

July

The Soul of Southwold: Volunteers

What is a Volunteer?

The Oxford Dictionary defines a volunteer as “a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task.” Similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary describes a volunteer as “a person who does something, especially helping others, willingly and without being forced or paid.”

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering doesn't just benefit the individuals or groups receiving support—it can also enrich your own life in meaningful ways. Here are just a few ways volunteering can enhance your well-being:

Connection: Volunteering introduces you to new people, often with shared interests, strengthening your social and relationship skills.

A Sense of Meaning: Giving your time and energy fosters a deep sense of purpose and boosts self-confidence, leading to greater happiness.

A Longer Lifespan: Studies show that volunteering can lower stress levels and improve overall well-being. Many volunteer activities even involve physical movement, making for an enjoyable way to stay active.

Living Your Passion: When you dedicate your time to a cause you believe in, whether coaching youth, supporting seniors, or championing another passion—you truly embody the spirit of purpose-driven living.

Seeking out organizations that align with your values can help you make a difference while enriching your own life in the process.

Early Southwold – Setting the Example

“There is no part of Ontario that was settled by a better class of men than the pioneers who first took up their abode in the wilderness in the township of Southwold.”

Reminiscences of Early Settlers, The Elgin Historical and Scientific Institute, A. D., 1911

Acts of kindness and community compassion stand out among the stories of Southwold pioneers.

Two distinguished early residents of Southwold came from Fingal, the township’s oldest village. Neil McAlpine’s generosity in 1836, followed decades later by Amasa Wood’s charitable actions in 1893, exemplify the spirit and values that helped shape Southwold’s enduring reputation.

Pioneer Profile: Neil McAlpine

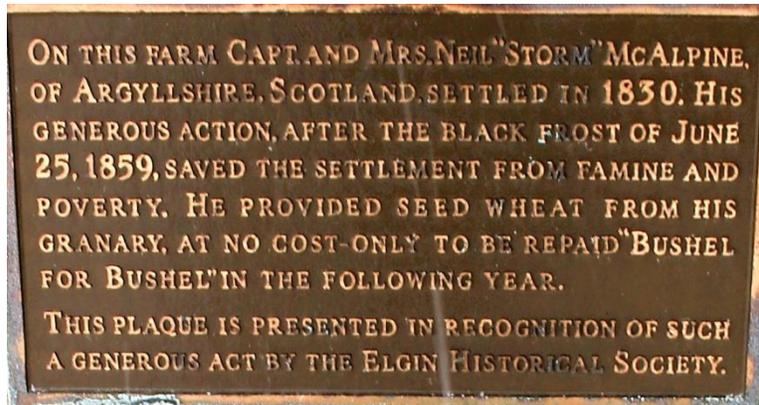
Neil McAlpine, originally from Argyllshire, Scotland, settled east of Fingal in 1830. A successful farmer, he carefully stored his grain when market prices were unfavorable, waiting until he could secure a more reasonable return.

His great act of generosity came after the devastating Black Frost of June 25, 1836, which threatened the settlement with famine and poverty. While virtually all of his neighbours had their crops wiped out, McAlpine’s foresight left him in a fortunate position of having plenty of stores in his granary.

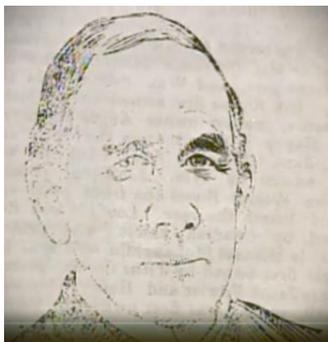


Despite the opportunity to sell his wheat for an exorbitant profit, McAlpine refused to capitalize on his neighbors' misfortune. Recognizing that their livelihoods depended on the next harvest, he selflessly provided seed wheat from his granary—free of charge—with the simple agreement that it would be repaid "Bushel for Bushel" the following year. His magnanimous gesture ensured his neighbors remained solvent, allowing them to rebuild and secure their future.

A plaque on Fingal Line at the Tufford Farm memorializes the selfless act of Neil McAlpine.



Pioneer Profile: Amasa Wood



Amasa Wood was born in Prescott in 1811 and spent his childhood in the Fingal area. He attended school in the old schoolhouse east of Fingal at what is now the north east corner of Fingal Line and Oneida Road. Wood began his career as a clerk at the McQueen store opposite the school house (on Fingal Line).

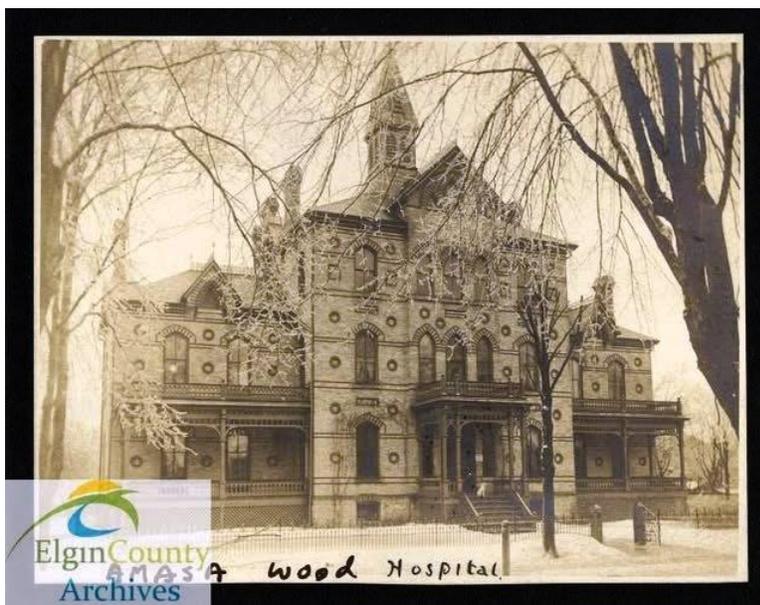
In 1830, Wood purchased William Burwell's old tavern on the southwest corner (now Union Road at Fingal Line) in Fingal. He ran the tavern for eleven years before selling the establishment and entering into a

partnership with his brother-in-law, Levi Fowler, at the Fingal store across (now Fingal Line) from the tavern.

