



Grand River Agricultural Society

Community Report
2024/2025



President's Message

The Grand River Agricultural Society has worked hard again this year to be the best Agricultural Society we can be. Our Directors are all highly qualified people who feel the responsibility of supporting growth and innovation in agriculture; of doing our best to be good environmentalists; of educating young and old, rural and urban on the tremendous contributions of agriculture to our lives; and of supporting several impressive initiatives which are happening in our broader community.

This year's Community Report will outline many of the specific details of this work, so I will call your attention to just a few highlights.

GRAS continues to fund its scholarships for students studying in the fields of agriculture or the environment including similar scholarships for Indigenous students through Indspire. We plan to add an additional scholarship for veterinary students wishing to work with large animals in more remote locations. We also continue our financial support for the Ontario Agricultural College so it can continue to thrive and attract the best and brightest students and faculty.

Our SPARK Symposium this year was very successful with five amazing pitching companies involved in a variety of ag tech and ag services. There were an additional four companies displaying their innovations in preparation for growing their businesses. This annual event enables GRAS to showcase very special entrepreneurs and to inform potential investors of the opportunities to facilitate the growth of these Ontario companies.

The Rapid Response program had another successful year in giving young entrepreneurs the opportunity to enhance their sales. It has been so successful in enabling sales that the decision was made to increase the funding yet again next year.

The 2025 Racing Season started up on June 4 for the second year of racing on the new 5/8 mile track complete with new LED lighting, a fast track surface and timer boxes. GRAS hosts a number of track related events including Harness the Hope to raise funds for breast cancer, patio parties to bring the excitement of racing to a wider audience and of course our continued support of Equine Guelph with its emphasis on the health and well being of horses and the sustainability of the equine/racing industry. On August 4, GRAS will sponsor our annual Industry Day to acknowledge the many people who keep the racing Industry alive and well.

Our Board of Directors has participated this year in a number of strategic planning meetings and we are moving ahead on exciting plans to grow and enhance the Grand River Agricultural Society and Raceway and Events Centre. Stay tuned as we continue to make good progress towards continuing our Mission to enable Agriculture, the Environment and the wider community to innovate, grow and remain sustainable.



Deborah Whale

Deborah Whale, President
Grand River Agricultural Society

Our Vision

Nourishing people, animals, and the planet.

Our Mission

Supporting innovation, education, economic growth, and community enabling agriculture and the environment to thrive.

Values

- Partnering with others
- Caring about people
- Reimagining the possible
- Making a difference
- Doing the right thing
- Celebrating diversity



This year...

\$3.7
MILLION

\$3.7 million in 2023-2024

Spent on goods
and services

\$1.4
MILLION

\$3.6 million in 2023-2024

Capital improvements

\$1.53
MILLION

\$1.47 million in 2023-2024

Total staff wages
and benefits

\$652
THOUSAND

\$501 thousand in 2023-2024

Agricultural events and
community support

GRAS Team Facts

Our workplace is
comprised of
53%
females.

10%
of the workforce is
over the age of 70
years of age.

28
Team members
with over 10+
years of service.

36.5%
of Team Members
with over 5 years
of service.

What the community is saying!

Grand River Raceway does an excellent job keeping the grounds in beautiful shape. Always impressed...I had the Smashburger with fries at the snack bar and have to say it was the best burger I've ever had. Wish I could get my homemade burgers to taste like this! And the French fries were homemade deliciousness...Keep up the good work GRR. - Ian, Google Review

We held our wedding and reception at The GrandWay at the end of September. I cannot recommend this venue enough for any event! The staff are all lovely and helpful. And the event coordinators were excellent to work with (Brittany and Alaya were both wonderful!) - they worked with us and provided a lot of options to help us achieve the type of wedding that we wanted, not like the cookie-cutter event you get at most venues. They also worked throughout the event to ensure everything ran smoothly. We were even lucky enough to have a winners circle photo as we held our event on a race night. We had so much fun and everything went so smoothly. Thank you to the whole team! - Jackie, Google Review

★★★★★ 4.7 stars on Google

Philanthropic Funding

WAYS WE GIVE



Philanthropic Funding

Apply for financial funding for your not-for-profit or charitable organization.
Application deadlines are March 31 and September 30.



