



CHALK TALK - FEBRUARY 2026

RWTO/OERO London-Middlesex Branch Newsletter

Editor: Janice Thielenhaus

Website: rwto.org/branch/london-middlesex



A message from branch president Linda Freeman

Welcome to our RWTO/OERO Jubilee year as branches celebrate across the province. We are also an integral part of planning for the upcoming Convention, to be held on June 2-4th at Clare Hall, Western University. It will be an exciting event that includes hosting a Wellness Fair, a town crier from our membership, door prizes, our choir, Karaoke and a special luncheon for members in their 90s (and caregivers). The accommodations are spacious with queen-sized beds (not like the dorms of the olden days), less expensive than any hotel, and offering lounges on all six floors. The Dean of the Faculty of Education (Dr. Donna Kotsopoulos) will be attending and bringing greetings to over 300 members attending the Convention.

London-Middlesex branch is growing again as we welcomed 2 new members in September, 5 in October and 10 in November. The new members' names were included in our web-site links sent out after each luncheon with 6 pictures of the event (the maximum pictures allowed). To date we have 220 members including 12 life members. Our membership drive "Each One, Reach One" really helps, and we ask younger members to mention our organization and our community involvement, to newly retired teachers whom they know.

One of our many differences between RTO/ERO and our organization is our Outreach Program which in the past year meant that we collected over \$5,000, plus many items, for organizations helping women and children in London/Middlesex and the wider community. Our Speakers' Program focuses on issues pertaining both to our members and women and education in the community, as indicated in our Program sent out each August. At our luncheons our executive is committed to providing a welcoming environment for new members, so we have added a second "New Members' Table" to enable people to become acquainted with each other as our membership grows.

Our luncheon venue, RiverBend clubhouse was fully renovated in 2024 and the servers are pleasant and efficient. As we all know, costs for everything are increasing but we hope to keep the price of luncheons as low as possible. Sandra McKeen has been able to negotiate the cost of the March and April lunches to remain at \$35.00 and with a Branch subsidy, the annual banquet will be only \$45.00.

Thank you to all who have served on the executive and various committees this year, it is your hard work and dedication that makes the branch successful.

Last year, every member received a printed copy of *Chalk Talk* as well as a digital copy on-line, but to save postal and printing costs, only those members who receive a printed copy of the provincial newsletter *Connections* will receive a printed copy of *Chalk Talk* this year, all others will get the on-line digital copy in early February. The layout, editing, printing (by M & T Printing Group), and mailing of this review of our past calendar year is done by Janice Thielenhaus, with our thanks.

I'll continue to send e-blast reminders of our activities and due dates for payments. Please email me if you have suggestions for activities, offers of help, or questions – lindyfreeman@sympatico.ca. Be sure to give us any changes/corrections of address, or if without a computer, phone me at 519-639-8187 and our phone committee (Joan Taylor) callers will continue to keep you updated. I look forward to seeing you in March at our first luncheon of 2026.

Yours in Caring and Sharing,

Linda Freeman



Spring Luncheon Dates

Thursday, March 26, 202 Thursday, April 23, 2026

New date for May Banquet

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Please remember your Name Tag, Rewards card and books for the Book Table

Branch Executive 2025-2026

In May 2025, the core executive members were re-affirmed. The Policies and Procedures committee led by Cathy Harrison worked on updating our executive and committee structure in 2025 to be more stream-lined and effective. Membership now has 3 chairpersons, Sandy O'Brien, Karen Tierney and Sharon Lunau. This team has been working on keeping our membership data correct and inclusive so that we not only increase our numbers but also retain members in our organization.



It is most helpful when members **promptly inform** Sandy O'Brien sjobrien4846@gmail.com ph. 519-439-6210 or Sharon Lunau sal_032949@hotmail.com ph. 519-472-2099 of **changes** in mailing address, phone number or email address as both Sandy and Sharon keep binders of our membership information sheets.

RWTO Supplementary Health Insurance

Our RWTO Hospital and Home Care Insurance plan from Manulife continues to offer the same coverage for the low price of \$14.49 for a single person. However, members must maintain their membership with RWTO in order to stay with their Manulife Plan.

Members who are in their first year of retirement do not have to complete the medical section on their application.

Contact Helen Munce at 519-473-2050 if you would like a brochure with an application form.