Eventually, Wood took over the business when Fowler retired, expanding his role by becoming the contractor of supplies for the nearby Indigenous community at Oneida.

He earned a reputation for his kindness and deep understanding of the Indigenous community, offering unwavering support to those in need. During the harsh winter of 1893, his generosity shone as he donated 700 pounds of flour and 200 pounds of pork, never turning away a struggling individual.

A shrewd businessman, Wood amassed an impressive fortune that totaled half a million dollars at the time of his passing. Though known for his sharp business acumen, he was equally recognized for his philanthropy, helping churches establish building funds and supporting various charitable causes.



Amasa Wood's most enduring legacy, however, was the establishment of St. Thomas's first hospital in 1891, named in his honor. Wood passed away in 1899, leaving behind a remarkable legacy of generosity and community impact.

Southwold Spirit

Inspired by the generosity of pioneers like McAlpine and Wood, Southwold has cultivated a volunteer spirit that is admired across Elgin County.

In Southwold's infancy, volunteers stepped in to assist neighbours with constructions of homes, barns, planting and harvesting. The practical aspect of volunteering for these events was the unwritten assurance that in assisting your friends and neighbours, you could expect them to reciprocate in your hour of need. It also provided social benefits.

Women prepared and served meals for the workers. Children played or performed menial tasks like carrying water or firewood. The extended community benefitted as residents came to know their neighbours better through these interactions!

Volunteers responded in fighting fires, digging out after snow storms and cleaning up after natural disasters like severe wind and rain induced flooding.

In Southwold villages until as late as the 1960s, the common decency of volunteers saw collections taken, door-to-door, when there was a death in the community, to provide flowers as a token of remembrance for the grieving family.

Twice in the 20th Century, Southwold residents rallied in response to catastrophic disasters.

On October 30, 1941, American Airlines DC-3 "Flagship Erie" crashed near Lawrence Station killing all 20 passengers and flight crew.

Thompson and Viola Howe had the immediate assistance of their neighbours as the aircraft burned in their front oat field.



Volunteers attempted to fight the fire, search for bodies and collect debris in the field. Viola's neighbours helped her feed and manage the steady flow of first responders, media and official personnel to the Howe farm.

A tornado struck Southwold on August 28, 1990, touching down at 4:30 PM. It was a powerful F3 tornado that caused extensive damage from Frome to Port Stanley, Ontario. The storm devastated the small Southwold hamlet of Frome, destroying homes and uprooting trees, leaving a lasting impact on the community.

Volunteers responded immediately to the disaster, checking that their neighbours were physically out of danger and then pitching in with the clean-up. Committees were established to raise funds to help those affected rebuild their shattered lives.

That's such a powerful testament to the resilience and compassion of the Southwold community. When disaster strikes, it's heartening to see people come together, looking out for each other and working toward recovery. The immediate response and generosity of Southwold residents in 1990 has left a lasting impact. Moments like these remind us of the strength found in unity and kindness.



Having torn through Southwold, the tornado is seen approaching Pt. Stanley on August 28, 1990.

Photo: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/ntp_mndta/1990s/1990/1/

Southwold Associations and Clubs

Through collaboration, creativity, and a shared commitment to service, volunteers have spearheaded numerous community improvements, shaping Southwold into a thriving and connected township.

Every community has its share of opinions on what should be done, but true progress comes from those who step forward with vision and leadership. Throughout Southwold's history, these individuals have created opportunities for others to participate in building a stronger, more connected community.

In pioneer times, neighbors gathered in private homes for education, religious services, social events, and political discussions. As the population grew and businesses flourished, new ideas emerged from these gatherings; "Let's build a school, a church, a town hall!" "What if we held an agricultural fair to showcase the fruits of our labour?" "Could we start a weekly dance or card party?"

Though many proposals were dismissed as "too expensive" or mere "pipe dreams," the spark of an idea often proved enough to ignite action. It is through this spirit of collaboration and determination that vibrant, thriving communities are born.

Over the past 175 years, countless individuals and groups have contributed to the community—church deacons, Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School leaders, youth sports coaches and organizers, as well as mentors in organizations like 4-H, Junior Farmers, Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Guides, and Beavers. Their dedication has touched nearly every household in Southwold.

We spotlight a few longstanding volunteer organizations...

Shedden Agricultural Society



One of the first Southwold groups to form an association was the Shedden and Dunwich Agricultural Society. Part of a rural trend that began in the late 1700s, Agricultural Fairs allowed farmers to showcase their crops and animals as well as permit agriculturalists from other regions to share new trends. It was a social outing for many, as well.

The Shedden and Dunwich Agricultural Society formed in 1854 making it one of the first groups of its kind in Southwold. The volunteers were responsible for organizing events that directly reflected their community's needs and interests. Shedden Fair developed its own traditions, fostering a unique identity that continues to thrive today.

Still active in 2025, Shedden Fair remains one of the most anticipated events of Southwold's community calendar. Volunteers plan the annual fair, oversee the competitions and events and lend their expertise in a variety of categories. (Editor's Note: Shedden Fair will be profiled in August)



CAN DRIVE — The Shedden 4-H Club Can Drive will be held Saturday. Among the club members canvassing, from left, will be: front — Karey Logghe, Lindsay Lynch, Kelly Palmer; back — Marcia Carr, Jerry Silcox and Jody Penning. — (Staff)

With the success of the fair, associate groups also developed. Junior Farmers and 4 H Clubs were established and flourished as young rural people learned about farming and homemaking. Generations of today's families were raised with input from Southwold volunteer leaders.