Scholarship Program

Students enrolled in an agricultural or environmental program in college or university can apply.
Applications open April 1 and close July 1.



Community Mini Grants

Apply if your organization is working on a local community project related to agriculture or the environment.
Applications open March 1 and close March 31.



Rapid Response for Business Development

Increase sales and innovation in your ag-tech or green-tech company.
Applications open April 11 and close March 31.



Gift-In-Kind Requests

Discounted spaces for meetings, training, or events for your not-for-profit or charitable organization.
Applications are always open.



\$1 Million
annual allocation

\$600,000
Philanthropy

- Philanthropic Funding
- Community Mini Grants
- Scholarships
- Gifts-In-Kind
- Educational Events:
 - Pizza Perfect
 - AgScape

\$400,000
Impact Investment

- Direct Investment
 - For innovative companies in their early stages.
- Rapid Response to Business Development
 - NEW! \$150,000 investment this year.
- SPARK Symposium

GRAS is known for its philanthropic contributions to the community through scholarships, community mini-grants, and major donations. GRAS is striving to bring agriculture, education, and community together.



Commitment to Community

Celebrating Women Who Lead and Inspire

On Friday, March 7th, The GrandWay Events Centre hosted a special lunch in celebration for International Women’s Day. Guests gathered to enjoy a delicious meal while hearing from two inspiring speakers who are making a powerful impact in their industries and communities.

Mandi Fields, Founder of Tampon Tuesday and a passionate advocate for local and national change, shared the story behind the initiative and its wide-reaching effect in addressing period poverty. She was joined by her close friend Anneke Donkers-Stickney representing Egg Farmers of Ontario—a young entrepreneur making significant strides in the poultry industry and a dedicated supporter of local farming and community causes.

The afternoon was not only a celebration of women’s achievements but also a chance to give back. A portion of ticket proceeds were donated to the Centre Wellington Food Bank, helping provide essential support to families in need. Attendees also brought physical donations to help support the cause.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Mandi and Anneke for their time, their stories, and their dedication to lifting up others. Events like these remind us of the strength, leadership, and generosity found in our community.



A Night of Pink and Purpose at Grand River Raceway

It was a sea of pink at Grand River Raceway on Friday, August 18th, as the track proudly “turned pink” in support of breast cancer awareness and fundraising. Guests, team members, and even horses and drivers showed their support by donning their best pink attire. The GrandWay joined in the celebration with themed pink cocktails, mocktails, and more.

The evening featured a fun Best-Dressed in Pink contest, with prizes awarded to the most fabulously pink guest, horse, and groom.

Thanks to generous contributions from guests, sponsors, and a donation match from GRAS (up to \$12,500), over \$25,000 was raised for Hareness the Hope. In the past 3 years, this event has raised over \$75,000. These

funds will help provide critical resources and support for individuals and families navigating life-changing diagnoses within our community.

Events like this reflect the power of connection, compassion, and community—and we’re proud to continue hosting them.



Pizza Perfect Celebrates 20 Years of Agricultural Education

Every March, the Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS) opens its doors—and its barn—to hundreds of excited Grade 3 students for “Pizza Perfect”, a hands-on agricultural education program designed to connect young learners with the origins of their food. Using the universally loved theme of pizza, the program brings agriculture to life in a fun and accessible way.

Celebrating its 20th year in 2025, “Pizza Perfect” continues to grow in popularity and impact. Students from four local school boards take part in the two-day event, engaging in a full day of learning through 20 interactive stations. These stations are carefully designed to help students explore the journey of food from farm to table, including how crops are grown and harvested, how animals are raised and cared for, and the importance of clean water and food safety.

The experience is immersive and memorable. From the moment buses arrive at the GRAS barn—sometimes with students wrinkling their noses at the unfamiliar “barn smell”—to the end of the day when they excitedly board the bus, eager to share all they’ve learned, the energy is contagious. THAT is success in our book!

Supported by several commodity groups and more than 70 volunteers each day, Pizza Perfect is a community-driven effort. The dedication of these volunteers, ranging from agricultural professionals and educators to enthusiastic community members, with little or no agricultural background—ensures that students receive an engaging and informative experience.

