

Rally for Israel | Page 9

## Council reversal: No heritage trail access for Rand subdivision

Evan Loree  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

After an immense public outcry, Niagara-on-the-Lake council has withdrawn an offer that would have let

developer use part of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail to build an access road to the contentious Rand Estate development.

On Friday, Jan. 12, after a nearly three-hour private meeting with its

legal advisers, councillors rescinded a Dec. 15 decision that offered Solmar Development Corp. access to the heritage trail.

In December, council met in camera with its lawyers and announced it

was willing to give Solmar the right to use "a portion of its lands at Charlotte Street" for an entrance to its proposed subdivision on the historic Rand Estate.

Exactly what land might have been used remains

unclear.

The subdivision is subject to litigation and scheduled for a hearing before the Ontario Land Tribunal in March.

"It's the right decision to make," Coun. Wendy

Cheropita said of the change in course.

All members of council attended Friday's private session, except Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, who again

*Continued on Page 2*

## Chautauqua speed limit reduced to 30 km/h

Evan Loree  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

After three years of pushing, residents may be able to walk the streets of Chautauqua a little more safely.

Council voted to decrease speed limits in the Chautauqua neighbourhood to 30 km/h, after hearing a presentation from residents John Scott and Shaun Devlin about ongoing road safety concerns in their community.

Coun. Nick Ruller suggested the town decrease the speed for a year and have staff collect data on the effect of the change, so council can assess its effectiveness.

Ruller suggested the roads affected by the speed reductions would include all streets coming off Circle Street, part of Niagara Boulevard and part of Shakespeare Avenue. Speed limits in the area are now 50 km/h.

"I'm biased towards ac-

*Continued on Page 4*

## There's a chill in the air

As Icewine Festival kicks off, a fresh grape crop is harvested



The icewine harvest at Pillitteri Estates began this week. The winery hopes to bring in about 3,000 tons of grapes. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Richard Hutton | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

With warmer-than-average December temperatures in the books, it seemed like the conditions needed to pick grapes for icewine might never arrive.

"There's no snow, no ice on the Great Lakes. Everyone's thinking

the season's over for icewine," said Jamie Slingerland, director of viticulture for Pillitteri Estates Winery, describing the situation for grape growers entering the new year.

But how quickly things change.

Thanks to January's polar vortex, temperatures plunged over the weekend: overnight Sunday into Monday, they surpassed the magical threshold of -8 C as set out by Vintners Quality Alliance standards.

Frozen grapes were ripe for the picking and their journey to becoming one of Niagara's sweetest vintages officially began.

In fact, on Sunday night, tem-

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Coun. Maria Mavridis.

## NOTL councillor faces integrity commissioner investigation

Evan Loree  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A Niagara-on-the-Lake councillor is being investigated by the town's integrity commissioner after some-

one complained she failed to declare a conflict of interest.

"A fellow business owner reported to the integrity commission that I should not be having any say or vote on patios," Coun.

Maria Mavridis told The Lake Report in an interview Jan. 15.

She would not identify the business owner who reported her, citing confidentiality concerns.

People who submit

complaints to the integrity commissioner's office are required to sign a confidentiality agreement, viewable at the town's website.

"A final investigation report will cease to be con-

fidential once it is included on a municipal council open session agenda," said the agreement.

Mavridis has been a supporter of temporary patios

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# Council remains quiet on easement details

Continued from Front Page

declared a conflict of interest because he lives near the Rand Estate.

Town clerk Grant Bivol said the town saw the access through Charlotte Street as an opportunity to celebrate the heritage trail with a "gateway feature."

The gateway design would have gone through a public consultation process, Bivol said.

The town did not respond to questions about whether it has received designs for potential road access to Solmar's property at 588 Charlotte St.

Town planner Kirsten McCauley said she did not know the details of exactly where the proposed easement would have gone, saying it was being sorted out by a consulting planner working with the town.

She also said she couldn't discuss particulars because of legal issues.

The town's actions in December came as a shock to members of the heritage trail committee.

"It just caught us off-guard. Yeah. We knew nothing about what's going on," said Rick Meloen, who chairs the committee.

Meloen stressed he had not seen any plans from the town on what an access point from Charlotte Street would look like.

He speculated that much of the Rand Estate stone wall would have to be taken down along with trees on the heritage trail, if the developer were to build a road into 588 Charlotte St.

"This is my take on it. I have not seen any plans," he said.

Meloen was thankful that residents stood up for the trail over news of council's initial decision.

"I was very pleasantly surprised at the outpouring of support for this trail," he said.

But he remains concerned the trail still could be at risk.

"When it goes to the tribunal, there's not much that we can do," he added.

Amid all the controversy, in a letter dated Jan. 8, Solmar formally asked the



Rick Meloen, who chairs the heritage trail committee, is thankful for the public response to the town's decision to offer Solmar an easement on the heritage trail. Council subsequently reversed its decision. EVAN LOREE

town for an easement to 588 Charlotte St.