Women's Institutes were established by rural volunteers throughout Southwold. The legacy of their Tweedsmuir Histories continues to be recognized as a key resource to historians.

(Editor's Note: Agricultural Groups were profiled in detail in the Southwold 175 -May feature)

Southwold's Ultimate Volunteers

There are no other Southwold volunteers who gave as much for the community as those who served in the two great wars of the 20th Century.

Five hundred and forty-six Southwold residents enlisted to serve Canada in World Wars I and II, and Korea. A plaque inside the front door at the Southwold Keystone Complex pays tribute to all residents who served.

Sixty-six "Sons of Southwold" made the ultimate sacrifice. There is no greater measure of devotion to the country and community than given by these volunteers. They are recognized at the War Veterans Memorial, also at the Keystone Complex.





Welcome Home Banquet for Second World War Veterans

Shedden United Church, June 1946

Back row, (left to right): O/Smn. William Halpin, Pte. Stuart Kilmer, Cpl. Ted Silcox, Sgt. Clarence Palmer, Pte. Roy Caswell, Pte. Stewart Moore, O/Tel. Burton Lodge, F.O. Clifton Holborn, L.A.C. Clarence Moore;

Middle row, (left to right): Pte. Noel Baker, F.O. Richard Stafford, D.F.C. Cpl. Archie Teetzel, L/Cpl. Lawrence Silcox, W.O. 2 Glenn Trace, Pte. Archie McTavish, Pte. Gordon Houghton, L.A.C. James Hamilton;

Front row, (left to right): P.O. William Moore, Pte. Warren Caswell, Sgt. Hugh Silcox, Sgt. Major Malcolm Galbraith, Pte. Betty Carter, Cpl. Albert Warner, Sgt. Walter Moore, L/Cpl. Maxwell Kilmer, Pte. Kenneth Williams.

Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives

Southwold Fire Department

In pioneer times, Southwold residents responded to fire emergencies with axes, shovels and pails of water. It was an often futile effort to save buildings due to the lack of proper equipment, access to sufficient water resources and lack of coordinated training.

Fire prevention in Shedden began humbly in 1920 with a two-wheel cart, marking the start of organized efforts to safeguard the community. By 1948, Southwold Township assumed responsibility for fire protection, setting the stage for decades of progress. The task of firefighting has always rested on the shoulders of Southwold volunteers.



The Shedden Fire Department posed with their “up to date” fire truck in October 1949.

Volunteer fire fighters decked out in the personal protection of the day include: Urquhart Welch, Charles Millar, Jack Schram, Charles Mabee (chief), Hugh Silcox, Ralph Palmer and Lawrence Silcox. Absent when picture was taken: Gilbert Butterwick.

Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives

Continued growth through the last half of the 20th Century and into the 21st Century has raised the quality of fire protection in Southwold. The constant over this period was the volunteer willing to risk injury or even death to protect his community.



Members of the Southwold Volunteer Fire Department receive First Aid Certificates in June 1969. Making the presentation to the firemen in front of the fire hall in Shedden is Robert Whitehead, left, of the St. Thomas branch of the St. John Ambulance, who was instructor for the course. Those receiving certificates were, Allen Kirk, Douglas Kirk, Gary Clinton, John Silcox, Lawrence Silcox, Donald Silcox, Robert Silcox, Carl Chamberlin, Harold Glover, Robert Fulton, Robert Brown, Charles Oldham, Gord Dickinson, Bill Vandenberg, Bill Brown, John Berdan, Jim McIntyre, Ralph Palmer, Clarence Hagerty, Walter Westacott, Allen Carmichael, John Brown, John Kruppe and Kenneth Monteith.

Southwold operated fire stations in Fingal, Shedden and Talbotville.

(Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives)



When the fire siren sounded, volunteers sprang into action from every corner of the community. Among the volunteers, Ralph Palmer and Carl Chamberlain dashed out of the Red & White Store in Shedden, while Bud Cummings, Clarence

Hagerty and Gary Clinton left their tractors behind, hurrying in from their farms. John and Bob Silcox quickly climbed down from the house they were building, and over in Fingal, Jack Lynch and Tom Brown raced across the alfalfa field—now the Township Works yards behind the Southwold Municipal Office—eager to see who would get behind the wheel of the fire truck. These scenes were consistent throughout Southwold as volunteers responded to the emergency.

Over the years, a sophisticated Southwold Fire Department has evolved. Better equipment, frequent training opportunities, interaction with other fire agencies and dedicated experienced leadership has transformed volunteer firefighters into a professional operation.





The Southwold Firefighters Association is still comprised of volunteers and is an active part of our community.

Volunteer firefighters participate in numerous events in Southwold, including Winterfest, the Rosy Rhubarb Festival, Shedden Tractor Pull, Shedden Fair, the Shedden Soccer tournament, the Fingal Santa Claus Parade, and the Southwold Remembrance Day Services.



SOUTHWOLD FIRE DEPARTMENT - 2025

Southwold Optimist Clubs

In February 1973, the Fingal Optimist Club was established, marking the beginning of a dedicated volunteer effort to serve Southwold. As the township's first service club, it introduced a wide range of activities and financial opportunities; all guided by its inspiring motto, "Friend of Youth."

In rallying the Southwold community to embrace the Optimist spirit, organizers identified one key element in Fingal to inspire their membership drive.

Fingal was traditionally a softball community. Skills honed in the schoolyard of the former SS # 12 Fingal School and the other Southwold schools in Boxall, Watsons Corners, Shedden, Lawrence Station and Talbotville areas had for years developed softball players who went on to Men's and Women's teams in local leagues. It was an era before Southwold schools had gymnasiums, arenas and other sports outlets and facilities. There was no youth soccer at the time!



