

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This winter will long be remembered for its snow, bracing temperatures, and - in some parts of Ontario - unwelcome power outages. A true old-fashioned Canadian winter. Yet even as we shovel and bundle up, winter has a way of deepening our appreciation for what comes next.

Spring rarely arrives all at once. It emerges quietly - in subtle shifts of light and air. Emily Dickinson captured this almost imperceptible change in her short poem *A Light exists in Spring*, describing that singular quality of early spring light - something we sense before we can quite name it:

*A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period -
When March is scarcely here*

March is now upon us, and I am pleased to assure you that your University of Guelph Retirees Association (UGRA) Board has not been hibernating. Quite the contrary - we have been actively preparing for a vibrant and engaging spring season.

I am especially delighted to announce our **Spring Forum** will be held on **Thursday, April 9**. We are honoured that the President of the University of Guelph, **Dr. Rene Van Acker**, will join us to share his vision for the University and engage directly with your questions. This will be a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the future direction of our institution and to meet and welcome our new president.

Our second speaker, **Dr. Paul Hebert**, will present "*The End Game - Every Living Thing*." Dr. Hebert is an Officer of the Order of Canada, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and the recipient of numerous international honours, including the 2018 Heineken Prize for the Environment, the 2020 MIDORI Prize for



Biodiversity, the 2024 Benjamin Franklin Medal in Earth and Environmental Science, and the 2025 Sustainability Award for Outstanding Research and Development in Biodiversity. His work continues to shape global understanding of biodiversity. This promises to be an exceptional event - one you will not want to miss.

At the fall forum, Margaret McLeod, Manager of Pensions and Benefits, Human Resources, University of Guelph presented some information on questions she frequently receives and answered attendees' questions on pensions, benefits and travel insurance. A summary of her comments are on the UGRA website at <https://ugra.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/website/Pension%2BBenefits-Q%2BA.pdf>. A summary of our second speaker, Dr. Alejandro Marangoni, is included later in this newsletter.

Beyond the Spring Forum, your Board remains committed to ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of our Association. My sincere thanks to those who have already renewed their membership; your dues are essential to supporting our programs and outreach.

We have also been engaged in productive

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UGRA

Editor: Cathy Ralston

www.ugra.ca

UGRA Spring Forum

Save the Date . . .

Thursday, April 9, 2026 from 2 to 4 pm
Arboretum Centre • Doors Open at 1:30 pm

Hybrid Meeting; Zoom opens at 1:30 pm



Dr. Rene Van Acker



Dr. Paul Hebert

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UNITED WAY
By Julie Hutchins



The 2025 United Way Campaign has come to a close! It has been another fantastic year for the retirees and their contributions. But first, announcing the winner of the retiree prize package!

The prize consisted of a \$25 gift card from Sweet Distractions: Elora's Candy Boutique, a gift card from the Grand Gourmet for \$50 and a tumbler from United Way. The lucky recipient was **Dr. Glen Van Der Kraak!** Congratulations, Glen!

Now on to the best part! Retirees raised a whopping **\$112,505**. This is the most we have ever raised! This is truly amazing! United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin offers a huge thank you! This campaign was a difficult one with the state of the world right now. So many people in our committee are struggling. It is so wonderful that retirees from the University of Guelph continue to help so many people in need! Thank you for your continued amazing support!

University of Guelph United Way Steering Committee 2025

Back Row L-R:

Mary Visser Kerr,
Julie Hutchins,
Claire Alexander,
Emily Mininger,

John Walsh, Sarah Mau,
Joshua Lannan,
Lisa Tersigni-Holt

Front Row L-R:

Erin Mancini,
Paige Westerman,
Grace Manarang,
Jyll Weinberg-Martin,
Kayla Da Silva



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discussions with colleagues at Alumni House to explore new opportunities to strengthen communication and engagement with our members. In addition, we are advancing several important initiatives, including:

- Implementing recommendations from our recent focus groups
- Evaluating the future balance between digital and print newsletters
- Expanding educational opportunities through the Colleges and University Retirees Association of Canada (CURAC)

As always, our purpose is to serve you. I encourage you to participate in our events and share your ideas. Your continued involvement enriches our community and strengthens our Association.

I am pleased to announce that Julie Hutchins, the long term URGAs United Way Chair was awarded the **UG Campaign Co-Chairs Award** at the 2025 wrap-up luncheon in January for her long-standing service to the university's fundraising campaign.



