

County asks for a rural school board

Want to split up TVDSB

Elgin County council has sent a loud message that rural education should no longer be neglected nor ignored.

This month County council unanimously passed a resolution that petitions Elizabeth Whitmer to review the size and composition of the Thames Valley District School Board.

The resolution asks Whitmer to change the TVDSB to "more adequately reflect the urban and rural differences in the delivery of education," and "to recognize that schools particularly in single school communities have geographic needs that differ from more urban centered schools."

The resolution has been passed additionally by Dutton/Dunwich council.

D/D Mayor and County councillor Rien Van Brenk said the work is now in the Ministry's hands and it will not just be an Elgin issue. Van Brenk said County Warden John Wilson is also to meet with both Oxford and Middlesex County

councils for support of the resolution and the idea of breaking the TVDSB into facets- one rural and one urban.

"We'll see where it goes. As community leaders we have to do something," said Van Brenk.

Van Brenk felt the education issue is just one of many that threaten rural Ontario, including gun registration, education and health care and the balance of votes in elections.

He said the shift of the balance of power from rural to urban is now seen as the norm.

The two TVDSB trustees, Linda Stevenson and David Stewart have both been on spoken in the public that the TVDSB does not have a rural focus.

Recently adding fuel to the fire has been the neglect of an agreed practice of TVDSB and the former boards that the chair of the TVDSB would rotate between a rural trustee and urban after each year. The last years have been spent with a rural chair.

JAN 27/03



Breakfast program is strong

The healthy nutritious breakfast at West Elgin Secondary School, now in its eighth month, is still going strong.

Breakfast choices each morning vary from cereal, toast, juice, fruit, waffles, rice krispie squares, and english muffins.

Beginning this week students will be able to have a free hot breakfast every Friday until the end of school.

Morgan McWilliam, student leader, and his daily assistant, Jessie Lowes, report that between 60 and 80 students participate each morning.

WESS was fortunate to receive a grant from Breakfast for Learning to begin this very important program. Also Breakfast Club members, parents, and School Council have been busy fundraising since September so that this program may continue. There are still tickets available on the 2002 Suzuki ATV, and two cordless phones. Winners of the two Detroit Red Wings games have already been drawn. The final draw for the ATV and phones will be made on May 20. If you haven't got your ticket yet or would like another chance to win, they may be purchased from any Breakfast Club member or from the main office at the high school.

Deb Tobias has donated four Toronto Blue Jays tickets for the club to raffle off in support of its fundraising.

The game is in August. This draw will be made on June 26, 2003.



Lucas Given, above, shows the garbage his creek cleaner caught in Jeffrey Drain behind his house in West Elgin. His invention was among the science fair entries judged last Wednesday at West Elgin Senior Elementary School. At left, Tim van der Zon demonstrates his project about how clouds are formed.



West Elgin Senior Elementary School students Liona van der Zon, left and Devon Willson examine their construction challenge project at the Skills London Oxford Middlesex Elgin showcase held last week in London. The event aimed to give hands-on experience in the skilled trades to students in elementary and high school.

MAY 22, 2003



The Aldborough Public School Horse Club held a field trip on Saturday, June 7 at Coyote Ridge Riding Centre on Carroll Line. Teacher Mrs. Kirschner started the club, expecting only 5 or 6 participants and was overwhelmed when 75 initially signed up. After receiving their Certificates of Completion, members posed for a picture, wearing the T-shirts that they made at their final meeting. Many thanks to Mrs. Kirschner and Pat Kell of Coyote Ridge Riding Centre for all their hard work.



Kristen Griffiths and Rhonda Knight perform as part of the jazz band at West Elgin Senior Elementary School's 'Beat' the Winter concert. The concert band and choir also performed for the community at the March 21 concert.

AUG. 14, 2003



MADD POSTERS DESIGNED BY STUDENTS

Paula Hejna, 10, and Abbey Fleming, 8, of Aldborough Public School, designed award winning posters in the 6th Annual Paul Carvalho Poster Contest held by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, St. Thomas Chapter. Presenting the award to the girls is Brenda Webber, a volunteer with MADD. The theme of the poster contest was "My life has just begun, don't drink and drive!" Hejna came in third place for ages nine to 11 and Fleming came first for ages six to 8.