Softball was Southwold's summer sport!

When Bell Telephone Company purchased the Southwold and Dunwich Telephone Company in 1964 part of the property on which the Fingal Telephone office resided was also part of the Fingal Ball Park. By 1966, the ball park was reduced in size due to construction of the Bell building and all of Southwold's local league games were scheduled in Shedden. Fingal needed a new ball park!

With a clear goal in sight, both current and former softball players joined forces with Southwold men eager to connect and contribute. Together, they built a team of dedicated volunteers, united by their shared passion and commitment to making a difference.

Starting with a minimum target of twenty-five volunteers, the Fingal



Optimist Club began their work in Fingal and the extended community.

Members of the Fingal Optimist Club proudly gathered at the Masonic Temple in St. Thomas for their charter night banquet. Joined by distinguished guests, they celebrated the beginning of their journey in service and community engagement. (April 28, 1973)

(Left to right): Jim Smith, secretary-treasurer of the newly-formed Fingal Club; Doug Taylor, a vice-president; Eden Snyder, of Waterloo, Governor of the Ontario District; Jack Lynch, president of the Fingal Club; Norm Shipley of St. Thomas, immediate past president of Optimist International; and Roy Orchard, another vice-president of the Fingal club. **Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives**

On July 14, 1973, the first major Fingal Optimist Club fundraising venture exploded on Fingal. The Fingal Optifest involved closing off Fingal Line from the Union Road intersection and west to the end of the

business section, at Ripley's Variety store. Optifest offered a beer garden, food booth, a street dance, and continuous entertainment.

Optifest was a homecoming for former Southwold residents. An estimated 1000 people enjoyed the street dance while the pounding beat of local favourites "The Village Inn" filled the air with tunes of the 1950s and 1960s. Optifest became the major fundraising event for the Optimist Club, and the money was all earmarked for local youth and community service activities.



Pictured on July 14, 1973, before the first Fingal Optifest activities got underway, are Optifest organizers. (*Left to right*): Jack Barrett, Len Lynch, Denes Toth, and Larry Lynch.

Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives

Optifest continued as a beloved July tradition in Fingal until the late 1980s / early 1990s, when rising insurance costs made it financially unsustainable. The event's decline was further influenced by the growing popularity of BINGO as a service club fundraising opportunity, ultimately bringing an end to Fingal Optifest's long-standing legacy.

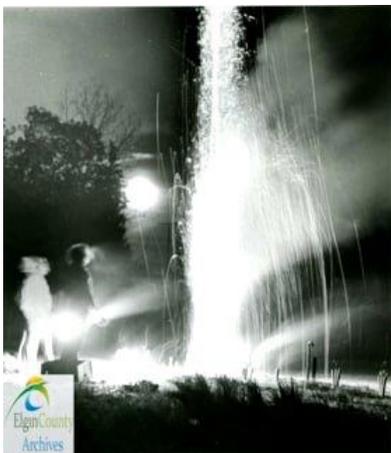
The Optimist Club opened the new Fingal Optimist Park softball facility in September 1977. It stands as a testament to a dedicated group of Southwold volunteers who identified a community need and reached their goal. Optifests were the primary financial support of the project!

In 1974, their second year of operation, the Fingal Optimist club expanded their volunteer roster and also their list of projects. They were recognized as the top club in the Ontario District of Optimist International due to the impressive work they were achieving in the Fingal and area community.

One of the Fingal Optimist Club's most cherished traditions, the Fingal Optimist Santa Parade, began in December 1974. Initially a joint effort with the International Order of Oddfellows in Shedden, the parade route spanned from Fingal, down Union Road, and into Shedden, concluding at the Shedden Fairgrounds. However, the journey proved too ambitious, and since 1975, the beloved holiday celebration has remained a Fingal-exclusive event, bringing festive joy to the community each year.



The Fingal Optimist Club launched its annual fireworks display in 1976, lighting up the night sky for the first time on Victoria Day. Optimist volunteers orchestrated the vibrant spectacle at the old Ball Park in Fingal—now Fingal Heritage Park—creating a tradition that continues to bring the community together for Canada Day celebrations. Canada Day festivities are now held at the Ball Park created by the Fingal Optimist Club, in 1977.



Southwold gained a second Optimist Club on November 25, 1975 with the formation of the Talbotville Optimist Club.



March 15, 1976 "Charter Night" - The Talbotville Optimist Club became the 10th chartered Optimist club in Elgin County Saturday night at the UAW Hall in a social evening attended by 350 Optimists and their wives. Pictured from left are (seated) Donald Stuart, Gary Dawdy, and Edward Lussier; (standing) Gordon MacKinnon (charter president), Kelvin Hewitson, James Silcox, Ken Loach, governor, Ontario District from Don Mills; Douglas Kirk, Garry Allen, Wayne Stuart and Robert Turner.

Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives

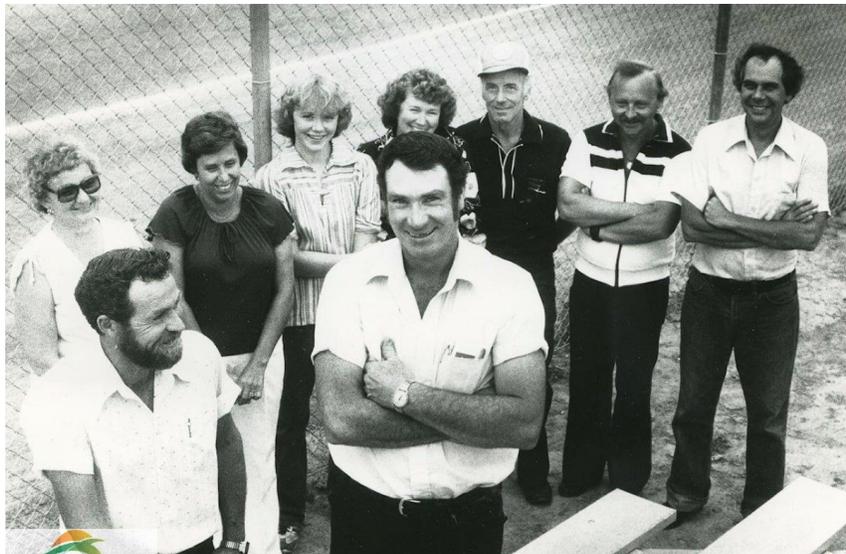
In the early 2000s, the Fingal Optimists welcomed female volunteers into their ranks, enriching the club with fresh ideas and creativity. Several years later, the organization embraced a broader regional identity, rebranding as the Fingal–Shedden and District Optimist Club. This expansion attracted new members from across the township, strengthening the club’s community impact.

