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advocate

November | December 2025

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DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

M&T Printing Group

ADVERTISING AND SALES:

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ADVERTISING AND COPY DEADLINES:

November 14, 2025 for January-February 2026

January 20, 2026 for March-April 2026

SUBSCRIPTION AND BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES:

Darlene Jones

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SUBMISSION POLICY:

Proposals and articles are accepted via mail or email

c/o Editor - Advocate. Please do not send originals.

All contributors articles must be accompanied by a head
shot in a jpg file and a 40 word author's bio.

publications permit: #40026716

FOR PERMISSIONS AND REPRINT REQUESTS

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PRINTED IN CANADA BY:

M&T
PRINTING GROUP

PUBLICATION OF:


GREATER KITCHENER WATERLOO
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BUSINESS BUILDING COMMUNITY

POSTMASTER ADDRESS CHANGES

c/o Advocate - Publications Office

80 Queen Street North, PO Box 2367

Kitchener, Ontario N2H 6L4

519.576.5000

The Advocate is a bi-monthly membership benefit publication of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce. Advertising content and the views expressed herein are those of the contributors and do not constitute endorsement by the Chamber. The Advocate follows the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards (1990), copies are available through the Publisher. The Chamber cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions that may occur and has the right to edit material submitted. The Chamber will not accept advertising with competitor comparison claims and has the right to refuse advertising that is deemed to be false, misleading, or inappropriate.

The Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce – Your Partner for a Bright Future

Welcome back! I hope that everyone had an amazing summer and was able to take time from their busy work schedules to find time to reconnect with family, friends and nature. I also hope you were able to check out some of the events that the Chamber held during the summer, like the new golf networking scramble and the Innovation Corridor Summit.

Now that it is fall, and we are back to our regular routines, I wanted to take a quick minute of your time to remind you of all the work the Chamber is doing, and all the value we hope to provide to you for your membership and sponsorship dollars. I, personally, like to think of the Chamber as a trusted business partner; one that is there to not only provide networking and educational opportunities, but also who is advocating for our business and community needs.

Most small businesses that join the Chamber do so for one of two reasons. One is business networking. And we do a lot of this. From our Chamber Young Professionals, to Business After 5, to our Peer-to-Peer and Toastmasters groups, we provide ample opportunities for business owners to meet with other like minded individuals. Not only can this help grow your business, through business-to-business transactions, but it also provides a sounding board of sorts; a place where you can bring up challenges that your business might be facing and get some real advice from people who might have faced a similar situation. It also provides an outlet for people to share success stories, which might help other businesses grow from these experiences. The second reason is usually for access to the Cowan benefits program, as many small businesses are finding it hard to retain key employees today without offering some sort of insurance/benefit/RRSP program.

As a small business owner myself, I can honestly say that these were the reasons I joined many years ago. And it was not until I joined the Board that I truly understood the additional work that the Chamber was doing. And it is these other things that have kept me investing in the Chamber since.

Did you know that the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce (GKWCC) hosts a physician recruitment weekend every year, inviting physicians from all over the world to come to the region with the hopes that some may move to the region and set up shop? Did you know that the GKWCC was one of the central organizations, as part of the Business and Economic Support Team of Waterloo Region (BestWR), that put together the Vision 1 Million Scorecard, which identifies challenges and will track the region's progress over the next 25 years as we move towards 1 million residents? These are just two of the biggest advocacy projects that the Chamber has been working on.

And none of this – the networking/benefits/advocacy work – could be accomplished without you, our members. So, on behalf of the Chamber and the Board of Directors, I would like to thank you for your continued support. If I have mentioned something in this article that you had never heard of, and it interests you, please reach out to Ian and his team. And, if you also believe in the important work that this Chamber is doing, please help us. We are always looking for volunteers, sponsors and, of course, new members!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brad Dunbar

Brad Dunbar is a Chartered Professional Accountant and President of Dunbar & Associates, Professional Corporation, a local accounting firm specializing in tax return preparation and tax planning for individuals and small/medium sized businesses.

Future Prospects Provide Relief for Waterloo Region

The global trade winds are blowing and while Canada has been impacted along with the rest of the world- Canada and Waterloo Region have some attributes and reasons to stay strong and remain positive.

Canadian economic output, as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), declined for the third straight month in June as manufacturing slowed against the global trade war. Statistics Canada indicated the second quarter of 2025 provided a relative decrease of 1.6 percent GDP compared to 2024 as a result of the global trade disruption brought on by Trump tariffs.

Andrew DiCapua of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce noted the domestic economy experienced a significant export shock in the second quarter this year as the impacts from the trade war were calculated. The impact on economic growth was apparent in weak investment numbers that confirm businesses are generally waiting to invest in machinery, new hiring and new markets.

Derek Holt of Scotiabank observed that Canadian businesses, across the first quarter of 2025, were stockpiling and shipping out products before the implementation of American tariffs. The analysis of GDP in the second quarter was relatively distorted against rising consumer spending and increased investments in housing.

A September 15, 2025, report from RBC Economics concluded that trade-sensitive sectors have faced significant challenges. Exports declined sharply across the second quarter and manufacturing contracted at an annualized rate of 8 percent. However, most Canadian exports cross the border duty-free in accordance with CUSMA exemptions, while weaknesses are contained in designated sectors such as steel and aluminum.

Employment in manufacturing and transportation sectors collectively decreased by 32,000 workers from the conclusion of 2024. However, increases of 70,000 jobs in other industries indicate the economy is resilient and there is reason to remain positive. According to RBC, consumer spending increased 4.5 percent in the second quarter despite lower confidence. The unemployment rate reached 7.1 percent in August, a relatively high rate, however job openings and improved business confidence suggest stabilization.

From a local perspective, the Region of Waterloo and other local municipal governments have historically promoted our economy as vibrant and diverse with significant manufacturing, food and beverage, automotive, aerospace, finance and insurance, and technology sectors providing resilience against changing political environments. In recent years, our capacity to incubate and

support businesses in technology and other sectors is considered a major asset against competing municipalities through Canada and around the world.