Chronicle photo

SPORTS



Athletes honoured

Joe Lyons, left and Ashley Clements were the senior athletes of the year and are joined by Pete Thompson and Racheal Kalita, junior athletes of the year. Awards were given out at West Elgin Secondary School June 10 for students in the high school's athletics programs.



Matt Woolsey and Mallory Peternel were this year's Heart and Hustle Award recipients at West Elgin Secondary School.

WESS athletic award recipients

Football MVP Brad Tunks (coaches Mr. Youngash, Mr. Epp); Jr. Boys Volleyball MVP Kris Oliveira (coach Mr. Vandyk); Sr. Boys Volleyball MVP Joe Lyons (coach Mr. Welch); Field Hockey MVP Marcie Charron (coaches Miss Campbell, Mr. Schneider) Golf MVP Justin Lyons (coach Mr. Fraser); Cross Country MIP Ruben VanderZon (coach Mr. Douglas); Jr. Girls Basketball MVP Jen Drummelsmith (coaches Miss Cunningham, Mr. Hills); Hockey MVP Andrew Hentz (coaches Mrs. McDowell, Mr. Shine, Mr. Rivard); Jr. Girls Volleyball MVP Amanda Leonardes (coaches Miss Campbell, Mrs. Rowsom); Sr. Girls Volleyball MVP Lindsey Webber (coaches Miss Clinton, Mrs. Wrobel); Jr. Boys Basketball MVP Mark Godfrey (coaches Mr. Roos, Chris Enns); Jr. Badminton MIP Ruben Vanderzon (coaches Mr. Miskiman, Mr. Youngash); Sr. Badminton MVP's Johnathon Woolsey & Josh Duplessis (coaches Miss Hughes, Mrs. Charron); Boys Soccer MIP Andrew Coates (coaches Mr. Boylan, Chris Leys); Girls Soccer MVP Nicole McPhail (coaches Miss Cunningham, Mrs. McCullough).



West Elgin Secondary School librarian, Melanie Thibert, receives a cheque from principal, Larry Schneider for \$500 toward the purchase of new books. However, Schneider was making the donation, not as principal, but as a member of the Ridgetown Players Incorporated. The successful amateur theatre company donated \$500 to 10 school libraries in the region in which there are students or teachers who participate in the theatre. **JUNE 19, 2003**



Despite the wintry weather, there was a full house at WESS last Wednesday night to hear conductor Jeff Christmas lead Orchestra London in its first public appearance in West Elgin. The orchestra was joined by the West Elgin Choral Society and St. Thomas Knox Presbyterian Church under the direction of Wayne Carroll. Above Janine Norloos takes a bow, after taking a turn at the baton. **FEB. 17/03**

OCT. 2/03



West Elgin Secondary School students were covered in oatmeal after taking part in some of the Grade 9 welcome games held Friday at the high school.

Chronicle photo



Spring visitor

Scott Aldred, second from the right, brought a lamb to his junior kindergarten class with Sharon Nielson at West Elgin Senior Elementary School late last month. Aldred comes from a farm where they have some sheep. He also visited the other junior kindergarten class at the school.

MAY 8, 2003



UNITED WAY CONTRIBUTION...

Staff and students at West Elgin Secondary School raised \$1,780.37 through events including a talent show and student buy-outs. From left to right is, Brianne Hein, Jenna Campbell, Jay Beecroft (lead representative for Ford/CAW Local 1520), Carolyn Blewett (education division chair, United Way), Scott Houston, Kyle Carew and WESS vice principal Mr. Miskiman.

NOV. 20, 2003

Chronicle photo

Youth learns about leadership

AUG. 7 2003

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

Kory Preston has come back from Washington DC ready to take on the world. The West Elgin Secondary School student just came back from the week-long World Leadership Congress and said interacting with young people from around the world has changed many of his views.

It's also opened his eyes even more to the importance of being a leader, even in a place as small as the hamlet of Wallacetown.

"I've been interested in having an impact on the world and this seemed to be the best way I could learn," he said of the decision to attend the conference. It reaffirmed his belief that even in small places, leaders are needed and change can be made.

Ran by an organization called Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership, programs to inspire leadership in youth have been held for more than 40 years now. With the support of many local service clubs, Preston was able to attend the conference, held July 17 to 25.

He was one of 332 participants from 15 countries including Russia, Korea, Ireland, Israel and Mexico.

The conference focussed largely on world events and, with 15 diverse perspectives represented by the youth from different countries, Preston was able to learn to look at those events in different ways.