Over their long active participation in community activities, the Optimist Clubs in Southwold have organized or sponsored Youth Oratorical

Contests, soapbox derbies, bicycle rodeos, youth softball/ soccer/ minor hockey, Halloween parties, Easter egg hunts, Dude Ranch adventures, elementary and high school projects, children's festivals, Family Game Nights, Big Brothers, Hospice Elgin Building Fund and many other vital youth / community service projects.

Southwold's Optimist Clubs are a valued partner assisting various other Southwold projects including: building ball parks / soccer fields in Fingal and Talbotville, funding to the Southwold Keystone Complex and Shedden Library and participating in Rosy Rhubarb festivals.

Partnering with other Optimist Clubs or community associations, our Optimist Clubs continue to be among the most valued Southwold volunteers.



"Pride of Talbotville" - Dave Small, left, president of the Talbotville Optimist Club, and Gary Clinton, centre, chairman of the Talbotville Recreation and Community Centre board, take pride in their ball diamond and soccer field now in use. Some of the people who have contributed to the park are, behind, from the left, Aileen Pyatt, Josie Chard, Michelle Pearson, Joyce Pearson, Gord Pearson, Bill Lethbridge and Gary Allen. (July 1980) **Photo: Elgin Heritage Archives**

Southwold Optimist Clubs have remained active and engaged for over fifty years, a testament to the dedication and commitment of our volunteers. New members are always welcome.

Shedden Tractor Pull (1973 – Present)



The Shedden Tractor Pull is a popular annual event in Southwold Township, featuring thrilling competitions where powerful trucks and tractors showcase their strength in pulling heavy loads. The event includes various classes, such as those from the Empire State Pullers, the

Southwestern Ontario Tractor Pullers Association, and the Ontario Truck and Tractor Pulling Association.

Originally a highlight of the Shedden Fair, the Shedden Tractor Pull gained momentum as a standalone attraction in the early 1990s.

Each June, a dedicated team of volunteers transforms the Keystone grounds into a Southwold "hot spot," bringing electrifying tractor action, live music, camping, food trucks and an unforgettable celebration.



What started from humble beginnings in 1973 now draws in upwards of 6000 people, making it one of the most successful tractor pulls in the area.



The Shedden Tractor Pull is a cornerstone of community support in Southwold, with event proceeds frequently reinvested into local initiatives. These funds help finance community projects, enhance recreational facilities, and support charitable causes. Over the past 20 years, the volunteer Shedden Tractor Pull Committee has contributed nearly \$300,000, with a strong focus on youth organizations and community development.

Rosy Rhubarb (1993 – Present)

The first Rosy Rhubarb festival was held in Shedden in June, 1993. The success of the festival was immediate!



Envisioned as a fundraising venture to support the building of a new community centre, Rosy Rhubarb has had a profound effect on not only Shedden but the entire extended community of Southwold Township.

Rosy Rhubarb volunteers have created an early summer experience similar to the Shedden Fair in August.

Crafts, clothing, contests, sauces, food vendors, music and other entertainments, vintage cars, mini tractor pulls and of course... lots of rhubarb are enjoyed each June at the Keystone Complex grounds. There's even a Kids Zone!

This year, a Beverage Tent will offer adult beverages to thirsty patrons who want to step out of the sun for cold refreshments.



Rosy Rhubarb volunteers have contributed over \$500,000 directly to Southwold community projects. Today's festival organizers have continued the legacy of the founding group and raised the bar significantly!

(Editor's Note: Visit the Southwold Township website and view the 175th Anniversary link to the June feature on the History of Rosy Rhubarb)

Southwold War Veterans Memorial Committee (2000 – Present)



LAY-OUT LANDSCAPING PLAN—Lain Lynch, with his wife, Karen, and Lorne Spoor presented Southwold Township Council with drawings for the

"Including the Generations Park" to be created at the Southwold Keystone Complex in Shaldon. The project will be completed in three phases.

The Southwold Landscape Committee included a War Veterans Memorial as part of their effort to beautify the newly constructed Keystone Complex (1998). The desire to recognize Southwold's World War 1, World War II and Korea War veterans emerged as a component of this effort.

The Landscape Committee established a separate group of community volunteers to identify the list of Southwold veterans, including a list of Southwold residents who were killed in these wars. The Southwold Research Committee did such an exemplary job that a request was presented to Southwold Council in 2000 to begin Remembrance Day Services that November.

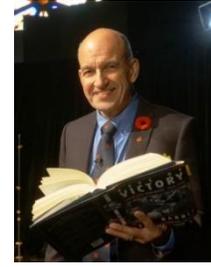


Members of the Landscape Committee and the Research Committee were part of the core volunteers in the formation of the Southwold War Veterans Memorial Committee.



Volunteers are responsible for setting up the Keystone complex to accommodate what is normally full attendance! Wreaths are checked carefully and arranged in presentation order the day before the service.