The local manufacturing sector is the fourth largest in Canada, employing 57,000 people in 2020 across 1,850 organizations with annual revenues exceeding \$6 billion. Manufacturing employs one in five local workers who have survived significant challenges including the COVID pandemic and the bankruptcies of General Motors and Chrysler. Waterloo Region has weathered global trade downturns and will do so again.

On the healthcare front, we continue to see movement on a new hospital in Waterloo Region that will provide significant economic benefits on top of service delivery for local residents. In announcing a future location at the University of Waterloo on July 22, 2024, Premier Ford indicated the facility will foster innovation, enhance research, and better connect the growing region to convenient care closer to home.

Local MPP and Minister of Natural Resources Mike Harris noted that Waterloo Region has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years with residents selecting the local community for work, education opportunities and the public services offered. The provision of expanded healthcare infrastructure aligns with population and economic growth and the new hospital at the University of Waterloo is a major advancement.

Investments in our local economy like the new hospital, an expanded Highway 7, increased GO Transit passenger rail service, and LRT Phase II are in progress and are necessary investments that Waterloo Region employers require to meet the challenges of a global economy.

Despite global trade disruptions and the need for investments in our community, our Chamber continues to ask the question – Are we ready for one million people? But as a community, we should remain confident that we will overcome the current political challenges.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian McLean

Ian is President and CEO of the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce.



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Building Canada into a Global Economic Force - Again

During the spring federal election campaign, Prime Minister Mark Carney and his Liberal Party promised to build everything for every community across Canada.

The Liberal platform reminded voters that in past times we built “things” in this country. Over our national history, we demonstrated the capacity to collectively construct the infrastructure that binds us together, from a national railway to the Trans-Canada Highway to the St. Lawrence Seaway.

The platform failed to mention crippling labour disputes that paralyzed rail and port traffic over the past year while piling up significant costs for Canadian and international businesses. However, as Kim Campbell said many years ago, election campaigns are not the appropriate time to discuss serious public policy issues.

The Liberal Party claimed and many voters obviously agreed that it is time to build again – primarily a new economy which will be the strongest in the G7. There was a promise to build more than anyone can ever take away from us and make Canada strong. We will develop a system based on new approaches with less spending on government and more on the people and businesses that will be our leaders.

Promising to cut government spending can be a high-risk political strategy – anyone remember Tim Hudak? An employment lawyer once told me that he voted Progressive Conservative in 2014 since he anticipated large public service layoffs and accompanying wrongful dismissal litigation.

After Carney’s election infrastructure commitment similar to Jean Chretien and the GST a generation ago (the tax was going to be scrapped but mysteriously stills applies), voters and businesses demanded action. Canada needs to get on track – as long as it is not a railway closed by labour disputes.

On September 11, 2025, the Government of Canada responded to rising public pressure by announcing five projects that will be fast-tracked through a new Major Projects Office. The Carney approach is not to build or expedite projects but rather create new government departments. Cutting red tape by... creating more red tape.

Michael Higgins, in the September 12 edition of the National Post, designated the Major Projects Office as a “fraud” noting that it does not get out of the way but rather provides more barriers for completion. The five designated projects are not new and many have already spent years in a national regulatory run-around process. The Prime Ministerial press conference on September 11 was simply a repeat of the campaign platform with the same messages. In the political forum if an idea works once then simply bring it again.

What the Prime Minister missed at his announcement, according to Higgins, was that regulatory red tape is the result of a decade of Liberal government policy. A major factor behind declining business investment is a heavy regulatory burden on the extraction of minerals, oil and gas. The Fraser Institute concluded that the effect of red tape is relatively stagnant Canadian growth compared to the United States. Higgins final suggestion to the Prime Minister was take your own advice and get out of the way.

In the Region of Waterloo located within southwestern Ontario which contains no federal cabinet ministers - a deplorable predicament for the last four years - we are awaiting our fast-tracked and expedited project to assist the local economy. Doug Ford wants a tunnel under Highway 401 in Toronto included on a future federal list as the Ontario Premier believes this project should be accelerated to benefit all of Canada.

Mike Farwell and I both want a new Highway 7 to Guelph. We have collectively waited long enough so contact your cabinet minister in the 519-area code and demand better.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Art Sinclair

Art is Vice President Policy and Advocacy for the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce.



Healthcare to Prosperity: Why Physician Recruitment Matters

Access to healthcare is more than a community issue, it's a business imperative. For employers, the ability to attract and retain top talent depends in part on whether families can secure a family physician. Over 2 million Ontarians do not have a family doctor, and our region is experiencing this shortage as well. This shortage directly affects workforce attraction and overall community competitiveness.

The Chamber's Healthcare & Physician Recruitment Program addresses this challenge head-on. Since its launch in 1998, the program has helped recruit more than 350 family physicians to the community, ensuring not only better health outcomes for residents but also strengthens the business and economic growth of our Region.



Progress & Impact

This past year, 12 family physicians were successfully recruited to our community. Some took over for retiring physicians, others started new practices or provided locum (contract) coverage.

Our recruitment pipeline remains strong, with additional candidates at various stages of consideration—ranging from short-term placements to physicians exploring permanent opportunities.

Collaboration & Looking Ahead

Collaboration remains one of our greatest strengths. Through the Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance and the Southern Ontario Physician Recruitment Alliance (SOPRA), we share resources, expand international outreach, and ensure our community's voice is part of a larger provincial effort to address the physician shortage.

As we look forward, physician recruitment is not just a healthcare initiative, it is a strategic investment in our region's economic prosperity. Strong healthcare

infrastructure makes our community more attractive to businesses, investors, and skilled professionals considering relocation.