Solmar's letter was published by the resident advocacy group, Save Our Rand Estate (SORE), the next day.

Cheropita said she and Coun. Erwin Wiens met with residents of Weatherstone Court early last week to hear their concerns.

"It was a very emotional conversation," she said. "They were very much against it."

King Street resident Lyle Hall said the town used the "wrong method" when it decided in closed session it would grant the easement at Charlotte Street if asked by the developer.

"There seems to be better, and from a resident point of view, more obvious options," he added.

Hall suggested the developer could build the access through the estate entrance at 144 and 176 John St. E., lots which Two Sisters Resorts Corp. owns.

For the access to go through the heritage trail, "A good chunk of that wall would have to come down," Hall added.

"The decision to back off from using the Charlotte Street entrance was a good one."

Though much has been

made about the time and money spent fighting development on the Rand Estate, Hall said it's worth it.

"For god's sake, we're making planning decisions that will affect the community for decades, for generations to come," he said. "We've gotta spend the time to do this properly."

Both Solmar and Two Sisters are owned by Benny Marotta, a fact pointed out by Kate Lyons, a lawyer representing SORE.

The group has been critical of Marotta's refusal to use the access through the Two Sisters properties.

In an interview, Lyons said the tribunal could not force Solmar to work with Two Sisters to make SORE's ideal access point a reality, but it could dismiss its appeal if it decided the proposed access would not work.

"They can say to Solmar, 'Unless you go and make an arrangement, your appeals are dismissed,'" she said.

Lyons maintained that SORE does not support access through the heritage trail.

"We're happy to see that the town has given a second thought to doing that," she said.

The decision to rescind the town's permission for an easement on the heritage

trail was unanimously supported after council came out of closed session Friday afternoon.

Prior to the conclusion of that meeting, The Lake Report sent a series of questions to all councillors about why the town decided it was prepared to offer an easement on the trail in its closed session in December.

Councillors did not respond to the questions.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor again cited litigation issues as the reason for her silence.

And Wiens said he was waiting for the town to issue its formal public statement on Jan. 17.

O'Connor, who put forward the motion to rescind the original offer, said Friday's meeting was called to hear additional information on the issue from town lawyers and planners.

"I thought the right thing was to take that heritage trail-Charlotte Street entrance off the table as one of the options," she said.

"We didn't want to do it hastily at that meeting, because it deserved considerable thought."

O'Connor said the town's lawyer will be able to negotiate on the municipality's behalf at the tribunal in March.

Coun. Maria Mavridis

said with the access at Charlotte Street "off the table," the only options left are through the entrance at 200 John St. and the one proposed by SORE, between the 144 and 176 John St. E. lots.

"That's one thing I don't know that people realize," she said.

Both SORE and the town have been critical of the access at 200 John St. because of its potential impact on heritage features in the estate, including the historic Dunington-Grubb landscaping, which fronts 200 John St.

"I will say that the Charlotte Street entrance has the least impact on heritage and I was asked to protect heritage and that's why originally I said, 'Of course, it's an option,'" Mavridis said.

She said Friday's decision instructs town lawyers to continue preparing their defence, but she would not share additional details due to the ongoing litigation.

"I would love to just tell you exactly how it is right now. But unfortunately, I can't," she said.

"We're using taxpayers' money to fight this. But they get no information? It is confusing to me, but that's the rules," she added.

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# Zalepa following legal advice in declaring conflict on Rand

Staff  
The Lake Report

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says his decision to declare a conflict of interest over the development of the Rand Estate was not taken lightly.

Development of the historic property has been one of the most contentious projects in Niagara-on-the-Lake for several years.

And Zalepa, who lives on Charlotte Street, not far from the Rand property, said he sought professional advice before initially declaring a conflict last April.

He's continued to follow that advice, he said, and did not participate in council's two most recent private debates over offering road access to the project via the Upper Canada Heritage Trail.

"I consulted the town's integrity commissioner and my own independent legal advice. Both sources advised me to declare (a conflict) on this matter," Zalepa told The Lake Report.

"The Municipal Conflict of Interest Act is clear that council members should consult and that failure to follow that advice can result in a less-forgiving decision regarding remedies or penalties," he said.

"The decision was not taken lightly and was a significant monetary expense personally."

# Town releases public statement on heritage trail

The town has released a statement about its decision to hold meetings in secret. Find it here:



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## Residents reel over Tawny Ridge development

Evan Loree  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A major development proposal for St. Davids is close to receiving final council approval but neighbours remain dissatisfied with the subdivision plan.

Residents came to council Tuesday night to voice objections to the Tawny Ridge project by St. Davids Riverview Estates Inc.

The revised subdivision proposal, along with recommendations from staff for approval, were received by council Tuesday night and will be brought back to another meeting this month for final approval.

The project on Tanbark and Warner roads first made waves at a public meeting in March where residents unanimously panned it.