When a plan member has a need for nursing services at home, as a result of injury or illness they must now send Manulife a **PRIOR AUTHORIZATION FORM** signed by a physician or nurse practitioner. If the need is urgent or immediate, contact the Manulife Call Centre at 1-877-222-7340 for verbal authorization.

Go to [rwto.org/membership/insurance plans](http://rwto.org/membership/insurance_plans) to obtain the forms or you can phone the call centre and have the forms mailed to you.

Remember to inform Manulife if you have a change of mailing or email address.

Helen Munce, Insurance

New members joined in 2025

This year Sandy O'Brien interviewed new members for some information on where and what they taught and about their interests/activities in retirement so that the membership learned about each new member as they were introduced to the general membership at a Luncheon.

The following were introduced in the Fall.

In **September '25**

Linda Gaudet and Jean Hewitt



In **October '25**

Marj Dudley, Barbara Goldhawk, Cathy Lewis, Mary Miller-Bishop, Cornelia Verwer



In **November '25**

Janice Beckett, Liz Ellis, Deb Gillespie, Ellen James, Jennifer Jolliffe, Sharon Miller, Goldha Stoker, Mary McKee, Karin Stapleford, Margy Tuomi.



Deborah Smith and Debra LeGrow have joined and will be introduced in 2026.

Rosie Triebner (Faculty of Ed, Western) joined as a social member.

Sandy O'Brien, Sharon Lunau and Karen Tierney Membership

Many thanks to our official photographer, Bernarda Norwood for the pictures.

Friendship Activities in 2026

Breakfast Socials: Shelley's Restaurant, Lamplighter Inn, Best Western Inn 591 Wellington Rd. S. 9:30 am
All are welcome – no reservation needed.

Wed. Feb. 11, Mon. Mar. 9, Tues. Apr. 14, Wed. May 13
Mon. Jun. 8, Tues. Jul. 14, Wed. Aug. 12, Mon. Sep 14.

Our Branch Choir

Rehearsals on Tuesdays start April 7th 1:30 – 3pm for our May concert and June Convention entertainment. New members are welcome to join the present 22 member choir.

Contact Johanna Hurd 519-473-2650

Johannahurd@rogers.com

Book Clubs

The **Thursday Book Club** meets on the 1st Thursday of the month at 1pm. Contact Mary Jane Finn mimsterfinn@gmail.com 226—663-6603

The **Wednesday Book Club** meets on the 2nd Wednesday each month at 10 am. Contact Maureen Tipping m.maureen.tipping@gmail.com 519-472-7539

Table Decorations by Crafty Folks

Irene Gauvin and her team – Sue Scruton, Helen Munce, Cathy Harrison, Gayle Murray, Joy Morrison, Rosanne Wadsworth, Marg Delagran and Terri Lyons, provide delightful table decorations for our six Branch lunches, and this year, for the Convention in June.

Sharing & Caring

Keeping in Touch visitors are a group of our volunteers who make personal visits to members who are now “shut-ins” and unable to participate in our lunches for various reasons.

In December members of the Executive met to write Christmas cards for the “over 80 - 90s” and the members in their 90s also received a personally delivered gift.



December 4,
2025 card-
writing group

Summer Theatre Trips

Huron Country Playhouse – Debby Albin has arranged a trip for interested members to see **42nd Street** in June.

Summer Lunch Outings

Lunches will be organized at different venues in July & August. Dates T.B.A.

Mini-Golf & Lunch at the Tin Cup on Windermere Rd by Adelaide St. N. and lunch at the Waltzing Weasel in early September – date T.B.A.

In Memoriam

It saddens us to announce we have lost these wonderful women during 2025. We have been privileged to have known them and extend our condolences to their families, friends and colleagues.

At our May '25 luncheon L-M branch past president Mary Maxwell conducted the In Memoriam ceremony for the members who had passed since the previous ceremony in May 2024. A portrait was shown on the screen and mention was made of each person's life before a flower was placed in the vase for remembrance.

Edith Van Keulen April 17, 2025
Nancy Bell April 23, 2025
June Levy May 31, 2025
Shirley Parr June 13, 2025
Alberta O'Neil Aug. 20, 2025
Mary Vernon Aug. 30, 2025
Margery (Nonnie) Butson Sept. 16, 2025
Doreen Knight Oct. 13, 2025
Barbara Williamson Dec. 15, 2025



Karen Tierney, Sharon Lunau, and Sandy O'Brien
Membership

Branch Policies & Procedures

Since 1956, branches of RWTO/OERO have followed the Constitution, Policies and Procedures of the provincial organization. This is our framework; but each branch has the freedom to set up independent P & P committees that suit the locale of the branch and accepted ways of good administration and management regarding membership, fees, outreach programs and recruitment of members, etc. Our last Policy & Procedures Handbook was published in 2015 and an updated version was needed.