By continuing to adapt, collaborate, and innovate, the Chamber's Healthcare & Physician Recruitment Program is ensuring that the greater Kitchener-Waterloo area remains a place where families want to live, businesses want to grow, and physicians want to practice.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenna Petker

Jenna is Director, Healthcare & Physician Recruitment for the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce



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Event Highlights



Ian McLean (Greater KW Chamber) moderating a session with panelists Greg Dunnett (Hamilton Chamber of Commerce), Dr. Leia Minaker (University of Waterloo), and Greg Durocher (Cambridge Chamber of Commerce) at Canada's Innovation Corridor Summit in KW.



Abby Cooper of Hearts Open for Everyone (H.O.P.E.) delivers an engaging 3 Minute Networker presentation.



Guests embracing the festive Oktoberfest atmosphere while mingling and forging new connections at the Charcoal Chamber Young Professionals Oktoberfest Social.



Wildcraft in Waterloo provided the perfect backdrop for cocktails and connections, during the Charcoal Chamber Young Professionals event.



Attendees paused for a quick photo while making valuable connections at the National Bank of Canada Business After 5.



Guests making new connections during the high-energy 3-Minute Networker event.



150+ women in business gathered on a warm Fall night at the new Stockyards Taphouse in St. Jacobs for the Heffner Women's Leadership Sip & Social.



Shannon Lerner, Wright Wealth taking the stage to deliver her pitch during the 3-Minute Networker, as part of the Immigration Partnership Networking Breakfast Series.

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Canada's Innovation Corridor Summit & BA5: Tomasz Adamski Photography

Annual General Meeting & 3 Minute Networker: Ascnd Media

Women's Leadership Sip and Social, CYP Oktoberfest Social: Inhouse photography



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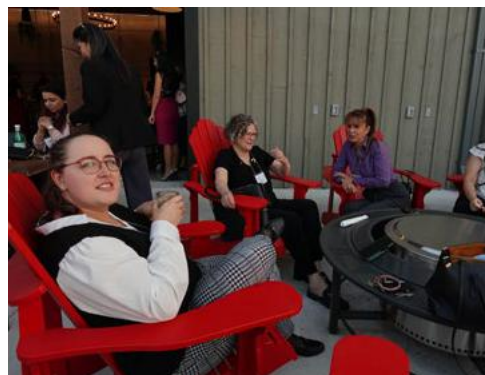
Event Highlights



Conrad Lovell, Business After 5 committee member, welcomes attendees at the season opener of the series, hosted at Splitsville Waterloo.



Warren Hastings, Managing Director of Investment Strategy at Global Investment Solutions - Scotiabank, shared insights during an engaging panel discussion at the Greater KW Chamber Annual General Meeting, moderated by Ian McLean.



Guests participate in the interactive networking activity at the Heffner Women's Leadership Sip and Social, designed to help them meet and connect with new business contacts.



Maryscott (Scotty) Greenwood, Global Head of Regulatory and Public Affairs at Manulife Financial Corporation, was the guest of honour at an executive roundtable ahead of the Canada's Innovation Corridor Summit (Kitchener).



In 60 minutes, guests heard from 15 different local businesses in a quick and efficient 3-Minute Networker format.



Bowling and networking. A perfect combination to break the ice, during the National Bank Business After 5.



Chamber members cast their votes during the formal business component of the 2025 Annual General Meeting.



Guests exchange smiles and laughter throughout the 3-Minute Networker presented by Immigration Partnership.



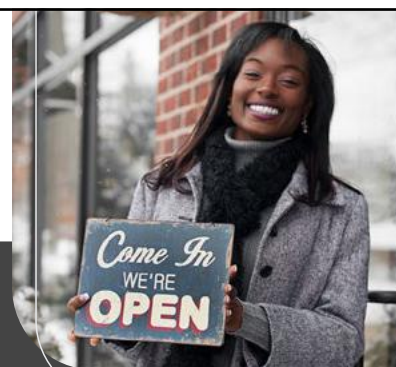
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Mark Your Calendar

Wednesday, November 19, 2025

Vision 1 Million. Are We Ready?

11:30AM – 1:30PM

Location: To Be Announced

Member: \$50 | Future Member: \$95

As Waterloo Region accelerates toward a population of one million by 2050, the question isn't if growth is coming - it's how ready we are to support it. The next event in the Vision 1 Million: Are We Ready? event series, is focused on "Taking Waterloo Region to New Heights." We'll hear from Pivot Airlines and Connect Airlines, who are expanding service from the Waterloo Region International Airport. Join us for a forward-looking conversation on how enhanced air service strengthens our economic ecosystem, fuels business expansion, and supports the infrastructure needed to sustain a thriving community.

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Tuesday, November 25th, 2025

National Bank Business After 5: Holiday Edition

5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Location: The Walper Hotel, Kitchener

Member: Complimentary, recommended \$10 donation to Feature Charity

Future Member: \$40

Join us for the National Bank Business After 5: Holiday Edition! This is a fantastic opportunity to mingle with local professionals and discover new ways to grow your network. Whether you're looking to expand your contacts, ignite new leads, or simply enjoy a festive evening, this event has something valuable for everyone. Don't miss the chance to engage with local professionals while supporting Movember and raising awareness for men's health.

Title Sponsor:



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Thursday, November 20th, 2025

Immigration Partnership Networking Breakfast Series: Speed Networking

8:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Location: The Walper Hotel, Kitchener

Member: \$45 | Season Pass: \$95

Future Member: \$90

Join us for the Speed Networking event, part of the Immigration Partnership Networking Breakfast Series! This is a great chance to expand your network by making at least 12 new connections through structured, timed rounds. The morning begins with open networking, and attendees with breakfast tickets can enjoy a buffet. Be sure to bring your business cards or your scannable LinkedIn QR code! After the timed rounds, there will be an opportunity for open networking to follow up with new connections. This event is ideal for anyone looking to grow their professional network in a friendly and efficient setting!