Warm regards - even on a cold and snowy day,
Clarence Swanton
President

Report on the Fall Forum Speaker

Aging, Health, and the Science of Prevention

Dr. Alejandro Marangoni, Professor, Department of Food Science, Notes by Rich Moccia and ChatGPT

Dr. Alejandro Marangoni, Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Food, Health, and Aging, and professor in the University of Guelph's Department of Food Science, delivered an engaging and evidence-based seminar on how lifestyle choices shape the aging process. Drawing on his background as a materials scientist and innovator holding more than 30 patents, Dr. Marangoni translated complex biological concepts into practical strategies for maintaining health and independence across our lifespan. The topic is close to home for UofG retirees: how to maintain strength, mobility, and mental sharpness as we age. While aging is inevitable, many of the changes we associate with "getting older" are strongly influenced by lifestyle - and therefore, within our control.

What we can (and can't) control about aging

Dr. Marangoni began by distinguishing between **biological aging** that includes unavoidable cellular damage and genetic changes, and **physiological aging** that affects muscles, bones, metabolism, and the brain. While biology sets certain limits, factors such as muscle mass, bone density, metabolic health, immune function, and cognition can be preserved - or accelerated - depending on diet, physical activity, and daily lifestyle choices. Importantly, he noted that healthy aging does not begin at 6 - it reflects choices made across adulthood, including after retirement.

Muscles matters more than we think

One of the strongest messages of the seminar was the importance of **maintaining muscle mass**. After age 60, inactive adults can lose 1-2% of muscle mass and up to 3% of strength each year, increasing the risk of weight gain, diabetes, falls, and loss of independence. Walking is beneficial, but Dr. Marangoni explained that step counts alone are not enough. The greatest benefits come from combining aerobic activity with **strength or resistance training**, such as lifting weights, gardening, carrying groceries, or using resistance bands. These activities strengthen bones, improve balance, help control blood sugar, and support everyday mobility.

Nutrition for strength and longevity

Nutrition, especially **adequate protein intake**, plays a key role in preserving muscle with age. Because older adults are less efficient at using dietary protein, individual needs may rise to 1.1 to 1.5 g per kilogram of body weight, ideally spread across meals. Dr. Marangoni discussed the advantages of plant-based diets for reducing inflammation and chronic disease risk, while noting that animal proteins -

especially fish, eggs, poultry, and low-fat dairy - are more digestible and amino-acid complete. A hybrid approach that combines plant and animal proteins can optimize both health and functionality.

Keeping the brain healthy and engaged

The seminar concluded with a focus on cognitive aging, highlighting that brain health is closely linked to vascular and metabolic health. Regular physical activity, quality sleep, mentally challenging hobbies, social connection, and nutrients such as omega-3 fats, vitamin D, and B12 all support cognitive aging. Dr. Marangoni reminded attendees that staying curious, active, and connected may be just as important as diet and exercise.

His final message resonated clearly: while we cannot avoid getting older, we can take meaningful steps to stay strong, independent, and mentally engaged throughout retirement.

CURAC

College and University Retirees Association of Canada

The 2026 conference May 20 to 22 in New Westminster, British Columbia. For information on the program, registration and hotel, please see their website: <https://curac.ca/en/conference/2026-conference>. Early-bird registration closes on April 25th. The deadline for booking hotel rooms at the conference rate has been extended and there is an option to participate virtually for \$50 if travel costs prevent in-person attendance.

CURAC is looking for several new board members to serve a two-year term beginning with election at the AGM in May 2026. For more information, please see: <https://curac.ca/en/blog/call-for-nominations-for-the-curac-board>.

To learn about events offered by CURAC partners, subscribe to the CURAC events calendar (https://curac.ca/en/home#events_calendar). There is a new page on the UGRA website under the CURAC tab listing groups that post videos of past events and workshops (<https://ugra.ca/curac/videos-curac-partners>).

CURAC offers several affinity partners that benefit both CURAC and individuals (<https://curac.ca/en/member-benefits>).

Happy Winter everyone. I don't know about you but I can't wait for spring to take us out of the deep freeze Ontario has experienced this winter. I'm writing this article on Valentines Day and Mother Nature has blessed us with a day of warmer weather. We reached a balmy 0°C this afternoon, so I'm impatiently waiting for March to do its job and start warming things up!

