

Gesto United Church closing

BY JENNIFER CRANSTON

After 134 years the congregation of Gesto United Church will celebrate its last service at the current site on June 1 at 9 a.m.

The building that has served as their house of worship since 1886 will be sold and the congregation will merge with Bethel-Maidstone United Church.

Bethel-Maidstone was formed in 1981 when the congregations of Bethel and Maidstone united.

"The cost of running the church was hard for the small congregation," said Rev. Lilian Patey.

Rev. Patey will continue to serve the amalgamated congregations.

"It's always been a familiar family group," said member Peggy Hall.

Gesto is currently comprised of about 12 families. Many of the church members are descendants of the founding families.

Those 12 families made a valiant effort to save money for the small church. Musicians Larry

Anderson, Wayne Little and Marjorie Reeb all donated their services in an effort to improve the bottom line. Rev. Patey says she is very grateful to them for helping out.

A special service to welcome the congregation of Gesto will be held at Bethel-Maidstone on June 8 at 10:30 a.m.

"I feel sad of course," said Rev. Patey. "In many ways there is sadness."

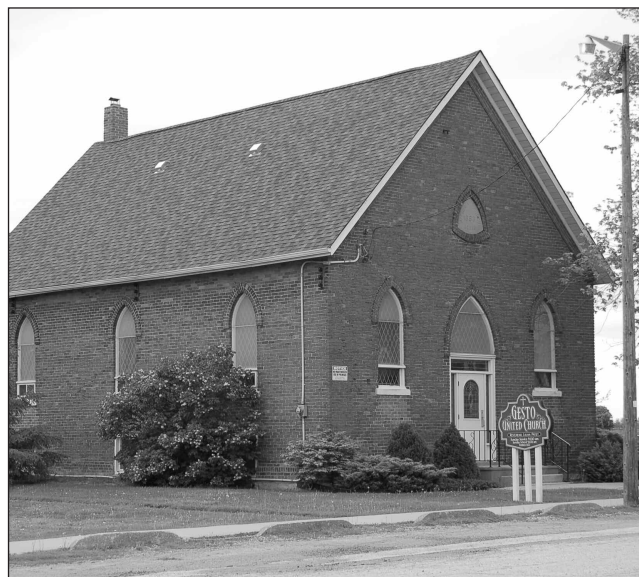
Rev. Patey is worried about diminishing membership in all churches.

"It was hard to attract new people," she said.

Dwindling membership has been a concern for churches everywhere for several years.

"People are taking their faith very lightly," said Rev. Patey. "The church will fail if people don't work together."

Rev. Patey believes that families should consider Sunday school as important as regular school, especially since religion has been removed from public schools.



Gesto United Church on Cty. Rd. 12 has been serving the community of Gesto for over 120 years. The congregation will hear their last sermon under its roof on June 1.

Hall says it can be challenging because other activities like sports draw people away from Sunday morning services.

"The good news is, we'll have more people working together," Rev. Patey said.

She expects the Sunday school to be bigger and she is excited about the talents people will bring with them.



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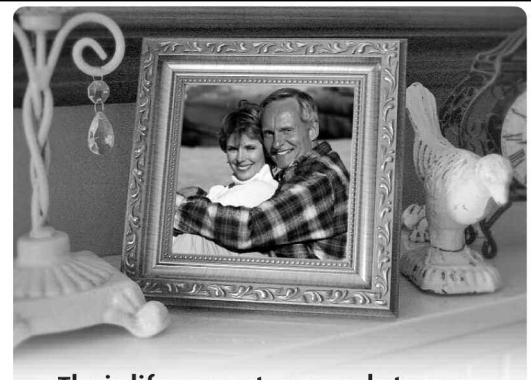
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Silver Acorn awarded locally

Judi Wijngaarden's dedication to Scouting is well known in the Essex area. Countless children and their parents have known Judi as the leader of a local Beaver Colony founded in Essex. She presently leads the 2nd Leamington Beaver Colony.

The retired public school teacher began her Scouting career in 1975. As a teacher and administrator, she has been able to draw upon her skills and expertise to develop programs and offer training to others in the Scouting movement.

Wijngaarden played a key role in developing "Beaver Fever", a program that supports Beaver Colonies and their leaders with resources.

On May 3, Wijngaarden was recognized nationally at Scouts Canada's annual Honours and Awards Recognition ceremony for the Central Canada division held in Kingston, where she received one of the three highest awards – the Silver

Acorn Award for distinguished service to Scouting.

Eugene Barna of Leamington is the only other recipient of the Silver Acorn award in Essex County.

The Bar to the Silver Acorn for continued distinguished service to Scouting and the Silver Wolf Award for distinguished service of national importance are the other two highest awards bestowed by Scouts Canada.



Essex resident Judi Wijngaarden receives the Silver Acorn award for distinguished service to Scouting from Jeff Smith, left, deputy executive commissioner for Central Canada Division, and Rob Stewart, executive commissioner and CEO of Scouts Canada. The presentation was made at Scouts Canada's annual Honours and Awards Recognition ceremony held May 3 in Kingston.

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