Title Sponsor:



Wednesday, December 3rd, 2025

Charcoal Group Chamber Young Professionals:

45 Questions

4:30PM-6:30PM

Location: Princess Cinemas, Waterloo

Member: \$40 | Future Member: \$75

Join us as we hear from 4 speakers, with inspiring journeys, who will collectively answer a total of 45 questions in just 60 minutes. They'll share their best advice on entrepreneurship, leadership, and career development. They'll tell stories on lessons they've learned (the hard way), and the pivotal moments that shaped their success. Walk away energized, informed, and ready to tackle your own next chapter with fresh ideas and real-world insight from leaders who have "been there".

Title Sponsor:



Gold Sponsor:



Thursday, December 11th, 2025

Gore Mutual Expert Exchange Series: Finance & Funding

Location: Communitel, Kitchener

3:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Member: \$30

Future Member: \$60

Are you a solopreneur, entrepreneur, or small business owner looking for practical finance and funding advice? Join us for the Gore Mutual Expert Exchange series on Finance and Funding, an evening designed to help you grow your business through small-group discussions with industry experts. The unique format features 15-minute "speed rounds" where you rotate between tables to engage directly with professionals on topics like accessing capital, managing cash flow, grants, loans, and pricing strategies. The focus is on your specific business questions and challenges, giving you direct, actionable insights. The event concludes with open networking, allowing you to follow up with experts and connect with fellow entrepreneurs.

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Preparing our Workforce: A Local Priority (and Partner) for Sustainable Growth

As members of Ontario's business community, we understand that long-term economic success depends on a strong and resilient workforce. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has been clear that preparing tomorrow's workforce is key to driving sustainable growth.

Here in Waterloo Region, the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce regularly highlights the challenges facing the business community. As one of Canada's fastest-growing communities, our region's continued success depends on addressing persistent talent shortages, particularly in education, healthcare, STEM, and the skilled trades. Developing talent must be a priority for our region as we build a foundation for productivity and prosperity in a rapidly changing economic environment. This is not a new story, but it is becoming a more pressing one as Canada faces a looming leadership gap. Over the next five years, millions of Canadians are projected to retire, leaving both the public and private sectors without enough management talent to fill the void. These leaders are vital: they transform innovation into market-ready products, grow companies, make critical financial decisions, and sell Canada – and our region – to the world.

To meet these challenges head-on, we must invest in education, strengthen pathways between training programs and local employers, and create opportunities that attract and retain top talent. Collaboration between business, government, and educational institutions isn't just beneficial, it's essential. By making talent development a regional priority today, we can ensure that Waterloo Region remains a thriving, competitive hub for innovation, growth, and economic leadership well into the future.

The good news is that Waterloo Region is home to one of the country's largest and most successful engines of management training and development—the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics at Wilfrid Laurier University. In today's uncertain global economy, I hope it's encouraging to share that there are more than 6,000 business and economics students right here in Waterloo Region to help close the talent gap.

At the Lazaridis School, 97% of students are from Ontario, and most stay to work here after graduating. Sixty per cent complete paid co-op work terms – primarily within Ontario – making it Canada's largest co-op business program. While youth unemployment hovers around 15%, more than 97% of Lazaridis Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students are employed

within a year, often in high-impact (and high-paying) roles. The Lazaridis School has an undeniably positive impact on the region's economy.

But how does this help you, as business owners and leaders?

First, we prepare our BBA students to hit the ground running. When you hire them into your company, they'll be ready to work. Their rigorous education is combined with unparalleled opportunities to learn-by-doing. In addition to co-op, students are actively immersed in case competitions from day one in the classroom. They are consistently working on consulting projects, simulations, brand challenges, international exchanges, and many other experiential learning activities.

Lazaridis finance students actively manage millions of dollars in public markets and venture capital. Students across Laurier have access to our StartUp Lab business incubator to work with local mentors to learn about entrepreneurship and explore their own new ventures. These are just a few examples of co-curriculum learning opportunities that take students beyond the walls of the classroom.

Count on us as a partner to solve the talent problem together

Yet, with all this success and activity, in recent years the Lazaridis School has not been as directly involved in the growth and prosperity of the region as it can be. To some extent, this reflects the disruption of relationships that resulted from the Covid pandemic. It can also be attributed to some retrenching in the face of years of funding cuts and tuition freezes. Nevertheless, the new strategic plan at the Lazaridis School has made community its central theme—at the heart of which is revitalizing its role in the region.

The Lazaridis School has a proven ability to train adaptable and high-impact talent, strong in both soft and hard skills – and we are eager to play a role in the growth of the region. Here are some ideas on how we'd love to work with you:

1. The tools and knowledge to diversify into new markets and navigate tariffs

The Lazaridis School has a strong Department of Economics that includes experts in international trade. We're also home to the world-class Einwechter Centre for Supply Chain

Management. Students receive in-depth training in risk mitigation, trade policy, and logistics optimization, that allow them to navigate trade barriers and tackle thorny problems rising from a rapidly changing system of international trade. Faculty members regularly share their expertise through published articles, public presentations, research with industry partners and consulting engagements.

Class projects, case problems, and research projects are part of our daily business. Professors can bring insights and knowledge to your boardroom tables and meetings, helping your leaders understand these complex issues.

2. Elevating productivity with (student) talent

In the conversation around Canada's lagging productivity, a lot of the focus has been placed on technology, yet management talent also plays a role in addressing this ongoing concern.

The Lazaridis School is developing graduates who can bring rigorous technical training, sophisticated strategic thinking, and a focus on continuous improvement to their organizations, both public and private. It is also home to more than 150 full-time faculty with relevant expertise.

Our BBA students work with companies to solve real business problems every year. Want to partner with us and have hundreds of creative, out-of-the-box solutions to your problems? There's no charge to work with us. We just ask for your time to meet with students to help them understand the problems they are trying to solve, and, of course, we'd love for you to be engaged as judges for the top presentations and be part of the panel that selects a winning team!