As was the case at the meeting in March, residents were largely focused on whether the existing infrastructure in St. Davids could support the continued growth.

Craig Rohe, an Upper Canada Consultants planner retained by the developer, presented some changes and said there appeared to be some drainage problems in the community, notably an obstructed flood swale on the north side of Cortland Valley.

He also took issue with a video of flooding presented by resident Bill Krahn at the meeting in March.

Rohe said it was "a little



Tony Taylor is not convinced the Tawny Ridge developer's flood plans are sufficient. EVAN LOREE

bit misleading" because the video was taken when the area was still under construction and no storm sewer was in place.

He also said the developer would be installing a new storm sewer on Warner Road, which he said would help alleviate the flooding issues.

Resident Tony Taylor was not satisfied with Rohe's assurances about flooding infrastructure.

"We're at the bottom of the escarpment," he said. "Everything runs down hill."

Taylor said he and his neighbours have videos of flooding from as recently as last November.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor was concerned the devel-

oper's sewer plans would be insufficient given impacts from climate change but town planner Rick Wilson said, "The bottom line is that there is capacity in the system."

The developer has withdrawn plans for a four-storey apartment building and replaced them with stacked townhouses, which Rohe said would be shorter at two or three storeys.

"The public was very clear about their opinions on that matter," he said.

A staff report recommending approval of the project said the applicant had not submitted conceptual plans for the townhouse units but was asking permission to build them to a height of 11.6 metres.

The report signed by three senior staffers said this was acceptable.

The rest of the plan, according to Rohe, was mostly the same as it was in March, with 32 single-family homes and 24 townhouses.

Warner Road resident Gienek Ksiazkiewicz told The Lake Report he still wasn't happy with the stacked townhouses.

"I don't understand why – why they have to have stacked townhouses or whatever. I mean, it just makes no sense," he said in an interview.

Ksiazkiewicz shared with the Lake Report a 12-page presentation outlining his concerns.

In it, he argued that the developer's traffic studies may not have been sufficient.

He also residents had collected data with security cameras that contradicted information collected by Paradigm Transportation Solutions, which conducted a traffic study for the developer.

As well, the amendments proposed by the developer "don't really fit in with the existing neighbourhood," he said.

He also suggested higher-density projects should not be placed in the middle of existing residential areas.

In his presentation, he urged council to reject the recommendations of staff and "not destroy what makes Niagara-on-the-Lake unique."

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## Conflict complaint prompts probe by integrity commissioner

Continued from Front Page

in NOTL during her first term on council and there is a temporary patio at her family's Queen Street restaurant, Firehall Flame.

When asked in February 2023 if she should declare a conflict in the patio debate, she said no.

"I stand by my decision," she told The Lake Report on Monday.

"I don't own that business.

(My) father does and I don't work at that business."

In a followup interview, she would not discuss further details about her role at the restaurant or the investigation.

Since Mavridis' father Bob Mavridis owns Firehall Flame and other NOTL restaurants the councillor could theoretically have a financial stake in temporary patios continuing.

However, under the Mu-

nicipal Conflict of Interest Act, councillors are not required to declare a conflict where their pecuniary interest is shared "in common with electors generally."

At a council meeting Tuesday night, Coun. Sandra O'Connor raised the idea that the town should end seasonal patios and take the time to build a new program that accounts for problems caused by patios.

Mavridis declared a conflict before the discussion and left the room.

While waiting to hear back from the integrity commissioner on whether there would be an investigation, she told The Lake Report on Monday that she is in favour

of ending seasonal patios so long as a permanent program could be properly planned for the future.

"Patios are great. I love them. I think they're a great addition. But we have to make up for the lost revenue in parking spaces."

Some seasonal patios used by NOTL's restaurants are set up on public parking spots.

How to recoup the lost revenue from those occupied spaces has been an ongoing concern for councillors in talks on whether to keep the temporary patios.

One option the town has considered is charging a fee to restaurants with patios that encroach onto the street. [evanloree@niagaranow.com](mailto:evanloree@niagaranow.com)



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# Chautauqua getting lower speed limits

Continued from Front Page

tion," Ruller said when he pressed his fellow councillors for support.

He pointed out town staff have already collected some data on speed in the neighbourhood and while most people drove close to the limit, there were "some anomalies that were very high speeds."

"Our town staff have speed minder data that reinforces the very data that they (the residents) presented in their position," Ruller said.

"It's not a singular resident coming to us saying, 'Hey, I think there's a problem,'" he said.

While Ruller acknowledged there was some risk that the data collected by staff would not support the anecdotal evidence of residents, he cautioned his peers about becoming "paralyzed."

"At some point, we also have to take action."

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa voted against the proposal.

"I would rather see us refer it (to staff) and have it come back," he said.



Members of the Chautauqua Residents Association and Friends of Ryerson Park have been trying for three years to do something about speeding in the neighbourhood. Their work has finally paid off. FILE/KEVIN MACLEAN

Scott told council the residents had been patiently waiting for the town to complete a master transportation plan, which would address the speeding concerns in their neighbourhood.

