NEPAL-TIBET FLOODS

Holding out hope

Canadian families desperately seek news of missing loved ones A4

TRADE WAR

Sign of the times

Ford unveils new 'Lake Ontario' billboard near Stoney Creek A3

PROUDLY CANADIAN OWNED SINCE 1892

SUNDAY STAR

WEATHER HIGH 24 C | CLOUDY, SHOWERS | MAP A18

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2026

STAR INVESTIGATION

Towering ambition

A developer picked by the province to transform Oakville's skyline has never built a highrise

SHEILA WANG
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER

When the Ontario government selected Emil Toma's development company to redefine Oakville's skyline, he was having money problems.

For months, Toma and his partners had been struggling to pay back a loan they needed to finance a lowrise apartment development in Toronto. The debts continued to pile up, reaching more than $80 million. They defaulted, driving the development into receivership without ever breaking ground.

The failed apartment project marked the latest in a succession of legal and financial battles for Toma as a homebuilder.

Over the past 10 years Toma has built custom homes, townhouses and mid-level condos through a number of firms he registered, but no highrises.

Yet Premier Doug Ford's government picked his company Distrikt Developments to lead a project to build 8 skyscrapers in Oakville near one of Ontario's busiest GO Transit stations.

If built, the Oakville project would include more than 6,800 homes — roughly 10 times what Distrikt has built in the past decade.

The Town of Oakville did not approve the plan when it was first proposed by Distrikt; however, the province stepped in, throwing its support behind Distrikt through a process that can override local planning.

RAMON FERREIRA/TORONTO STAR PHOTO ILLUSTRATION; SOURCES: ANDREW FRANCIS WALLACE/TORONTO STAR

A proposed transit-oriented community near the Oakville GO station would include more than 6,800 homes.

Goodbye, lunch and recess: schools try 'Balanced Day'

Schedule with longer instructional periods and two daily 'nutrition breaks' gains traction in Ontario

JANET HURLEY
SENIOR WRITER

When Richelle Wheeler's 13-year-old daughter learned that her Toronto public school was going to replace its traditional timetable with three 100-minute instructional blocks this fall, she had one main worry.

That's a long time to sit in class, the soon-to-be Grade 8 student told her mother.

This September, Birch Cliff Public School is trading two recesses, a lunch hour and shorter class periods for two 45-minute "nutrition breaks" and three longer teaching stretches — a model known as the Balanced Day.

Conceived by a Peel school board

SEE SCHOOLS A10

'I want reaction and attention, just like Trump'

For presidential impersonator, trade war isn't necessarily good for business

KRISTJAN LAUTENS
STAFF REPORTER

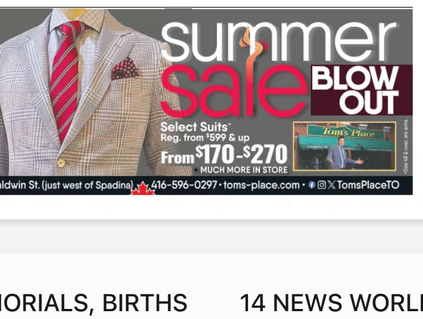
MCs never know how to introduce Glen Griffith's act.

As they call for the president of the United States, the Toronto comedian walks up to the stage in orange face paint and a shaggy wig, serenaded by "Hail to the Chief" as some nervous laughter slowly rolls through the audience.

"This is Donald J. Trump," he'll tell the crowd before he squints, makes pointed hand gestures and mumbles about his presidential achievements.

Though he doesn't associate with the MAGA crowd, Griffith has been steadily working as a Trump impersonator across private parties,

SEE IMPERSONATOR A4



CNE to review use of AI images

Vendors' vivid promotional posters spark concern among some fairgoers for various reasons

SADEEN MOHSEN
STAFF REPORTER

Some of the food at this year's Canadian National Exhibition almost looks too good to be true.

Posters feature images of large scoops of ice cream oozing on top of crispy fried chicken, others show perfectly grilled corn with wisps of smoke. The colours are bright, vibrant and electric with eye-popping fonts advertising this year's offbeat carnival snacks.