“Southwold Remembers” has become a community institution boasting full house audiences at the Keystone Complex each year. Guest speakers including renowned author, broadcaster, educator Ted Barris inform and enlighten patrons with military history. Missing Man



Formation tributes from the Canadian Harvard Aircraft Association and Canadian Owners and Pilots Flight 75 group are eagerly anticipated events at the Presentation of Wreaths ceremony at the War Veterans Memorial.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, the committee scaled down Remembrance Day programs in adherence to municipal guidelines on public gathering restrictions. Determined to uphold the tradition of honoring Southwold veterans, the featured speaker, Ted Barris, was pre-recorded at a playhouse in St. Thomas, and the live service was streamed online. Committee members participating in the service maintained appropriate spacing according to safety standards, with all attendees wearing masks.



It requires committed volunteers to plan and execute the Southwold Remembers program each year. However, each member of the committee and all the community volunteers who assist with set up and clean up duties recognize that the effort is worth the tribute to Southwold veterans.



The War Veterans Memorial Committee celebrated their 25th consecutive Service in November 2024.



Communities in Bloom (2015 – Present)

"It's not what you have, but how you keep it."

This motto perfectly captures the heart of the Southwold Communities in Bloom (CIB) committee, highlighting the simple yet powerful ways individuals can contribute to their community.

Southwold CIB believes that the essence of a thriving township isn't about having grand gardens or elaborate displays. It's about the small acts of care and pride that make a difference. Whether it's a neatly kept yard, a freshly painted mailbox, or well-maintained grass, every effort, big or small, helps to enhance the Township of Southwold.



Valerie Cron

Founded in 2015, the committee set out with a clear vision: to inspire individuals to take part in small, meaningful actions that, together, create a lasting impact on the community. Valerie Cron played a key role in establishing Southwold CIB; while Karen and Harvey Graff, known as the “greenhouse wizards”, have been instrumental in preparing plants for the vibrant planter boxes that brighten Southwold. Throughout the growing and blooming season, a dedicated team of volunteers ensures the planters remain well-watered and beautifully maintained.



Since its founding, Southwold CIB has spearheaded numerous initiatives, including:

- Hosting engaging spring and fall seminars
- Installing and landscaping planter boxes around Township of Southwold Hamlet signs and throughout local communities

- Organizing an annual spring plant sale
- Leading tree-planting efforts
- Designing and displaying banners in Fingal
- Collaborating with the Southwold Fire Department to raise Canadian flags in local communities



There is no doubt that Communities in Bloom has made a lasting impact on Southwold Township. Through their dedication and hard work, these passionate volunteers have helped shape a community that radiates pride and unity. Their efforts have enriched the township, reinforcing its identity as the beloved “Keystone Township” and inspiring residents to take pride in their surroundings.

“Everyone has put their heart and soul into this project. You don’t have to have a big yard, a giant flower garden, or a huge home to participate. It’s not what you have, but how well you maintain it.” Valerie Cron

Southwold History Committee (2015 – Present)

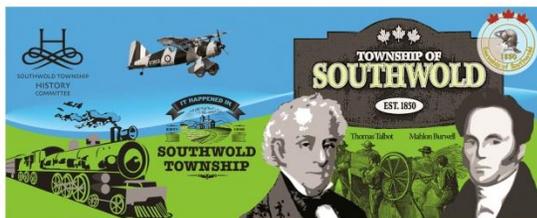


The history group originally formed as a subcommittee of the Communities in Bloom Committee. While our municipality was proud to earn 4 out of 5 blooms in our inaugural competition, we set our sights on achieving the perfect 5 out of 5 in our second year. To reach that goal, the judges advised placing greater emphasis on heritage.

A group of 12 volunteers with a collective wealth of knowledge on our township's development formed the Southwold Township History Committee in the autumn of 2015. Fortunately, one of those volunteers was Kim Poole, a professional graphic designer. Appealing



visual concepts made the task of creating interest in local history so much easier. Kim has since retired, but the group was lucky to find a qualified replacement in retired designer and photographer Tony Paul.



“It Happened In Southwold Township” is the thrust of the group’s activities. Immediately, a website www.southwoldtownshiphistory.ca was created to serve as a local history

resource centre featuring books written about our township’s beginning and early growth. There are links to a host of other websites full of archives and genealogy material, including records of local cemeteries.

On the Southwold Township History Committee Facebook page you’ll find interesting stories and photos from our past, and readers are encouraged to share their own family’s history in Southwold Township.

History walking tour brochures for Fingal, Shedden, Middlemarch, Talbotville, and Southwold Earthworks have been



developed, as well as a guide to the Barn Quilts of Southwold Township. These handouts are available at the township office.



A booth at the Rosy Rhubarb Festival, featuring engaging displays, enlarged vintage photos and maps, and tour brochures, proved to be an effective way to showcase our township’s rich history and draw interest from the community.

With the enhanced emphasis on heritage, Southwold earned the top score of 5 out of 5 blooms from the Communities in Bloom judges in both 2016 and 2017—the final years the township participated in the competition.

The history committee has enjoyed many “historical” highlights that include:

On July 1, 2017—Canada’s 150th birthday—a permanent interactive display, ***“Settling Southwold”*** was unveiled at the Canadian Museum of History. The exhibit invites visitors to explore the lives of Southwold’s early settlers. The township’s European settlement was chosen as a lens into the early Upper Canada lifestyle. Be sure to visit the museum, located in Gatineau, Quebec, just across the river from Ottawa Ontario.

Southwold raised sisters, Debra Nolan, Sandra Fish and Karen Lynch took in the ***Settling Southwold*** interactive exhibit in June 2024.





In 2018, the History group partnered with the Fingal School Alumni Association to create a lasting memorial in Lawrence Station. The plaque honours the tragic 1941 crash of the American Airlines DC-3 airliner, Flagship Erie, in which all 20 passengers and crew lost their lives instantly.