With 700 to 1,000 students participating annually, Pizza Perfect has become a cornerstone of GRAS’s commitment to agricultural education. Registrations fill up within a week, a testament to the program’s value and the enthusiasm of teachers and students alike.

Even during the challenges of the pandemic, GRAS adapted to continue delivering this important educational experience. The “Personal-Sized Pizza Perfect” virtual program was launched,

allowing classrooms to participate through a YouTube presentation. GRAS team members delivered tomato plants, pots, and soil to each registered class, giving students the chance to grow one of pizza’s key ingredients themselves. The virtual version of the program remains available for schools that are unable to attend in person, extending the reach and impact of Pizza Perfect.

At its core, GRAS believes that agricultural education is vital. Helping the next generation understand where their food comes from—and the people, animals, land, and water that make it all possible—is more important than ever. With the continued support of dedicated volunteers, commodity partners, educators, and the broader community, Pizza Perfect is positioned to keep inspiring students for many years to come.

Twenty years in, the mission remains clear: connect youth to agriculture in fun, meaningful ways. Because when students leave the barn with full minds (and maybe a bit of barn smell), we know we’ve planted the seeds of curiosity and respect for the world of food and farming.



Cultivating Futures: The Impact of GRAS Support on the OAC Student Recruitment & Liaison Program



In 2019, the Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS) committed to a nine-year, \$500,000 partnership with the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) at the University of Guelph. This strategic investment in the OAC Student Recruitment & Liaison Program has since transformed how young people explore careers in agriculture, food, environmental science, and community development— areas critical to our future.

Since 2008, the Liaison Program has grown substantially. With GRAS support, enrollment has increased by 40%, staffing has doubled, and a small team of student ambassadors (2–5 each year) plays a vital role in connecting with high school students across Ontario. These peer-led interactions have proven especially effective; students are inspired by voices that are relatable, enthusiastic, and rooted in lived campus experience.

At the heart of the program’s success is the commitment to helping students answer an essential question: What can I do with a degree in agriculture? Under the leadership of Christine Wilkinson, the

program continues to evolve with a strong focus on succession planning and knowledge transfer—ensuring that it remains vibrant, relevant, and responsive to changing career landscapes.

Each year, the program offers a rich blend of in-person and virtual engagement. In 2024–2025 alone, it has delivered 31 on-campus experience days, 13 webinars, and 4 virtual guest speaker events. The program also maintains a strong presence at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair and the University of Guelph’s major recruitment events. By the midpoint of the 2024/25 cycle, over 3,400 high school students had already been reached.

The program’s success also stems from its wide network of partners, including 4-H Ontario, Shad Canada, AgScape, the Career Education Council, and the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance. Together, these partners help showcase the depth and diversity of modern agriculture—from animal science and agri-business to environmental studies and AI-enhanced food systems.

\$500,000
over 9 years

UNIVERSITY OF
GUELPH | Ontario
Agricultural
College

Looking ahead, the Liaison Team is piloting new initiatives aimed at deepening student engagement. The Experience OAC Day, launched in 2025 with 60 students, invites applicants to spend a day on campus, taking part in workshops, mock lectures, and one-on-one sessions with faculty and current students. The goal is to scale this to 300 participants by 2026.

Another promising development is a high school competition currently in the planning stages. This cross-disciplinary challenge will invite students and teachers to explore key themes in food, agriculture, communities, and the environment—offering prizes, recognition, and a deeper connection to future career possibilities.

Since GRAS’s involvement began in 2019, between 1,400 and 5,000 students have been engaged annually. Undergraduate interest in programs like agriculture, turf management, animal biology, and environmental science continues to rise. The program is also helping to support the associate diploma stream at the Ridgetown Campus, making sure all pathways to success are represented.

Crucially, the Liaison Program is helping students—and their families—reimagine what a career in agriculture looks like. It’s not just farming anymore. It’s science, innovation, leadership, and sustainability. The program also acknowledges emerging trends: a growing need for tech-savviness, AI literacy, and soft skills like communication and collaboration.