The youth were then told that they could see and understand how the world is now, but were challenged to go out and change it.

Housed on the George Washington University campus, the students talked about religion,



Kory Preston holds a silver plate with a replica of a United States emblem given to him by an American friend at a leadership conference that brought youth together from around the world.

Chronicle photo

science and technology and current events such as the war in Iraq.

"My perspectives changed a lot," said Preston.

"Before I went down, I was really opposed to the war on Iraq," he said. Now, he's not so sure it was wrong.

He also realized how media focuses on issues in their own countries and that not everyone is aware of the problems other countries are facing.

Some youth said their

countries have never reported information about SARS or mad cow, which surprised Preston at first.

But with more open ideas now and a better realization that he can make a difference, Preston is feeling even more inspired to meet the congress's challenge and go out and make changes.

He is already a member of the Leo Club in Dutton but wants to get more involved in the community and at the high school.

That way, he said he

could inspire and encourage more leaders.

"A true leader doesn't create followers, he creates more leaders," said Preston.

With more leaders inspired to make a difference, he said that's one way to set the stage for change in the world.

And even in a rural community, he said he could see now how he could affect the world around him.

"If I could change one thing in the world, there'd be no more starving children," said Preston.

Preston has always been a volunteer. Even though required to complete 40 hours of volunteer work to graduate from high school, has felt uncomfortable having groups he has helped sign the school volunteer documents because he didn't want them to think he was only doing it for the credit.

Now, he's thinking of starting up an organization within high schools and through a network of new friends from the conference and their schools, to help provide even more aid to countries with starving children.

"We're thinking of a small school-based organization to raise awareness and raise funds," he said.

That's how he sees a way he can help change the world, even from his home in Wallacetown.

Thinking about a career in education, Preston is now giving consideration to teaching in less fortunate countries but before that, he is thinking about taking a year off of school to do some missionary work.

He knows they are big challenges but the leadership program has left him inspired and hopeful, understanding change really does have to start with just one person.



Abbey Fleming of Aldborough Public School holds her 2nd place, nationally winning Mothers Against Drunk Driving poster contest entry with MADD's Elgin-St. Thomas Chapter representative, Brenda Webber. She received \$150 and a MADD gym bag filled with goodies for her efforts which now could be used in national MADD campaigns.

OCT 16 /03

Chronicle photo

Parents meet with minister of education

Group asks for school closure moratorium

For The Chronicle

A group of West Elgin parents are calling on the province's education minister to impose a moratorium on school closures and re-evaluate the real costs and benefits of investing in rural education.

Tracy Grant, chairman of the West Elgin Secondary School (WESS) council, briefly spoke with Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy as he prepared to address area school board trustees Wednesday afternoon at the Stone Ridge Inn north of Talbotville.

Grant had arranged to present the minister with her school council's recommendations on a rural education strategy designed to provide more equitable opportunities for rural/single school community students in the province.

The report outlines five key points, including the implementation of programming-based funding which would ensure all community schools receive teachers, texts, library resources and equipment to provide all streams of provincially mandated programs without the need for teachers to "double up" grades or teaching levels.

WESS is one of four Thames Valley District School Board community secondary schools currently involved in an accommodation study dealing with the administration's recommendation to close Glencoe District High School.

Grant says getting the recommendations to Kennedy is an important first step.

"I'm very pleased to have done that. We've made previous submissions to previous education ministers and we've had a lack of response. But we're really hoping with a new government that they'll respond to our concerns about

rural education."

She is hoping Kennedy will grasp the urgency of the situation and implement a moratorium on school closings.

"I'm hoping he'll understand the immediacy of the problem. That there are schools that are currently being reviewed for closure and it would be upsetting to those communities to have that happen."

Grant says there is a need to re-define the terms "remote schools" and "small schools."

"To better reflect rural-based schooling. Distance and class size should not be the only defining factors. Community and social structure also need to be considered."

She notes WESS serves a catchment area of 618 square kilometres with many students traveling more than an hour on a bus to attend classes. But enrollment numbers are declining.

"We are concerned about critical numbers for programming and we are approaching those numbers with declining enrolment. So it is certainly an on-going concern. The enrolment right now is 540 students and under 500 is one critical number."

Those concerns have been relayed to the school board, but Grant feels trustees have so far have not come to grips with rural issues.

