

OCTOBER 2026

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The Woman Who Mapped a Community's Heart
MEET AMANDA MACDERMID



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THE WOMAN WHO MAPPED A COMMUNITY'S HEART

Meet Amanda MacDermid

By Gabrielle Clermont • Photos by Sabryna Evans Photography

If you have spent any time this summer searching for a splash pad, a dance camp, or the exact hour the parade starts, chances are you have already met Amanda MacDermid, even if you have never shaken her hand. She is the woman behind lambtonfamilyhub.ca, the free website that has quietly become the go-to source for everything happening with families across Lambton County, and especially here in Grand Bend. What most people do not know is that the story behind the site is one of grief, a life-altering diagnosis, and a stubborn refusal to let either one slow her down.

Amanda grew up just outside Warwick, splitting her childhood between figure skating rinks in Watford and long summer weekends on the water. Her family kept a boat at the Port Franks Conservation Area, and from about age ten onward, Fridays meant loading up as soon as her dad finished work and heading out until Sunday night. One memorable trip took the family through the entire lock system all the way to Ottawa and back, a two-week adventure she still talks about fondly. Closer to home, she and her brother would jet ski from Port Franks to Grand Bend as a matter of routine, and she spent countless afternoons biking through both towns. "I really can't imagine living anywhere that isn't on the lake," she says.

Her ties to the area run deeper than a shared love of the beach. Her father owned the Co-operators insurance branch in Forest, and when he retired, her brother took it over and now owns the branch in Grand Bend as well. Her family also founded MacDermid Pallet and Lumber in Warwick, a business that at one point employed a large share of Warwick Village's residents. Amanda herself started working for the Co-operators at just fifteen, following in her family's footsteps, and was soon fully licensed and working steadily.

She started her own family at a young age, and today her seven kids range from twelve-year-old twins to a twenty-eight-year-old, with three of them on the autism spectrum. When her eldest was diagnosed years ago, long before autism was as widely understood as it is today, Amanda found herself needing more flexibility, which eventually led her to homeschool.

Around the age of thirty, driven by a genuine love of learning rather than any particular career plan, Amanda went back to school and simply kept going. "I'm a perma-student," she jokes. She earned a degree in web design, followed by police foundations, criminology, and further study into body language, sociopathy, and the connection between brain injury and criminal behaviour. Somewhere along the way she



also became a licensed private investigator, a role she has now held for eleven years, running her own agency and specializing in missing persons and fraud investigations. She also spent years contracting in the mental health field, helping revamp mental health, addiction, and case management programs alongside clinicians in the mental health and substance abuse fields. Eventually, she found her way back to Co-operators, this time working for the corporate office.

In the middle of all this multitasking, tragedy struck her family when the father of her children passed away, leaving her to raise a household of grieving children as the world tipped into the COVID-19 pandemic only months later.

Then, in 2023, new and frightening symptoms began. Short-term memory problems that she first chalked up to stress and grief grew steadily worse, followed by numbness in her limbs. After months of tests, hospital stays, and MRIs, Amanda was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. By the time her diagnosis was confirmed, MS had already left areas of permanent damage in her brain and spinal cord, including three lesions in her brainstem. Her neurologist soon pulled her off work entirely, telling her that the cognitive demands of her insurance advisor role were no longer safe for her to manage. For a woman who had spent her whole life juggling a career, a growing family, and endless side projects, it was a devastating blow.

Rather than let the diagnosis define her, Amanda leaned on a philosophy she credits to her ancestors: when life forces a sudden reset, you figure out how to live differently, and you get moving. She began thinking about what her own brain needed most, which was simplicity, low cognitive clutter, and a clear structure to follow. Drawing on her years of experience helping people rebuild their lives, she sat down and wrote a book. Published in January 2025, "From Chaos to Calm" is part journal and part life organizer, designed for people managing brain injuries, neurodivergence, grief, divorce, or any major life disruption. She piloted the book with a group of clinicians, whose positive response led to a request for a companion resource for people transitioning to sober living. The result was her second book, "Returning to Balance," which, together with the facilitator's guide she wrote to accompany it, has become a trusted resource in the mental health field.

continued on page 10>



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continued from page 09>

Even with three books published, one persistent frustration remained. For years Amanda had run a Facebook group, originally with an almost comically long name, aimed at gathering community events from across Lambton County in one place. It grew to more than six thousand members, but Facebook's format made it nearly impossible to actually search for anything. A flyer posted as an image could not be searched by keyword, and families were left scrolling endlessly. So, with a brain that now demanded simplicity above all else, Amanda decided to build something better herself, coding included, despite not having touched a website in over fifteen years. "I was not going to use AI," she jokes, "my kids would kill me."

After about four months of relearning how to code, lambtonfamilyhub.ca launched on May 2nd of this year. The response was immediate. Within its first months the site added a dedicated summer camps page that pulled in listings from forty-five different camps across the county, letting parents filter by age and interest in seconds. Pages for fall sports registration, classes, clubs, and this season's fall fairs quickly followed. The site is completely free for both families and organizations, and already ranks first on Google for several local search terms, including where to find family-friendly activities in Grand Bend.

Outside of work, books, and the website, Amanda's household is anything but quiet. She shares her home with two rescue dogs, Kratos and Corvo. Two cats, Pyke and Calcifur, round out the family, along with three terrariums of tiny, long-lived Opae Ula shrimp terrariums that Amanda also builds and gives to others.



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What strikes you most about Amanda's story is not any single chapter of it, the grief, the diagnosis, the seven kids, the books, but the thread running through all of them. Every time life handed her something that could have knocked her down for good, she found a way to turn it into something useful for someone else. The grief became three books that are helping people needing a life reset to find their footing. The diagnosis that could have sidelined her instead sharpened her instinct for simplicity, and that instinct became the backbone of a website that thousands of families now rely on.

Ask Amanda about it and she will wave it off as no big deal, just a woman figuring things out one day at a time. But talk to any parent in Grand Bend who has pulled up lambtonfamilyhub.ca on their phone and found the perfect program for their kid in thirty seconds flat, and you will hear a different story, one about a community that got a little easier to navigate because someone refused to let hardship have the last word. That is Amanda's real gift to this town, not just a website, but proof that something beautiful and lasting can be built out of the hardest years of your life, one page, one small step, and one late night of coding at a time.