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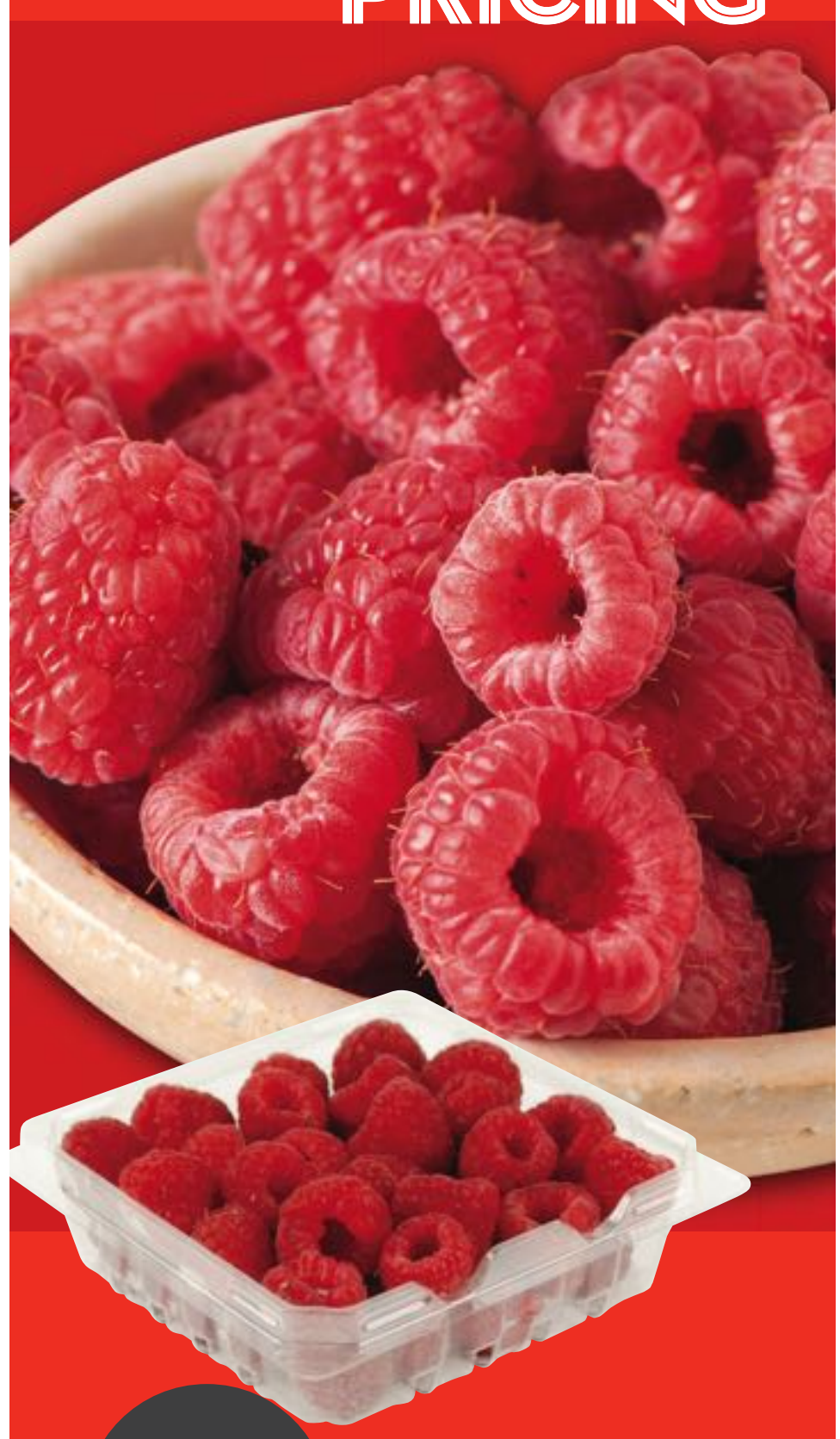
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SKATE WITH SANTA BRINGS HOLIDAY CHEER TO TPC TORONTO – Santa Claus came to Town a few days early this Christmas season to break in his skates and enjoy a fun Saturday skating afternoon with families and friends at TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley. For more, see Page A8.
PHOTO BY RILEY MURPHY

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Record numbers at CCS' Exchange Food Bank reflect growing food insecurity

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Caledon Community Service's (CCS) Food Bank, the Exchange, is reaching a record-breaking number of visits.

The Exchange saw the highest-ever number of visits last year, with an almost 18% year-over-year increase, and Donna Cragg, Director of Communications and Marketing for CCS, shares that they are setting tragic records every day.

Cragg adds that the number of people relying on CCS's Exchange Food bank has almost doubled since pre-pandemic levels, with a 73 per cent increase. It follows a trend they see elsewhere, where many visitors seeking food and basic needs support are employed.

Although they do not yet have their numbers for the 2025/2026 year, from 2023/2024 to 2024/2025, they saw almost 1,000 more visits, and they're continuing to reach these high numbers this year.

On Monday, December 1, 2,900 pounds of food were distributed in just one day.

CCS Board Member Catherine Jackson has been volunteering with the Exchange even before she joined the board in 2023, and says she came on board because she wanted to make a difference.

"I joined the board in 2023 for the very reason that I wanted to make sure that if the Region was having their conversations, that CCS and the Exchange were thought about in the appropriate way," she says. "Caledon is such a small part of the picture, and we needed to make sure that we had an appropriate voice in the conversation. I really wanted to be part of that conversation and make sure I was hearing that conversation, putting my hand up and saying, 'Okay, let's make sure we're looking at this from the right perspective'."

Continued on Page A11

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Catherine Jackson is pictured during her shift at the Exchange last week.
PHOTO BY RILEY MURPHY

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Renewed Hope collaborates with Mayor Groves to bring turkey dinners to families in need

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The charity Renewed Hope, in collaboration with Mayor Annette Groves, will be travelling throughout Caledon this holiday season, handing out turkey dinners, complete with dessert, to families in need.

Renewed Hope is a volunteer-run nationwide charity and nonprofit that works to deliver essential services, support, and resources to communities in need.

They have been running their holiday turkey drive for years now, and this year are bringing it to Caledon.

Tim from Renewed Hope shares hey're often meeting families who are just looking to get through the holidays.

"They just really want to push past it, because they don't want to deal with sometimes the loneliness, all the things and elements that go along with the struggle trying to put things together for Christmas," he says. "People associate Christmas with family, fellowship, eating together, so on and so forth, and there are many people that don't have those various opportunities."

"We want to be able to say, we're there with you. We will go through it and we will have a great time with you if we can support you in any way that Renewed Hope is available and has the provisions to do so," he adds.

They are currently working with the Bolton Renewed Hope team, collecting phone numbers and addresses for everyone who needs a turkey dinner delivered this season.

Tim notes this work was made possible this year in Caledon with the help of Mayor Groves.

"Mayor Groves was 100% on board, very ready to engage and very excited to reach the people of Caledon," adds Tim. "She's a Mayor that wants to take care of the citizens of Caledon."

Groves says the collaboration to provide these dinners with Renewed Hope has been "truly wonderful."

"I'm deeply grateful to Renewed Hope and to every volunteer who helped make this possible. This year has been especially challenging for many families, and moments of kindness and giving back mean so much to our community," says Groves.

Renewed Hope Caledon Ambassador Carmela Anzelmo-Palkowski notes they are not only receiving calls from those in need of the turkey dinners, but also those who want to help.

Some are even offering Renewed Hope to keep the turkeys in their fridges and freezers for the time being.

"It's been an amazing community event. People are saying, 'What can I do?' even the smallest thing, and that's really what it's about especially during this time of year," says Palkowski.

Renewed Hope's Mobile Mercy Units were slated to roll out December 23 and Christmas Eve, with multiple volunteers to ensure everyone is helped this season.

Tim remarks that he can hear the relief in people's voices when they call their Hope Hotline.