"Our school council tries to make its concerns known to the school board. But we don't feel that rural areas are represented adequately."

And by putting her council's report in Kennedy's hands, she hopes the minister agrees with her that "we have seen no evidence that closing these schools provides any cost saving to the school board. And the effect of school closures has been devastating for many communities." DEC. 11 /03



Safety day

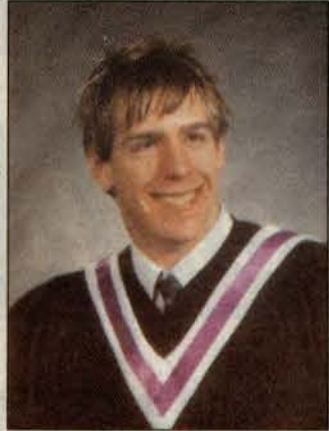
Craig Elliott of the West Lorne Fire Department helps Grade 6 Aldborough Public School student, Alex McIntyre, get out of the gear firefighters wear on calls. Elliott joined members of the health, police, farm and emergency communities to teach Grade 4 to 6 students about safety last Wednesday at the West Lorne Arena.

2003 ONTARIO SCHOLARS

W. E. S. S.



MEGAN McLANDRESS
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Dave & Cathy McLandress
School Attending & Program:
Ryerson University
Hospitality & Tourism Management



MATT McWILLIAM
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Paul & Donna McWilliam
School Attending & Program :
Carleton University
Arts and Social Sciences



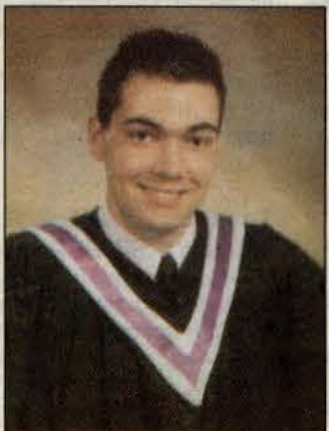
NICOLE McPHAIL
Wardville, Ontario
Parents: Duncan McPhail
School Attending & Program:
University of Waterloo
Honours, Arts



IAN MOLNAR
Iona Station, Ontario
Parents: Lou Anne & Rob Molnar
School Attending & Program:
University of Western Ontario
Engineering Science



JENNIFER LEWIS-MOSS
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Nicky & Graham Moss
School Attending & Program:
Queen's University
Honours, Phycology



NATHAN NEWPORT
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Lucy & Randy Newport
School Attending & Program:
University of Western Ontario
Engineering



CASEY OKOLISAN
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Bill & Cathy Okolisan
School Attending & Program:
University of Guelph
Hotel and Food Administration



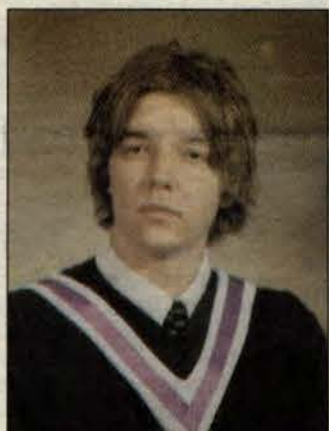
NELLIE OLIVEIRA
West Lorne, Ontario
Parents: Manuel & Maria Oliveira
School Attending & Program:
University of Toronto
Humanities and Social Sciences



MALLORY PETERMEL
Iona Station, Ontario
Parents: Joe & Beth Petermel
School Attending & Program:
University of Waterloo
Science Honours



JULIET PREY
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Emmy & Helmut Prey
School Attending & Program:
Brock University
Arts-Phycology



ANDREW RASTAPKEVICIVS
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Al & Irene Rastapkevics
School Attending & Program:
Queen's University
Political Studies



BROOKE ROEST
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Bill & Bonnie Roest
School Attending & Program:
University of Guelph
Honours Science, Major Bio-chem.



ELIZABETH ROSE
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Dave & Connie Rose
School Attending & Program:
Ryerson University
B of C Hospitality & Tourism Mngmt.