The travel climate is still quite volatile with old and new issues with our neighbours to the south. Unfortunately, Cuba has been the latest victim of the Administration's actions. With Venezuela's leader's "capture" and Cuba's biggest supplier of fuel being withheld, it has resulted in them having barely enough jet fuel for the tourism industry to be viable. Due to this latest crisis, Air Canada, Sunwing/WestJet and Air Transat have withdrawn their flights until this can be rectified. Mexico is currently trying to assist Cuba with fuel and supplies. It's a beautiful thing - neighbours helping neighbours - kindness and empathy still lives. Let's hope that this can be resolved and the

Cuban people can once again live with a robust tourism industry and end the supply shortages.

Update on the Turkey Egypt UGRA Trip:

A reminder that the UGRA members' 2026 group trip with Exoticca to Turkey and Egypt is October 2026. We have received a lot of interest from our members and 24 guests have already booked. Even though the trip is filling up, we would love to have you join us for this exciting trip that includes a balloon ride over Cappadocia and sailing down the Nile to the Valley of the Kings and Pyramids of Giza. This is an action-packed guided tour with so many historical wonders of the world to see and experience. You can view the details at:

<https://ugra.ca/news/2025/08/ugra-going-turkey-and-egypt-october-2026> and the cost and itinerary at

<https://ugra.ca/system/files/Turkey%2BEgypt-MOGU.pdf>.

If you have any questions, please contact me at victoria.tremblay@transat.com or call me at 519-993-4685 and I would be happy to help you.

Enjoy what's left of our winter and I look forward to seeing you at the next forum.

VIK'S TIPS

<p>When applying for a travel visa, always go to that country's official government website. There are lots of other sites that may have the ability to get you one, but they will charge you ten times more. These "scam" sites are often at the top of an internet search and are labeled "ad".</p>	<p>Do you know your rights as a Canadian air passenger. You can go to the website at https://otc-cta.gc.ca/eng/air-passenger-protection-regulations to find out what your rights are about cancelled flights, denied boarding, refunds for services not received. The bottom line is "know your rights and know where to find assistance".</p>
<p>Planning on bringing back a bunch of souvenirs? Stuff an extra duffel bag in your suitcase. They fold over easily and take up little space, and you can just swing it over your shoulder once it's filled with goodies.</p>	<p>Before going on vacation, place a coin on a mug of ice in your freezer. On return, if the coin is in the ice, it means your freezer stopped working at one point and may have spoiled your food.</p>
<p>Many airlines are changing rules on how you can do your advanced seat selection. They will not allow you to prebook the aisle and window seats if the middle seat hasn't been booked yet!</p>	<p>TripAdvisor has maps you can download to your phone that have a built-in compass function. This will help you navigate old, organically developed cities like Rome or Paris, as well as find foreign street names.</p>

So now you know..... Safe travels everyone!

RECENT RETIREES

June 30, 2025	Jiang De-Tong	Physics
October 31, 2025	Donna Groff	PR Business Operations
November 30, 2025	Debbie Cook	Companion Animal Hospital
	Mary-Margaret McDonald	Ridgetown - Business Development Centre
	Sandra Speller	Enrolment Services
	Sharon St. Amour	Student Wellness Services
December 31, 2025	Sasan Amirsadeghi	Plant Agriculture
	Irina Bednartchouk	Food Operations
	Darrin Chasty	PR Business Operations
	Sue Cornwell	Large Animal Hospital
	Josepha Delay	LSD Animal Health Laboratory
	Donna Hancock	Plant Agriculture
	James Harley	School of Fine Arts and Music
	Amanda Hathway	Large Animal Hospital
	Deborah Hayward	Food Operations
	Joe Mignacca	Technology Operations
	Gabrielle Monteith	Clinical Studies
	Kim O'Brien	Controller
	William Sears	Population Medicine
	Sandra Seed	OMAFRA Research Facilities
	Tammy Skanes	Food Operations
	Rosemarie (Romie) Smith	Library Communications
	Greg Watt	Ridgetown - Research
	Janet Wolstenholme	Office of Teaching and Learning
January 31, 2026	Tak Chan	Food Operations

Teresa Lewitzky	Library Research and Scholarship
Judy Marchegiano	Enrolment Services
Sandra Reginato	Library Human Resources and Administration
Philip Watson	CoE-Office of the Dean Administration