3. Leverage technology, protect your innovations, and get ready for rapid change

Immersed in the importance of digitization and exploring AI tools throughout their time at the Lazaridis School, students are ready to help organizations apply technology within their organizations.

Going beyond technical solutions, business and economics graduates have the people skills to facilitate the effective deployment of technology in large organizations, as well

as startups. Both students and faculty are available as consultants and advisors, providing companies in the region with the expertise required to take advantage of recent advancements.

As just one example, the new Lazaridis Intellectual Property Lab provides legal information on topics related to IP law and business strategy.

4. Tap into our talent pipeline for long-term benefits to your business

Whether employing a co-op student, hiring a new graduate, or working with faculty members, Lazaridis can provide the talent that the region will require to continue its rapid growth.

The Lazaridis School is not, however, just preparing students for jobs—we are nurturing independent thinkers and developing leaders who will have a positive impact on the world. As the Region of Waterloo works towards long-term sustainable growth, the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics is a local partner, ready and willing to help build a prosperous business community.

How can we help you? Connect with my team directly at LazaridisDean@wlu.ca to start a conversation. **How can you help us?** Hire a co-op student or new graduate, and participate in the life of the Lazaridis School through competitions as the case problem, or as a judge. By infusing your challenges and opportunities into our business and economics classes, we'll continue to ensure the region is ready for our more than 6,000 (and growing!) students to enter the job market – driving Canada's economic growth within Waterloo Region.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kyle Murray

Kyle Murray is Dean of the Lazaridis School of Business & Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University

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The Importance of Placemaking

As Waterloo Region approaches the milestone of one million residents, the community faces a pivotal juncture that requires careful planning and bold action. Placemaking—the collaborative process of shaping public spaces and infrastructure to nurture vibrant, inclusive communities—is now more essential than ever. The changes our region must embrace extend beyond physical development; they touch upon connectivity, culture, sustainability, and service, which all contribute to Waterloo Region’s appeal for both residents and visitors.

Population growth brings economic vitality and cultural diversity. It also strains existing infrastructure and services, creating a need for innovative solutions. In Waterloo Region, placemaking means planning for better experiences, not just for a larger population. It involves designing spaces where residents flourish and visitors are inspired to return.

Placemaking goes beyond urban design. It is the intentional creation of environments that foster community, connection, and well-being. Success in placemaking comes from collaboration among public, private, and civic interests to build spaces that are accessible, attractive, and functional. As Waterloo Region expands, placemaking will be key in shaping neighborhoods, parks, public squares, and gathering places that embody our values and aspirations.

Importantly, placemaking fuels economic growth. Attractive retail corridors, cultural venues, and recreational spaces draw in residents and tourists alike. A strong tourism brand serves not only to attract visitors but also new residents, investors, and students. When people experience the region’s offerings, they are more likely to make Waterloo Region their home, supporting long-term prosperity.

Building a world-class community means investing in services and activities that enrich daily life for everyone. Continued development of retail, attractions, sports venues, and restaurants benefits locals and visitors. Prioritizing recreational facilities, green spaces, and trail networks promotes health, relaxation, and community interaction. Initiatives like “farm to fork” dining and celebrating diverse arts and culture further strengthen the region’s brand and appeal.

Connectivity is another crucial aspect of placemaking. Expanding public transportation, such as the LRT and “All Day Two Way Go,” enhances convenience for residents and serves as an attractive feature for visitors. Well-connected mobility options bridge communities, reduce congestion, and encourage sustainable travel throughout the region.

Currently, Waterloo Region’s ability to host large events is limited by the lack of a Convention Centre. Investing in such infrastructure, along with upgrades to existing facilities like the Aud, is vital for economic development and for attracting high-profile gatherings. These venues foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and community pride, while generating revenue and trade opportunities.

Supporting placemaking also means addressing challenges within the service sector, including labor shortages and affordable housing. A strong service sector is essential for attracting skilled talent and ensuring Waterloo Region remains a desirable place to live and work. Improving amenities like public parking, accessible washrooms, and street beautification will meet the needs of both visitors and a growing population.

Sustainability must remain central to Waterloo Region’s placemaking strategy. The Tourism Master Plan distinguishes the region in event bidding by highlighting efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of large gatherings. Preserving and expanding green spaces, trail networks, and natural areas not only enhance attractiveness but also reinforce a commitment to environmental stewardship. Integrating nature into urban planning improves quality of life and connects people to the region’s unique landscape.

As Waterloo Region prepares for a population of one million, strategic placemaking will be imperative. By investing in infrastructure, connectivity, cultural enrichment, and sustainable practices, the region can create a destination that is thriving, inclusive, and welcoming. Embracing diversity in celebrations, integrating public art, and fostering community engagement will ensure Waterloo Region continues to be a place where people want to live, work, invest, and visit.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Saran

Michele Saran is the CEO of Explore Waterloo Region. She has over 30 years of experience in the Tourism industry at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Explore Waterloo Region markets the area as a destination for Business Events, Sport tourism and leisure travel.



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Rooted in Care. Building for Health: The Path to 1 Million Ready

Waterloo Region is one of the fastest-growing communities in Canada and is projected to reach one million residents by 2050. This growth brings with it both opportunity and a collective responsibility to be 1 Million Ready as we grow and evolve our healthcare, together.

From Legacy to a Unified Future

Grand River Hospital and St. Mary's General Hospital have rich legacies of care, serving our community in shared and unique ways. Throughout the years, our talented and dedicated teams partnered to provide that care, as two distinct organizations. Through engagements with thousands across the communities we serve, health partners, and within our teams, it was clear that the decision to merge was no longer "if" but "how".