BEATRICE SACHER
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: August & Marianne Sacher
School Attending & Program:
Fanshawe College
Personal Support Worker



CONNIE SMALL
Wallacetown, Ontario
Parents: Larry & Kathy Small
School Attending & Program:
Wilfred Laurier
Business Administration



TRISTAN STADDON
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Richard & Carol Staddon
School Attending & Program:
Ryerson University
Journalism



BRAD TUNKS
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: John & Wendy Tunks
School Attending & Program:
University of Waterloo
Mathematics



PAUL TUNKS
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: John & Wendy Tunks
School Attending & Program:
Queen's University
Bachelor of Arts



KRISTYN WATTERWORTH
West Lorne, Ontario
Parents: Don & Pat Watterworth
School Attending & Program:
York University
Fine Arts

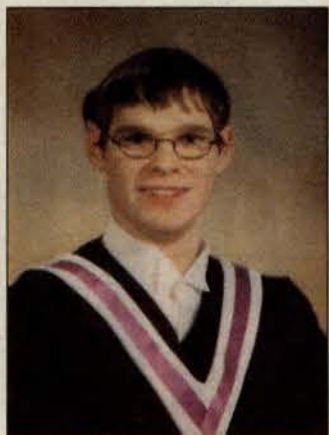


MATTHEW WOOLSEY
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Bob & Wendy Woolsey
School Attending & Program:
University of Western Ontario
Honours, Science

2003 ONTARIO SCHOLARS



JESSICA AMBROSE
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Katie Ambrose
School Attending & Program:
Ryerson Polytechnic University
Hospitality & Tourism Management



MICHAEL BENNETT
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Janice Whelan, Jim Bennett
School Attending & Program:
University of Western Ontario
Music



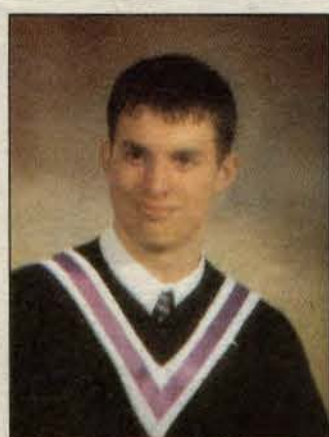
MARGARET BENNETTO
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Norah & John Bennetto
School Attending & Program:
University of Waterloo, St. Jeromes
Honours Arts, Faculty of Arts Eng.



AMANDA BREEN
Fingal, Ontario
Parents: Hugh & Georgetta Breen
School Attending & Program:
Wilfred Laurier, Hon. of Bach. Bus. Admin.
Univ. of Waterloo, Hon. Bach. of Math.



MARCIE CHARRON
West Lorne
Parents: Barb & Ray Charron
School Attending & Program:
Wilfred Laurier
Music Education



CHRIS ENNS
Iona Station, Ontario
Parents: Isaac & Dorothy Jean Enns
School Attending & Program:
Dalhousie University
Bach. of Science (Biology)



JON FLEMING
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Frank & Shelley Fleming
Returning to W.E.S.S.



ILSE FLEUREN
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Peter & Idith Fleuren
School Attending & Program:
University of Guelph
Bach. of Arts, Hon. Major Psychology



ROBERTA FORD
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Tom & Lynda Ford
School Attending & Program:
University of Guelph
Water Resource Engineering



STEPHEN CHRISTIAN GRANT
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Stephen & Tracy Grant
School Attending & Program:
Brock University
Honours Physical Education



ANDREW HENTZ
Wallacetown, Ontario
Parents: Mike & Ingrid Hentz
School Attending & Program:
Queen's University
Arts-History-French



SUSAN HOGAN
West Lorne, Ontario
Parents: Deborah & Patrick Hogan
School Attending & Program:
Brescia University College
Foods and Nutrition



LINDSEY HULL
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Brenda & Kevin Hull
School Attending & Program:
Queen's University
Music (Performance)



SAM HUMPHREY
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Jim & Marie Humphrey
School Attending & Program:
Queen's University
History



LAURA JONES
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Marion & Stephen Jones
School Attending & Program:
University of Guelph
Kinetics



KRISTOPHER W. KING
Rodney, Ontario
Parents: Susan & Bill King
Returning to W.E.S.S.



STEPHANIE LACKEY
Wallacetown, Ontario
Parents: Margaret & Ron Lackey
School Attending & Program:
University of Waterloo
Arts and Business



SIMONE LOETERS
Wardsville, Ontario
Parents: John & Annemieke
School Attending & Program:
Brock University
Child and Youth Studies



JOE LYONS
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Bob & Luci Lyons
School Attending & Program:
Huron University College
International & Comparative Studies



AMY McLANDRESS
Dutton, Ontario
Parents: Dave & Cathy McLandress
School Attending & Program:
Ryerson University
Hospitality & Tourism Management

WESS welcomes back 2003 grads

By Suzanne McGregor
For The Chronicle

The graduates at the WESS commencement on Saturday represented the last graduating class of OAC's and the first graduates of the new curriculum. While it made for the largest graduating class ever out of WESS, the reunion of students, many who hadn't seen each other since summer, was warm and uplifting as hugs and chatter and laughter dominated.

