism Place

Meridian Credit Union - Collecting items for the Community Closet & use of window for Giving Tuesday

Ontario St. North & Widder St. West Neighbours - Collecting dry/wet cat food, clumping litter and financial donations for the Feline Friends Network

Parkview West 22 St. Andrews North - Created Christmas cards for residents at Kingsway Lodge and Wildwood Care Centre & a virtual food drive for financial donation to the Library Pantry

Peak Select Realty Inc. Brokerage - Accepting \$10 gift cards for Tim Hortons or Foodland for the Library Pantry

Petals and Foliage - Proceeds from the roadside farmstand sales donated to the Salvation Army Food Bank

Reflexology by Ruth - Proceeds from festive Christmas sweaters and art cards to the Salvation Army. "Nominate a Neighbour" for a 1 hour relaxation session.

Rotary Club of St. Marys - Financial donation to the Salvation Army

Salina Street Neighbours - Personal hygiene products for the Library Pantry

Sam's Home Hardware - Proceeds from windshield washer sales to the St. Marys Kinsmen

Sarah Michal Studios / Sage & Soul Photography Studio - "Nominate a Neighbour" Photo Session Giveaway & "Caught You Giving" Downtown Photos on Giving Tuesday

Scenic Holsteins Ltd. - Weekly donation of milk used by Stonetown Artisan Cheese to produce the cheese curds to donate to the Salvation Army Food Bank

Scruffy Puppy Salon - Accepting donations for K9 Safe Space (medical & grooming

attention for rescue pets)

South Perth Centennial School - Nov 28 bake sale for United Way, Nov 27 - Dec 5 Candygrams for United Way, December "12 days of giving" food drive for the Salvation Army Food Bank & Library Pantry

St. James Anglican Church - Collecting new men's, women's and children's underwear for the Community Closet. Drop off donations at the Meridian Credit Union.

St. Marys Buick GMC - Toy Drive for the Salvation Army

St. Marys Bowling Lanes - Collecting food items for donation to the Library Pantry

St. Marys Ford - Food drive during the Santa Claus parade, donated to the Salvation Army Food Bank

St. Marys Friendship Choir - Donating non-perishable food items to the Salvation Army Food Bank

St. Marys Friendship Centre - Giving Tuesday \$5 Come & Go lunch (sign-up needed) to benefit Meals on Wheels. Also accepting non-perishable food donations for the Library Pantry and personal care hygiene kits for teens for the Salvation Army

St. Marys Giving Tuesday Committee - "Womanizing" the Salvation Army Kettle on Giving Tuesday

St. Marys Healthcare Foundation - On Giving Tuesday all donations will be matched towards the new \$650,000 X-Ray machine

St. Marys Independent Newspaper - Giving Tuesday promotion partner

St. Marys Insurance Group Inc. - Donations to employees' preferred charities & donating vouchers to local nursing home residents

St. Marys Optometry - Diaper drive for the Salvation Army

St. Marys Sparks & Embers - November 27 donating to the Salvation Army Food Bank; December 4 making decorations for Kingsway Lodge residents; December 11, bingo and carols singing at Kingsway Lodge

St. Marys United Church - Community Dinner Dec 1st

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic - Donations to the Farley Foundation

St. Marys Kinettes - Feminine hygiene donations to Optimism Place

Stonetown Artisan Cheese - Weekly donation of 100 x 225g packages of cheese curds to the food bank (milk provided by Scenic Holsteins)

Stonetown Physio - Financial donation to the Library Pantry

Stratford Police Services - "Fill the Cruiser" drive at the Foodland Store on Giving Tuesday, collecting personal hygiene products for the St. Marys Salvation Army Food Bank

The Hitching Post (2019) Ltd. - Proceeds from the sale of coffee & cookies on Giving Tuesday donated to the Rotary Hospice for Days of Care

The Local Community Food Centre - Challenging the community to become a monthly sponsor of The Local Community Food Centre

The Sunset Diner - Collecting non-perishable Christmas food items & new or gently used winter clothing for St. Marys Outreach

The Widder Street NOISE Makers - Collecting underwear for the Community Closet

Town Of St. Marys - Community Grant for Giving Tuesday

Towne & Country Cheese Shoppe & Deli - Donating 1 Christmas Dinner for every 1 purchased & for every \$50 gift card purchased, \$5 gift card donated to St. Marys Outreach or Salvation Army & year-round donations

Troyer's Spices - Spices purchased for donation to The Local Community Food Centre will be matched by Troyer Spices

Veterinary Purchasing Company Ltd. - Employee food drive for donation to the Salvation Army Food Bank

Vitality Health and Fitness - \$5 from each \$15 drop-in class fee goes to purchase of feminine hygiene products for local donation

It is not too late to be part of this world-wide movement! Plan something for Tuesday, December 2nd or support an event listed above! Be sure to tag St. Marys Giving Tuesday on Facebook and Instagram and we will share share share!

GIVING
TUESDAY

DEC
2



For more information
contact
jdockerrjohnson@gmail.com
www.CanadaHelps.org/en/
givingtuesday

COLUMNS

UKRAINIAN CORNER: The immigrant's first rule; prioritize peace, the budget can wait

ALONA VASYLIEVA

Independent Columnist

I've been doing some intense, highly localized research into that mythical creature known as work-life balance. The results? Shocking!

I wanted to find out: What country is the absolute best for work-life balance?

Spoiler alert: Neither my beloved Canada nor my motherland, Ukraine, is currently sporting the gold medal. Apparently, the current Work-Life Olympics are dominated by the trifecta of chill: New Zealand, Denmark and Norway.