That plan is being updated and has yet to return to council.

Meanwhile, Scott said, the community's concerns with safety because of speeding cars have continued "and possibly increased."

"Remember, the Chautauqua area is characterized by a series of very narrow streets," he said. "They're really laneways."

The streets are well-used by kids, families and seniors, he said.

"It's a dangerous situation." Matt Finlin, a Chautauqua resident who previously was vocal about the need for decreased speeds on Shakespeare later told The Lake Report it was "the right decision."

"It's nice to hear that the voices of the neighbourhood have been heard."

The father of two said he wants his daughters to be able to run and play without being hit by a car.

"Sometimes progress is slow," he said.

"Bureaucrats are always gonna be bureaucrats and there's always gonna be red tape," he said.

It was important to keep pushing to make a difference in your community, he added.

Coun. Erwin Wiens raised concerns that the cost of time and money necessary to study the impact of reduced speed limits in Chautauqua would draw attention away from efforts to do the same in rural areas of town, where Wiens said there have been fatal crashes.


"We have to start doing something," Coun. Sandra O'Connor said.

She agreed with Wiens, however, that there was a need to prioritize efforts to improve safety in rural areas.

"Let's try to balance all these needs," she said. [evanloree@niagaranow.com](mailto:evanloree@niagaranow.com)


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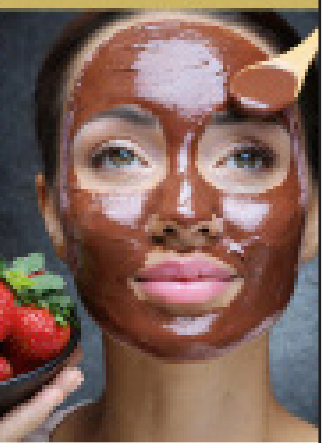


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# Public to get look at report on controversial King Street proposal

Richard Hutton  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The public will finally get a chance to see a recommendation report from town staff concerning a controversial development proposed for land on King Street next week.

Town politicians decided at a special council meeting Tuesday to make the report public at another special council meeting set for Jan. 24.

Coun. Gary Burroughs, who had expressed concern that the report on a proposal to build a three-storey, 17-unit condominium complex put forward by Josh Bice of Butler's Gardens Development Inc. had not been made public.

The development is proposed for a parcel of land on the northwest side of King. The building will sit just under 12 metres in height and include 22 parking spaces.

Burroughs made his feelings known once again

Tuesday at a council meeting to discuss the matter and, in answer to the veteran councillor's concerns, chief planner Kirsten McCauley confirmed the town had received legal advice that recommended the report be discussed in camera.

"Because it is subject to litigation, the staff report would go in camera," she said.

Burroughs, however, disagreed.

"I appreciate the legal advice but I don't appreciate the fact that the report itself – it's a public document and should be dealt with that way," he said prior to council moving behind closed doors to discuss the issue.

The reason for discussing the report out of the view of the public was that because Bice had registered an appeal with the Ontario Land Tribunal, it had become a legal matter.

When contacted by The Lake Report on Wednesday, Burroughs reiterated the need for planning matters to be



Coun. Gary Burroughs believes planning matters need to be discussed in public. EVAN LOREE

discussed in public, adding there are several other developments – notably ones proposed for the site of the former Parliament Oak school and another on property owned by developer Rainer Hummel on Queen Street.

In both proposals, permission is being sought to build a hotel. He is worried that by keeping discussion of the Bice development report behind closed doors, a precedent would be set.

"Would we – I would hope not – need to get legal advice on all of these? The way it's working, it's almost becoming a part of the process, going in camera for

all planning discussions," Burroughs said.

"We seem to be missing deadlines on all planning applications, especially the controversial ones."

Also on Wednesday, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said it was up to council to decide the fate of the report.

"Council made a decision, which is the right one," he said.

But no matter what councillors decide to do, in reality, the decision on the fate of the Bice proposal is no longer in their hands.

"The matter will be decided at the (tribunal) hearing. That's something we're not used to here," he said.

Burroughs, meanwhile, said he was happy – after a lengthy discussion behind closed doors – his colleagues had joined him in wanting to have the report made public.

"We spent over two hours talking about it and by the time we got to the vote there was consensus," he said.

The development – on a site bounded by King Street, vineyards and single-family homes – has been criticized by nearby residents with one going as far to say it was "like trying to fit a size nine foot into a size six shoe."

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## Shoreline protection



Work to protect the Lake Ontario shoreline from erosion is underway at Fort Mississauga. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

## Editorial

# Council's U-turn on the heritage trail

Kevin MacLean  
 Managing Editor

We all make mistakes. When you're in a position that is in the public realm — say, a town politician or even a community newspaper entrepreneur — the decisions you make often are subject to intense scrutiny by people who care. So, it was interesting from the outside looking in to watch the U-turn made by Niagara-on-the-Lake council this past week in reversing a stance it took barely a month ago.