In April 2025, Waterloo Regional Health Network (WRHN) was born from a voluntary merger. In addition to the many community-based sites, the three acute-care sites became WRHN @ Midtown (formerly Grand River Hospital, KW Campus), WRHN @ Queen's Blvd. (formerly St. Mary's General Hospital) and WRHN @ Chicopee (formerly Grand River Hospital, Freeport Campus). The shift from "Hospital" to "Health Network" reflects the understanding that healthcare is not just about facilities; it's a collaborative, team-based effort that extends beyond hospital walls, reaching patients at home and in the community.

Preparing for a Growing Region: A New Hospital for Waterloo Region

Our merger as WRHN was a significant step forward, enabling us to better plan for and coordinate care for our growing communities and provide a better, more seamless experience for our patients and our team members.

Today, nearly 1.5 million people, 10 per cent of the provincial population, rely on WRHN for their healthcare needs. Some of our facilities are over 100 years old, designed for a much smaller population, do not meet today's design standards, and cannot accommodate technological advancements due to infrastructure limitations. Our redevelopment project includes a new state-of-the-art acute care hospital and renovated and expanded existing infrastructure. It will be the largest health infrastructure project in our community's history. However, we cannot have an honest conversation about the future without acknowledging the pressures we face today.

WRHN is challenged daily to meet today's demands, and this will only be exacerbated over the next 10 – 20 years; hallway medicine is and will continue to be the only option without timely capital infrastructure investments. We cannot continue to provide the care our patients deserve without investing in a new hospital and renovating and expanding our current facilities.

The Importance of Adapting and Expanding

WRHN and healthcare across our communities share two major issues: rising demand for healthcare services and funding models

that have not kept pace with this growth. Expanding hospital capacity is only part of the solution. The best care is often delivered outside hospital settings.

Many patients begin their care in hospitals but are better served by continuing their recovery at home or in community programs. Our Hospital-to-Home programs, which offer post-discharge support, have helped reduce unnecessary Emergency Department visits and improve patient flow, easing pressure on staff and improving outcomes. It's a reimagining of how and where services can be provided to deliver the right care, in the right place, to improve outcomes and create a more sustainable health system. WRHN's inaugural Strategic Plan will provide a roadmap for a new vision for the future as we adapt to the changing needs of our communities and strengthen partnerships with local governments, universities, and health-tech innovators to integrate new technologies and patient-centred approaches into our healthcare system.

Building Boldly Together

During the pandemic, our region saw the power of cross-sector collaboration as our hospitals partnered with the innovation community to respond in real time to urgent needs. That spirit of discovery continues today through CareNext—a unique partnership between WRHN and the University of Waterloo—bringing together clinicians, researchers and local health-tech companies, creating a collaborative hub where ideas can be co-developed, tested, scaled, and applied to improve care in smarter, more equitable, and truly patient-centred ways.

The path to Vision 1 Million cannot be hindered by what has been done in the past; it must be guided by what is possible for the future. Only then will we continue to ensure that the future of healthcare is not only about the services we provide, but how those services reflect the values, priorities, and voices of the people we serve.

So, I ask you:

- How can we collaborate instead of compete?
- What bold steps will we take together to build the healthcare system our growing region deserves?
- How can we ensure that we are 1 Million ready?

Now is the time to put communities first, to think bigger, and to act together.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ron Gagnon

Ron Gagnon was appointed WRHN's inaugural President and CEO in April 2025. He is a seasoned executive with 25+ years of leadership, driving organizational transformation, mergers, digital initiatives, and capital projects. He advises health leaders and serves on multiple boards.

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Growth and Prosperity are Promised to No One

When the calendar turns to 2026, Waterloo EDC will complete its tenth year as Waterloo Region's investment promotion agency.

Looking back, it seems like a different world. Indeed, you may be surprised at how much has changed.

Ten years ago, our skylines looked incredibly different – we've now celebrated billions of dollars in new development. Much of this development came alongside a new light rail system that was still nearly four years away from its launch. Today, that light rail system is the envy of communities around North America with an annual ridership of 26.2 million in 2024.

Ten years ago, Catalyst 137 was an empty dingy warehouse. Google hadn't built its new Canadian Engineering Headquarters on Breithaupt Street in Kitchener. The EVOLV1 building at the University of Waterloo's David Johnston Research + Technology Park didn't exist. Toyota hadn't made a game-changing \$1.4 billion investment in its local operations. Companies like Ford, Bosch, Lincoln Electric, Beckhoff Automation and Westinghouse didn't have local offices and we didn't have flourishing health innovation, fintech and nuclear clusters.

Ten years ago, the University of Waterloo didn't have an Artificial Intelligence Institute, Conestoga College didn't have one of Canada's largest skilled trades campuses and Wilfrid Laurier University didn't have the beautiful Lazaridis Hall on University Avenue in Waterloo.

Ten years ago, Waterloo EDC hadn't delivered over \$2.2 billion in new investment to Waterloo Region, including helping global brands like EPAM Systems, OVHcloud and MasterClass set up shop here. We hadn't created 5,600 new jobs while retaining thousands more.

My point is that Waterloo Region has experienced a ton of progress. In just a decade, we've grown up to become one of Canada's most pre-eminent and influential communities. One sign: a decade ago, Waterloo Region didn't appear in CBRE's list of top tech talent markets, but in September we were ranked 7th in North America, ahead of Boston, Atlanta and Chicago.

Recent history also shows how unpredictable the world can be.

Ten years ago, we hadn't experienced a world-changing pandemic, we didn't know that there'd be a President Trump and we couldn't have predicted that the global consensus on things like free trade would be crumbling before our eyes.

Waterloo Region has experienced a decade of exceptional growth despite these roadblocks and, as an optimist, I think the next decade can be even better.

But it's also important to remember that growth and progress don't just happen – people work for it. We've earned our economic growth.

To continue this winning streak, we need the foresight, perseverance and political will to make hard decisions. We have challenges on the horizon.

We know that we're growing quickly – in fact, we're the fastest-growing community in Canada. That's why it's so important that our leaders are putting a focus on Vision 1 Million – we need to act now to ensure we have the housing, jobs, health care, culture, recreational opportunities and more to embrace this growth.