"That would be the two words – the excitement and the relief," says Tim. "It was super encouraging to know that we can reach out and touch a family's life and change that for those moments. It's just amazing and it's an opportunity that we would not pass up, changing somebody's life."

He adds that this initiative will only grow over time and become more expansive, which, he adds, is all made possible with help from the community.

"If you're looking to donate at year end to make a difference in someone's life and reach out and touch someone's life, Renewed Hope is an incredible registered charity organization that you can donate to and receive a tax-deductible charitable receipt," says Tim. "You're getting a tax-deductible receipt, but you're also changing lives partnering with Renewed Hope."

"We know things are tough. We know food prices are out of control, taxes are out of control," adds Tim.

"It's about the giving and the receiving. People don't understand it can happen to them in an instant," adds Palkowski.

Because of their Mobile Mercy Units, they can go directly to those in need, which Palkowski says is "life-changing."

"I hope that this inspires others to join so that we can become bigger and become more mobile across this town, across Caledon, because it's a really big life-saving gesture having a mobile unit come to your home and deliver a full meal for a family."

Another aspect of their deliveries through their Mobile Mercy Units is that Renewed Hope will be able to offer clothing at the same time as delivering the food, ensuring that this year they can help those in the community stay warm and fed this holiday season.



PHOTO BY RILEY MURPHY

Nobletoyz launches Community Gift Card Drive to support local families

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

As families go out to buy Christmas gifts this year, they're noticing the rising costs more than ever. And so, Nobletoyz in Bolton set out to help ensure that no local child should be without a gift or two this Christmas.

In the nearly ten years that Nobletoyz has been in business, giving back has always been a part of what they do.

Whether it's money for the Exchange, food and toy drives, donations to local schools, Sea Cadets, or Caledon Special Olympics, the owner of NobleToyz, Derrick Noble, says that helping out local organizations and charities is always something they look to do.

This year, he says he's noticed a growing need.

"It's been a rough year and a lot of these small businesses are closing down. Not only that, food bank usage is up, people are losing jobs, [and] people are struggling a little more this year," says Noble.

"I don't think any local person should have to worry about putting a gift or two under the tree for their kids."

Noble set up a "gift card drive" in his store, where both he and community members donate money for gift cards, allowing families and kids in need to come in and take one to buy toys at the store.

"I just think it's a sin that no matter how much people are struggling, that their kids won't have a Christmas," says Noble. "If we can help in any way, then that's what we're going to do."

Noble notes the tough years many have been facing, as he has experienced them himself, and at one point, he thought he might have to close down.

"I know how it is to struggle growing up, and I know how rough it could be," says Noble. "I know how it feels to be on that side, and it's not like I'm killing it; I'm struggling myself, but I'm not struggling enough that I can't do things for the community and try to help out a little bit."

He adds a lot has been possible with the community's help.

"People in the community are helping out a lot. A little bit goes a long way."

Each year, Noble sets aside an amount to give to local schools and events throughout the year, and this year he tripled his usual amount due to the growing need everyone is facing.

He shares it's a great feeling when he sees a kid come into the store with their gift card, excited to shop.

The gift card drive will be up until December 24.

"When I close the door, any leftover cards, we'll use them for a different event or something like that. We're going to make sure they go to someone who really needs them," says Noble. "It doesn't have to be just a Christmas thing."

He also says he plans to run this idea again in the future.

"I want to do more," he says.

To visit or make a donation to the gift card drive, visit the store at 266 Queen Street South #4, Bolton.

Town of Caledon prepares for 22nd annual Winterfest

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

This year marks the 22nd annual Winterfest celebration with the Town of Caledon, and the festivities kick off on January 4 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Mayfield Recreation Complex.

Judith D'Souza Soares, Commissioner of Community Services, shares that Winterfest has become a beloved tradition, bringing the community together in a welcoming, inclusive space to kick off the new year.

"It is an important event for the Town to continue hosting each year to provide an opportunity to reconnect with neighbours and members of the community prior to family members returning to school," she says.

Soares adds that, as a free event, it underscores the Town's commitment to providing accessible community programming that fosters connection and belonging for all residents in Caledon.

This year's 22nd annual Winterfest, she says, builds on past successes while introducing new and enhanced elements that continue to evolve the event.

Brand new this year, residents can look forward to a live magic show at 2:30 p.m., interactive experiences such as a caricature artist, and an expanded lineup of community partners onsite to engage attendees.

At Winterfest, residents can enjoy an afternoon of free, family-friendly activities, including skating, swimming, crafts, cookie decorating, a photobooth, face painting, and more.

Town Crier Andrew Welch, alongside Mayor Annette Groves and members of Council, will offer welcome remarks at 1:55 p.m., and guests can enjoy a special 45-minute magic show in the afternoon at 2:30 p.m.

Soares says they are especially excited about the Community Partners tables, which will be open throughout the event from 1 to 4 p.m., offering residents an opportunity to learn more about services and programs in the Caledon community.

This will include the following groups: Age-Friendly Caledon, Animal Shelter, Caledon Library, Caledon Fire and Emergency Services, OPP, Cassie's Place, Special Olympics, Peel Children's Aid Society, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), and the Brampton Steelheads.

At Winterfest, they will also be running a food drive and accepting non-perishable food items for The Exchange food bank.

"Including a food drive at Winterfest has become an important aspect of the event and demonstrates the Caledon community's commitment to supporting one another. By inviting attendees to bring non-perishable food items for The Exchange in Bolton, we're turning a day of celebration into an opportunity to make a tangible difference for local families facing food insecurity," says Soares. "It aligns perfectly with the spirit of this event, a celebration of community, generosity, and connection during the holidays."

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"Looking Back and Moving Forward: 2025 Reflections and Hopes for 2026" *by Chrissy Jarvie, CCS Communications Lead*



Thinking about your New Year's resolutions? Here's some food for thought: according to a Forbes Health poll, most people give up on their resolutions after less than four months. So, if you've ever failed to see your resolution through, you're not alone.

Making a New Year's resolution is a tradition for many and its history goes back as far as the ancient Babylonians who, during the 12-day festival called Akitu, made promises to their gods, hoping for favour in the coming year. Ancient Romans engaged in similar customs and early Christians viewed the new year as a time for reflection. And depending on your traditions, you might get two chances at resolutions this year, as in 2026, Muharram, the Islamic New Year, falls in June; a mid-year opportunity to pause and reflect.

Across time and cultures, there's a common thread of looking back to move forward.

At Caledon Community Services (CCS), we're doing our own reflecting on the incredible impact we've made, together with our caring community: 28,577 rides provided, helping Caledon stay active and connected. 8,974 volunteer hours of helping hands and changing lives. 287,102 lbs of food and essentials were shared with neighbours in need.

Behind those numbers are the real stories of lives that have been changed, like Sarah*, a single mom who didn't have to choose between groceries or back-to-school essentials for her children.

Or Qingwan, a youth who gained confidence and practical job skills through the workshops, mentorship and paid work placements of LIFE for Youth. And Lydia, 94 years-young and not slowing down any time soon, thanks to our specialized transportation.

So, what are we looking forward to in 2026? Continuing to focus on what matters most: meeting the growing and ever-changing needs of our community, building connections and creating opportunities for everyone to thrive.

As you look ahead, what are you reflecting on? And if resolutions are part of your traditions, here's a suggestion for one you won't want to give up: get involved in your community! Whether you volunteer, donate or advocate for a cause close to your heart, you'll be amazed at the incredible things that happen when you lead with kindness.

Visit ccs4u.org to learn more. Let's make 2026 another year of caring together.

**Sarah's name has been changed to protect her identity.*
***Statistics referencing 2024-2025 Community Impact Report*

How Do You See It?

Tell us how you see it.
Donna Cragg, Director, Communications and Marketing, Caledon Community Services at 905-584-2300 ext. 222 or dcragg@ccs4u.org

This column is provided free of charge by the Caledon Citizen.