The unveiling ceremony drew hundreds of attendees, including 26 American family members of the victims. Ray Lunn of the Fingal school group and Ken Howe participated in the ceremony. Mr. Howe was a witness to the activities on his family's farm where the crash occurred.

In 2023, the History Committee brought to life a theatrical drama about the Flagship Erie crash, penned by the talented Len Cuthbert of Mount Brydges. All three performances at the Keystone Complex played to sold-out crowds, including family members of victims who traveled from as far away as Texas. The committee collaborated with Elgin Heritage curator Mike Baker to present compelling photo and artifact displays, while volunteers Len Lynch and Tony Paul curated an extensive collection of images to craft a highly detailed video chronicling the story.



In 2024, the Keystone Complex hosted another live theatre production, *Snapshots*, written by Len Cuthbert, this time with four sold-out performances. In tribute to the 100th anniversary of the RCAF, the production spotlighted the WWII Fingal Bombing and Gunnery School, as well as local air force veterans Lorne Spicer and Franklin Small. Once again, Mike Baker assisted the group in curating impressive displays, while Len Lynch and Tony Paul collaborated to produce another compelling video.



For each of these productions, Southwold volunteers played an essential role in ensuring their success. They managed historical displays that complemented the plays, handled ticket admissions, guided patrons to their seats, sold merchandise, supervised parking, and served complimentary refreshments. Thanks to their dedication, Southwold delivered two outstanding shows—made possible by the hard work and commitment of its volunteers.



The History Committee, in partnership with the Elgin County Museum and Archives, is preparing to launch *On This Spot*, a project featuring a compelling collection of 'Then and Now' photographs highlighting various locations across Southwold Township.

The Southwold History Committee has played a vital role in preserving and celebrating the rich heritage of Southwold Township. Through engaging displays, theatrical productions, and meaningful memorials, the committee has fostered a deep appreciation for local history, ensuring that the stories of the past remain accessible and relevant to future generations. With its ongoing initiatives and dedicated volunteers, the committee continues to bring the township's heritage to life, inspiring the community to connect with its roots and honor the legacy of those who shaped Southwold's history.



Shedden Historical Tour 2019

Co-Sponsored by the Young At Heart group and the Southwold History Committee, over fifty people toured historical sites in Shedden. The entertaining tour was narrated by Mary Clutterbuck and “Doctor” Ross Burgar of the History Committee. **Photo: Melissa Schneider – The Echo**

Fingal Heritage Park Committee (2017 – Present)

Created to preserve the heritage legacy of Southwold's first village and to recognize key historical institutions of the immediate area, Fingal



Heritage Park was initiated by childhood Fingal neighbours, Len Lynch and Ross Burgar. The late former Southwold Deputy Mayor Ian Chard was a guiding influence in initiating the project.

Southwold Councillor and now Deputy Mayor Justin Pennings provided technical advice and is an invaluable member of the committee.



The property was formerly the community Ball Park. Historically, it had been the location of Fingal's first manufacturing industry, MacPherson, Glasgow and Co., 1848 – 1898.



Recognizing the potential of an underutilized green space at the heart of the community, volunteers sought design guidance from Catharine Spratley, who had previously contributed to the Keystone Park project. A steel gazebo was chosen as the park's centerpiece, serving as a focal point for visitors.

To celebrate local heritage, history-themed signs were designed by volunteer graphic artists Kim Poole and, later, Tony Paul. Strategically planted mixed deciduous trees enhanced the landscape, while an accessible footpath seamlessly connected all elements, ensuring inclusivity and ease of navigation.

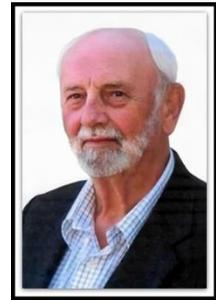


Volunteers from the community including members of Communities in Bloom, Southwold Fire Department and Parks staff worked in harmony with Southwold Council and staff to accomplish the park project.



Southwold Young at Heart Committee (2018 – Present)

The Young at Heart group’s first meeting took place in late 2018, following the municipal election. The idea to create a seniors’ committee originated with former Deputy Mayor, the late Ian Chard.



Ian Chard



The name Young at Heart reflects the mission: to provide Southwold’s seniors with meaningful opportunities to engage in social activities that energize both mind and body.

In 2019, the inaugural year, the group launched in-person events at the Keystone Complex, featuring pickleball, shuffleboard, card games, board games, and refreshments. The year wrapped up with a sold-out Christmas dinner, complete with live music and carol singing by the Strumin' Ukes.



The COVID-19 pandemic brought a halt to in-person gatherings in 2020, a particularly serious concern for seniors. Thankfully, with the support of a provincial grant, the volunteers pivoted and introduced “Activity Bags”—beautiful cloth bags

filled with crafts, treats, colouring books, local goodies, and seasonally themed surprises—all safely distributed in accordance with public health guidelines.



Themed “Take-Out Dinners” were introduced around seasonal holidays, often including a thoughtful gift like a poinsettia at Christmas. These dinners were so well received; they continue to offer them to this day.

Currently, Young At Heart programming includes summer picnics, interpretive nature hikes, and educational talks—often focusing on local history.



**SOUTHWOLD
YOUNG @ ♥ GROUP**

Southwold Township: “Blasts from the Past”

Throughout the years, Southwold has seen the formation of various committees, each created to oversee temporary projects or special events. These dedicated groups have played pivotal roles in shaping key moments in Southwold’s rich history, leaving a lasting legacy within the community.