After the Convention of 2022, held in London, a serious look at the Handbook was begun. Goals were established for the revision work with the ultimate aim of recognizing **Membership is the key and heart of our organization**, the executive is there to serve our members in all ways from the first welcome of new members, to providing an interesting Program of speakers/topics, to recognizing all the hard work of so many members who contribute to our success.

In the summer of 2025, the final draft of the Handbook was ready for printing and then distributed to the core executive and committee chairs.

In order to keep our membership informed, there is a “back table” display chart of our organization, with a core group dealing with admin, planning, fees and funds, budgeting etc. and supporting chairs of committees working on different activities. **Handbooks are available for all members to peruse at each luncheon's “back table.”**



Cathy Harrison,
Policy & Procedures

Member Recognition in 2025

Cora Bailey Award – a Provincial Award

The branch nominates a member for this provincial award for excellent leadership and outstanding service to the branch, which was presented by President Linda Freeman in May 2025 to choir leader, Johanna Hurd and to Luncheon chair, Sandra McKeen.



Shining Stars – a Branch Award

In November 2025 a Shining Star Award was given to three recipients in recognition of their work and support of our branch over many years. Linda Freeman presented the award certificates to :

Bernarda Norwood who is our official photographer at our luncheons and to **Mary McNabb-Lutz** and **Donna Newcombe** who receive our Outreach donations at luncheons and make the deliveries to the recipient organizations.



The 2025 Program Speakers

In **March**: Natalie Canoglu, in **April**: police officers, in **May**: our choir; In **September**: Patsy Day, in **October**: Travel Guide, In **November**: our choir with seasonal songs.



Good Books to Read

As recommended by members -

Bloomsbury Girls by Oakville author, Natalie Jenner In postwar London, three talented women with their dreams are locked into their roles in a Bloomsbury bookstore by the mores of the times and the men in charge. **Elizabeth Van Dongen** was sorry the story ended.

The Housemaid by Freida McFadden is the first of her series of 3 books + a novella. It's a thriller – a real page turner, the movie is out now. **Dianne Heatherington**

The Queens of Crime by Marie Benedict is an historical fiction with some mystery, as 5 amazing fictional crime writers, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, and Baroness Emma Orczy gather together to prove their detecting skills. **Mary Maxwell**

A Most Puzzling Murder by Bianca Marais is interspersed with riddles and puzzles that both main character Destiny, and the reader must solve. It's "one of a kind" mystery book that will keep you guessing and gasping until the very last page. **Jane Williams**

The Book Lover's Library by Madeline Martin follows the life of a British girl between the two World Wars. The life of Emma, with her family, friends and colleagues at the Boots Library in Nottingham, England is woven into a remarkable story that makes the reader feel part of that history. **Cathy Harrison**

Finding Flora by Elinor Florence is an historical fiction about Flora who comes to Canada from Scotland as a young bride in 1905. The marriage is a mistake from which Flora escapes to make a new, but not an easy life in Alberta. **Mary Jane Finn** was enchanted with this story of female resilience against hardship and injustice.

The Boxcar Librarian by Brianna Labuskes who weaves a story of three women in three decades of the early 1900s. This novel is inspired by true events. The boxcar library is a converted mining train that brings books to the isolated rural towns of Montana where women and working class people were controlled by ruthless business men. Lots of plot twists!
Sharon Lunau

Horse by Geraldine Brooks is a parallel story of a famous race horse born and bred in Kentucky during the 1850s. In the 2000s, his bones are articulated by a young woman commissioned by a museum to study his skeleton. Slavery, the Civil War and the history/relationship between Blacks and Whites in both time periods are explored. Nothing much has progressed over the years. **Linda Freeman**

The Villa in Italy by Elizabeth Edmondson is a novel about four strangers who have been summoned to a grand villa in Italy because they have each been named in a Will. They must figure out their relationship to the deceased, and to each other. A devastating secret will be revealed that will affect them all.
Michele Specht

A Reminder

Send changes of address/email/phone to Membership Chairs
Sandy O'Brien sjobrien4846@gmail.com or
Sharon Lunau sal_032949@hotmail.com or
Karen Tierney tierneykaren288@gmail.com