Hanna Joyce took top honours in Caledon Rotary's Christmas Decoration Contest.
PHOTO BY RILEY MURPHY

Caledon Rotary recognizes 2025 Winners of Home Christmas Decoration contest in Palgrave

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Caledon Rotary held its annual tree lighting this year on Saturday, December 6.

After months of planning and work, the day was celebrated with community spirit, cider, hot chocolate, a visit from Santa and his elves, and the announcement of this year's winners of the Rotary contest for home Christmas decorations in Palgrave.

For more than 20 years, Caledon Rotary, previously known as Palgrave Rotary, has brought the community together to light Sarah's Tree.

Sarah's Tree was donated by the Thomas family in memory of Sarah Thomas, who passed away from cancer; the tree is dedicated to Sarah's memory as well as all cancer victims.

As the years went on, Caledon Rotary began looking for more ways to involve the community even more in their yearly ritual.

So, they began the home Christmas decorating contest.

Each year, a judge walks around Palgrave admiring each house's decor, and the winners are declared at the annual tree lighting.

This year's winners were Hanna Joyce in first place, John Farrow in second, and an honourable mention went to Josie Vitti's decorations.

Joyce's house can be seen down the road as you approach it, as both the outside and inside of her house are brightly lit with Christmas lights.

A large Christmas tree stands tall and bright in her window, and more than 10 trees shine back at you.

Joyce says it's a true team effort between her and her family.

"It's a lot of work, but it's rewarding."

In second place, Farrow's house follows a candy-cane-and-Christmas-light-wrapped tree trail up his driveway, with pillars wrapped in garland and wreaths creating a warm, welcoming sight.

Vitti's decor, which received an honourable mention, burns bright blue and inviting.

Whether it's the playful deer she has arranged as Santa's helpers, or Santa himself in the window, there's no question why her house received a mention.

The winners received gifts donated by local companies, including Legacy Pines Golf Club, A Taste Of Freedom, and Caledon Hills Brewing Company.

Continued on Page A11





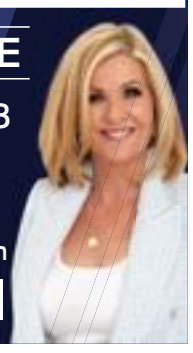
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Emergency Access Plan for Valleywood discussed resident concerns

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

During the last Planning and Development Committee meeting before the New Year, Fire Chief Dave Pelayo included a memorandum providing an overview of the Valleywood subdivision's emergency access considerations and outlined how emergency services would respond in the event of a large-scale incident.

The memorandum's goal was to provide Council with information relating to emergency access and evacuation procedures for the Valleywood subdivision as part of the Town's ongoing emergency management planning efforts.

Currently, Valleywood has a single main entrance and an access gate at Snelcrest Drive. Their one main entrance connects to the 410, which allows access to Highway 10.

"A gate that takes 40 minutes to be opened cannot be considered an emergency access," says Rob Harrison of the Valleywood Residents Association, noting an estimation of time given at a May Traffic Safety meeting. "The term emergency exit implies instantaneous functionality during emergencies, not conditional procedures at time of need."

For decades, residents in the Valleywood community have voiced concerns about having only one entrance to their community, especially one linked to a major highway, for emergency access.

The other access point is a gate at Snelcrest Drive, and is stated to be a "maintenance gate" under the jurisdiction of the MTO, as the gate connects directly to Highway 410.

Pelayo said the gate serves as an emergency exit for use during significant emergency incidents that would prevent normal egress through Valleywood Boulevard.

Because the gate leads directly onto a 400-series highway without stop signs or traffic lights, its use would require the temporary closure of Highway 410 and the Highway 10 extension.

The Valleywood subdivision was established in 1990. In the early 2000s, the extension of Highway 410 altered traffic patterns around the subdivision by adding new on- and off-ramps at Valleywood Boulevard.

Pelayo noted in his memorandum "these changes altered how vehicles enter and exit the area and created additional considerations for emergency planning."

The memorandum outlined various steps Caledon Fire and Emergency will take in the event of an emergency, noting that, for most emergencies, residents would be directed to shelter in place.

Shelter in place, as described, means staying in your current location and seeking safety there until further direction is provided by authorities, generally in response to an emergency or public safety directive.

This allows emergency responders to focus on stabilizing the incident while maintaining safe and unobstructed routes for response operations.

It stated that if an evacuation is needed, emergency services would coordinate the temporary closure of Highway 410 and the Highway 10 extension with the Ontario Provincial Police and the MTO to allow residents to safely exit the subdivision via the Snelcrest Drive emergency route.

"The Valleywood subdivision presents unique emergency access challenges due to its single main entrance and the limited-use emergency gate at Snelcrest Drive. Despite these challenges, the Town of Caledon has established clear and coordinated emergency response protocols to ensure the safety of all residents," states the memorandum.

Councillor Dave Sheen shared he's heard many concerns from Valleywood residents "who have expressed concern about being trapped in a neighbourhood with only one entrance in and out," and noted that it's appreciated that there is now a documented plan in place.

"We have tested our Community Emergency Response Plan. We did test a similar situation that would involve the closure of Valleywood Boulevard over by the interchange. We did test that with the OPP, with the MTO, with the Region of Peel, and with the province as well who were in attendance from Emergency Management Ontario. We are confident that much like any other emergency we are prepared to respond to it," shared Pelayo.

"A key point I can point out is that emergencies are different, emergencies vary. Our number one priority is always life, the preservation of life, property, and the environment. That is what we do, that is our mandate, and that is what we strive to train to ensure that we're able to execute that, and that is what this memo, this plan that we have, that is what we're ensuring," adds Pelayo.

"I've had a lot of experience with the Valleywood community over the years," said Mayor Groves. "I'm not very thrilled with the way that community was designed. I've always had some issues with this gate. Sometimes there's lots of snow, and sometimes getting there to clear the snow to unlock the gate becomes challenging."

Groves shared that looking at the subdivision with "one access in, one access out, is very problematic."

"I don't like that we have to wait for Region or for the province or MTO to come and assist us unlocking the gate and doing all those things. It just concerns me."

"'I've seen things over the years, and I've certainly heard from those residents over the years how concerned they are, I just want to make sure that they are safe," added Groves.

Councillor Mario Russo noted they look forward to looking at how to mitigate this further.

"It's a safety hazard. It's something we need to deal with. There are certain circumstances where snow and everything else can be an issue. But again, it's something that Staff is doing a great job of mitigating, but we think we can do a bit better going forward."

The memorandum that day also followed the Ontario government's announcement of a Request for Proposal to design an extension of Highway 410 that will directly connect to the future Highway 413, which Council noted will hopefully help mitigate some of the issues.

Harrison has worked for the past two decades to advocate for the safety of his neighbourhood regarding emergency access.

"This is an important and positive step in the correction, a very important step in relation to Valleywood," says Harrison.

"We wouldn't be here without the help of Mayor Annette Groves," Harrison adds. "Two decades ago, Ward 5 Councillor Groves heard our story. Her efforts were critical in sequestering the required land for the correction that has been announced."

When it comes to the emergency plan for his neighbourhood, Harrison feels that although this is a step in the right direction, there is still work to be done.

"We can't spend 40 minutes shutting down a highway for someone who's having a heart attack when our bridge is blocked with an additional anticipated 200% more traffic," says Harrison regarding the safety plan.

"We cannot risk mortality because of bad planning," he says. "An emergency is now, not 40 minutes from now."

Harrison explains that the Mayfield West Secondary Plan proposes thousands more people living west of Highway 10, "on a bridge that has already proven problematic, when the roadway specification is converted to a regional arterial road the opportunity for a true viable emergency access will be available, until then it is not."