Since I haven't lived in any of those places – unless you count a very intense seven-hour layover – I have to trust the internet on this one. But let's be honest; judging a country's soul while on vacation is like judging a fancy cake by sniffing the box. Everything looks rosy and shines brighter when you're not the one paying the rent or battling local bureaucracy!

Ukrainians are a deeply resilient and hardworking nation, and that is a trait we can be incredibly proud of. However, perhaps we can gently examine whether we sometimes prioritize the "work" side of the equation a little too heavily, leaving the "life" side feeling slightly neglected.

This isn't a critique of effort, but a plea for efficiency. As the saying wisely suggests, "Work smarter, not just harder." The goal isn't to accumulate the most hours but to cultivate a balanced approach where we can genuinely enjoy life, no matter where we are. If we can find that joy in our home country, it only makes the experience of moving elsewhere richer and easier.

I've had the privilege of hearing many inspiring stories from immigrants, and one piece of advice has consistently resonated with me as profoundly wise. "When you relocate, prioritize a healthy and supportive environment for your family right away."

There is a common, financially sensible instinct to choose the most inexpensive accommodation in a less desirable area to save money initially. While this has a rational basis, its emotional toll can be immense. Starting life in a new country is already challenging; compounding that stress by residing in a difficult neighborhood can severely impact your peace of mind. It risks souring your entire perception of the new country, making you feel you've made a mistake.

I wholeheartedly agree that protecting your emotion-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

A recent newcomer compares the "savouring" lifestyle of Europe with the saving discipline of Canada, arguing the true secret to work-life balance lies not in a gold-medal country, but in prioritizing mental sanctuary over the cheapest rent.

al wellbeing and sanity is paramount. We were incredibly fortunate to land in the wonderful community of St. Marys. This decision wasn't ours – it was beautifully managed by kind volunteers and V.J. Knutson, who connected us with a fantastic host family. I never take that guided kindness for granted. Had our first experience been in a much colder or more challenging area, our initial view of Canada might have been unfairly negative.

We should allow ourselves the grace to live our best lives right from the moment of arrival. This positive start allows you to embrace new people and experiences with open arms and cheerful energy.

It's completely natural to move from Ukraine to Canada and initially try to carry over old habits and approaches. But sometimes, these old ways just don't quite fit the new culture.

While staying connected with your Ukrainian community is beautiful and essential, closing yourself off to the new culture means missing out on the excitement of what you moved for! The thrill of immigration is embracing new traditions and expanding your mentality.

I've observed some interesting differences in how financial balance is approached.

I've noticed many Canadians I know demonstrate a strong, informed approach to personal finance, particularly concerning investing and contributing to their retirement plans. It seems like there is an opportunity

for Ukrainians to benefit from exploring and adopting similar financial strategies.

In my personal experience while in Ukraine, I found it simpler to minimize focus on the percentage of income allocated to taxes, though this approach is often detrimental to long-term financial health.

It's common and understandable that people globally express concerns about taxation levels.

I've also noticed the prevailing cultural mindset in Ukraine tends to prioritize present-day living over long-term financial planning, such as setting concrete retirement goals. While understandable, this approach may not be the most sustainable for future wellbeing.

Regarding other European countries, I must acknowledge I am not in a position to offer a fair comparison since I haven't personally navigated their tax systems or managed a monthly budget there.

However, based on the perspectives of friends living and working in Europe, it appears that some European nations have managed to achieve an impressive balance between income and expenditure for their citizens.

Many European countries might have lower average salaries than North America.

But they tend to favour smaller homes and often own only one compact vehicle per family. This preference for a less debt-heavy lifestyle seems to allow them to enjoy a higher quality of life in the present, potentially by reducing the burden of substantial car loans and mortgage payments.

I must admit, after experiencing Canadian space, going back to a one-bedroom apartment would be a lovely challenge – I may be happily spoiled now!

The pace of life also varies. In many European cities, people shop for groceries more frequently at smaller shops, and Sunday closures often enforce a restful pause. This is why a European friend's first trip to a sprawling Costco can be a moment of genuine, albeit humorous, cultural shock!

As a transplant, I now find myself adopting the efficient Canadian lifestyle: stocking up the freezer and pantry to avoid shopping for a week or more. And when it comes to dining out, both cultures love sharing a meal, but Canadians often prioritize efficiency with takeout or quick meals – a likely adaptation to the amount of time spent driving.

Ultimately, there is no single right or wrong way to live. These are simply my heartfelt and gently shared observations on the quest for personal balance.

Straight from the Shelves

LAURA MCASH

St. Marys Public Library

Kick off the holiday season next week with two festive programs at the St. Marys Public Library! Both programs are free to attend, and no registration is required.

Join us at the Library on Tuesday, December 1 at 6 p.m. for "Star of Bethlehem", a special presentation by Tony Martinez on how astronomical phenomena relate to the story of the Star of Bethlehem. This program is for all ages.

Improve your gift-wrapping skills at our "Holiday Wrapping Party"! Learn simple techniques and creative tips to make wrapping any gift a breeze. Simply come into the Library on Thursday,

December 4 from 6-8 p.m. or on Friday, December 5 from 1-3 p.m. We supply the wrapping paper; you bring your gifts (2 maximum). This program is aimed at patrons 16 and older.

Up This Week

Fri., Nov. 28: Open 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 29: Dungeons & Dragons (10 a.m.)