But the images have sparked concern on social media, and from some attendees at this year's 147th CNE, about what they say appear to be AI-generated photos used in vendors' posters advertising their new offerings.

A marketing expert and several vendors at the Ex say AI is a necessary tool to help keep small businesses alive.

"I can always pick it out and I always hate to see it," said Zoe Cothron, a 25-year-old American who's been living in Toronto for the past few months and who made their first visit to the CNE on Saturday. "When I see AI, I go the other direction."

There are several issues with the use of AI, said Cothron, who voiced concerns about the environmental impacts and water usage.

"I know a lot of younger people feel that way," they said. "I feel like Gen Z and Gen Alpha are pretty trained to spot it."

Some of the CNE's small-business vendors rely on AI as a "cost- and time-effective tool" because of a lack of resources to hire photographers or marketing agencies to create signs and posters for their booths, said CEO Mark Holland in a statement to the Star.

"We recognize that AI is becoming more prevalent in society, and we're all learning together how to navigate this rapidly changing technology," he said.

"The CNE will be reviewing the use of AI-generated imagery in product advertising and signage within our fairgrounds to implement a plan going forward next year to ensure greater transparency so that consumers can make their own choices," Holland added.

Some of the discussions could include mandatory labelling and disclosure when AI is used for advertising, he said.

For vendors like Collin Black, owner of the Jerk Brothers food truck parked near the Princes' Gates, it's all about keeping the business running. Black said he believes AI can help promote what a business is selling.

Los Vietnamita Taqueria owner Kevin Chiu said he hasn't used AI for the posters at his food truck at the Ex. Customers appreciate his food, regardless of the AI uproar, he added.

SOPHIE BOUQUILLON/ TORONTO STAR

He said all of the pictures displayed in and around his food truck are photos he's taken, adding other vendors' potential use of AI "doesn't bother me if it helps your business."

"Small businesses need as much help as they could possibly get," he added.

If a vendor does use AI for their advertisements, the first thing that will stick out to a consumer is the quality of the ads, especially for small businesses in a competitive market, said David Soberman, a marketing professor at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

He also noted the ongoing U.S.-Canada trade war has added pressure to the survival of local and small businesses.

"You have a lot of people that criticize them for maybe using AI to assist with their marketing," Soberman said. "Yet it's only by virtue of the fact that they're able to do these things and improve their efficiency that they are able to remain profitable and keep people employed."

Los Vietnamita Taqueria owner Kevin Chiu said he hasn't used AI for any of the promotional posters for his food truck. Customers appreciate his food, regardless of the AI uproar, he said.

In front of his food truck, four large posters feature CNE-exclusive foods, including a $5 mOreo Fried Chicken Ice Cream Sandwich and a Cotton Chick Baldak Ramen Taco. The former has a perfect golden Oreo placed on top of a melting ice cream scoop while the latter has cotton candy oozing all over the ramen taco shell with a neon ferris wheel in the background.

"You can't judge every poster thinking it's AI," said Chiu. "What we're doing is touching it up and making it look more crisps more clean."

Just across the busy narrow walkway, Kevin Wong stares at the Los Vietnamita Taqueria truck. He's debating back and forth with his friends on whether to get the ramen taco while raising his head to take a look at the poster.

When asked what he thought of vendors potentially using AI to advertise their offerings, Wong said it wouldn't deter him as long as the food lived up to the hype.

"As long as it's accurate enough," he said. "If not, it's kind of like false advertisement."

OBITUARY BILL STEPHENS

'Papa Bill' coached generations of track stars

FRÉDÉRIK PLANTE
STAFF REPORTER

Legendary Scarborough track and field coach Bill Stephens, mentor to several athletes who went on to become national champions and Olympic medallists, has died. He was 82.

Among his most successful athletes is sprinter Aaron Brown, a three-time Olympic medallist from Toronto.

"We called him Papa Bill, just because he was a father figure for everybody," Brown said, recalling that Stephens convinced him to join his track club by offering to cover the $500 dues for the first year — a significant amount for Brown at the time.

Birchmount Park Collegiate Institute's track team, where Stephens had been a longtime coach, shared the news on social media Friday. It did not specify a cause of death.