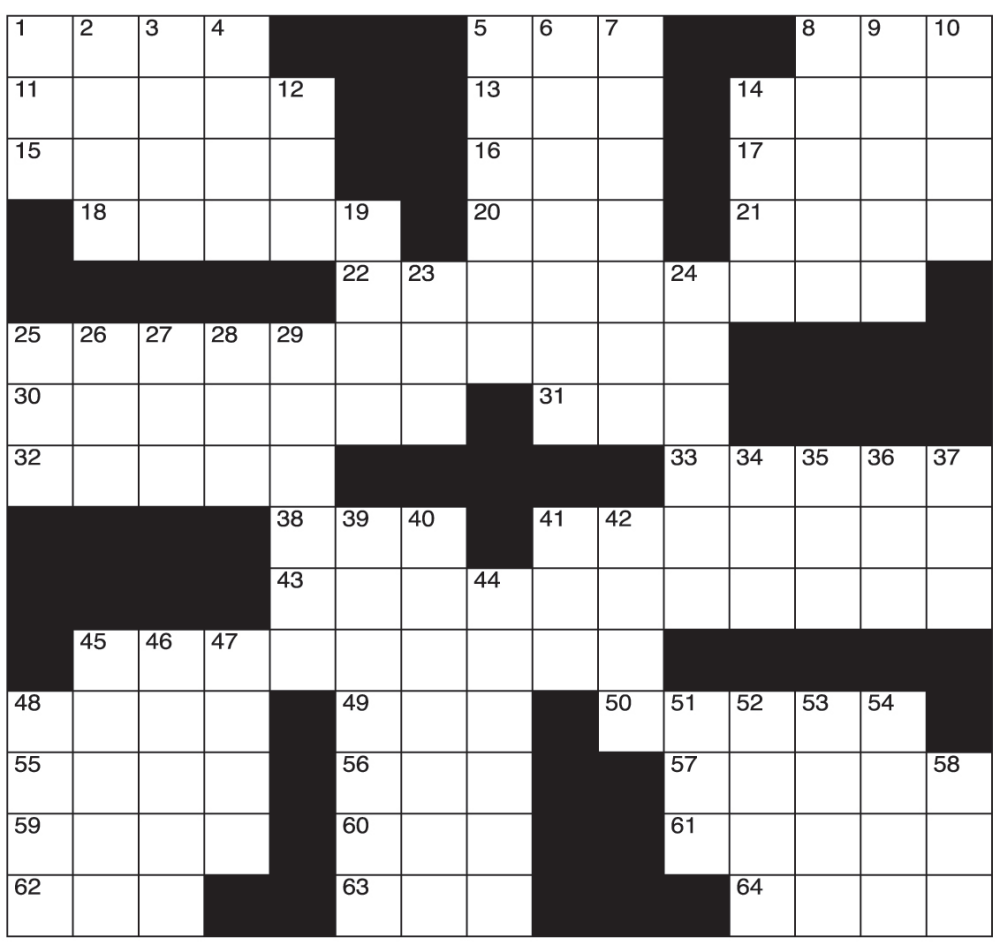
"There is only one access egress to Valleywood, and the alternative that Chief Pelayo speaks of is conditional on an estimated 40-minute closure of the Highway because it's a 400 series Highway," adds Harrison.

Within a Ministry of Labour File G-2019-00772 / KH, it was confirmed that for the gate to be used in the event of an emergency, the highway would be closed.



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54. Confederate soldiers
58. Criticize

No one has more self-confidence than the person who does a crossword puzzle with a pen.



STAN DOUGLAS

TALES OF EMPIRE

Global legacies of colonialism through the lens of one of Canada's most celebrated artists.

ON NOW

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Stan Douglas (b. 1960), *Masonic Lodge, Barkerville* (detail), 2006, laserchrome print, 127 x 145 cm, courtesy of the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner © Stan Douglas

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BROCK WEIR
BROCK'S BANTER

Communities of Care

Tradition, ritual, and custom – for many of us, they are an important part of holiday season, but, are these traditions, rituals, and customs three factors on which the spirit of your season depends, or do you ever find they bog you down?

At a recent holiday gathering, talk turned to what we had planned for our time off – if, of course, we were lucky enough to have some.

While a few of the players in this conversation had plans to get away somewhere warm, to decompress, or simply disconnect, others had much more active plans – and, truth be told, some of them were less than thrilled about it.

One of them was on turkey duty, rolling their eyes at what they insisted would be a "dry" meal – I resisted the temptation to offer they still had some time to get a few cooking tutorials under their belts before the big day to avoid that – arguing that ham or roast beef would be preferred.

Family tradition, however, dictated otherwise.

Another rattled off all the stops they had to hit before the end of Boxing Day, including at least three or four family dinners because, with a sigh, "that's always how it's been."

Personally, I'm always grateful there are more than a few places we have to hit each year, but "have" isn't the right word. Each stop brings me together with people I love, the familial warmth that is at its peak at this time of year, and, in all honesty, it's an interesting challenge to figure out all the logistics ahead of time. Although I feel I might be in the minority on that last one.

Traditions have always been an important part of our family's holiday, even down to the little things – including what to watch on the big day.

One particular 1962 episode of The Lucy Show is always in the rotation. In this installment, Lucy Carmichael (Lucille Ball) and Vivian Bagley (Vivian Vance) are two single moms sharing a house with their children and, for the first time, they're spending the holiday together as a non-traditional blended family.

It's all fun and games until Lucy and Viv realize their own respective traditions, ones they hold pretty dear, are almost completely incompatible. Viv's family opened their presents on Christmas Eve with everyone taking turns, while Lucy's family saved theirs for Christmas Day, the littlest child in the family getting the distribution honours. Lucy's family always tucked into a turkey for the big meal, while Viv's always had Christmas Goose – and let's not even get into what each woman preferred to stuff their birds with. We'd be here until New Year's.

It never fails to raise smiles as it underscores how zany people can get about their traditions, but also how it usually pays off to have a bit of flexibility about them.

Another tradition that is an important part of our Christmas routine is holding off on getting the celebration truly underway until after the King's Christmas Message.

It's always provided an oasis of calm amid the chaos, but, more than that, I always find there's always at least one kernel of wisdom to keep in mind as we prepare to welcome a New Year. In short, it often helps set the tone of what lies ahead – or, at least how to tackle it.

The King's 2025 Christmas Message, of course, was still under wraps as we went to press this week, but the Monarch recently offered some particularly poignant – and potent – words of wisdom a few weeks ago in a special broadcast for Stand Up to Cancer.

The message was very personal, but evidently it stuck a chord with many because, in the immediate days following the video's release, cancer organizations in the United Kingdom, in particular, saw a significant uptick in the number of calls they had received from individuals looking to get tested.

As someone whose family was touched by cancer this year, it was hard not to feel encouraged by such a profound reaction, and I share his words below in case you missed them:

"I know from my own experience that a cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming. Yet I also know that early detection is the key that can transform treatment journeys, giving invaluable time to medical teams – and, to their patients, the precious gift of hope. These are gifts we can all help deliver. Throughout my own cancer journey, I have been profoundly moved by what I can only call the 'community of care' that surrounds every cancer patient – the specialists, the nurses, researchers and volunteers who work tirelessly to save and improve lives.

"But I have also learned something that troubles me deeply – at least nine million people in our country are not up to date with the cancer screenings available to them. That is at least nine million opportunities for early diagnosis being missed. The statistics speak with stark clarity. To take just one example: When bowel cancer is caught at the earliest stage, around nine in ten people survive for at least five years. When diagnosed late, that falls to just one in ten. Early diagnosis quite simply saves lives.

"Now, I have heard this message repeatedly during my visits to cancer centres across the country. I know, too, what a difference it has made in my own case, enabling me to continue leading a full and active life, even while undergoing treatment. Indeed, today I am able to share with you the good news that thanks to early diagnosis, effective intervention and adherence to 'doctors' orders', my own schedule of cancer treatment can be reduced in the New Year. This milestone is both a personal blessing and a testimony to the remarkable advances that have been made in cancer care in recent years; testimony that I hope may give encouragement to the fifty per cent of us who will be diagnosed with the illness at some point in our lives.