Mon., Dec. 1: Learn to Play Bridge (1-3 p.m.)

Tues., Dec. 2: Star of Bethlehem with Tony Martinez (6-8 p.m.)

Wed., Dec. 3: EarlyON Play and Read (9:30-10:30 a.m.), Mahjong! (1-4 p.m.)

Thurs., Dec. 4: Holiday Wrapping Party (6-8 p.m.)

Fri., Dec. 5: Holiday Wrapping Party (1-3 p.m.)

Ask the Arborist

By Joel Hackett | 519 272 5742 | jtsquote@gmail.com

**Dear Arborist,**

What is the best choice for a traditional natural Christmas tree?

Thanks, Beth

Dear Beth,

The most common traditional Christmas tree is a fir. There are traditionally about four different firs you can choose from: Douglas, Fraser, Balsam, and Noble.

In this area, firs are not as common as some other trees, so early pioneers

often would cut down a spruce or pine. In more recent times, people are avoiding the cut tree, instead using a potted tree that is planted at a later time.

Sincerely,

The Arborist

Joel Hackett is a certified Arborist residing in the St. Marys area. Currently, he spends most of the year running Joel's Tree Service. For contact call 519 272 5742 or email jtsquote@gmail.com

HISTORIC ST. MARYS: William Notman: St. Marys connections, part two

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

William Notman (1826-1891), the famous 19th century Montreal photographer, paid at least one visit to St. Marys. His studio produced many stunning images of natural landscapes throughout Canada and the United States, but Notman was also intrigued by technology and engineering. In the late 1850s, the Grand Trunk Railway had commissioned him to record the construction of the Victoria Bridge over the St. Lawrence River at Montreal. Notman later followed the railway's progress westward. In St. Marys in 1860, he photographed two other engineering achievements – the high-level railway trestles on their limestone pillars over Trout Creek and the Thames River. Copies of these two historic photographs are in the St. Marys Museum's collection. Notman's 1860 view of the London Bridge can also be seen in L. W. Wilson and L. R. Pfaff's history book, *Early St. Marys*.

In Montreal by 1860, William Notman was well on his way to becoming the best-known photographer in the city, at least among the English-speaking population. His thriving studio had expanded into larger premises, and he had moved with his wife, Alice, and their children into a spacious new house. In 1858, he paid the passage for his extended family to come from Glasgow to Montreal. William Senior and Janet Notman were the parents of eight children – four sons and four daughters. William, the photographer, two of his brothers, and three of his sisters were born between 1824 and 1837. Then, after a nine-year gap, Margaret Notman was born in 1846 and her younger brother, James, in 1849. When the Notman family emigrated to Canada, the eldest three daughters remained in Scotland, presumably having established lives of their own. But William Notman's two unmarried adult brothers, his 12-year-old sister, Margaret, or Maggie as her family called her, and nine-year-old brother, James, arrived in Montreal with their parents.

William Notman had a family photograph taken in his own studio in 1859. Prints would have been sent back to Scotland to assure friends and relatives that everyone was happy and thriving. The Notman parents are seated in the centre of the photograph with their grandchildren, William and Alice's little girl, Fanny, and baby William, on their laps. Alice Notman is also seated, pregnant with her third child, Jessie, who would be born in December of that year. The five Notman siblings – four brothers and one sister – are standing behind their parents in the photograph. The three eldest brothers tower over the two youngest, Maggie and James. Maggie, the only Notman daughter to come with the family to Canada, must have been especially dear to her parents. She was a favourite of her older brother, William, as well. He took many studio portraits of her through the early 1860s, tracing her development from a child to a young woman.

The McCord Stewart Museum in Montreal holds the Notman Photographic Archives. A large selection of the photographs can be seen on-line and can be searched by topic. We can see that William may



(PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NOTMAN STUDIOS - MCCORD STEWART MUSEUM DIGITAL COLLECTION)

In 1866, Montreal photographer William Notman took this portrait of his sister, Maggie, before her marriage to Dr. David Harrison of St. Marys.

have used various family members as studio models as he worked to perfect certain methods of posing and lighting. He also experimented with different developing and printing techniques. His best efforts created a beautiful family album. He took a series of photographs of his mother, usually seated with an open book on a table before her. His father was posed, formally dressed, a distinguished retired gentleman. There are many photographs of his wife and his own children. As his sons grew up, they became photographers too and carried on the tradition.

But among the family photographs he took in the 1860s, his sister Maggie was his most frequent model. In 1861, when she was 15, Notman took a series of photographs with Maggie dressed for a winter outing, wearing a fur hat and fur-trimmed cape. In one pose, she is holding a snowshoe, but that photograph is not very credible. Maggie was slender and small for her age. While she might have been game to try, she does not look like someone who would embrace rigorous outdoor activities. Photographs of her with a book in her hand or a small niece or nephew on her lap are more convincing. Another portrait taken in 1864 shows her, now 18 years old, looking directly at the camera. She seems poised and confident, a young woman who knows she is loved and respected, who is looking forward to her future.

Maggie might not have been dramatically beautiful, but she was lovely. Her fine features and calm expression suggest that she was thoughtful and intelligent. She wore the fashions of that period with great style – high lace collar, tight corseted waist and voluminously full skirts. Her hair was drawn back from her face and dressed simply. She wore minimal jewelry, perhaps a single brooch on her collar. At any rate, when she was

in her late teens, she caught the eye of a young medical student at McGill. David Howard Harrison, from St. Marys, Ontario, was the son of businessman Milner Harrison and his wife, Catherine Howard. The Harrisons were a prosperous family, and David, born in 1843, had been educated at the best schools available in Canada West at that time. He graduated as a physician in 1864 and returned to St. Marys to establish his medical practice.