Council revoked its offer of right-of-way access for the Rand Estate development that would have permitted a roadway over part of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail along Charlotte Street.

Visiting the location, it is difficult to see how the town or Solmar Development Corp. could have shoehorned a two-lane roadway into that location.

The trail and the stone wall of the estate intersect at that point, but it is a narrow, angular, odd conjunction.

Perhaps planners and architects could have come up with an inoffensive option.

But council, wisely, revisited the situation and last Friday, after a nearly three-hour private session, voted to withdraw its offer to Solmar.

Given the hue and cry from the community, that is the right decision and we give credit to our councillors for having the courage to reverse course.

They weren't trying to bring more controversy to the already controversial Rand Estate project. In fact, some councillors said they saw the right-of-way access as the least disruptive option and least harmful in terms of heritage attributes.

There remain a lot of questions about how council and we as a community got to this point.

With that in mind, late last week, we sent the lord mayor and all councillors a list of questions we hoped they would answer.

Unfortunately, none of them responded. That's their prerogative. They answer to you, not to us.

And in a statement Wednesday afternoon, the town said due to the impending tribunal hearing over Rand, it cannot release full details.

That said, we feel councillors could answer at least some questions without violating any protocols. In fact, the town statement touches on a few of the issues we asked about.

Our questions were:  
 • On the face of it, the subject of an easement on the heritage trail in itself does not seem an issue that would merit a closed session, especially with no public debate by council. How did the creation of an easement on the trail come about?

• Why was there no public discussion after the closed session? Should there have been, in your opinion?

• Did you support the idea of not debating any of the issue in public? Why?

• Why was the easement offered before Solmar (almost a month later, in January) formally asked for one?

• Were preliminary discussions of an ease-

ment held with Solmar, its representatives, council members and/or staff in the weeks prior to the Dec. 15 meeting?

• If so, what was the substance of those discussions? Did Solmar or others ever informally ask for or suggest an easement? Who and when?

• Was the easement offer a negotiation position for the town in the ongoing dispute with Solmar and the upcoming Ontario Land Tribunal hearing?

• If so, what did the town get or expect to get (including concessions) in return?

• Was council privy to any designs of the potential access at the meeting of Dec. 15? If so, why are the designs not public and when will they be made public?

• It seems unusual for a “simple” easement discussion to have become such a litigious matter. How and why did that occur?

We think residents deserve to know more about how council's Dec. 15 short-lived decision came about.

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## LETTER OF THE WEEK

# Withdrawing trail offer was the **right decision**

The following letter was sent to members of town council. A copy was submitted to *The Lake Report* for publication.

For sure this letter is just a blip among those you are receiving from the good citizens of Niagara-on-the-Lake who are distressed, disappointed, even bewildered by council's decision to meet privately and choose to offer a goodly section of our Upper Canada Heritage Trail to the developer of the Rand Estate.

I understand the role of our councillors and wish to thank you for standing for election and for serving.

I know you all and I had the privilege during the last two elections to MC a few of the candidate meetings at the Legion Hall. I have contributed to the financial



Charlotte Street access to the heritage trail. EVAN LOREE

support of the trail development and fortunately, too, I am a regular user of it.

In my own career I was a chief executive officer and required to make decisions daily, embody the values of the organization, articulate the vision, and deploy the strategy and tactics to progress and keep up the chase for excellence.

Now retired, I say honestly that I made good decisions, but not always.

You, too, are subject to many influences that affect one's judgment. I have good knowledge of the issue, the context and the processes by which you acquired the knowledge to vote on the heritage trail proposition.

Hence the purpose of this

letter is to gently, but unequivocally, convey directly that in this case you have made a blatant mistake.

It is in the process you used to reach the decision and the consequences of the decision itself.

The in camera Dec. 15 decision is rightly being and viewed by the hundreds of citizens I know as undemocratic, a sop to the developer, plus bad for heritage, and the social and cultural ambience of our little town.

I see also collateral damage to the respect and integrity for the institution of the council and, personally for each of the councillors who voted in favour. I find it sad that your dedication and endless hours are now viewed this way.

We now know that sober

second thought has led to a review of the December decision and, thankfully, council has withdrawn the offer to the developer to make use of a good portion of the heritage trail as an entrance/exit and road to the Rand subdivision.

It is the expressed ask to our council that it make less use of in-camera meetings and to seek and listen more to the advice of the expert community volunteers on the town's various committees.

Public officials and processes are held to a higher standard and when deviations occur it's unacceptable.

I believe this issue should have never developed and, unfortunately, this is not even near the end of this saga.

Since the message has been delivered that the trail is available under the right circumstances, I bet the developer will return with an offer that "can't be refused."

In the coming months we will be confronted with this all over again unless council changes processes and messages.

Please learn from this debacle and apply the lesson that there is a principle involved: namely this highly utilized, publicly subscribed, heritage trail is just not available, no matter the price.