"Yet too often, I am told, people avoid screening because they imagine it may be frightening, embarrassing or uncomfortable. If and when they do finally take up their invitation, they are glad they took part. A few moments of minor inconvenience are a small price to pay for the reassurance that comes for most people when they are either told either they don't need further tests, or, for some, are given the chance to enable early detection, with the life-saving intervention that can follow.

"As I have observed before, the darkest moments of illness can be illuminated by the greatest compassion. But compassion must be paired with action. This December, as we gather to reflect on the year past, I pray that we can each pledge, as part of our resolutions for the year ahead, to play our part in helping to catch cancer early. Your life - or the life of someone you love - may depend upon it."

I wish all of you, and especially those in our respective "communities of care," a very warm and wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy New Year!



Let's help each other hear, see and know

by Mark Pavilons



"Do you hear what I hear? Said the night wind to the little lamb.
"Do you see what I see? A star, a star, dancing in the night ...
"Do you know what I know? A Child, a Child shivers in the cold ...
"Let us bring him silver and gold.
"Said the king to the people everywhere ...
"Listen to what I say!
"Pray for peace, people, everywhere."

Do you hear, not the noise of the world, but the sounds of beauty and joy?

It's all around us.

Nature lovers will attest to the symphony of the world, sounds that simply cannot be reproduced, or even explained by man. From the insects keeping cool on a humid summer's night to the cry of owls from their nocturnal perch, this oral orchestra is more than just noise.

They contain messages, meaning and mystery. Maybe they're a sonic map of sorts, tunes that provide answers. Of course, they often lead to more questions.

They are the teachers, mentors and joyful conductors. If only we could hear what they're saying.

Okay, they may not be bringing us sweet notes of On High, but who knows? Maybe they know, or at least sense, things we can't.

I have heard forces of nature – beauty – in action: waves crashing on the shore, gulls looking for a meal, power of mid-summer thunderstorms, and even the laughter of dolphins. I have tried to decipher my dogs' cries and even listened intently to the unbelievable movement of a hummingbird's wings.

I have enjoyed song – from the orchestra at Phantom of the Opera to our children's annual pageants. Heavenly, all.

Have you heard what I heard? If not, you owe it to yourself to explore and witness this instrumental masterpiece all around us.

Are these sounds – which dance and play in the crazily complicated human eardrum – a product of math, genetics and evolution, or something divine? Given the awesome structure of each note, my bet is on the latter.

Humans are blessed with good eyesight, a computer-like digital lens that captures light and creates unique images. While most of us can't rely solely on memory, we have photographers and filmmakers to bring to light all that is. If you've seen pristine mountain lakes or unspoiled canyons – in person or in pictures – you get it. Standing on a precipice or watching an eagle soar, you can't help but be touched.

The rocks and gorges and rivers have been here for millions of years and will continue to exist long after humans have departed this planet.

Growing up in rural Caledon, my parents passed on a love for nature – the caring for evergreens, growing fresh fruits and vegetables. My dad would often take long walks alone on our property, likely connecting and admiring Nature's handiwork. Maybe that's what gave him peace. In the warmer months, my mom would never be found inside but on a bench, a step, just listening and feeling. I miss that property and the healing power it had.

While my parents, and not a higher power, transformed the landscape of this slice of paradise, they worked with what God provided – rocks and birds and babbling brooks.

My wife and I have seen many wondrous things on our vacations and I still feel these images in my heart, as the crisp images have become a bit fuzzy over time.

Have you seen what I've seen? I would love to see what you've seen, too.

Maybe the onus is on each and every one of us to share our visual experiences, via photos and colourful tales that excite the senses. We can't all travel to the ends of the earth but maybe we can share, exchange, and invite others.

During our lives we learn things that cannot be taught in any classroom or boardroom. We learn by doing and our experiences build up who we are.

None of us started out with fountains of knowledge. As shivering children, we knew nothing of the world and had no idea just how fortunate we were to be born in the first place. We were graced into existence and from then on began a journey – often a challenging one – of growth, knowledge and emotional theatrics.

While none of us know what's going on the minds of others, we can guess. We are pretty similar and respond to things in similar ways.

I don't know what you know, but I make it my job to learn, and extract and grasp.

My chosen profession has exposed me to literally thousands of different people – entrepreneurs, athletes, musicians, actors, astronauts, builders and movers and shakers. Each one had a story to tell and I was blessed to hear their tales. I now know a little bit more than when I started my career some 30 years ago.

The stories and fabulous fables continue to flow as I encounter new and interesting people weekly. They may not realize, but they're doing me a huge favour – they're teaching me and passing on bits and pieces of their knowledge. Conversely, while I don't get many opportunities, I am happy to share all that I know, too. Maybe I do this in my columns without realizing it. If so, I hope that you can absorb something useful, something new, something special.

Maybe, just maybe, you can know what I know.

Again, while the quoted Christmas carol speaks of a profound, world-changing birth and child, maybe we can continue that miracle. We can come together, spread peace and joy.

Are we tasked with spreading sounds, sights and know-how to our brethren? Yes, we are. People often wonder about their purpose in life. Well, my friends, I just spelled it out, or at least partially.

If we all connected better and shared such things from the heart, the world would truly come to life.

If we pass on what we hear and see and know, it may open the eyes, ears and minds of our brothers and sisters.

Share one, share all!



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KEN HUNT

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Hearts Behind the Ice: Caledon honours two Community Builders with Distinguished Citizen Awards

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

Under this year's Town of Caledon Citizen Achievement Awards, six selected community members received the Distinguished Citizen Award.

The 2025 Winners were presented with their award at Caledon Day, and among this year's recipients are two familiar faces to anyone who laces up skates in Caledon.

One of the recipients was Ken Hunt, otherwise known as the "Ice Angel."

Hunt ran the Palgrave Pond every winter since 2000, until two years ago, when the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), which owns the pond, closed it for safety reasons.

Over the years, Hunt spent tireless hours, often getting home from work after waking up at three in the morning to scrape off the snow and ensure the ice was the best for all the neighbourhood kids to come clambering on it shortly after.

Hunt says there would be a line up to use it at 9 a.m., and he'd end up having to kick kids off of it into the night." Nobody wanted to go home," he says.

He says he often saw hundreds of people using Palgrave Pond each day.

Hunt says that when the Palgrave Pond was operating, he saw people from miles away just to skate on it; for some, it was their first time on ice.

It especially brought people together, as he notes he often saw families and big teams skating together.

"It was a big thing in the community with the people. The people you meet down there and people down and all the families," says Hunt. "I'm sure a lot of them still talk about it."

"People would come from overseas, visiting their families, and they've never been on skates before, and they go down there and have memories for a lifetime of learning how to skate on the pond."

Hunt even built benches and brought down hockey nets for the kids to use.

"I wish it was up and going by now," says Hunt. "For the kids' sake."

Now, Hunt volunteers with rinks set up at the local ball diamond, and he hopes to someday see a rink similar to the Palgrave Pond return for the entire community to use.

"It's a thing of the heart," Hunt says, reflecting on his 25 years at Palgrave Pond. "I could never give up, to see the smile on the kids' faces."

Daniel Venafro, despite his numerous other volunteer commitments, participates in the community rink program. For the last eight years, he's watched both families and kids enjoy the rinks that he's been able to maintain.

Venafro has been a volunteer firefighter with Caledon for going on 15 years, and he currently serves as President of the Village of Inglewood Association (VIA).

"The award, it wasn't something that I was expecting. I've received a few over the past few years, it's not why I do it. I do it because I enjoy giving back to the community," he says.

He has been the recipient of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Pin, presented by Dufferin–Caledon MP Kyle Seeback, and he also received the COVID-19 Local Community Hero Award from Seeback.

Venafro was born and raised here in Caledon, and his wife, Caledon District Chief Mandy Gould, is third generation in Inglewood and he adds she often helps out with the rink program as well.

"It's just something that I've always done," says Venafro about helping his community. "It's nothing that I expect recognition for. It's not why I do it. I do it just because I'm able to, I'm capable, and I like to bring good community spirit to the community. I just think doing some good around your community goes a long way."