But before David Harrison left Montreal, he stopped at the Notman Studio. His portrait, probably taken to mark his graduation, shows him seated in a rustic chair, a cane and bowler hat at his knee. He was a good-looking young man with wavy dark hair – clean-shaven except for very slight side whiskers. It is not known how he met Maggie Notman. Perhaps it was a chance encounter at the studio, or possibly at church or during some social function. However it happened, during the next two years, David must have made several trips from St. Marys back to visit her in Montreal. They were married in that city on April 26, 1866. This week's photograph shows Maggie in her magnificent wedding dress. (Try counting the number of ruffles on her sleeves!) She was 20 years old but looked younger. With the best wishes of the Notman clan, the newly married couple took the train back to St. Marys.

David and Maggie Harrison had seven years of married life. Maggie was pregnant five times but only two of the babies survived – William Milner Harrison, born in May 1870, and little Maggie, born a year and a half later in November 1871. More portraits were taken during those years at the Notman Studio, during trips home to visit the Notman family. In December 1867, Maggie's father died. There are several photographs dated that year, probably during Maggie's extended stay to help her mother. She was in Montreal again in 1871 and again, her brother had her pose in his studio. She was never robust, and the previous years of pregnancy and loss had taken their toll. Although she was pregnant with Maggie, she remained slender and elegant. Her expression was still calm but now included a hint of sadness.

Margaret Notman Harrison did not have very long to love and enjoy her little son and daughter. Her fifth pregnancy was difficult, confining her to bed. Her baby, a boy, was born in April 1873 but lived only briefly. Maggie survived her son by a few days, dying on April 18, 1873, three days after her 27th birthday and eight days short of her seventh wedding anniversary. In his eulogy, her minister, Dr. Waters of the Presbyterian Church, spoke of "the natural amiability and loveliness of her character." He emphasized her great faith and her belief that she would meet her loved ones again in the "Happy Land." That might have provided some comfort to Maggie's heart-broken family, but David Harrison, now the single parent of two very young children, had to go on with his life without her.

NOTE: The Notman photographs held at the McCord Stewart Museum in Montreal are in the public domain, and the museum encourages people to download them, free of charge, to use in whatever research, educational, and creative projects they might be helpful.



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OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Walking in the footsteps of first-century Romans



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

In Canada, it's pretty common to find a busy hockey arena at the centre of town. In many British and European cities, it's more likely a football (i.e. soccer) stadium. But in Vienne, a French town on the Rhone River, it's a theatre, and the unusual thing is this theatre is about 2,000 years old.

The Vienne amphitheatre was just one of a number of amazing Roman finds we explored during our visit to Vienne. This was a fascinating stop on our Viking Rhone River cruise, which took us from Lyon to Arles in southern France.

Vienne is a quiet French town; its population, listed at about 30,000, has been pretty much constant for the past 50 years.

But those 50 years are just a short paragraph in a long, long story that goes back to an era well before Christ. The community was a key Gallic capital until the apparently omnipotent Romans arrived around 47 B.C. during the reign of Julius Caesar. The Romans made Vienne a provincial capital and built a great many impressive structures in the town. What is even more impressive is how many of them still stand, or have been

restored, today.

We did a walking tour of Vienne. As is often the case on Viking cruises, we were offered a choice of a "leisurely" tour, a regular tour, or an "active" tour. I have to admit that our active tour in Vienne was far and away the most active of any of the thus-named tours during our cruise. That's because our guide led us on foot up a one-kilometre trek – I swear it was at a 90-degree angle – to an amazing vantage point overlooking the town and, most interestingly, the amphitheatre.

Okay, maybe it wasn't 90-degree tough, but it was worth the effort anyway.

The amphitheatre seated 13,000 people and it is used today, for the extremely popular Vienne Jazz Festival, which attracts huge crowds of music-lovers each year. A famous player who performed here many times was Miles Davis, and you can find as much Miles Davis memorabilia for sale in the shops as you do Roman images.

But reminders of the Romans abound. Early in our tour – before the tortuous trek to the top (did I mention that?) – we saw still-standing Roman walls, aqueducts, drain systems and archways. The people of Vienne have created a beautiful, park-like garden among ruins beside one of the most impressive remaining walls.

We then walked past the ground level of the theatre, which, from that perspective, could only be viewed through openings in a fence. Thus, the climb to the top of the town.

There, we enjoyed amazing views of the theatre, of the

entire town of Vienne, and of the Rhone. We also visited the Chapel of Notre Dame de Pipet – more of this later.

As we strolled back down the lengthy path, our guide assured us the best was yet to come. Having just seen the impressive Roman theatre, that seemed unlikely. But it was true. Nonetheless, right in the heart of Vienne stands a restored Roman temple, an enormous structure featuring everything you might expect – mighty columns, lots of fancy architectural details. It's the Temple of Augustus and Livia, constructed at the command of Roman Emperor Claudius, who ruled Rome in the middle of the first century AD. And it is breathtaking, especially as it sits right in the middle of a modern French town.

There are more surprises from the Roman era here, as well. I am familiar with European and British roads of today that follow the same route as roads built by the Romans. They say, if you find a straight motorway anywhere in Britain, for example, the route was laid out by the Romans. In Vienne, in a lovely park close to the Rhone docks, they have excavated a portion of a genuine Roman road; you descend several steps to get to that level, but then you are free to walk in the exact footsteps of Roman women and men from the first century. Amazing!