February 28, 2026	Robert Cook	Clinical Support
	Leo Giesen	OMAFRA Research Facilities
	Gayle Jones	Ridgetown - Academic Learning and Development
	Linda Watt	
March 31, 2026	Barbara Merrill	School of Fine Arts and Music
	David Siefker	



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UofG President to Retirees: Join the Campaign, Help Build the UofG's Future

by Owen Roberts



President Rene Van Acker wants retirees to be part the UofG's capital campaign starting later this year. Having shaped the university's past, he'd like retirees to help build its future. He will engage with attendees during a fireside chat at the UGRA spring forum and urges retirees to identify priorities for the upcoming campaign. "Figure out what you're passionate about and create a project, or claim an existing project to lead," he says. "What would retirees like to be involved in?"

The campaign is a vital part of Van Acker's plan to build on the university's upward trajectory and address shortcomings such as long neglected buildings. He describes the current fiscal atmosphere as "really challenging," and has huge issues on his plate that dog other university presidents too, such as the province's tuition freeze and Ottawa's decision to limit international student enrolment. Both measures have "knocked the stuffing out of university budgets," and they require constant attention and lobbying from academic leaders like him.

That said, Van Acker cites several encouraging wins that bode well for the future. For example, even with the province standing on the sidelines, the university's budget is "tracking." That means that planned and actual spending are aligned. He credits this in part to the colleges having been given responsibility for their own budgets, to which they've responded with programs that are drawing more students. In fact, enrolment now stands at 36,000 and is likely to hit 40,000 within 2.5 years. That will make the UofG the third largest student body in Ontario.

Capital projects are planned or underway to make sure the infrastructure is in place to handle the growth. Projects include \$40-million Day Hall renovation, dedicated wholly to classroom and student spaces, and significant investments in improving the Crop Science building, the J.D. MacLachlan building and Johnston Hall. The biggest investment - \$260 million - will be the 1,250-bed student residence at 78 College Avenue West that will be complete in 2029.

The emphasis on enhancing students' experience is intention, says Van Acker. "The student experience - such as residence life, hospitality services and athletics - is the Number One reason students apply to the UofG," says Van Acker.

He ought to know. Van Acker, who was appointed president in 2025, has a lot of experience on campus as a student. He graduated from OAC with a BSc in 1990, then earned his Master's degree under UGRA President Clarence Swanton.

He's the first UofG alum to be named president, and the second Aggie. Dr. Burt Matthews, who was president from 1983 to 1988, graduated from the OAC in 1947, before the university became a degree-granting entity in 1964.

Van Acker also had a breadth of experience as an academic. After earning his PhD at University of Reading in the United Kingdom, he became an assistant plant science professor at the University of Manitoba in 1996, then returned to Guelph as chair of the Department of Plant Agriculture. In 2009, he became OAC's associate dean external. In 2016, Van Acker was appointed OAC Dean, followed by Vice-president of Research and Innovation in 2024. He served as interim president in 2024 before being appointed president in 2025.

Van Acker is part of a first-generation Canadian farm family. His Belgian immigrant parents came to Canada in 1958 and started farming. He says that upbringing - including working in tobacco, arguably one of the most physically demanding jobs in agriculture - brought with it many lessons. "Growing up on a farm, with parents who were hard-working new Canadians, I learned how to work and how to see work that needed doing," he says. "That has served me very well in my career."

Passings

Sylvie Wathier	September 4, 2025
Irene MacCrimmon	September 12, 2025
John Black	September 13, 2025
Helen Daniecki	September 25, 2025
Patricia Garton	October 1, 2025
Thomas Condon	October 4, 2025
Rhonda Horne	October 6, 2025
Linda Trouten-Radford	October 9, 2025
Judy Kerr	October 14, 2025
George Robinson	October 22, 2025
Helen McLean	October 30, 2025
Judith Wanner	October 31, 2025
John Gruzleski	November 1, 2025
Dino Favretto	November 10, 2025
Martin Madden	November 12, 2025
George Smith	November 13, 2025
Gertrude Davis	November 16, 2025
Eileen Cook	November 20, 2025
Ronald Jay	December 9, 2025
John Bligh	December 10, 2025
Elizabeth Cockburn	December 14, 2025
Joseph Mokanski	December 20, 2025
Anne Fougere	December 27, 2025
Kathleen Brown	December 27, 2025
Kenneth Gregory	December 30, 2025
Jack Barr	January 10, 2026
Pierina Cusinato	January 11, 2026
Eric Reiche	January 16, 2026
Paul Campagnolo	January 16, 2026
Beulah Stahlbaum	January 30, 2026
Alma Steel	January 31, 2026
Michael Brookfield	February 4, 2026
Elaine Lowes	February 5, 2026
Dilip Banerji	February 9, 2026
Waldemar Scholtes	February 14, 2026
Kelly Airdrie	February 26, 2026
Sandra Howlet	February 28, 2026