Through leading by example, he hopes to encourage others in the community to help out as well.

Venafro says he often has young kids from the neighbourhood ask if they can help him set up the rink. He says the rink program takes a lot of hours and a lot of work, both behind the scenes and on the ice.

Not only does it take various applications, but Venafro adds it's often when he's coming home from work close to midnight that he can be found down at the rink cleaning it, scraping it, and conducting inspections to ensure it's safe for the next day.

"The last couple of years, I haven't even skated on it," he adds. "Just knowing that kids look forward to that and families look forward to that, like driving home from work and driving through Town and passing the outdoor rink and seeing families on it is my satisfaction."

"It's for me to be able to see that families and kids are going down there and enjoying it and having a good time and building new relationships and making new friends, because people come from all over."

Venafro adds it takes a whole community to make this happen.

Young people from Town, or members of the VIA, he adds, often help maintain the rinks.

When it comes to the VIA, Venafro has been involved for years. During COVID, he says VIA was struggling to keep its head above water.

"We raise a lot of our money through community events and fundraisers, so during COVID, we couldn't do any of that. We do everything we can to make a little bit of money to throw that money back into the community to run bigger events and host different things, and it was to the point where I had people coming in to me and saying, 'Dan, just let it go.'"

But he says he just couldn't, and now they're successfully back up and running yet again.

The VIA recently held their annual Christmas Tree Lighting for the community. When he heard he was receiving the Distinguished Citizen Award, he says he was both surprised and excited.

"I do it because I enjoy doing it and not because I'm expecting or hoping to get something out of it at the end."

"You need the support of others in order to get things like this done. I can't do this kind of stuff by myself. People might think that I'm the only one who does all the work, but because they see me out there spraying the rink at 12 o'clock at night or a couple of us down there cleaning it. But at the same time, those other individuals are just as hard-working as I am and should be recognized also," says Venafro. "It's not just me, it's everybody."

MAYOR ANNETTE GROVES
MAYOR GROVES' COLUMN



Community Watch Program

Caledon is a caring, connected community, and keeping our neighbourhoods safe is something we can take part in.

I'd like to share information about an important Ontario Provincial Police program that is available right here in Caledon and across Ontario.

Community Watch programs—often known as Neighbourhood Watch—are community-led and police-supported initiatives that encourage residents to look out for one another and report anything that seems unusual or concerning. These programs strengthen the Community Mobilization and Engagement Model of Community Policing by empowering residents to play an active role in creating safer, more secure neighbourhoods.

The goal of Community Watch is simple: to help reduce opportunities for crime and prevent harm and victimization. It's not about getting involved in your neighbour's personal affairs—it's about building a community where people feel comfortable, connected, and protected.

Community Watch programs can be introduced wherever there is a need and where enough volunteers are willing to form a Community Watch Committee.

Many Community Watch programs are thriving across Ontario, each shaped to fit the unique needs of its local area. The heart of every successful program is strong community commitment. Volunteers run the program with support from their local police service and municipality. When at least 51 per cent of the neighbourhood participates, the program can be formally launched and Community Watch signs can be posted at key locations.

I encourage residents to consider getting involved in this meaningful initiative.

Benefits of Community Watch

- Help reduce crime;
- Learn valuable crime-prevention skills;
- Build stronger connections with neighbours and community partners;
- Learn how to identify and report unusual activity;
- Contribute to a safer, more welcoming community.

For more information on starting a Community Watch program in your area, please contact the Caledon OPP at (905) 584-2241 or by email 15512@opp.ca.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone a Merry Christmas.

The holidays are a special time for us to come together, with families and friends to reflect on the blessings in our lives, and to embrace the spirit of togetherness.

Let us spread kindness and open our hearts to those in our community who may need a support during this special time of year.

On behalf of the Town Council, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a holiday season full of joy, laughter, and love.

SHERALYN ROMAN
TALK CALEDON



It's a Christmas Miracle

It's usually around this time of year I take some time to write what I hope to be a generally more cheerful column than my usual musings. Increasingly it has proven challenging to do so. But, just like some kind of Dickens inspired Christmas story, this week I do have something happy to write about! A surprise series of events (possibly coincidental) has led to a true Caledon Christmas Miracle that (also coincidental) flies in the face of the very thing I wrote about last week.

Caledon Council, during its December 16th meeting, surprised some residents by including a Memorandum concerning Swan Lake on the agenda. Doing so generated significant interest amongst those community members who have played an active role in trying to protect the lake from the "prominent developer" who seeks to fill it with all manner of debris. Strong, and unique delegations were made before Council once again, only this time, in what seemed to this reviewer to be a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre, Council voted unanimously to grant Swan Lake a "stay of execution."

The move to rescind the original motion put before Council in May of this year was a complicated matter that likely required some level of coordination and effort amongst staff and some members of Council to pull it off. Councillor Russo was left holding the political hot potato, tasked with explaining the rationale behind Council's sudden reversal. Whether some of us remain dubious as to the timing and machinations that resulted in this true Caledon Christmas Miracle, for now it is safe to say that Swan Lake remains, as it should, for the swans (and every other species currently calling it home.)

Keri Parfitt, whom we have written about before, became an ardent, vocal and extremely well-versed advocate for Swan Lake, with a team of supportive residents relying on her extensive knowledge to help lead the charge against filling in the groundwater-fed lake located at 0 Shaw's Creek Rd. Hundreds of concerned residents and nearby local landowners supported her efforts, as did literally thousands of people who signed a petition against squandering this beautiful natural resource. In the end, the cause may also have been significantly bolstered by the efforts of a Member of Provincial Parliament. Not, for the record, our own Caledon MPP, but rather MPP Ted Hsu of Kingston and the Islands. That's because in addition to the cumulative efforts of Keri and an entire team of people behind her, Caledon Council's reversal came hot on the heels of a key statement made in the Provincial legislature before it broke for the holidays.

Nudge, nudge, this is the coincidental part. MPP Hsu recently rose in the Provincial legislature to pose a question on behalf of all Caledon residents. He asked: "Would the Minister of Natural Resources please say (regarding the former aggregate pit, sited at 0 Shaws Creek Road, in the Town of Caledon, which has been inspected, declared successfully rehabilitated and, as a result, had its aggregate licence surrendered on August 2, 2023) whether the Government of Ontario now considers, legally, the remaining below-water-table feature on the site as an aggregate pit, or as a lake or wetland." And the answer? With a drumroll please, the answer, according to the MNR, is that 0 Shaw's Creek Rd is a "lake or wetland." In other words, what supporters of Swan Lake have been saying all along. This address is NOT an aggregate pit, but in fact, a fully rehabilitated property with a groundwater fed lake.

So – it's good news for Swan Lake. A win for protecting private wells and Ward 1 drinking water, a win for protecting both species at risk and all denizens of Swan Lake, a win for all the flora and fauna surrounding the lake and a win for the health, welfare and even livelihoods of the adjacent land owners. Frankly, it is also a win for the four Councillors who doggedly supported Swan Lake from the very beginning. Thank you Councillors Early, Kiernan, Sheen and DeBoer.

Finally, according to Caledon Council proceedings, the matter is barred from coming before Council again at any time during this "current term of council," meaning in theory the reprieve should see Swan Lake safely through to next October. The matter also demonstrated a rare show of unity amongst the entire Council when the vote to rescind the May 2025 motion did NOT result in the somewhat typical 5-4 split (as we wrote about just last week.) Even if temporary, or simply in the spirit of the season, the unanimous vote in itself was also a win.

For now, I choose the positive and see this as a true example of a "power to the people" moment. The Swan Lake victory is indeed a Caledon Christmas Miracle. Whether Council decisions prove to be coincidental to Provincial proceedings or not, it's a reprieve and residents are rightly celebrating. As for whether or not proposed changes to the Site Alteration Bylaw (coming to Council sometime in the new year) could yet still impact this address, continuing to centre it squarely within the developer's crosshairs, remains to be seen. In the meantime, whatever you celebrate – and how – you do so at this time of year, I wish you all a happy, healthy and joyful holiday and a very happy new year!