Because of the double cohort, there were two valedictorians.

Stephanie Lackey gave the Valedictory address, speaking on behalf of the OAC (5th year) graduates.

Lackey is currently attending the University of Waterloo, taking arts and business. She began her address by expressing to the audience of students, family and friends what commencement meant to those returning.

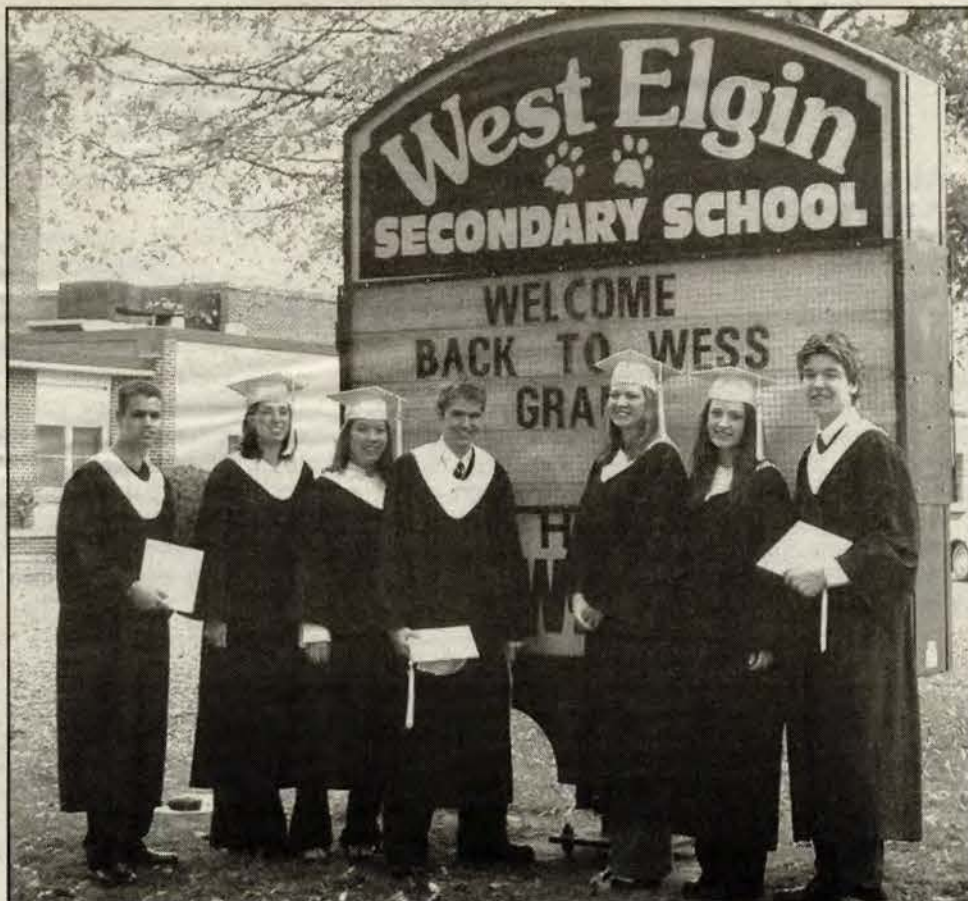
"For the graduates we are happy to be reunited with our high school friends, and also a bit of relief that we have made it to this day — which means we have successfully completed four or five years of high school and survived the first couple months of college, university, or work."

For those students that have gone on to higher education, the facilities they are now attending are much larger, but Lackey suggested that their rural school upbringing was important and helped shape lives.

"Because we are fortunate enough to attend a rural school we soon realized that a small, but adequately populated school is not intimidating at all. It was easy to meet new friends, from WESES or St. Mary's, or those new to the area and have a sense who everyone was, or who everyone was related to at least. Almost like one big family."

And Lackey was firm in her support of WESS and rural education.

