

# AYLMER EXPRESS

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WHERE THE COMMUNITY MEETS

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## Express-O-Gram No criticism allowed at TVDSB

### THE MIRACLE OF MOTHERHOOD

Here we are on the cusp of another Mother's Day, one of the most significant landmarks on our calendar. We can't think of anyone more deserving of recognition for their contribution to the civilized part of civilization than mothers, yet we don't even recognize them with a holiday.

We'd suggest May 24, currently a mysterious anachronistic celebration of a foreign queen.

In this newspaper, we have the especially enriching story of Jackie Stockford and her daughter Petra, born on September 18, 2020, 12 weeks prematurely.

She was just one pound, five ounces at birth and the story relates the resolve and love of the parents and the miraculous abilities of the healthcare system that have manifested a very happy continuance.

These circumstances would be acutely trying for any mother and family in such dire circumstances with a tiny baby's life in the balance on a daily basis. It is hard to imagine how it was all accomplished in the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic. Defence against that threat made normal social contact impossible and the protocols around the protection of those already at-risk infants, had to be just so much tighter.

Because Jackie is a colleague here at the Aylmer Express, we are not surprised that she was able to handle those hard-to-imagine tensions and demands.

What she has done for us is put a face on the tremendous service provided by the Ronald McDonald House in London, which became a home for her in the 71 days that her baby spent at Children's Hospital in London. It allowed her to remain close and become a constant in her infant's life, despite the restrictions due to COVID.

This business has supported the Ronald McDonald House in Toronto for many years. It became personal

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by Rob Perry  
of The Aylmer Express

Criticism of any kind of Thames Valley District School Board trustees and administration is forbidden at its meetings, as Norwich Mayor and rural school activist Marcus Ryan learned at a board meeting Tuesday, April 26.

He walked out before concluding his remarks, describing the rules as "farcical."

Board Chairman and London Trustee Lori-Ann Pizzolato warned Mayor Ryan before he started speaking, he would be strictly limited to five minutes, and that he had to conduct himself in a "respectful" manner.

Mayor Ryan asked at the beginning of his statement, "Who, in fact, is in charge here?"

He wanted to know who made decisions about how the board's billion-dollar annual budget was spent. "Do trustees make decisions and then administration does what it wants?"

London Trustee Corinne Rahman immediately raised a point of order, describing the remarks as disrespectful.

Mayor Ryan asked what specifically was disrespectful in what he had said.

Chairman Pizzolato said comments had to be kept "positive."

Trustee Rahman asked Mayor Ryan to be respectful of trustees and staff, saying they were all trying to do their best during the COVID pandemic.

Mayor Ryan said if pointing

out deficiencies was considered disrespectful, he wasn't sure what he could give his presentation to an institution unwilling to accept "even the slightest criticism of how they function."

London Trustee Sherri Moore said, "There's criticism and there's sarcasm," and the initial remarks had been very sarcastic.

"Are the egos in this room that fragile?" Mayor Ryan demanded. "I'm frankly stunned by this."

TVDSB Parliamentarian Lori Lukinuk said argumentativeness and criticism "are not allowed in any form in the board room."

Mayor Ryan said he'd never seen municipal councillors refuse constructive criticism from taxpayers and residents and didn't know how they could function under similar rules.

"Whether it is respectful or not is irrelevant" when it came to criticism from members of the public, he argued.

Everyone had been struggling through the pandemic, he said, not just trustees and school administrators. That didn't make them immune to criticism.

The message being sent out by the board was, "Everything you do is perfect. I'm dumbfounded. It is stunning to me the fragility of the egos in here."

He pointed to a recent decision by the board to resume requiring children and staff to wear face masks while at school. Afterward, administrators put

out a message to parents saying the rule wasn't enforceable and they should ignore it, and then the board chairman put out a

contradictory statement. "Which one do they follow?" he asked. "Who knows who's in charge?"

He then was informed that he had only one minute remaining. "Is that a joke?" he said.

"This is nothing but a charade and a shame and I'll cede the rest of my time. "This is absolutely farcical."