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Daniel Petrov's hat trick guides Golden Hawks to 5-4 win over Schomberg Cougars

BY JIM STEWART

In an exciting PJHL game featuring a pair of hat tricks by Schomberg's Jack Geniole and Caledon's Daniel Petrov, the visiting Golden Hawks defeated the Cougars 5-4 at the Trisan Centre on Thursday night.

The Golden Hawks opened the scoring at 9:25 of the first period when Petrov beat Cougars' goaltender Ryan Potvin for the first of his three goals.

Eighty-nine seconds later, Geniole got the Cougars on the board when he finished a feed from Lucas Marshall.

Schomberg's 6'5" Captain scored his second of the game 55 seconds into the second when Cooper Drennan, Brandon Petrova, and Geniole clicked on the power play to give the Cougars a 2-1 lead.



Schomberg Captain Jack Geniole fired three goals on Thursday, but the Caledon Golden Hawks defeated the Cougars 5-4. Caledon was led by Daniel Petrov's impressive four-point performance: a hat trick and an assist.
PHOTO BY JIM STEWART

Less than four minutes later, Caledon AP Austin Wong tallied his first of the season to pull the visitors into a 2-2 tie.

Petrov set up Arland Devendra for the Golden Hawks' go-ahead goal at 13:10 and fired home his second of the game past Potvin at 18:32 to give the visitors a 4-2 lead heading into the second intermission.

Petrov's late period goal chased Potvin from the game after the Schomberg netminder surrendered four goals on 22 shots. Former OJHL Aurora Tiger Rafael DeFina took his place between the pipes for the Cougars for the final period of play.

Inspired by the goaltending change, Geniole completed his hat trick at 11:01 to pull the home side to within one, but the Cougars' spirited rally for the balance of the period fell short. When Petrov completed his hat trick by beating DeFina with 1:27 on the clock to make it 5-3, it appeared to be an insurance goal for the Golden Hawks.

However, just eight seconds after Petrov's third of the game, the never-say-die Cougars made it 5-4 when Samuel Lamy tallied his tenth of the season. Despite a closing flurry by Schomberg, Caledon goaltender Max Zemp and the seventh-place Golden Hawks held off the hard-pressing home side to secure the road win.

Zemp turned aside 29 of 33 shots to earn the W.

SSE90 U16 soccer players selected for Serie A Elite Experience in Rome

BY JIM STEWART

Caledon U16 soccer players Chester Borscevski and Arjun Dhindsa have been selected from the "North American Serie A Elite / Rome City Institute ID camps" to travel to Italy for a unique training experience.

The Mayfield Secondary School students will participate in soccer camps running from December 13-20 in Rome.

Borscevski and Dhindsa play for the SSE90 Boys U16 team, a Caledonbased academy led by Coach Valerio Rocca, that's been developing local players through yearround training and its rep program.

Chester's mom, Carol Borscevski, said she was pleased about her son being selected for the travel team: "We're very proud. He's a committed soccer player. Chester is excited about the opportunities and about the doors that it could open. It is an experience of a lifetime."

Only 18 players across Canada and the United States were chosen for the travel team and Carol Borscevski expressed here gratitude to the SSE90 soccer program and its coaches.

"We're grateful towards SSE90 for what they've done to improve Chester as a player over the last two years. He's played for South Caledon since he was 4. We're also grateful for the role Coach Valerio Rocco has played in Chester's development as a rep player. He encouraged the players in the organization to try out for this opportunity in Rome and only three players were selected across Canada. It's fantastic for Chester and Arjun. They're both super-excited about eight days of training sessions followed by preparation practices for the North American players so they're ready to play local Italian teams in exhibition games. They'll also enjoy two days of local excursions—visiting landmarks in Rome."

Borscevsky, a Health Services instructor at Sheridan College's main campus, provided context for the arduous process through which Chester and Arjun were selected: "Rome City Institute held 12 ID camps across North America this summer, two of them in Canada (Toronto and Montreal). SSE90, based here in Mayfield West and led by Academy Director and Head Coach Valerio Rocca, has been instrumental in developing these young athletes. Coach Rocca oversees the South Caledon Soccer Club, where Chester and many of his teammates began their soccer journeys many years ago. SSE90 is a fantastic club that continues to provide remarkable opportunities for youth in our Mayfield West community."

Skate with Santa brings holiday cheer to TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Santa Claus came to town a few days early this Christmas season to break in his skates and enjoy a fun skating afternoon with families and friends at TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley.

TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley opened its new complimentary ice rink on December 5th, allowing community members and families to enjoy all Osprey Valley has to offer year-round.

This past weekend, they held a free Skate with Santa event, where families could come out and enjoy the rink and take a few turns around the ice with Santa himself.

He could even be seen warming himself up by the fire bowls outside the rink and handing out candy canes.

With their new rink and winter activities, attendees can also enjoy food and beverages, and at the Skate with Santa, TPC provided complimentary hot chocolate.

The new rink can be booked for private rentals, or community members can come and skate during their various skate times throughout the week, and includes free skate, hockey, and the most popular, family skate.

Shauna Meyer, Tournament and Programming Manager at TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley, says the family skate often draws a big crowd, much like the one at Skate with Santa.

"I've been working here for 10 years now, to see it all come together is amazing," says Meyer, noting the new winter experience at TPC.

With the rink now open for the season, TPC Toronto at Osprey Valley is inviting families to lace up their skates and make winter memories that will last long after Santa has hung up his skates for the year.

To view the full rink schedule, visit www.ospreyvalley.com/thekettle.

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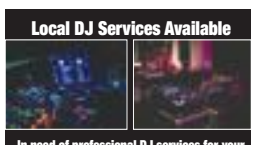
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- These are full-time positions, based on 88 hours of work per 2-week cycle, with occasional overtime.
- At this time, we are only looking for individuals who can work a 12-hour rotating continental shift, including nights and weekends. Work an 8.5-hour rotating shift, days, afternoons, nights and weekends.
- Salary $24.50 - $25.40 per hour, with possibility of bonus; 10 days vacation plus extended medical, dental, and long-term disability insurance & participation in our retirement savings plan.
- Inbound transportation costs for out of province applicants.
- Completion of high school required.
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- Certified and experienced in operating various forklifts, including models equipped with clamps, with a strong emphasis on safety protocols, efficient loading techniques, and adherence to load capacities.
- Previous heavy equipment experience preferred.

To view a comprehensive overview of the position, please go to https: https://jobs.dayforcehcm.com/en-US/irss/CANDIDATEPORTAL/jobs/3305. Interested candidates please send a copy of your resume and cover letter to cstewart@iceriversprings.com or write to:

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- Salary $20.60 - $23.00 per hour, with possibility of bonus; 10 days vacation plus extended medical, dental, and long-term disability insurance & participation in our retirement savings plan.
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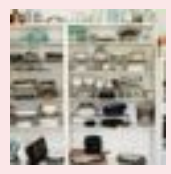
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Second place went to John Farrow, left, and honourable mention to Josie Vitti, right.
PHOTOS BY RILEY MURPHY

Rotary recognizes 2025 Winners of Home Christmas Decoration contest

Continued from PAGE A3

Caledon Rotary works to ensure true community collaboration each year for their tree lighting.

The community gives that same effort back, with many local stores donating either their services or help for the event.

They have a performance each year from the Palgrave Public School Choir, and the Rotary Chuckwagon was on site throughout the event, serving hot dogs. Coffee Time Bolton provided hot chocolate for the evening, and Media 21 donated their sound system for the event.

They also had crafts and a bouncy house for all the kids.

Raphael Boettger, past president of Caledon Rotary, says that a goal of theirs is to make people feel that the community is not just attending another event, but that they are part of the event.