"West Elgin has been here for over 51 years and I know will continue to be here educating students



Because of the double cohort, WESS welcomed back the largest graduating class ever on Saturday, at the 2003 commencement exercises. Along with the graduates, Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 students were presented with honour awards. Posing in front of the school on Saturday are left to right, Andrew Hentz, Laura Jones, Stephanie Lackey (OAC valedictorian), Ian Molnar (grade 12 new curriculum valedictorian), Roberta Ford, Amanda Breen, and Andrew Rastapkevicius (salutarian).

Chronicle Photo

for years and years to come. West Elgin is, or was once your school, your home — respect it and support it so you will always have a West Elgin to come back to... we are fortunate to have teachers who put in extra time to coach our sports, to lead our clubs and committees, tutor us when we need help, and never let us give up."

Lackey ended her address with some words of wisdom for all.

"As we go out into the world I hope we all remember the basic morals our parents taught us. Be respectful, treat others the way you want to be treated, don't get in a car with a stranger (no matter how cold the walk back to residence), get lots of rest, and don't skip breakfast..(even if it is at noon). The journey has just begun."

Ian Molnar, was the valedictorian representing the Grade 12 (new curriculum) class. Molnar is now attending the University of Western Ontario in Engineering Science.

He began his address

remiscing over the four years at WESS.

"We've all come a long way in four years. From Grade 9 day to the very final class where we sat in our seats watching Ms. Sehti draw her work-play diagram on the board as we struggled with the enormity of the situation that was quickly approaching. Our life was about to change drastically, for better or worse."

While places and events are important in our lives, Molnar reflected that it is the people in our lives that make the difference.

"It is because of the people that we remember places like West Elgin with such fondness, making us remember high school as some of the best years of our lives. It's not the situation you're in that lets you have fun, it's the people that you do it with that makes all the difference."

Molnar spoke of the feelings of both excitement and dread of moving on to the new life of university. And he spoke to everyone present, especially those

still in high school when he advised that "we've moved on to bigger and better things. High school isn't as good as it gets. It just gets better and the sky's the limit. But don't let the past shape who you are now and who you are going to be. You can go out, do anything you set your mind to, as long as you believe in yourself. Like Neil Diamond when he says, 'Not a trace of doubt in my mind, I'm a believer.' Oh the places you'll go."

Congratulations to all the successful graduates of 2003.

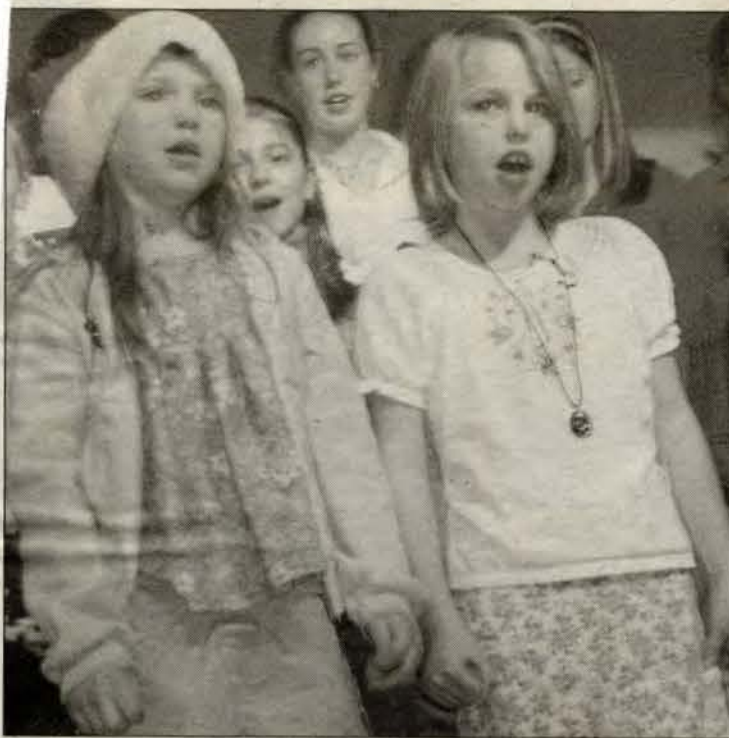


ON THE FIELD...

Jessica Kalita, third left, moves in for the ball during girls field hockey hosted by West Elgin Secondary School last Thursday afternoon. The Wildcats took on the Glencoe Gaels but were defeated 2-1.