Now, let's make that climb back to the top of the town, to the height called the Mount Pipet because, in addition to the incredible view, this is the site of the Chapel of Notre Dame de Pipet, an elegant church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, espe-



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Local residents practice Tai Chi among 2,000-year-old Roman ruins.

cially connected to the story of an appearance of Mary to two children. That event – known as "Our Lady of La Salette" – occurred in a community about 170 kilometres south of Vienne. The Vienne chapel – which features statues of Mary and the two children – is one of several in the region dedicated to this "Marian apparition."

The Christian history of Vienne is almost as old as the Roman story; and by the time Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 AD and brought the whole Empire with him, Vienne was already a

place of Christian worship. Its first bishop, it is claimed, was a disciple of Saint Paul. Today, there are churches in Vienne whose founding date back to the fifth century.

In short, seldom have I visited a destination that so immersed a visitor in its fascinating history.

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@gold-en.net.



The Roman amphitheatre, as seen from Mount Pipet in Vienne.



The Temple of Augustus and Livia sits in the heart of Vienne.

EAT AT OUR HOUSE: Holiday baking



LAUREN EEDY

Independent Columnist

With the past festive weekend featuring the Downtown Merchant's Open House and Santa Claus parade, it's safe to say we have officially kicked off the holiday season. This naturally encourages the desire to think about effortless recipes to bake. We're all familiar with classic shortbread and gingerbread; the following are treats I take pleasure in making.

Rosemary parmesan snowflake cookies

'Tis the season of sweet treats but this savoury, crisp cookie is a welcome and elegant addition.

Prep: 15 minutes; Cook: 15 minutes; Total: 30; Serves: 12

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- ½ tsp finely chopped fresh rosemary
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, cold and cubed

- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 2-3 tbsp cold water
- Optional: extra parmesan for sprinkling

Method:

- Preheat oven to 350° F and line baking sheet with parchment paper.

- In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, salt, pepper and chopped rosemary. Add cold butter and rub it into the flour with your fingers or a pastry cutter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs.

- Stir in parmesan. Gradually add cold water, 1 tbsp at a time, until dough comes together.

- Roll the dough out on a lightly floured surface to about quarter-inch thickness. Cut into snowflake shapes using a cookie cutter.

- Transfer cookies to prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle with additional parmesan if desired.

- Bake for 12-15 minutes or until edges are lightly golden. Let cool completely on a wire rack before serving.

Chai tea cookies

Once the dough for this cookie is ready, you can shape it into a log and chill or freeze to be sliced and baked. Alternatively, wrap in freezer paper with a ribbon and have on hand for easy holiday gifting (include baking instructions)! Troyer's Spices carry a chai tea seasoning that can make this assembly

even easier, or you can follow the recipe as follows.

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- 1 tbsp chai tea mix either from Troyer's Spices or the contents from several chai tea bags.

- ½ tsp ground cardamom (optional)

- ½ tsp ground cinnamon (optional)

- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 stick (½ cup) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small cubes

- ½ tsp vanilla extract

Method:

- Place the flour, sugar, powdered sugar, chai and salt in a food processor. If using tea, process until tea is pulverized and distributed evenly. If desired, pulse cardamom and cinnamon which will give a more pronounced chai spice flavour.
- Add butter and vanilla. Pulse until a rough dough is formed. Scrape dough onto a piece of wax or parchment paper. Form into an eight-to-nine-inch-long log. Wrap paper around the log and roll until smooth. Freeze dough or refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

- To bake: arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 350° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Use a sharp knife to slice the chilled or frozen log into one-third-

inch thick rounds. Bake 10-12 minutes or until beginning to brown. Let cool on baking sheet for five minutes and transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

Nutmeg glaze optional:

- 1 ½ cups powdered sugar
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg plus more for sprinkling
- 3 tbsp whole milk or eggnog

Method:

- Whisk ingredients in a medium bowl until a thick glaze occurs and spread over centre of cookies.

Chocolate-dipped orange palmiers

Makes two dozen.

- 14 oz good quality puff pastry, thawed (Perfect Pastry at the Flour Mill is where I purchase mine)

- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- Zest from 2 large or 3 smaller oranges

- Optional: 4 oz dark or semi-sweet chocolate

Method:

- Zest the oranges and massage the zest into the sugar.

- Sprinkle an even layer of sugar on a clean surface, then place puff pastry on top. Sprinkle orange sugar liberally onto your puff pastry, then press sugar in with your hands.

- Slightly roll out puff pastry to about 13-by-14 inches.

- Fold longer section in half to mark the middle point. Then fold each halfway to the middle, and then again so the



(LAUREN EEDY PHOTO)

Chocolate-dipped orange palmiers are a perfect holiday cookie everyone is sure to enjoy.

two sides nearly meet, leaving some space between. Sprinkle more sugar on each fold. Fold again, then store in freezer for 30 minutes.

- Preheat oven to 400° F.

- Remove from freezer and cut into half-inch thick cookies. Space about two inches away from each other on parchment paper (DO NOT use silicone mat for this recipe) and bake for eight to 10 minutes. Flip with spatula and cook for another four to five minutes. When you flip, they should be golden brown without any fully caramelized sections. They are done when fully brown and crispy. Dip in melted chocolate and sprinkle with leftover orange sugar.