Yes, in future please be principle, value and ethically driven in the important work you do on behalf of all citizens in this role as councillor.

**Colin Patey**  
**NOTL**

## Developers who bypass town are **bad actors**

Dear editor:

In the busy-ness before Christmas a letter writer to *The Lake Report* on the issue of a proposed residential development was headlined "No consequences for developer not responding to town."

The writer noted "despite the fact the developer was able to run out the clock by not responding to the town's comments by deadline," a planning expert said he wouldn't call that "a flaw in the system" (???)

The developer is, of course, going immediately to the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Councillors said there was no response from the developer on a number of critical concerns so no decision could be made, and critical issues were discussed behind closed doors by council because the project is subject to "legal proceedings."

Here's a suggestion or two on handling these kinds of manoeuvres:

1. Any developer that files an application with the Ontario Land Tribunal before completing the processes necessary for municipal planning requirements is immediately determined by the town to be bargaining in bad faith. Negotiations are halted until the developer rescinds that application, resubmits a revised one and receives approval for the project from council.

2. Council sets a deadline for developers to respond to the town's requirements, one to two months before any appeal to the land tribunal is legally possible.

3. Applications by any developer that miss deadlines set by council are denied at the end of deadline day. That decision is final and binding unless council agrees to let the developer continue with a revised application, subject to council conditions.

4. The land tribunal is informed the application has been denied or rejected by council with the results of any referendum, questionnaire or survey of residents included in the notification to the tribunal.

5. No discussions regarding such applications are handled "behind closed doors." Litigation against Niagara-on-the-Lake is everyone's business and everyone's cost. "He or she who pays the piper" etc.

There are trojan horse manoeuvres, end-run tactics, divide-and-conquer games and a favourite of many developers – stalling tactics.

Council needs to strategize effective opposition to any and all of these — and implement those tactics. These ideas are a start.

**Daphne Lavers**  
**NOTL**

## Four-city model is **best choice** for Niagara

Dear editor:

The pedantic Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa's clearly agitated performance at the amalgamation meeting last week lobbying against change could have alone tossed the provincial standing committee enough justification to ignore the typical small-town thinking of what effective governance should look like.

Whereas Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati's "too many cRooks in the kitchen" sober analogy was the best.

Zalepa has already by

default pitched the concept of amalgamation by constantly trying to sell the shared services model that exists at the region.

What is really odd is Zalepa previously opined about not stripping villages and towns of their identities and yet he supports the destruction of the St. Davids village historical commercial centre by constructing a roundabout intersection through a flawed environmental assessment process.

Yet he stands tall against his bosses at the province trying to assert how much

he understands about local governance within the context of the objectives of the province.

Zalepa clearly knows that under a four-city model he would lose to Diodati in an amalgamated new city vote and that is maybe what the province will now pursue with vigour. Maybe they'll even assign Tory MPP Sam Oosterhoff to make sure of that after, having been scolded by a small-town, part-time lord mayor.

The reality is a new City of Niagara will not change the identity of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and,

if implemented properly, the result would be a more effective and economically beneficial governance structure, not too dissimilar to what is being attempted by the shared services idea.

We also could use full-time leaders like Diodati to better ensure the implementation of effective governance, lower taxes and getting some housing constructed.

Amalgamation in the form of a four-city model will be good for everybody.

**Peter Rusin**  
**St. Davids**

## When officials **don't understand** 'open and transparent'

Dear editor:

It's unfortunate that your interesting article, "Speed camera on Niagara Stone Road now active," (Jan. 11) ended with the declaration that information about what speed over the limit will trigger the issuing of a ticket "will not be disclosed to the public."

Isn't it ironic that many recent, local news reports have been emphasizing how important it is for government to be open and transparent in all matters to the people they serve?

This "speed camera" debacle is a perfect example of government officials behaving as if they don't

understand "open and transparent."

Speed cameras are necessary in any community where the traffic laws are ignored by scofflaws.

Logic and common sense surely dictate that the posted speed limit is what the law intended and cameras should be set at that number.

Everyone will be aware — if it is not kept secret. The written law does not allow for individual interpretation according each driver's personal opinion.

Non-disclosure agreements are for business and military secrets, not politics.

**George Dunbar**  
**Toronto**

## We welcome your letters

The *Lake Report* welcomes your letters to the editor. Please, write early and often. Letters ideally should be under 400 words long. Occasionally, longer letters may be published. All letters may be edited for conciseness, accuracy, libel and defamation. Please include your full name, street address and a daytime telephone number so that authorship can be authenticated. Only names and general addresses (eg. Virgil, St. Davids, NOTL) will be published. Send your letters to editor@niagaranow.com or drop them by our office at 496 Mississauga St., NOTL.



# Innovative ways to **build more homes** quickly



**ARCHITEXT**

Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Over the past five decades I have been blessed to work with some pretty brilliant folks, each of whom have freely shared pearls of wisdom with me.