"Bill's athletes experienced phenomenal success under his tutelage," the post reads. "Several went on to become OFSAA (provincial) champions, NCAA scholarship recipients, national team members, and Olympic medallists! More importantly, Bill's influence led his athletes to become even better people."

According to a biography on Phoenix Athletics' website, where Stephens also worked, he spent more than four decades coaching and served on the board of Athletics Ontario for 22 years, including five as president. His specialties included the 400-m, 1,500, 3,000 metres and cross country.

"Bill has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of athletes," the biography says, including as a high school teacher and coach with the Toronto District School Board for 32 years.

Glenn Duncan, head of the Birchmount Exceptional Athlete Program, met Stephens at a coaching clinic in the early 2000s.

"He was the best," Duncan said of Stephens. "He was good at coaching all the track events, from the sprints all the way up to the distance events, and many people regarded him as probably the best 800-metres coach in the country during his time."

His athletes loved him, Duncan said, despite exacting standards.

"He made them workhard, and he told it like it was, but they just adored him," Duncan added.

Competitive runner Eamonn Kichuk is among those athletes.

Legendary Scarborough track coach Bill Stephens was a mentor to many athletes who went on to become champions, including three-time Olympic medallist Aaron Brown. Stephens died last week at age 82.

After a promising high school career, Kichuk struggled with burnout and injuries in college, keeping him away from the sport for several years. When he came back in his late 20s, most coaches told him he was too old — but not Stephens.

"He believed in me," Kichuk said. "I know you have more in you," Stephens told him.

"Within two years, I was in the top six in the country in the 800 metres. So he was right, and I couldn't have done it without him."

After some early success under his coaching, it was Stephens again who told Brown that if he worked hard, he could get an athletic scholarship in the US.

"That became my goal," Brown said. "I started taking everything more seriously: My academics, my training, all that stuff, I really locked in."

He ended up with a full ride to the University of Southern California — and participating in five Olympic Games.

The track at Birchmount Stadium was named in Stephens' honour in 2021.

Stephens leaves his wife Judy, two grown children and several grandchildren.

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CANADIAN OWNED

CANADA-U.S. TRADE WAR

Ford's big blue billboard sends Trump a message

Stoney Creek sign rejects president's lake renaming stunt

FRÉDÉRIK PLANTE
STAFF REPORTER

Premier Doug Ford has unveiled a new sign for the times — a large blue billboard erected at Fifty Point Conservation Area near Stoney Creek that reads, in white letters, "Lake Ontario Now and Always."

"President Trump can call it whatever he wants, but I can tell you, the rest of the world will always call it Lake Ontario," said Ford, who was wearing a red Canada Soccer T-shirt at his Saturday afternoon announcement.

"We're always going to protect our sovereignty, always. And we'll never ever back down from a bully," added Ford, standing next to Niagara West MPP Sam Oosterhoff.

The ceremony followed an executive order signed by US President Donald Trump to rename Lake Ontario "Lake America" on Thursday, after a bitter public spat with Ford and the collapse of trade talks between Canada and the United States.

> President Trump can call it whatever he wants, but I can tell you, the rest of the world will always call it Lake Ontario.
>
> ONTARIO PREMIER DOUG FORD

Prime Minister Mark Carney has dismissed Trump's attempt to rename Lake Ontario, saying Canada will not recognize the change. Canadians — and many Americans — have denounced and derided the move.

Trump's decision to rename the Great Lake came after he traded insults with Ford, who called the president a bully and told him to "kiss my ass." Trump responded by comparing the premier to his brother, former Toronto mayor Rob Ford, saying Doug Ford was a less charismatic version of him.

Trump also accused Canada of "ripping off" the United States and said his administration did not expect to continue doing business with Ontario "much longer."

Ford's Progressive Conservative party used the standoff in a text blast last week ahead of three by-elections.

"Doug Ford is the only leader who will stand up and fight back," one text reads, as voters head to the polls in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Scarborough Southwest and York-Simcoe on Thursday.

John Fraser, interim leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, said: "We all know it's Lake Ontario, and it will always be Lake Ontario. The problem with Doug Ford's sign is it's pointed in the wrong direction. We don't need reminding. The guy on the other side does."