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3RD
ST. MARYS LEGION HALL

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- Potluck Dinner - 6:30 PM (bring your own cutlery, plate, food contribution to potluck to share)
- Coffee/Tea provided by St. Marys Tim Hortons
- Seasonal Entertainment
- Annual Meeting & Installation of the Board to Follow

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Riddles

- What runs but cannot walk, has a mouth but no teeth,
and has a bed but cannot sleep?
A river.
- There is one word spelled wrong in every English
dictionary. What is it?
Wrong.
- What goes in your pocket but keeps it empty?
A hole.
- What has legs but cannot walk?
A chair.
- I sometimes run but cannot walk. You follow me
around. What am I?
Your nose.
- What word begins and ends with the E but only has
one letter?
Envelope.
- What do you find at the end of a rainbow?
The letter W.
- I'm taller when I'm young and shorter when I'm old.
What am I?
A candle.
- What is always right in front of you, yet you cannot
see it?
The future.
- What has a tongue but cannot talk?
A shoe.
- What is easier to get into than out of?
Trouble.

- Word Search -



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GIVING TUESDAY

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C I M L F T Z Z O F G H J G U M X O P W
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A Y V A W L S I E L U Q H E U O Q M E E
P H G G F K F U L X Q N H Y G P D U C P
W Y N T G S U Y P G E X T P D R I N N Y
K H H A F D N E O I P U K E R O I I E T
B G M R F E D Y E V J I N T E Z N T R I
C I B N D E R Q P E U C B U T R S Y E S
G V E G R D A U F T J U Y A P N P Y F O
P I O J R D I A O I N R T G B S I M F R
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D B K U C G N I W G H M N I C J N W A E
H A W L H F G W O Z M E C A L L G K E G
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L K W H Z R J L S C N X P S B E C G A Q
S U Y Y D P O R Y Q N D P W Z I H H M W
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Generosity
Community
Make a difference
Fundraising
Good deeds
Power of people
Give time
Smile
Giving back



The Riddle Kid OF THE WEEK



Lizy Hickmont-Gowan (2.5)

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

St. Marys Veterinary Clinic is pleased to be the sponsor of the

PET OF THE WEEK



Falling leaves are fun for pets, but they can hide dangers like ticks, sharp objects, and mold. Wet leaves are also slippery. Keep your yard clear, check your pet after play, and continue flea and tick prevention for a safe and enjoyable autumn.



SAM

Our Pet of the Week is 13-year-old Sam. Approximately 12 years ago, the St. Marys Vet Clinic was looking for a good home for Sam and Al Callender offered just that. In exchange for treats, Sam is great company for Al.



Thorndale News

A section within the
St. Marys Independent



The community of Thorndale prepares for Christmas

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

As the Christmas season is fast approaching, the community of Thorndale is a buzz of activity planning for December.

On Dec. 1 at 7 p.m., the Thorndale Lions are hosting their annual Christmas Bingo at the Thorndale Lions Community Centre, which is always fun and draws a crowd.

On Saturday, Dec. 6, the Thorndale Agricultural Society is selling tickets for the upcoming 2026 Dinner Theatre at the Thorndale Library from 10 a.m. until noon. The 2026 Dinner Theatre performances are scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 21 (full dinner and play), Sunday, Feb. 22 (brunch and matinee performance), Wednesday, Feb. 25 (show only), and

Friday, Feb. 27, and Saturday, Feb. 28, with full dinners by various community groups and the play, A Murder of Scarecrows, a comedy by playwright Pat Cook. For information regarding ticket sales after Dec. 6, contact Jackie Malleck 519-461-0218.

Also, on Dec. 6 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thorndale United Church is hosting a Christmas Day Camp for children in JK to Grade 6, where they can explore the Christmas story through crafts, games and music. Registration is required by Dec. 1. For more information, contact lighthouse@tzuc.ca.

On Sunday, Dec. 7, at 7 p.m., St. George's Anglican Church is hosting a Community Carol Service, recounting the Christmas story through song and readings. There will also be a social time after this service.

The BGC-rural program in Thorndale is holding a Kindness Quest on Dec. 8, from 6-8 p.m. for ages eight to 12, promoting character development, social connections and positive community engagement. Registration is required. Visit www.bgcclondon.ca/rural for more information.

Sheena Ball, registered massage therapist at Therapy Worx (160 King St.), in partnership with the Thames Centre Fire Department - Thorndale Fire Station, is collecting new unwrapped toys including games for the children of all ages. These donations can be dropped off by Dec. 11 by the Christmas tree upstairs at 160 King St., then they will be added to the Thorndale Fire Station's efforts to collect toys at the Thorndale Santa Claus Parade on Dec. 12. All donated toys will be delivered to the Dorchester

Food Bank to be distributed.

The Thorndale Library is hosting a Holiday Movie afternoon on Tuesday, Dec. 23 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. for all ages. Bring a drink and popcorn will be provided. For information on all programs at the Thorndale Library, call 519-461-1150 or email thorndale_staff@middlesex.ca.

As for celebrating Christmas, both Thorndale United Church and St. George's Anglican Church are each hosting a special service on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24. Thorndale United's service is at 8 p.m. and St. George's Anglican at 8:30 p.m. All are welcome.

Thorndale is the place to get in the holiday spirit. Check out the community calendar for upcoming events at www.ilovethorndale.ca/events.

It's merry and bright at Heeman's Greenhouse

NANCY ABRA

Independent Reporter

December is a special time at Heeman's Greenhouse. This year, Heeman's is offering a full lineup of events and programming for the community, from hands-on workshops to their Merry and Bright Thursday nights with the greenhouse coming to life in a true Christmas sparkling form.