From an economic perspective, we need to provide the right environment to support our homegrown companies and new entrants, including a mega site for new industrial investment. We need to support our companies as they pivot to a whole new global trade rulebook, rapidly shifting political priorities and AI-enabled disruption.

As we enter 2026, we need to remember that progress and growth won't just happen because we want it – we need to build it. We need to keep inventing the future.

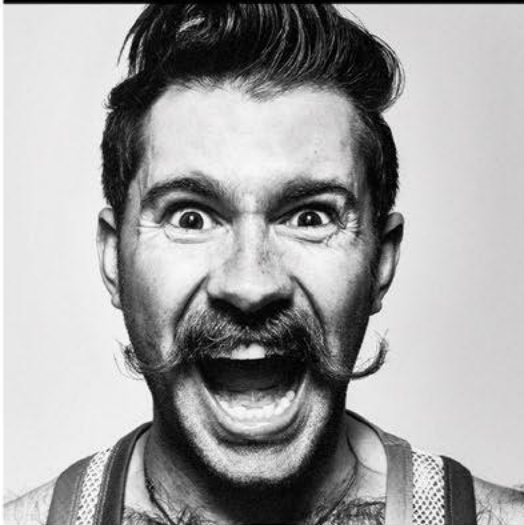


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony LaMantia

Tony LaMantia is President & CEO of Waterloo Region Economic Development Corporation. A University of Waterloo alumnus, Tony has held executive roles in investment marketing, technology sales and mining, as well as the public sector where he was ADM of Investment and Industry (Ontario).

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Community Corner



1



2



3



4



5

- 1 Little Mushroom Catering celebrated their 15th Anniversary at the Armenian Community Centre in Cambridge.
- 2 The City of Kitchener's "Building Division" team showed up to support Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region's deconstruction site. Together, their efforts helped clear the way for future homes and long-lasting community growth.
- 3 Mayor Dorothy McCabe and Stephanie Stretch (City of Kitchener Council) were one of many supporters at OktoberFest, presented by Destiny Boxing at SydFIT Event Centre for an evening of live amateur boxing, food and beverages.
- 4 The selection committee for the 2026 Oktoberfest Ambassador Program held a meeting to interview future candidates at the KW Chamber Office, including Colleen James (Regional Councillor), Syd Vanderpool, (SydFIT Health Centre), and Ron Caudle (Caudle's Catch).
- 5 The KW Chamber hosted an exciting Meet & Greet networking event to welcome all their newest members at DAS Bar (Hampton Inn & Suites, Waterloo).



6 The Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) joined the festivities at the Gidinawendamin/ Ska'nikú•lát 22nd Annual Pow Wow, presented by the University of Waterloo. This one-day non-competitive celebration of Indigenous heritage featured vendors, dancers, and singers from the Waterloo Region and beyond.

7 Uptown Waterloo BIA hosted their annual "Uptown Night Market", which supports local vendors and performers. This year the market raised over \$3600 for local charities/ organizations.

8 The Multicultural Festival of Elmira (MFE), presented by H.O.P.E, hosted their 3rd annual event to help bring awareness to the diverse cultures in Waterloo Region and was showcased by their wide variety of food at their MFE Market.

9 Run-Walk-Roll for WRHNC (Waterloo Regional Health Network Cancer Centre) marked their 10th anniversary in 2025. This year, they raised \$10,124 in support of WRHNC and over \$86,000 since 2015.

10 Oktoberfest Loft Haus was held at the Walper Hotel with local dignitaries and business professionals, including Mayor Berry Urbanovic and staff from the KW Chamber.

What's happening in your corner of the community?
Send your pics to events@greaterkwchamber.com so we can feature them in the next issue of *The Advocate*!

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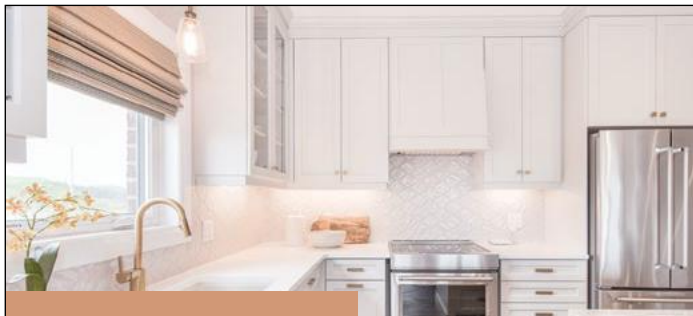
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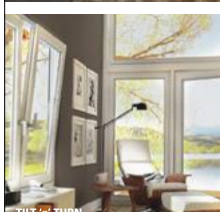

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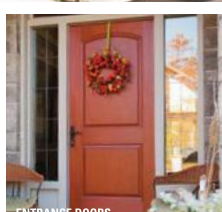
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WORLD OF STAY

Chamber Members Achieving Success



Milton Chamber of Commerce Appoints Interim President & CEO

Erin Caldwell assumed the position of Interim President & CEO at the Milton Chamber of Commerce effective September 29, 2025.

She is a long-time resident of Milton and her 20-year professional career includes positions within government and post-secondary education where she demonstrated her commitment to building trust between institutions and the communities they serve.

A Milton Chamber news release noted Erin is known for her diplomacy and sharp strategic thinking while she is an exceptional leader with a proven track record of delivering high-profile projects, managing cross-functional teams, engaging elected officials, and developing partnerships in support of economic prosperity.

City of Kitchener Recognizes Contribution from Cowan Foundation

The City of Kitchener recently announced their new facility on Fischer Hallman Road will be named the Cowan Recreation Centre.

The naming recognizes a generous \$2.5 million donation from the Cowan Foundation that represents one of the most significant private contributions to recreation in the city's history. The donation will be placed in a dedicated reserve fund to support future enhancements that ensure the centre remains innovative, inclusive and responsive to community requirements.