Thanks to the Grand River Agricultural Society’s generosity, the OAC Student Recruitment & Liaison Program is not just opening doors—it’s building bridges to a brighter, more informed future. The impact of this support is felt not only in enrollment numbers and event attendance, but in the transformed aspirations of thousands of students across the province.



GRAS Provides \$20,000 in Philanthropic Funding to Support Ecological Farming in Ontario

GRAS is proud to announce a \$20,000 philanthropic grant to the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) in support of its Farmer-Led Research (FLR) Program—an initiative that empowers farmers across Ontario to advance ecological agriculture through on-farm research and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

Founded in 1979 by and for farmers, EFAO is a membership-based charitable organization dedicated to helping farmers build resilient, ecological farms. EFAO’s mission centers on supporting farmer-led education, research, and community-building to foster organic, regenerative, and climate-friendly farming practices. These practices not only safeguard vital natural resources and biodiversity but also promote sustainable food systems and stronger, more equitable communities.

The FLR Program, launched in 2016, is the first of its kind in Canada. It is built on a simple but powerful concept: farmers are most inspired and influenced by other farmers. The program equips ecological farmers to investigate real-world agricultural questions using scientific methods adapted to their unique farm operations. Since its inception, the FLR Program has empowered more than 80 farmers to complete over 125 on-farm research trials. These projects have explored a wide range of ecological strategies—from soil health conservation through no-till methods and cover cropping, to regional vegetable seed breeding and biodiversity enhancement through crop rotation.

This kind of hands-on, farmer-driven research is not only advancing ecological practices in the field but also strengthening a dynamic and growing network of knowledge-sharing among Ontario’s farming community. According to a recent peer-reviewed study in partnership with the University of Guelph, farmers involved in EFAO’s FLR Program report increased confidence, knowledge, and motivation to adopt ecological practices. They also benefit from deeper social connections that align with their values and support long-term sustainability.

With the support from GRAS, EFAO aims to fund 25 farmer-led trials in 2025, including at least 10 in the Grand River watershed. The Grand River area has been identified as a key region due to its active community of ecological farmers and its environmental importance. These trials will continue to address pressing questions in ecological agriculture and generate practical solutions that farmers can implement and share widely.

EFAO ensures that the knowledge generated through its FLR Program reaches a broad audience. Research findings are shared through its open-access Research Library, e-newsletters, quarterly magazine, webinars, field days, and the organizations widely attended annual Research Symposium and Conference.

GRAS is honored to support EFAO in its mission to cultivate a sustainable, knowledge-rich future for Ontario’s farming communities.



GRAS Expands Support for Equine Guelph with New \$180,000 Partnership

The Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS) is thrilled to announce a new three-year partnership with Equine Guelph, committing \$180,000 from 2025 through 2027 to support equine education, safety, and career development. This investment builds upon more than a decade of impactful collaboration between the two organizations and continues GRAS’s longstanding support of Equine Guelph’s vital contributions to the equine industry.

Founded in 2003, Equine Guelph is the horse owner’s Centre at the University of Guelph, dedicated to improving the health and well-being of horses through research, education, and career support. Over the years, GRAS has been a committed partner, helping to launch and grow several of Equine Guelph’s core programs.

From 2014 to 2021, GRAS funding supported a range of initiatives, including the launch of the Large Animal Emergency Rescue (LAER) Training program, which includes essential education in barn fire prevention, biosecurity, and equine first aid training. Additional support was directed toward youth outreach and the redevelopment of Equine JobTrack. A further gift of \$150,000 between 2022 and 2024 helped sustain three flagship programs that remain the focus of this new agreement.

EquiMania! is a popular youth education program that features both live exhibits and an online platform with 12 interactive activities. It introduces young learners to equine care, science, and safety in an engaging and accessible format.

Equine JobTrack is a career showcase designed to help newcomers explore job opportunities in the equine industry, connecting them to employment and training through a dedicated job board and career resources.

LAER Training provides essential instruction in the Incident Command System and best practices for managing large animal emergencies, equipping first responders and farm personnel with life-saving skills.