Olympic Torch Relay Committee - 1987



The Olympic Torch Relay was run through Southwold for the 1988 Calgary Winter Games in December, 1987. The Committee for Olympic Torch Run, from left to right: Phyllis Lendvay, Melba Marr, Shirley Longhurst, Kay Chamberlain, Hugh Orchard, Roger Lunn, Jean Palmer, Harold Ellis, Ruby Glover, Len Lynch, and Peter Oostvogels

Southwold Tornado Volunteers 1990

Friends, neighbors rush to help Frome

Hundreds of volunteers have been working to put the tiny farming community back together after the tornado.

By Peter Christie
The London Free Press

FROME — Almost as suddenly as last Tuesday's savage tornado battered its way through this small Elgin County farming community, a whirlwind of help from friends, neighbors and other concerned people has blown in after it to repair the damage.

"It's quite amazing to see what's been done in four days," Bud Marr said Saturday, standing with his wife, Melba, outside his farmhouse on the edge of the wind-ravaged hamlet, southwest of London.

The storm lifted the roof and



PITCHING IN - People of all ages are pulling together to help in the tornado cleanup. Ken Fayter, 7, of RR 1, Southwold, seems bur-

ied in the debris as he helps pile branches at the farm of George Kimble, on Elgin County Road 16 near Fingal. - (T-J Photo)

Southwold Landscape Committee 1998 – 2003

Though their time was brief, the Southwold Landscape Committee made an enduring mark on the community. Their journey began in August 1998 with casual conversations—first at Stan’s Total Tire in Fingal, and later, fittingly, in the rhubarb patch behind the Shedden Fairgrounds. These informal exchanges soon blossomed into a remarkable initiative: the landscaping of the newly built Southwold Keystone Complex. What started as a simple idea grew into a transformative project, exceeding all expectations and leaving a lasting impression on Southwold.

The idea, sparked by Len Lynch, Lorne Spicer, Deputy Mayor Jim McIntyre and Councillor Stan Lidster, quickly took root and was approved by Southwold Council just two weeks later. With generous financial support from Rosy Rhubarb, a dedicated committee was formed to bring the vision to life—creating a park that would beautifully complement the newly built community centre. What began as a simple concept soon grew into a meaningful project, enhancing the landscape and spirit of Southwold.

Take a stroll through the Keystone Complex and experience the park that came to life—all thanks to a casual Saturday morning conversation in Southwold. What started as friendly chatter among dedicated community members grew into a lasting landmark, built with passion and volunteer effort.





Did You Know?

Over the years, Southwold volunteers have been instrumental in providing services, resources or milestone events that have shaped our community. While many of the volunteer achievements are part of everyday life in Southwold, we remember that these projects are the result of Southwold volunteers!

Southwold Library Committee (2012-2018)



Who hasn't benefitted from the Shedden Library?

The Shedden Public Library plays a vital role in the Southwold community by fostering lifelong learning, creative expression, and cultural engagement. It provides a welcoming and inclusive space where residents can access books, technology, and various resources to support education and personal growth. Volunteers championed the cause and raised funds to help build the library.

Beyond books, the library offers public-use computers, free Wi-Fi, printing services, and accessibility features, ensuring that everyone can benefit from its services. It also serves as a hub for community events, workshops, and programs that bring people together and strengthen local connections.

A network of dedicated volunteers worked together to transition the book inventory, symbolizing their essential role in bringing the Shedden Library to life.



Playground Committees

Volunteer committees in Shedden, Fingal, and Ferndale have taken the lead in planning and funding programs that bring playground facilities to their communities.



Fingal Wildlife Management Area

The Fingal Wildlife Management Area was established on the site of the former World War II air force training base, RCAF Fingal No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School.



Led by volunteers Lorne Spicer, Ian Carmichael and Gord Longhurst, volunteers transformed the site into a conservation space. The area spans 724 acres of Crown land and serves multiple purposes, including habitat restoration, wildlife conservation, and outdoor recreation.

Some of the habitat restoration activities included the removal of the military infrastructure, development of a series of ponds, planting of trees and shrubs, establishment of hedgerows, food and cover plots and brush piles.

While local hunters, hikers and historians are regular visitors to the site, the COVID 19 pandemic introduced hundreds of new visitors to the Fingal Wildlife Management Area!

Recognizing Volunteerism in Southwold Township

In 2009, Southwold Township established a Volunteer Recognition Policy to formally acknowledge the invaluable contributions of its volunteers. What started as a simple coffee gathering to present awards has since evolved into a catered banquet celebrating a wide range of achievements.

Recognition Levels:

Volunteer Service Award: Honors individuals, groups, or organizations whose efforts have significantly contributed to the development and growth of recreational sports, arts and culture, or community and social services.

Distinguished Citizen Award: Celebrates individuals whose selfless actions may not fit traditional volunteer criteria but still merit recognition for their outstanding contributions to the community.

Mayor's Prestigious Award: The highest honour bestowed by the Township of Southwold, this award recognizes individuals for humanitarianism, exceptional achievement in a profession, sports, or the arts, or acts of heroism and bravery.

This recognition program serves as a powerful tribute to the dedication and generosity of those who help shape Southwold Township into a thriving and compassionate community.

Know a Southwold volunteer who deserves recognition? Visit the Southwold Township website to learn how to nominate them for one of these prestigious awards!

Celebrate Your Volunteers!

For 175 years, Southwold volunteers have been the heart and soul of the community, shaping its identity through unwavering dedication and selfless service.

Their contributions—whether preserving local history, supporting charitable causes, or enhancing public spaces—have left a lasting impact, fostering a spirit of unity and pride that continues to thrive. Through generations, their commitment has enriched lives, strengthened connections, and ensured that Southwold’s heritage and values endure.

Their legacy stands as a testament to the power of community and the remarkable difference that dedicated volunteers can make.

Volunteers: The Soul of Southwold!

References:

We appreciate the continued cooperation of the Elgin Heritage Archives for historical photos and information provided these Southwold 175 Anniversary reflections.

We also acknowledge the images and information gleaned from individual committee Facebook or internet sites.

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