OCT. 2003

Chronicle photo



Renee Forgues and Ashly Blais join the St. Mary's Choir in singing Winter Wonderland.



Melanie Howard accompanies a St. Mary's Catholic School class in playing Silent Night during the school's Christmas concert last Tuesday night. Below, right, William Weeks, left, and Luke Stacey perform the song in sign language with the rest of their class.

Chronicle photos



Alyssa Paiva and James Schadenberg play Mary and Joseph in a Grade 1 performance.



Accommodation study committees to continue, says TVDSB

For The Chronicle

Thames Valley District School Board is telling several community committees studying the future of their local schools to carry on with the job.

Heeding a warning last Tuesday from administration, TVDSB trustees agreed in discussion that they won't interfere with accommodation reviews that are under way in several areas, including both west and east Elgin.

But with the provincial government asking school boards to delay any school closings slated for September, trustees also suggested they could put any such recommendation from their committees on hold although none of the accommodation reviews now under way would be able to recommend a September closing in time for it to happen, anyway.

The Ontario government said Friday it wants school boards to hold off approving closings until the ministry of education can review its funding formula.

School board chairman Jan Hunter said last night the announcement sounds hopeful.

"We don't really know exactly what it means but we will look forward optimistically." Like many school boards, Thames Valley is

grappling with a declining enrolment which threatens the future of schools.

Educators are particularly concerned about being able to offer a full range of programs to small schools, especially in rural areas.

But while rookie Oxford trustee Margaret Reidl said the province's announcement means TVDSB "should proceed with extreme caution" with accommodation reviews, executive superintendent of operations Peter Gryseels warned the board not to tinker with established policy and procedures governing the studies.

"Don't interfere with the process," he said. "Let the communities discuss this."

And, in fact, trustees heard the committee studying high schools in west Middlesex and west Elgin decided the night before it wants to continue with its review.

"They gave a very clear indication they want to continue with their deliberations and bring it to a resolve," Gryseels said.

Study chairman Peggy Sattler, a Middlesex trustee, said the committee is concerned delaying its recommendations could hurt Glencoe District High School by dissuading parents from enrolling their children at the school.

While school board administration has suggested closure of the school; the committee is

looking for a way to keep all the high schools under study, including West Elgin, open.

The school board did decide last night to send a letter to the education ministry explaining its response.

• In other business, TVDSB was told last night that it has had a windfall of close to \$600,000 for rural elementary schools because of new provincial funding. The school board agreed to prioritize the need for the money among 30 schools, including several in Elgin, for library and information technology upgrades.

Students collecting food door-to-door, Dec. 9⁰³

**By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle**

West Elgin Secondary School students will be blitzing western Elgin County collecting food in its "Yes We Can" program.

More than 50 students and 15 adult volunteers will take two hours Tuesday, Dec. 9 to collect food from homes in Dutton, West Lorne and Rodney and in points in between.

Last year, they collected 14 truck loads of food which is split between the Daffodil Society and Caring Cupboard.

"The kids have done just a phenomenal job," said Berta Prelaz, teacher supervisor for the third annual event.

The Daffodil Society provides food and Christmas hampers to people in need in the Dutton and West Lorne areas while the Caring Cupboard helps families in the Rodney area. Students will be out in

force Dec. 9 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. to collect food and donations for the two organizations.

Prelaz said people who can't be at home during the collection period can leave food on their doorsteps and encourages people, even if you are home, to leave their food outside for a quicker pickup.

Items most needed include peanut butter, soap and other hygiene products and facial tissues but an assortment of non-perishable food items is always needed.

The collection will help the organizations fill Christmas hampers but is also a boost to its ongoing service of providing food to people who need some support.

"I always thought it was important for our kids to realize how big the need is out there," said Prelaz, who organized the event.

And she said the students really get behind the project.

"Kids I never would expect have come out to help," she said.

The event follows a homeroom competition that has students currently collecting food in their classrooms until Dec. 8.

That's when volunteers will judge the homerooms based on how much food they have collected and how they are displaying it in the classroom. The winning homeroom receives a pizza party.

Dec. 5-7, there will also be boxes left in local grocery stores where anyone can donate food or food can be left before Dec. 9 at the high school.

During the community collection on Tuesday, Dec. 9, Prelaz said the volunteers will be wearing badges to identify themselves when they come to someone's door.

Anyone looking for more information can call the school at 768-1350.