GRAS is proud to support Equine Guelph’s leadership in building a safer, stronger, and more resilient equine community!

EQUINE GUELPH
helping horses for life™



Impact Investing



SPARK V4 Ignites Innovation at GRAS’s Annual Ag-Tech Showcase

Now in its fourth year, Spark V4, GRAS’s popular ag-tech event, continues to build momentum as a dynamic platform for agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship. This year’s event welcomed 130 attendees who gathered to network, collaborate, and explore the future of agri-tech in Canada.

A new addition to this year’s event was a trade show featuring 13 exhibitor booths, which proved to be a very popular element, offering guests the opportunity to engage directly with product and service providers supporting innovation in the ag-environmental sectors.

The highlight of the afternoon was the highly anticipated pitch session, where five companies took the stage to showcase their innovative products and services: VetSon, Cstainable Inc., Farm Health Guardian, FloNergia Systems Inc., and Haggerty AgRobotics.

New this year, companies applied for the opportunity to pitch in front of attendees. Similar to previous years, the audience played a key role in selecting a winning pitch to receive \$5,000, funded through a combination of ticket sales and generous sponsorship from RHA Accelerator, with matching funds from GRAS.

The event also featured updates on past pitch participants, showcasing the continued growth and success of ag-tech entrepreneurs in the region. Spark V4 not only celebrates emerging talent in the ag-tech sector but also fosters vital connections between entrepreneurs, investors, and industry leaders. As the event continues to grow, GRAS is proud to foster a community where ideas take root and agri-tech innovation thrives.

Pitch Companies:



Future Innovators:



RRBDI Momentum Builds: More Projects, More Funding, Stronger Support

After three years of strong growth, the Rapid Response to Business Development Initiative (RRBDI) continues to build momentum.

Launched in April 2022, by the Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS), the program has grown steadily, with six projects funded in its first year, nine in its second, and 13 in its third. RRBDI is designed to help early-stage Ontario companies—particularly in the ag-tech, green-tech, and agri-food sectors—seize timely market opportunities.

To help “close the deal,” it offers up to \$10,000 per project to support eligible travel and related costs for companies travelling both nationally and internationally.

In recognition of the program’s ongoing success, GRAS will increase its annual investment to \$150,000 for 2025–2026. Delivery of the initiative will transition to the Agricultural Adaptation Council, a sister organization to current partner Canlead Solutions, ensuring continued expertise in program administration.

KEY RESULTS FOR 2024-2025:

Approved applications	13
Funds approved	\$107,100
Travel to	6 countries
Resulting Sales Potential within 1 year	\$5.24M

Application details and eligibility criteria are available at: grandriveragsociety.com/philanthropy

Scholarships



GRAS established this scholarship program to provide financial assistance for students who are permanent residents within our membership area of Wellington County, Perth County, and the Region of Waterloo, and who are entering or enrolled in college or university programs in agricultural or environmental fields of study.

2024 Scholarship Recipients (\$3,000 each):

Mary Brander
Bachelor of Science-Agriculture,
Major-Animal Science
University of Guelph

Nora de Vos
Bachelor of Environmental Science, Co-Op
University of Guelph

Melyssa Favero
Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
OVC, University of Guelph

Lauren Irvine
Bachelor of Science Honours, Major - Animal Biology
University of Guelph

Devin Johnston
Bachelor of Science-Agriculture, Honours
University of Guelph

Derrick Knill
Doctor of Veterinary Medicine
OVC, University of Guelph

Emily Lennox
Bachelor of Science-Agriculture,
Major - Honours Agriculture
University of Guelph

Katelyn MacGillivray
Bachelor of Commerce, Major-Food &
Agricultural Business
University of Guelph

Rachel Manongdo
Bachelor of Science, Honours
University of Guelph

Lucas McCurdy
Bachelor of Science-Agriculture, Co-Op
University of Guelph

Colin Ormiston
Bachelor of Arts, Major-Food, Agriculture,
Resource Economics
University of Guelph

Briar Shepherd
Bachelor of Science-Agriculture
University of Guelph

Julianna Tindall
Master of Science-Plant Agriculture
University of Guelph

Matthew Whittemore
Master of Science-Environmental Science
University of Guelph

Nurturing the Next Generation of Women in Agriculture

This past November, GRAS was proud to sponsor two passionate students—Brianna Miller and Julianna Tindall—to attend the Advancing Women in Agriculture Conference in Niagara Falls.