At Heeman's Greenhouse "JOY" wall, guests can snap a photo with it and tag Heeman's. For every tagged photo, the business will donate \$10 to Merrymount Family Support Centre, up to a maximum of \$3,000, supporting local kids in crisis. It is a simple way to spread a little joy and give back.

The Grinch returns to Heeman's on Dec. 4 from 5-8 p.m. and staff expect more fun shenanigans again this year. On Dec. 11, Heeman's is hosting carolling in the greenhouse from 6-7 p.m. with a local community group.

Heeman's Winter Workshops continue to grow in popularity and have become one of the most exciting parts of the season. With new classes, Heeman's has expanded its December offerings for people to embrace their creativity and make something special for the holidays.

Heeman's offers a stellar lineup of more than 60 workshops in December with many still open for registration at heeman.ca/workshops.



(NANCY ABRA PHOTO)

The holiday season is in full swing at Heeman's Greenhouse.



Thorndale Agricultural Society
Dinner Theatre presents:



A Murder of Scarecrows
A Play by Pat Cook

SHOW DATES
DINNER & SHOW:
FEB 21, 22 (BRUNCH), 27 & 28, 2026
SHOW ONLY: FEB 25, 2026
Dinner & Show \$50 & Show Only Night \$25
Ticket Sales: <https://www.ticketowl.io/thorndalefallfair>
(Online starting Dec 6, 2pm)

BOX OFFICE DATES
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THORNDALE COMMUNITY CENTRE:
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DEC 16 5-7PM, DEC 17 6-8PM, DEC 20 10-NOON

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<https://www.facebook.com/ThorndaleDinnerTheatre>
online ticket purchases attract processing fees

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT GRANTHAVEN.COM

OBITUARY

Bridge



Gordon David Bridge passed away peacefully after a courageous battle, at St. Marys Memorial Hospital on November 19, 2025, in his 90th year.

Beloved husband of Carol Anne Reed for 66 years. Cherished father of Carolyn McAsh, Jeffrey Bridge and Brent Bridge. Proud and loving grandfather of Steven Bridge and Laura McAsh. Dear brother of Thelma Trask (Morley) and brother-in-law of Lorence Reed (Janis), Jane Reed (Bruno Szafran), and Nancy Reed. Uncle Gordon to many nieces and nephews. Also missed by friends and extended family members. Predeceased by infant son Gary Bridge, parents Victor and Lydia (Foster) Bridge, sister Shirley Bridge, nephews David and Gordon Trask, parents-in-law H. Arthur and R. Marie (Chambers) Reed, and brother-in-law Gregory Reed.

On August 23, 1936 Gordon was born north of Molesworth in Wallace Township, Perth County and was raised in a farming community. He was a quiet, mild-mannered individual with a love for animals and nature. Gord and Carol were married in 1959, and while living in Palmerston, Gord worked at Campbell's Soup in Listowel and was a volunteer firefighter with the Palmerston Fire Department.

In 1969 Gord was transferred to the St. Marys Campbell's Soup plant as production and shipping/ receiving manager, retiring in 1996. He was active in the St. Marys Minor Hockey Association and the St. Marys Presbyterian Church during his middle years. Gord enjoyed 30 years of retirement, living a simple life in his country home. His grandchildren were his pride and joy, as was his red 2003 Dodge truck. Gord was a Toronto Blue Jays fan and an avid supporter of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

For 45 years, Gord's labour of love was maintaining "The Path", parallel to the Thames River across from his home, for walkers to enjoy. We are grateful for the life of Gord ... our husband, father, and grandfather. He will always hold a special place in our hearts, and we will treasure our memories and the time we have shared with him. In his memory, perhaps you might stroll along "The Path" or cheer loudly with fingers crossed, during a Toronto Maple Leafs game, while enjoying a piece of lemon meringue pie - his favourite!

Thank you to our family and friends for their support along Gord's journey and the medical staff who cared for him during his last days. In keeping with Gord's wishes, there will be no funeral service or visitation. A private family graveside service will be held with interment in St. Marys Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, those wishing to make a donation in Gord's memory are asked to consider the St. Marys Presbyterian Church, St. Marys Health Foundation or the Stratford Perth Humane Society. Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

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OBITUARY

Barber



Jim Barber, of Thorndale, passed away suddenly on November 21, 2025.

He is survived by his wife Jean, married 46 years. Father of Lyndsey Barber, and Scott Barber (Brooke). Grandpa of Steel and Boone. Brother of Terry Barber (Vicki), Cheryl Barber, Kym Pitvor (Mike) and brother-in-law of Frances Prance (Wayne), Kathy Bilyea (Nelson), Janice Stauttner (Bill, deceased), and John Major (Cheryl). Also remembered by many nieces and nephews.

Jim was an avid hunter, enjoyed target shooting, and was a coach and manager for Junior Rifle, helping with many competitions. By trade, Jim drove dump truck, and had many friends within his trucking circle. He loved Christmas and enjoyed dressing up as Santa.

Cremation to take place with a Celebration of Life at Purple Hill Country Hall (20903 Purple Hill Rd., Thorndale) on Sunday, Dec. 7, 2025 from 1 to 4 p.m. Memorial donations may be made to Karis Disability Services. Online tributes at www.hodgesfuneralhome.ca.

IN MEMORIAM

Pearson

In loving memory of my wife, mother, grandmother and great grandmother Reta, who passed away 13 years ago November 29, 2012.