I recall a conversation back in the late 1970s with a gentleman whose company, within 10 years of him founding it, was generating \$80 million in annual sales (that's roughly \$352 million in 2023 dollars).

When I asked him what he credited as the principal reason for his company's success, he thought for a minute.

Then he replied, "Always watching for the gaps that, over time, almost inevitably form between the way things have been done and the new emerging needs of the market – then nimbly providing the correct solution to fill that gap."

"You see," he continued, "it's rare that a mature company will objectively analyze if their goods, services and processes – the things that originally made them successful – remain in sync with the changing requirements of their customers. That is, until somebody like me slips in and eats their breakfast."

"Complacency provides the opportunity for an entrepreneur to build a business. But, it is also the mousetrap that a successful entrepreneur must guard against falling into by continually monitoring the market and ensuring his company meets all the customers' current and potential needs," he concluded.

In my opinion, Canada's construction and real estate development industry has, to a very great extent, fallen into this mousetrap.

To quote my wife



From receipt of a building permit to a completed move-in, Ontario company Quality Homes can deliver a custom modular design in 16 weeks or less. Columnist Brian Marshall says more innovative builds are needed.

(she's one of those "brilliant folks," having led a \$30-million Canadian company to over \$500 million in less than a decade) and one of her favourite sayings: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got."

Now, let's accept that the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation claim (mentioned in last week's Arch-i-text column: "The resurrection of wartime housing") that an additional 3.5 million new dwellings – or 388,889 units per year above and beyond what was already planned – will be required in the next decade.

Let's also assume that the construction industry is already working at capacity finishing the "planned" 205,762 units per year.

Despite this, there is a monumental gap between provision and requirement, and this is a gap that cannot possibly be filled by continuing to adhere to current practices.

In 1941, Joseph Pigott, as the CEO of the federal corporation Wartime Housing Limited, faced a similar challenge in how to quickly and efficiently build housing with a war-induced labour shortage and material

supply chain constrictions.

The answer was factory-manufactured panelized construction. In short, working on an automotive assembly line basis in a climate-controlled building, workers produced all of the framing and roof systems for the houses.

For every house, the panel units were bundled and transported to a designated site to be assembled, with the net result being one completed house every 36 hours.

But, once the wartime pressure disappeared, panelized construction was largely abandoned as the industry returned to traditional on-site building methods.

However, the inherent advantages of manufacturing ensured some hardy businesses would continue.

Today, aided by fully computerized systems, companies like Bensonwood in New Hampshire and RengliAG in Switzerland manufacture extraordinarily high-quality, fully complete wall, roof and floor panel systems (including insulation) for building sites across North America and Europe.

The panels are craned

into place to finish weathered-in buildings, in days rather than weeks, whether the design is drawn from a manufacturers' catalogue or an architect's full custom plans.

And, because dwelling services – such as plumbing and electrical – have been designed into the panel systems, thereby preserving the weather-tight integrity of the building, it also means the labour time associated with the trades is often cut by up to 50 per cent.

For these reasons and others, the construction timeline of a panelized home is significantly shortened from start to finish. Further, the finished quality of the dwelling is measurably superior to one built on-site using conventional methods.

Carrying the factory-built model further are companies such as Quality Homes here in Ontario. In their manufacturing facilities, these companies construct modules that are transported to the customer's property, craned onto position and locked together like a series of Lego blocks.

Each module is almost completely finished on the factory floor – kitchens, bathrooms, lighting and

so on have been installed before transport. A few simple service connections are required on-site together with some relatively minor (in many cases) finish work and the house is ready to move into.

Now, if the customer wishes to have masonry (brick, stone, stucco, etc.) exterior cladding, that must be installed after the building is delivered while exterior cladding suitable to transport is typically installed in the factory.

Here again, the speed of construction is much shorter than conventional methods and the finished quality of the modules is typically superior whether the dwelling design is from their catalogue or fully customized.

Not to put too fine a point on it, Quality Homes guarantees it will complete your home on time, on budget, and to the highest quality standard. It can extend such a guarantee solely because it builds in a factory, with computer-aided systems, using superior materials and quality control at every step in the manufacturing process.

And, keep in mind, unlike conventional construction, a factory can operate 24 hours per day, seven days a

week, in any season or type of weather.

As we saw in the Arch-i-text column published Oct. 19, 2023, "Embracing Glendale through a more inspired design," modules also lend themselves to multi-storey residential developments – in some cases with entire completed dwelling units transported to the site, craned into place and locked together. Again, leaving comparatively minor construction work to be finished on-site.

If the federal government is serious about meeting Canada's housing crisis with a viable solution, it must take concrete steps. Some of these may include:

- Ensuring "preapproved designs" are compatible with panelized or modular construction.

- Making federal loans and/or grants available to existing companies that manufacture panelized systems or modular units to underwrite the costs of expanding their manufacturing capabilities.

- Guaranteeing minimum projected unit uptake (sold unit revenues) for each manufacturing company that agrees to expand its production capabilities.