Both Brianna and Julianna are pursuing post-secondary studies in agriculture and food, and this conference gave them a unique opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. Over the course of the event, they heard powerful stories from industry leaders, developed leadership and career-building skills, participated in hands-on workshops, and connected with women

from across the country who share a passion for the agricultural sector.

Surrounded by like-minded peers and mentors, the students explored new ideas, gained fresh perspectives, and left feeling inspired about their futures in agriculture.

GRAS is dedicated to encouraging young women to pursue meaningful careers in the agri-food sector. We're honoured to support experiences like this that help shape the next generation of agricultural leaders.



The Advancing Women Conference ... was an enriching experience that expanded my understanding of the diverse leadership opportunities in the agriculture industry. This conference enlightened me about the importance of mental health and developing resilience in personal and professional spaces...The sessions...equipped me with practical tools for managing stress and navigating challenging interpersonal situations...

The conference also allowed me to network with like-minded women across Canada and beyond, many of whom are involved in agriculture or closely related fields. Engaging with these women expanded my professional network...

The conference was pivotal in my personal and academic journey, providing both inspiration and practical strategies that I can apply to my current education and future career.

- Julianna Tindall



...I had the opportunity to attend two brilliant workshops the first day, each lead by leading female professionals...The second half of the first day and second day was filled with amazing speakers such as Carol Kinsey Goman - leadership presence and Beverly Beuermann-King - Transforming Toxicity. Aside from the amazing talks and workshops, I had the opportunity to network and meet with so many amazing women...Listening to their stories, whether they were fellow students or in the height of their career, was both inspiring and empowering.

I left the venue with a new sense of confidence and empowerment. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity and enabling me to learn from these inspiring women.

- Brianna Miller



Growing Future Leaders



Mini Grant Supports CWDHS DECA Team's Agricultural Leadership on the World Stage

The Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS), through its Community Mini Grant Program, generously supported Centre Wellington District High School's (CWDHS) participation in this year's Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) competitions, enabling three outstanding students—Isabel Robblee-Brown, Paige Pettifer, and Kezia Skerritt—to compete on the international stage.

DECA, founded in 1946, is a global organization that engages students worldwide to explore careers in business, entrepreneurship, marketing, and related fields. Thirteen CWDHS students attended the DECA Provincials in Toronto, where Isabel, Paige, and Kezia won their category—Project Management Career Development—with their innovative Rural Roots Career Development Series. This nine-week initiative introduced Grade 9 and 10 students to agriculture-focused business careers through mentorship, hands-on activities, and presentations by local leaders such as Senator Robert Black and dairy farmer Korb Whale.

The trio advanced to the DECA International Career Development Conference in Anaheim, California, where they competed against 145 teams from around the world. Although they did not place, they competed with determination and impressed the judges with their project's strong emphasis on agriculture and sustainability.

GRAS's Community Mini Grant funding—covering travel, accommodation, and other expenses—contributed to making this enriching experience possible, empowering students to promote critical career opportunities in a sector increasingly in need of skilled professionals due to urbanization and an aging workforce.



Investing in Young Minds: GRAS Supports Rural School Nutrition Programs

Over the past three years, the Grand River Agricultural Society (GRAS) has proudly supported breakfast and nutrition programs in thirty-seven rural elementary schools across the Upper Grand District School Board and the Wellington Catholic District School Board. Recognizing the essential link between nutrition and learning, GRAS allocated \$55,500 in funding for the 2025 school year to help ensure students start their day with the nourishment they need.

This support comes at a time of growing concern over food security, particularly among youth. Rising food costs, inflation, and access challenges have placed increasing pressure on families. Schools have become an important front line in addressing this issue, with breakfast and snack programs playing a vital role in supporting student well-being.

Numerous studies show that young minds learn better and stay more focused when they are not distracted by hunger. By helping to fund these programs, GRAS is ensuring that children are better equipped to succeed in the classroom. A full tummy not only supports academic performance but also improves behavior, attendance, and overall mental and physical health.