The arrival of baby Petra, born three months early, to the Malahide home of the Stockford family, Oli, 9, left, mother Jackie, father Mark and daughter Kit, 5, on Dec. 18, 2020, was an occasion for great celebration and joy. Jackie stayed for 71 nights at Ronald McDonald House in London while Petra,

in hospital, slowly grew to the point where she was safe to come home. Jackie is urging everyone to go to McHappy Day at McDonalds on Wednesday, May 11, where proceeds from sales will go to support the house. A full story and more pictures are on page 3. (AE/contributed)

## Six to seven portables at SDPS

### New Belmont school still years away

by Rob Perry  
of The Aylmer Express

The opening of a new elementary school in Belmont could be four years or more away, Thames Valley District School Board trustees learned on Tuesday, April 26.

Elgin-St. Thomas Trustee Bruce Smith had asked for an update on the process of getting the new school built, to replace Westminster Central and South Dorchester public schools.

(Westminster Central will close this summer, and children

from there transferred on a "temporary" basis starting in September to SDPS.)

Facility Services and Planning Superintendent Geoff Vogt said building the school had already been "a long and frustrating journey."

The board had been trying to acquire the land for a new school from a real estate developer since 2016 and was just now in the process of submitting documentation to the Ontario Ministry of Education to allow that to be completed.

Elgin-St. Thomas Trustee Meagan Ruddock asked if designing the school could be advanced, so TVDSB was ready to build when that land approval came.

Supt. Vogt said as much would be done simultaneously as possible, but at certain stages the ministry's okay was needed before proceeding any further. He later said steps requiring approval were: first to acquire needed land; second when the design of the new school was nearly completed; and finally the

price negotiated with a contractor to do the actual construction.

Asking for an approximate timeline, Trustee Ruddock was told the acquisition approval would take six to 12 months and then, after that, getting the school built would be another 36 to 42 months.

She asked how increased enrolment at South Dorchester would be handled in the meantime.

Associate Director Jeff Pratt said a similar question

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## Elgin offers symbolic support of Ukraine

by Rob Perry  
of The Aylmer Express

Elgin County councillors at a meeting Tuesday, April 26, decided to give symbolic support to war-torn Ukraine, rather than any financial backing.

The county is flying the Ukrainian flag at the Elgin Heritage Centre, and posting online to raise public awareness

of the invasion of that country by Russia.

At a meeting a month earlier, West Elgin Mayor Duncan McPhail, supported by other councillors, had raised the possibility of making a financial donation to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

At the April 26 meeting, county Administrator Julie

Gonyou presented a report arguing that Elgin should not do so.

The county, she wrote, had at one time had a \$5,000 annual fund to allow Elgin council to make donations toward unanticipated events or causes through the year.

In 2016, that fund was used to contribute to the relief effort for Fort McMurray wildfires, and in 2011 to help assist Goderich after it had been hit by a tornado.

However, she said, the current council cancelled that line from its annual budget, and all requests for financial help were now handled through a Community Grant Program.

"The rationale behind removing this budget line was to ensure that all programs and events receiving taxpayer-funded grants were vetted through a consistent process, and that funds were given to organizations serving the residents of Elgin County.

"There is no doubt that the citizens of Ukraine are suffering greatly and that their plight is a worthy cause. However,

staff are recommending that county council support the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine through non-financial means or through personal donations."

Mayor McPhail said he understood the thrust of the report. "The policy is the policy. I certainly understand that."

He also noted that as of that morning, the number of refugees who had fled the war in Ukraine was estimated at 8.3-million.

Central Elgin Deputy Mayor Tom Marks said just talking about the issue could spur individuals to make private donations to support Ukraine. "It's hard to watch television at night," given the news coming out of that country, he added.

Central Elgin Mayor Sally Martyn agreed that taxpayer money shouldn't be used to donate to Ukraine, and that county councillors didn't have the right to do so.

She challenged councillors to donate a portion of their county pay for that month toward humanitarian relief. "It would be a nice gesture."



As demonstrator Emilie Buys, left, organized 5 through 7-year-old dancers for a jazz number, "Wanna Be," Sloane Edwards waved to someone in the audience for the first Spring Recital in three years for Tammy's Dance Studio students at Immanuel Christian School in Aylmer on Saturday, April 30. Two shows were held that day, and a final show will be on Saturday, May 7, at 1 p.m. More pictures are inside and to follow next edition. (AE/Rob Perry)

## Summer Projects

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