The Cowan Recreation Centre will be Kitchener's first net-zero carbon recreation building and one of the most accessible across the region. The opening is anticipated for late 2026 and provides an example of private-public partnerships for resilient communities.



New Chief Administrative Officer Appointed at Wilmot Township

On July 28, 2025, Wilmot Township Council announced that Jeff Willmer was appointed Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) following their unanimous vote. His contract will be effective until February of 2027, providing experienced and stable leadership as Wilmot navigates a critical period of transformation.

Mr. Willmer is a long-time resident of Waterloo Region with three decades of local municipal government experience. He commenced his career in Wilmot Township followed by a series of positions at the City of Kitchener, retiring as CAO in 2017. Jeff continued to serve the local community as co-founder and Chair of A Better Tent City, a grassroots housing initiative for vulnerable populations.

He assumed his position in Wilmot on August 11 and will work closely with Council, staff and community stakeholders to advance strategic objectives and strengthen long-term resilience.



Janet Davidson Appointed Chair of WRHN Board of Directors

Janet Davidson was recently appointed Chair of the Waterloo Regional Health Network (WRHN) Board of Directors effective September 1, 2025.

Janet joined the WRHN Board in April 2025 and follows co-chairs Sandra Hanmer and Tim Rollins who both transitioned into vice chair positions. Ms. Davidson provides over 40 years of experience in healthcare leadership through various Canadian and international positions including Deputy Minister of Health for Alberta, CEO of Trillium Health Centre and COO of Vancouver Coastal Health.

An August 19, 2025 news release from WRHN notes that Ms. Davidson looks forward to building on the strong foundation provided by Sanda and Tim, and working with community partners to ensure exceptional, integrated care for the residents served.



New School Planned for Breslau

In July of 2025, the Ontario government provided the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) with approval to issue the tender for the new Breslau-Hopewell Crossing School to create more student spaces and licensed child care spaces.

The facility will accommodate 611 students from kindergarten to Grade 8 accompanying 73 students up to the age of four in a four-room child care centre. Scott Miller, Director Education for the WRDSB, indicated in a board release the new school will provide a modern and inclusive learning environment to serve students, families and the local community.

Mike Harris, MPP for Kitchner-Conestoga, also indicated that Breslau is one of the fastest growing communities in Waterloo Region and new classrooms and child care centres will ensure students have access to supportive learning environments.



New Councillor for Region of Waterloo

Joe Gowing was appointed to Region of Waterloo Council on August 14, 2025 following a formal process.

Council declared the seat vacant after the passing of Councillor Kari Williams and opted to fill the vacancy through an appointment by calling for applications. Candidates subsequently provided presentations at a Special Council meeting where Council voted to appoint Mr. Gowing to fill the vacant seat.

A resident of Kitchener, Joe is an investment and insurance professional with an extensive record of volunteerism and community service. He is the president of Preston Legion Branch 126 and was elected as one of Ontario's youngest school board trustees.



LERNERS

Intergenerational Perspective: Legal Strategies for the Sandwich Generation

The “sandwich generation” — comprising people usually in their 30s to 50s who are caring for their parents and their dependent children — faces a unique set of challenges. Caught between two generations, these individuals must juggle caregiving duties, financial obligations, and long-term planning for their parents, their children, and themselves. In matters relating to estate planning and family law, legal strategies are essential to protect loved ones and preserve peace of mind.

The dual caregiving role comes with a host of responsibilities. Planning for the long-term care of aging parents and managing their finances and medical appointments while also raising children, saving for their education, and planning for one’s own retirement is a balancing act and source of strain — both emotionally and financially.

Estate planning can help mitigate some of the stresses for those navigating the complexities of the sandwich generation. Beyond the preparation of documents such as wills and powers of attorney, a proper estate plan provides detailed guidance on navigating the path ahead, such as advance healthcare directives or wishes expressed in family meetings. It helps ensure the necessary information is provided to those who will rely on it to make decisions affecting others.

With respect to estate planning, considerations for those in the sandwich generation and their parents include:

- Ensuring both your parents and you have powers of attorney for property and personal care. These documents allow trusted individuals to make financial and medical decisions on behalf of those who have lost the capacity to do so.
- Ensuring that both your parents and you have up-to-date wills that cover various contingencies.
- Reviewing beneficiary designations on assets such as RRSPs, TFSAs, and life insurance policies to confirm beneficiaries and ensure they are aligned with the will and estate plan.
- Researching and considering options for care including retirement homes, long-term care homes, or home care support services.

Beyond various estate planning considerations, family law implications include the following:

- Guardianship of Children: If something happens to you, who will care for your children? This should be clearly outlined in a will.

- Spousal and Child Support Obligations: If you are divorced or separated, there may be ongoing support obligations that can impact your estate planning.
- Domestic Contracts: Consideration should be given to a marriage contract or cohabitation agreement. It is important to document the resolution of matters in the event of a separation, including appropriate releases against each party’s estate.
- Preparing for a Gift or Inheritance: It is increasingly common for families to gift significant sums of money to adult children to, for example, assist with first-time home purchases. To protect the intention of the gift and have it properly recognized by law, consideration should be given to a marriage contract that sets out the allocation of the gifted money in the event of a separation.

Conversations about aging, incapacity, and death are never easy — but they are necessary. Engaging in regular and open dialogue can help both parents and their adult children clarify their wishes and expectations. Having legal plans in place can help prevent misunderstandings and mitigate stress during a crisis. A comprehensive estate plan that considers various aspects of family law is critical to protecting your family.

For guidance and support in estate planning and matters relating to family law, reach out to Hilary or Anamaria at Leners LLP.



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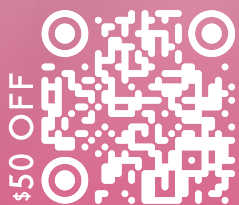
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