For the tree lighting, Caledon Rotary shared they also received numerous donations, allowing them to continue their efforts in serving the community.

"We do everything for the good of the community," says Bernie Rochon, who has been a member of Caledon Rotary for numerous years. "It's guaranteed that everything that we get, dollars, support, 100% of it goes back out."

The Rotary Club covers its own fees and operating costs through its membership fund and grants, ensuring that every donation they receive goes directly back into serving the community.

"Every single penny that gets donated goes right back into the community," says Boettger.

Recently, the club has put its efforts into various community initiatives, such as repainting the local gazebo and supporting local organizations.

Their efforts recently went towards the Caledon Community Services food drive and scholarships for students at local high schools, such as Humberview and Robert F. Hall.

Boettger notes that although they do outreach with charities as well, outside the community, their main focus is on local charities and organizations.

Now, Caledon Rotary is calling on the community to let them know what you want to see done in your local community.

Boettger says they're all ears to what the community would like them to accomplish.

Their doors are also always open to new members looking to make a difference in their local community.



Isolde Boettger presents one of this year's gifts to employee Sunish Puri. (Left to right) Yogesh Chauhan, Manpreet Kaur, Sunish Puri, Isolde Boettger, and Raphael Boettger.
PHOTO BY RILEY MURPHY

Silcotech Donates $9,000 to CCS

BY RILEY MURPHY
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Local business Silcotech held its annual employee gift raffle recently and this year saw high numbers as they raised $9,000 for Caledon Community Services and featured 160 holiday gifts.

Their annual holiday raffle began about 20 years ago, and has grown exponentially since then.

Each year, they ask their suppliers to collaborate with them and donate a gift for their raffle, which Isolde Boettger, Vice President and Co-Founder, says began with just 10 suppliers.

Boettger notes that Silcotech also buys gifts for the raffle, and this year, between donations from them and suppliers, they hit 160 gifts.

"We really are amazed by what people do," says Boettger. "We at Silcotech have created such a great raffle for the community with our suppliers. We couldn't do it without them."

She notes that this type of response shows them the great relationship they have not only with their customers, but also with their suppliers.

Boettger also says that the team and employees at Silcotech worked extremely hard on the raffle.

The team, composed of EHSQ specialist Manpreet Kaur, Purchasing Specialist Raphael Boettger, and CEO Yogesh Chauhan, say that it "makes it worth it."

This year, from the raffle, employees put in $4,500, and Silcotech, on top of purchasing many of the gifts, is going to match that for a total of $9,000 going to CCS, the recipient of the raffle each year.

"The most important thing is the synergy between suppliers, employees, and the organization, and then donating it to your own community. I think that in itself, the whole thing comes out very positive for everyone," says Chauhan.

"It's a great example for other companies within the community to organize something like this that goes back to the community, and that's what we want to do," notes Isolde Boettger.

Each year, Silcotech also runs food and toy donations through the company that go back into the community, which Raphael Boettger notes often amounts to hundreds of pounds of food.

As Silcotech continues to grow, they look forward to watching their raffle grow right alongside them and continue to give back for years to come.

Record numbers at CCS' Exchange Food Bank reflect growing food insecurity

Continued from FRONT

Jackson worked for 10 years at General Mills, during which she worked with the philanthropic group that first introduced her to how different food banks operate.

"I got the opportunity to really get into it and see how it worked, and I realized this is a much bigger problem than I thought it was going to be," says Jackson. "The Foodbank is a band-aid. It's not a solution, and it's become a solution instead of a band-aid, and it's really sad."

It was the community's food insecurity issues that first brought Jackson to volunteer at the Exchange pre-COVID.

Jackson works a weekly shift on Thursdays, which she says has almost become the best part of her week.

To her, it's not just about the food, it's about the relationships and conversations she's able to have with the clients who use the Exchange.

"Something that's going to make their experience the way it should be," she adds.

The not-so-great parts, she notes, are when she has to tell those who come to the Exchange that they have run out of meat, or dairy, or eggs.

Jackson adds that at the Exchange, she's feeling the high numbers being reported.

"You're seeing a lot of people that are first-timers and people that have been working very recently, and suddenly they're here."

"A little step to the left or a little step to the right, and you can be here. It's no fault of your own. These things happen, and that's why I'm truly grateful that we're able to provide this because if we didn't, I would really worry," she says.

Jackson says that social services are absolutely needed, as well as the volunteers that make it happen, "and not just at this time of the year. All the time."

With food bank visits on the rise, Jackson notes that at this time of year, people are very generous, with both their delivery doors busy with drop-offs, school donations, and more.

"I think the most important thing is to realize that a step left or a step right, and things could change, and realize that, recognize that, and appreciate where you are," she adds.

Jackson also notes that volunteer time is just as valuable for those unable to give financially or with food donations.

"CCS does an amazing job with all the different programs that they're running. It frightens me if they were not there. What would be happening? How would people get around? Transportation, learning another language, learning how to get a job, all that stuff is key. If you don't have that social safety net, you have a problem," she adds.

Carol Good has been a part of CCS for over 30 years now, when it was originally called Caledon Information and Community Services. She says she's seen it go through location changes, upgrades, and recalls a time when they didn't yet have an established food bank.

Around the holidays, Caledon Information and Community Services would run what they called a "Santa Fund" because, at the time, the community did not have a food bank.

During the Santa Fund, they would collect food donations around the holidays, pack them into boxes of canned goods, and distribute them along with toys and clothes.

The leftovers from the Santa Fund would be put in a closet, and that became the "food bank" for the time being.

When they opened the Exchange at its current location, Good notes that CCS envisioned a community hub, a dignified food bank.

They implemented a community kitchen, a pantry, and clients were able to meet with CCS volunteers for a needs assessment.

She notes that those volunteering and working at CCS are incredibly resourceful in all aspects of the work required.

Good echoed Jackson's point that the food bank is a band-aid to a much larger problem.

"It's like a Band-Aid. It's not addressing the fundamentals of what makes life so unaffordable for too many people," says Good.

"For some people, it's a choice between food and rent, and this is not a climate where you can go without shelter. People need shelter, and because we have such limited transportation options, people need transport. Then people with kids, everything with kids is expensive, that ends up being a priority over food as well, so food really is the one that is a bit more squishable and that's where people have to scrimp if they have to scrimp."

Over her 30 years involved, Good says she's seen the need grow substantially.

During the pandemic, Good was asked whether she and her husband could take over collecting donations at each pickup location in the community.

She as recently as December 17 they picked up over 500 pounds of food just from one grocery store, which, she adds, is more than usual, as there is an uptick in volume around the Holidays.

But she notes that it often only lasts a short time.

"What amazes me is that we could drop off a truckload of food, and it's gone the next week we come back," says Good. "The volume of food that moves through this place is mind-boggling."

Good adds it's more than just the pantry, and CCS also works to connect their clients with services across the community that best fit their needs, such as help with utility payments or kids' programming.

Although Good sees a rise in donations around the holidays, she says there's a plunge very soon after.

"Food donations are very cyclical," she says.

They often see more donations roll in at the beginning or end of school-year food drives, or during holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving.

But after these big donation periods, they are seen equally as big drops.

"Affordability is hitting everyone. That is the reality," says Good. "One of the shocking things that I learned is that prices in the last few years have gone up around 20-25%.... That's far more than anybody's wages were going up, and so, the reality is, it pinches everybody."

Good notes their sponsors that help keep their pantry shelves full, as well as community collaborations with groups such as Albion Hills Community Farm.

"Many hands make light work, I think that's very real. But the need never goes away. People are always hungry the next day. It's just relentless that way."

Good, as Jackson said, encourages the community to come out and volunteer.

"It only works if everybody pitches in," she says. "To me, I don't know how you get a community that you want to live in if you don't actually get in there and help make it happen."

To volunteer at the Exchange or help keep their shelves full, community members can visit them in person at 55 Healey Road in Bolton or visit their website with CCS: ccs4u.org/life/the-exchange.

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