Lake Ontario is not the first border-straddling body of water that Trump has attempted to rename. One of his first moves after returning to office in January 2025 was signing an executive order directing the US government to use "Gulf of America" instead of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Gulf of Mexico has carried its name for more than 400 years, and Trump's order only holds water in the United States.

The name Lake Ontario predates both Canada and the United States. Historians believe Ontario has Iroquoian roots, with interpretations including "beautiful lake," "great lake" or "sparkling water," according to the Canadian Encyclopedia. Europeans were using the name Ontario for the lake by 1641, and it appeared on maps by 1656.

Canadian quick to c 'Lake An

From chocolate ba anti-Trump merch

DANIYAH YAQOOB
STAFF REPORTER

Canadian businesses from coast to coast — from ice cream makers to beer companies to small firms — are banding together to protect Lake Ontario's name after U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order to change it.

The president, currently in a trade war with Canada, has ordered that maps in the U.S. rename the "former Lake Ontario" to "Lake America." The Geographic Names Information System in the U.S. has already made it official, he said.

Much like the "Elbows Up!" movement that defined Canada's federal election last year, a similar campaign is growing to reaffirm that Lake Ontario will remain Lake Ontario, as it has for hundreds of years. Canadian businesses — and some international brands — are taking up the charge.

Chocolate protest

Pease by Chocolate, run by Nova Scotia confectioner Tareq Hadhad, was quick to launch a new chocolate bar for the Canada Collection on Thursday in hours after Trump signed his executive order. Dubbed the "Lake Ontario Canada Bar," the 92 gram sweet combines milk chocolate with maple cream flavours. "ONTARIO is an Indigenous name that means[illegible] Today's bombers. That history should not be erased," said a post on X. The company previously offered chocolate bars called "Elbows Up," "Strong and Free," "Go Canada Go."

Lake Ontario, actually

Paulo Sesma, head of communications for Canada Soccer and an "abstract artist," said instead of feeling defeated by Trump's latest stunt, he "did a thing. A small act of polite Canadian defiance." Sesma posted a picture of himself sporting a "Lake Ontario, actually" baseball cap and covering up the pre-existing sign on a website with the caption, "Some things don't need rebranding."

Meanwhile, Canada is Not For Sale, a brand inspired by Trump's remarks calling Canada the 51st

Paulo Sesma made a fashion and p

U.S.-based MapQuest stands by Lake Ont

Mapping company pokes fun at change with an online tool

GABRIEL MILTY
STAFF REPORTER

MapQuest says it won't change the name of Lake Ontario on its maps after US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Thursday to rename the large body of water to "Lake America," amid ongoing trade tensions.

"We're not changing it," the American mapping company wrote in a post on social media, displaying a map of the lake bearing the familiar "Lake Ontario" moniker.

MapQuest also invited people to use its online tool to generate their own name for the lake, which is then displayed on a custom downloadable map to share with friends and family. For example, it suggested: "Lake We Doing This Again?"

MapQuest's general manager Doug Berger said the company's stance on the name change has resulted in a surge in customer feedback.

> MapQuest's general manager Doug Berger said the company's stance on the name change has resulted in a surge in customer feedback. "There's been an increase in downloads by 330 per cent."

"There's been an increase in downloads by 330 per cent (compared to a typical day). I think people want to keep the lake named what they recognize and we're here for it," Berger said.

It is unclear if other mapping applications like Google and Apple Maps will change Lake Ontario's name. The Star has reached out to both companies for comment, but has not heard back.

The executive order is not Trump's first attempt at renaming North American geography. The president signed an order in January 2025 renaming the Gulf of Mexico to "Gulf of America."

MapQuest also rejected that request. "It was more of a stance ... why's to say [if] the names are going to stick around forever," Berger said.

Google Maps now displays the Gulf of America moniker for users in the U.S., while all others around the world see both names with "Gulf of America" in brackets.

Apple Maps also renamed the gulf for US users but includes both names for international users.

The Associated Press refused to change the gulf's name in its style guide, which is widely used by news publications in the US.

Trump's move to change Lake Ontario's name, which has Indigenous roots, has drawn significant blowback from both sides of the border.

Prime Minister Mark Carney clapped back with a statement on social media. "The name is more