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TODAY'S QUESTION

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LFP ONLINE

Story of the Day

London lawyer mourned after holiday drowning near Grand Bend: Joyce Thomas, who drowned near Grand Bend over the long weekend, had a passion for the law and a bright future ahead of her, a former colleague says. This was the most-viewed article on lfp.com Tuesday.

Comment of the Day

"Sunfest I think drew loads more people. Should combine it all on a four-day weekend: SunRibsBeerFest."

Online reader Dalibor Bilicic had this suggestion after reading our wrap-up of another successful year at Ribfest.

Tweet of the Day

"So what WAS the movie they made once in his hometown?" @mhamiltonmusic goofs on a Tragically Hip lyric from the song Blow at High Dough.

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Hours: Mon-Fri, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Website: www.lfp.com

Canadian Publications Mail

Product Sales Agreement

No. 40009219

Customer Service/

Circulation: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Mon.-Fri., 8 a.m.-noon Sat.

Phone: 519-679-1999

Toll-free: (from 519)

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Joe Malec, president of London Eco-Metal Manufacturing Inc. in Dorchester, started his business installing long-lasting metal roofs 10 years ago. *DEREK RUTTAN*

'Dreamer's' idea endures

Metal roofing firm continues to thrive as competition mounts

DAN BROWN

To put a roof over his head, Joe Malec made a living putting roofs over heads.

It was 10 years ago that his Dorchester-based company, London Eco-Metal Manufacturing, built its first metal roof.

"It's just a family business. We work hard. We make people happy; that's our job. We have people who care," the Polish immigrant said.

Malec, 51, now employs almost 100 workers. They fabricate and install about 1,500 roofs every year.

"It's just hard work and a little luck," he said of the secret to his success.

His customers are mainly homeowners, but Eco-Metal also has worked on churches, industrial buildings and cottages.

When he and his partners launched the business in 2009, metal roofs — as opposed to traditional asphalt shingles — were rare on residential buildings.

"It was truly a very risky proposition at that time," said Kapil Lakhota, the head of the London Economic Development Corp., which helped turn Malec's dream into a reality.

Malec had done his homework. He travelled to his native Poland, where metal roofs were more common, to get ideas and secure funding. In all, he did 13 revisions of his original business plan.

Looking back, it may seem like Eco-Metal's success was inevitable. The truth is it's difficult to thrive in a competitive industry such as roofing. "I have no idea how that happened," he said. His backers "were silly enough to trust me."

Malec came to Canada in 1988. He landed in London because his grandmother had immigrated here in the 1950s. "It was a land of opportunity. We were looking for a better life," he said of his decision to pick the Forest City as a home.

A graduate of the Fanshawe College mechanical-engineering program, Malec worked for a num-

ber of other companies, including GM, before going into business for himself.

Eco-Metal's product is sold on the strength of its durability. A metal roof costs more than asphalt shingles, but it will last much longer, Malec said. The ones Malec's firm makes are intended to look like clay or ceramic tiles.

But, he said, it's people, not the product, that have allowed his company to endure.

"The secret is a lot of good people. It's the people," he said.

So, is he a good judge of character after 10 years?

"I suck. I am a dreamer. Dreamers hire people on hope, not on performance," he said, adding he trusts his managers to make those decisions.

"Working with Joe over the years, I've truly felt that he's built this business by having the right team around him," said Lakhota.

And the competition isn't going away anytime soon: In 2009, Malec says, there were nine manufacturers of metal roofing in the province. Today, there are 43 such plants.

danbrown@postmedia.com

twitter.com/DanatLFPpress

With record July home sales, buyers look farther afield

DAN BROWN

The real estate market in London continued to sizzle with record sales in July and a neighbouring county also posting notable numbers.

"A great month all around. We're still in the situation where we've got bidding wars happening," said Accsell realtor Blair Campbell.

"There is a price-sensitivity aspect to it," Campbell said, with homes priced below \$500,000 to \$600,000 seeing lots of competition among would-be buyers.

Last month was the best July for residential sales since the London and St. Thomas Association of Realtors (LSTAR) began tracking home sales in 1978, with 1,043 homes changing hands, an increase of 5.4 per cent over July 2018.

"Analyzing the sales-to-new-

listings ratios across LSTAR's jurisdiction, it's safe to say that most of (LSTAR's) regions are currently sellers' markets, with the exception of Middlesex County, where the ratio sits at 56.7 per cent, which moves this market into a more balanced territory," Earl Taylor, the head of LSTAR, said in a statement.

Taylor's organization points out that Middlesex County's eight municipalities including Strathroy and Parkhill had their best July in a decade. Of 121 listings in Middlesex County, 99 units sold last month.

"Really, what I think it's driven by is some buyer price sensitivity," he said.

Buyers who can't afford the perfect home in the city are casting a wider net, said Campbell.

Campbell recently sold a home in Rodney in West Elgin that drew 13 offers. Two years ago, by com-

parison, a similar property would have had one showing and one offer, he said: "It was a lot more activity than I was expecting."

Taylor also recommends a wider search radius to frustrated prospective buyers.