Update on Benefit Costs for Retirees from Human Resources

Human Resources has just finalized the SunLife group benefit renewal and now know the May 1, 2026 impact to benefit premium rates for retirees.

Extended Health Care Premiums	Type	Retiree Paid	University Paid	Total Premium
Current	Single	64.85	151.30	216.15
	Family	132.96	310.23	443.19
As of May 1, 2026	Single	69.38	161.90	231.28
	Family	142.26	331.95	474.21

There will be no change to premium rates for the Old retiree Extended Health Coverage or Dental premium rates (impacting those who retired pre-1996 with a different benefit plan design). There is also no change to premium rates for the New retiree dental plan.

Premium rates for the newer retiree Extended Health Coverage will be increasing 7%. Retirees should see these new rates deducted on their May 1 pension deposits.



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University of Guelph Retirees Association Contributing Membership (2026) Form

YES! I want to help promote the welfare of retirees and to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between retirees and the University by contributing to the UGRA's administrative costs.

My contribution is \$.....

Name..... Date.....

Address.....

City/Province..... Postal Code.....

Email..... Phone.....

(Note that the email address will be used for UGRA communications only.)

Please make your cheque payable to the University of Guelph Retirees Association. Mail this form with your cheque to: University of Guelph Retirees Association • PO Box 48-4916 • University of Guelph • Guelph Ontario, N1G 2W1

Electronic Payment  **PayPal**

Instead of mailing in a cheque, you can now make a secure donation to UGRA electronically using PayPal and your credit card on our web page at: <https://ugra.ca/join-us>. You can also use e-transfer to pay using the email address ugraEtransfers@gmail.com. If you are new to e-transfers, we have provided a short primer <https://ugra.ca/join-us>

How to Contact Us

Don't hesitate to contact us with your questions, comments, and concerns. To advocate on your behalf, we truly want, and need, to hear from you. Here are the ways to contact us – don't forget to provide your name and contact information in your message so we can follow up promptly.

By Email:

ugra@uoguelph.ca

By using the UGRA website:

<https://ugra.ca>

By Letter:

University of Guelph
Retirees Association
P.O. Box 48-4916
University of Guelph
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

Did you have questions?

If you have questions about your benefits, please contact Sun Life by checking your claim at <https://www.sunnet.sunlife.com/signin/mysunlife/home.wca> or calling 1-800-361-6212. If you have questions about your pension or to change your address or status, please check out this website: <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/retire>. If you have other questions or concerns, please contact UGRA at ugra@uoguelph.ca and we will see if we can help.

Did you know?

The main objectives of the University of Guelph Retirees Association are to foster a mutually beneficial relationship between retirees and the University of Guelph and to advocate for our members in matters such as access to university facilities and resources on retiree benefits. The UGRA works hard to keep our members up to date on the University community through emails, newsletters and meetings and, from time to time, also shares information that is of more general interest to retirees.

All UGRA members are also members of CURAC which offers many benefits including discounts for insurance and travel, as well as access to educational events at other participating institutions. For details, check their website <https://curac.ca>.

The UGRA is run by a group of fellow retirees who freely volunteer their time and talents. The funds needed to run the UGRA come mostly from our members' contributions. With your support, we can maintain an electronic presence, produce the newsletters, as well as hold the AGM, Spring and Fall Forums, and other events and activities to keep you connected to the university and fellow retirees. You can send feedback by email or physical mail.

Be a Contributing Member of the UGRA in 2026

We hope you enjoy this newsletter, our informative website (<https://ugra.ca/>), and our various on-campus functions throughout the year. An annual contribution of \$30 from you goes a long way in sustaining the UGRA so we can continue to work on your behalf.

PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40064673

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
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