GRAS remains committed to supporting initiatives that benefit rural communities and contribute to a strong, healthy future for the next generation. Working alongside local school boards, GRAS is proud to contribute to healthier, more equitable learning environments—where every child has the opportunity to thrive, starting with a nutritious start to their day.

**GRAS allocated
\$55,500
in funding for 2025**

Horseracing at Grand River Raceway



Grand River Raceway's 2024 season marked a major milestone with the successful expansion from a ½ mile to a 5/8 mile oval—one of our most anticipated upgrades. Horses began training on the new track May 9th and qualified over it for the first time on May 29th. The season ran June 5th to September 30th, completing all 48 race days. We celebrated the grand opening with a ribbon-cutting on June 12th alongside Ontario Racing and OLG. Despite challenges from a reduced horse

population, a strong product was delivered, including a record-breaking opening night handle of \$404,071. The season ended with a total handle of \$13.93 million—up \$50,000 from last year. On-track wagering rose 3%, and the September handle increased 13% year-over-year, boosted by events like the Ontario Sire Stakes and Prospect Series finale. The 2024 season was a resounding success, showcasing innovation, resilience, and continued growth.



Photo by: James Woods

\$13,933,213

Wagered from all sources
on horse racing at GRR
\$13,889,449 in 2023

\$4,697,500

Total purses paid
\$4,249,700 in 2023

48

Race Cards Contested
47 in 2023

**JUNE TO
SEPTEMBER
2024**

\$290,275

Average wagering
per race card at GRR
\$295,393 in 2023

\$97,865

Average purses
paid per card
\$90,419 in 2023

\$29,457

Average wagered
from all sources per race
\$29,228 in 2023

Ashley Lendvoy earned the first leading trainer title of her career by capturing 19 wins and \$104,856 in earnings for the meet. Julie Walker and Kyle Bossense followed with 13 wins each.

Travis Henry secured the leading dash driver by putting up 54 wins and \$375,363 in purse money this season. Jason Ryan and Brett MacDonald sat in second with 44 wins apiece.

Industry Day went off without a hitch with a healthy handle of \$580,074.70, which was just short of last year's record setting handle by \$10,749.30. The live on-track handle for this day increased 15% to \$50,851.20.



Photo by: James Woods



Photo by: Tiffany Chantel

Our most adorable race of the season

The Wiener Dog Races have proven year over year to be the most popular race night at Grand River Raceway with over 3,000 people visiting the track.

Over 3,000 people enjoying GrandWay Patio Parties

They are bringing new and returning guests (and fans!) to Grand River Raceway!

Industry Day brings more families to the track

Out NEIGHbourhood Kid's Area is always a hit with a petting zoo, face painting, games, and more!

STONEBRIDGE WIZARD

The crowd was on hand to witness Stonebridge Wizard victorious in the 35th edition of the Battle of Waterloo. The gelded son of Dancin Lou is owned by David Kryway, trained by Jared Bako and driven by local driver, Doug McNair. The race was won in a blistering track record time of 1:51.2 which remains the record for 2-year-old colt pacers on the new 5/8th-of-a-mile track.

WICKEDPACE

Driven by Jody Jamieson, trained by Paul Cameron, and owned by Paul & Jayme Cameron, Arnolds Horse Shack. The 2024 Battle of the Belles was a dramatic one, with the top three shuffled twice due to inquiries and an appeal. Initially, Wicked N Single was declared the winner, but after a judge's review, Manhattan Mayhem was placed third for interference, moving Wickedpace into second. Later, an appeal to the Horse Racing Appeal Panel determined Wicked N Single had violated the pilon rule. The finish order was revised again: Wickedpace was officially named the winner, followed by Manhattan Mayhem in second and Wicked N Single in third.



Photo by: Fedora Media
 Coordination: Modern Functions
 Cake: Willowhead Farm
 Suit: Armature Bespoke
 Gown: Vona Bride
 Flowers: Petals Floral Studio

THE GRANDWay

At The GrandWay, we have a philosophy that every event we hold is an experience and our team works hard to bring our guests' vision to life. We take a down-to-earth approach and welcome guests to tap into our network and expertise. Our team takes pride in hosting your event, always executing it with a smile!