There will always be a heartache
And often a silent tear,
But always precious memories
Of the days when you were here.
We hold you close within our hearts
And there you will remain,
To walk with us throughout our lives
Until we meet again...
Always in our hearts.

With love, from Gord, Nancy, Cindy, Doug and families

IN MEMORIAM

Deery

In Loving Memory of Ron Deery who passed away Dec. 3rd, 2011.

Those we love don't go away,
they walk beside us every day...
unseen, unheard, but always near,
still loved, still missed and very dear.

With love, Dianna

CELEBRATION



YOU'RE INVITED TO AN OPEN HOUSE FOR
Elaine Stephen Miller's
85TH BIRTHDAY
Sat. Dec. 6 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
Thames Valley Community Centre (77 Ann St.)
Your presence is the best present!

THANK YOU

McGregor

Dear friends and family,

I can not express enough gratitude for all of you taking the time to come out and celebrate my 90th milestone. In many ways it feels like the years have happened in the blink of an eye until you reflect on all the life that has happened personally and the changes that have happened throughout the society.

Nowadays, you could have just sent a quick text, yet you took the time to come share in conversation, laughs and hugs. I will be forever grateful for all the well wishes from in person and afar and the memories you have given me throughout the years.

Please remember, it is not how long you have lived, but how well you lived that is the main thing. Be present with the people you love, for they are life's greatest gifts.

Love, Georgina (Mom, Grandma and GG)



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Sudoku

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Solutions on pg. 39

CORRECTION:

A formatting error was published in the story, "Community Christmas Dinners gathering donations for fifth year running," on page 5 of the Nov. 20 edition of the St. Marys Independent. In the story, an email address was split between two lines and a dash was automatically inserted. The correct email address is rachjoneill@gmail.com. We regret any confusion this may have caused.

Looking
Back

AMY CUBBERLEY

Independent Columnist



New Avon Trail

25 years ago (2000)

The Downtown Merchants of St. Marys are trying to put some extra kindness into the Christmas season. This year's downtown theme is "Be an angel this Christmas." All of the downtown stores were asked to have their windows decorated to fit the theme. Each store was also asked to donate one gift for the angel tree, which will be on display in the window of Ivy's Boutique.

The 1911 CCM motorcycle, a treasure of the St. Marys Museum's collection, spent several months at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa recently where a trained conservator spent 860 hours restoring the artifact. The bike is now on display in the Museum where visitors are welcome to come see it.

50 years ago (1975)

At last Wednesday's anti-rabies clinic at the Town barns, 411 dogs and 296 cats were present for the "ceremony".

The new Avon Trail, officially opened in Stratford recently, leads out of St. Marys along Trout Creek to Wildwood Lake, then towards Harrington and north-east to Stratford. The trail is marked by vertical white blazes two inches wide by six inches high; double blazes denote a change in direction. They are placed on trees, posts, and other objects.

75 years ago (1950)

A modern hold-up alarm system has recently been installed in the Royal Bank of Canada.

Crosthwaite's Pharmacy is offering a gift or twenty-five dollars to the first baby born in St. Marys Memorial Hospital to a veteran family.

100 years ago (1925)

The young son of William Bailey was knocked down by a passing car on Tuesday afternoon while playing near the West Ward School and received a bad cut on his scalp which necessitated medical attention.

Five local men returned home on Saturday from a two-week hunting trip in the Nipissing district. They reported a good time, plenty of deer, and lots of snow.

W.N. McMurray of Queen Street West was elected president of the Perth County Beekeeper's Association at the annual meeting in Stratford last week. McMurray is a member of the committee tasked with inspecting the hives in the district in order to keep the foul brood pest in check.



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THE WEEK AHEAD

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

St. Marys Library events – See Page 30

Friday, Nov 28

- Stonetown Arts show and sale at Riverwalk Commons – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Royal Canadian Legion hot dog lunch at Noon
- A.N.A.F. meat draw – 6 p.m.
- Holiday light tour begins – View map at discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays

Saturday, Nov 29

- St. James Anglican Church Christmas bazaar – 9 a.m. to Noon
- Multi-vendor Christmas market at Maple Lane Park, 25 Thames Rd – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Country craft show at Jane Sparling's, 7101 Cobble Hills Rd – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Stonetown Arts show and sale at Riverwalk Commons – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Royal Canadian Legion meat draw – 5 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs Cambridge Redhawks at the PRC – 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, Nov 30

- Multi-vendor Christmas market at Maple Lane Park, 25 Thames Rd – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Legion bingo – Doors open 11:30 a.m., Play 1-4 p.m.

Monday, Dec 1

- Community dinner at St. Marys United Church – 5 p.m., Sponsored by Community Living
- Thorndale Lions Christmas Bingo at Thorndale Lions Community Centre – 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Dec 2

- Giving Tuesday – See Page 27 for a list of events
- Royal Canadian Legion buddy check coffee – 10 a.m. to Noon
- St. Marys Legion cribbage – Starts 7 p.m. sharp

Wednesday, Dec 3

- St. Marys Horticultural Society show, potluck dinner and annual meeting at the Legion – 6 p.m.

Thursday, Dec 4

- A.N.A.F. sausage on a bun lunch – Noon to 1:30 p.m.
- Flower Shop & More Santa meet-and-greet with photoshoots – 5-7 p.m.
- The Grinch returns to Heeman's – 5-8 p.m.
- St. Marys Lincolns vs Sarnia Legionnaires at Pat Stapleton Arena – 7:10 p.m.

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9.	Bingo
10.	True

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7	5	1	9	3	2	6	8	4	
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