"Let's go to Dutton, let's go Shedden way," Taylor said.

Record July sales follow a slight slowdown in sales activity in June. "July came right back very powerful," he said.

Sales in St. Thomas continued to be strong in July.

"In St. Thomas, there were 73 home sales last month, which is right on par with the 10-year average number of residential sales in this city for the month of July," Taylor said in LSTAR's report for the month.

danbrown@postmedia.com

twitter.com/DanatLFPpress

Near-shore ban on motorboats extended

DAVE BATTAGELLO

WINDSOR A majority of boaters or those on personal watercraft have been complying with orders from the Windsor Port Authority and the city to remain 30 metres from the shoreline due to high waters levels on the Detroit River.

But more than 35 warnings have been issued in the past month by police since a 30-metre ban for motorized watercraft was imposed by the city and port authority.

"It's frustrating," said harbour master Peter Berry. "It's not like it's unknown what is happening with the water. It's everywhere in the media. But there is a certain group that is choosing to act this way."

"A certain percentage who feel 'I can do what I want on the water — and you can't stop me.'"

The 30-metre ban for boaters being anywhere near the shoreline

along the Detroit River — unless going directly to or from a dock — was extended on Tuesday for another month.

It is intended to protect waterfront properties and shoreline erosion due to the extreme high water levels and flooding this year being experienced throughout Windsor and Essex County.

"What we see is the water levels are still high," Berry said. "They are not forecasted to go down for another six to eight weeks. ERCA (Essex Region Conservation Authority) has extended their flood watch until October."

The port authority's shoreline ban will remain in place until Sept. 6 — when it will again be reviewed, he said.

"It pertains to anything self-propelled," Berry said. "It can be a small fishing boat, jet skis or anything."

Every warning handed out to

date has been recorded by police with anyone caught a second time automatically facing up to a \$5,000 fine for individuals or \$50,000 for a corporation.

"This is under the Canadian Federal Marine Act, so it's a direct charge," Berry said. "It's not get a ticket and pay it, but you will be required to appear in court and will need legal representation."

Among the largest known offenders to date has been several Detroit-based river tour cruise boats, that include the Diamond Jack, he said.

"They have been provided notice from me and I've told them they can be charged with an offence in Canada," Berry said.

"They tried to tell me they have been doing the same (route) for a long time, have different captains and sometimes they forget. They have been warned."

POLICE BLOTTER

Londoner charged with luring teen

A London man faces child luring charges after police say a teen met with a man with whom she'd been chatting online. A girl, 14, and a man started communicating through Facebook messenger between May 25 and June 11 before meeting in person, police said. The social media company contacted London police about the messages, leading to the Friday arrest of a man at west-end home, police said. Joshua Robert Wightwick, 27, of London, is charged with invitation to sexual touching of someone under 16, three counts of luring a person under 16 through telecommunication and three counts of luring a person under 18 by means of telecommunication.

Man charged after airsoft pistol pointed

A London man has been charged after an argument during which a man pointed an airsoft pistol at another man outside a Byron restaurant, police said Tuesday. The two men were inside the restaurant Saturday at 1288 Commissioners Rd. when they exchanged words, police said. The men left the restaurant. One man removed a firearm from his vehicle, pointed the firearm at the other man and made threats, police said. A fight ensued and the firearm — an airsoft pistol — was taken from the man. The two men did not know each other, police said. The charged man was treated at hospital for injuries from the fight. The other man was not injured, police said.

Sarnia police probe child's sudden death

Sarnia police are investigating the sudden death of a two-year-old child. Police said Tuesday officers have remained at a townhouse on Pontiac Court since the investigation began Friday. The force's mobile command and a cruiser were parked outside a townhouse with police tape around the front yard. Police are waiting for the results of an autopsy, he said. "From there, we'll determine what happens," Const. Giovanni Sottosanti, a police spokesperson, said.

Wheatley man, 66, killed in crash

A 66-year-old Wheatley man died in a single vehicle crash Monday, Chatham-Kent police said. Police were called to the scene on Third Concession Line near Zion Road east of Wheatley just before 4 p.m. Monday. The victim was unresponsive in the vehicle when officers arrived, police said.

London airport adds winter destinations to schedule

London travellers looking for some fun in the sun have two new options for the coming winter travel season.

Sunwing is offering all-inclusive packages with flights departing weekly from the London International Airport to Cayo Santa Maria, Cuba, and Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

"We are very excited that our passengers will have two new destinations with Sunwing to experience this winter," airport president and chief executive Michael Seabrook said in a statement.

"Many of our sun seekers are regular Sunwing travellers and today's announcement provides them with more destinations from the easy and comfortable airport."

The low-cost airline also is bringing back its flights to Montego Bay, Jamaica, and Varadero, Cuba.

The flights to all four destinations run between December and April.

Andrew Dawson, Sunwing's president of tour operation, said Cayo Santa Maria and Punta Cana are two of the company's most popular destinations.

"Cayo Santa Maria and Punta Cana are known for their spectacular beaches, beautiful resorts and vibrant culture. We're confident that both destinations will be well-received by our customers," he said in a statement.