Community at the Heart of Every Event at The GrandWay

Throughout 2024 and into 2025, The GrandWay Events Centre has continued to grow as a space where community thrives—welcoming returning guests and many new faces through our doors.

From joyous weddings to milestone birthdays, baby showers, and bridal showers, we've been honoured to help families celebrate life's biggest moments. We've also stood beside families during more emotional times, offering a respectful and supportive environment for celebrations of life, thoughtfully tailored to honour loved ones.

Our corporate partners remain at the core of our business, and we're grateful to the many businesses who continue to choose The GrandWay for meetings, conferences, training days, and team-building events. We continue to open our doors to non-profit organizations, offering discounted rental rates to local charitable organizations. We take pride in being a venue where causes can grow and impact can flourish.

Our event calendar was full of meaningful moments, including:

- Hosting several signature fundraising galas and events for organizations like the Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce's Awards of Excellence, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Centre Wellington, and many more.

- A sold-out Mother's Day Brunch, where a portion of proceeds supported Groves Youth Wellness Hub, who help provide safe and inclusive space for local youth.
- A successful Trivia Night on April 4th in partnership with Crime Stoppers Guelph Wellington, raising close to \$1,000.

As a hub for entertainment, we kept crowds laughing and engaged with another sold-out season of Yuk Yuk's Comedy Nights, and the much-loved return of our Murder Mystery Dinner Theatres.

Our popular Patio Parties during the horseracing season offer a unique and VIP-style summer experience, meal, and front-row racing action.

Heading into the 2024 holiday season, we broke records hosting the most holiday celebrations yet from November through January.

We're proud to share that through the efforts of many passionate organizations and the support of our space, over \$330,000 was raised for community causes through fundraising events hosted at The GrandWay!

Whether it's laughter, learning, celebrating, or giving back, community continues to be the reason behind every event we host. Thank you for making The GrandWay a part of your stories—we can't wait to see what we build together next.



GRAS Partnerships

Our partners are making great waves in our community.
We are proud to work with each of them and see their projects flourishing.



Community Mini Grant Recipients

Our Mini Grants are for community organizations and charities needing funding for a project benefiting our local community. Grants are available for an amount of \$1,000 for agricultural or environmental initiatives.

2024 Recipients:

Centre Wellington DHS - DECA
Elora Farmers' Market
Fergus & District Horticultural Society
Friends of the Grand
Perth South East Dairy 4-H Club
Salem Public School
St. Mary's Catholic School
Wellington County 4-H

Ontario Farmland Trust
Wellington County Plowmen's Association
Ontario Carriage Driving Association
Elora Centre for the Arts, Tree Trust
Grow Our People Unconference
Shannon Rolph Occupational Therapy
Centre Wellington Victim Services
Big Brothers Big Sisters

Apply for a Mini Grant March 1-31st at: grandriveragsociety.com/philanthropy

over
\$15,000

Total mini grant funding
dispersed in 2024.

Meet The Board



Deborah Whale
President



Brendan Ross
1st Vice President



Cindy Lindsay
2nd Vice President



Terry Thompson
Secretary



Garth Green
Past President



Jason Castellan
Director



Diane Squires
Director



Joe Stutzman
Director



Paul Dick
Director



Tyler Whale
Director



Mel Luymes
Director

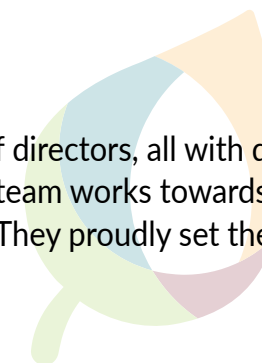


John Geurtjens
Director



Dorothy Key
Executive Assistant/
Board & Member Liaison

GRAS is governed by a volunteer board of directors, all with diverse backgrounds in agriculture, finance, law, corporate, and so much more. This team works towards fostering innovation and relations in the agriculture and environmental sectors. They proudly set the strategic direction for the organization.







Grand River Agricultural Society

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