- Putting federal incentives in place to encourage real estate development companies to adopt panelized and modular construction methods.

Finally, in real terms, particularly associated with making the new housing "affordable," governments at every level must give serious consideration to utilizing land that they own (governments and government agencies are the largest land owners in Canada) to develop new housing.

Land lease arrangements – not limited simply to detached/semi-detached/townhouse dwellings, but also for condo, rental and other forms of housing – spring to mind.

As was mentioned in last week's column, there is just a whole lot more work to do.

*Brian Marshall is a NOTL realtor, author and expert consultant on architectural design, restoration and heritage.*



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Cora Long D.D.





Top: About 70 supporters came out for Sunday's Run for Their Lives at Canada Games Park in St. Catharines. Sunday marked 100 days since Israeli hostages were taken by Hamas. Bottom: Shifra Tselniker waved a flag of Israel during her walk. JULIA SACCO

## Niagara rally shows support for release of Israeli hostages

Julia Sacco  
The Lake Report

Sunday marked 100 days since about 240 hostages were taken from Israel to Gaza during the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas, launching the Israel-Hamas war, now entering its fourth month.

While hostages were released in November in an agreement between Israel and Hamas, as of Jan. 9, Israeli military officials say 132 people are still being held in Gaza. On Tuesday, Hamas reported that two of the hostages were confirmed dead.

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Alana Hurov worked alongside Perla Zaltzman, wife of Chabad rabbi Shneur Zaltzman, and Rotary Club member Rose Campbell to organize a walk in solidarity with those remaining hostages on Sunday.

The walk, called Run For Their Lives, is "not political, it's really about human-

ity," Zaltzman told The Lake Report.

About 70 people gathered at Canada Games Park in St. Catharines to show their support for the release of the hostages.

Run For Their Lives was started by Rachel Goldberg, mother of one of the hostages, American-Israeli citizen Hersh Goldberg-Polin.

Zaltzman said that when she heard people were walking in solidarity she wanted to create a space to do so in Niagara.

"What (Rachel) has done, I was very, very moved by," Zaltzman said through tears.

"I just feel hurt in my heart. I want her to have her son back," she said.

Following words from some participants — including a speech from Coun. Erwin Wiens in which he his support for the hostages' return and Campbell's reading of Rachel Goldberg's poem "A Tiny Seed" — the names and ages of the hos-

tages were read out loud.

"I think everybody can get behind the goal of releasing hostages. They are innocent people that don't have a stake in it," Wiens told the crowd.

All participants then walked the indoor track for 18 minutes, many wearing photos of the hostages and some carrying the Israeli flag.

Campbell said that aside from raising awareness and supporting the global initiative to bring them home, the walk provided a safe space for people in the community who are feeling isolated by the rise in antisemitism.

"There are a lot of people who feel like there's nothing they can do," she said.

Campbell added that the act of being there to walk feels like "we are doing something," she said.

"We just wanted it to be about the hostages and about bringing them home," she said.

[juliasacco@niagaranow.com](mailto:juliasacco@niagaranow.com)

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# Sights on the sea

## Goettler Foundation, NOTL Rotary partner on coral reef project

Bill French  
Special to The Lake Report

The Goettler Foundation and the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake have teamed up to help fund a \$65,000 coral reef restoration project in Indonesia.

The reef is in the Misool Marine Reserve of Raja Ampat, an archipelago in the western Pacific Ocean off Indonesia's southwest coast.

Coral reefs are often referred to as the "rainforest of the sea" and the Misool reefs are the highest priority for conservation.

Dr. Mark Erdmann, a marine biologist, coral reef ecologist and vice-president of Conservation International's Asia-Pacific marine programs, says, "Misool represents one of the most pristine reef systems left on Earth — one of only a handful of places in the universe where biodiversity is improving rather than declining."

The Goettler Foundation/Rotary Club of NOTL Reef Restoration and Environmental Education Project scales up Misool's transplantation activities through community engagement, data collection and monitoring.

The project engages high school students through a series of educational and practical activities, designed to empower the local community to become change-makers and guardians.

An environmental education program was developed and delivered in two high schools to 123 students. Pre- and post-lesson testing showed a 78 per cent increase in environmental knowledge.

In addition to the in-school program, outreach staff repurposed the lessons into games and marine life colouring books for younger children in the surrounding villages.

The Goettler Foundation



A \$65,000 donation from the NOTL Rotary Club and the Goettler Foundation is helping restore a major coral reef in Raja Ampat. MISOOL FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT

and the Rotary Club of Niagara on the Lake are elated to be engaging Raja Ampat youth in shaping a brighter, sustainable future for their community.

Club president Carol Lipsett thanked the Goettler Foundation "for their ongoing support of our work and specifically for their support of this critical reef restoration project."

Vaughn Goettler said, "As the planet reels from the effects of humankind's activities over the years, it is an honour and a privilege to participate in the restoration of our vital coral reefs."

"They are truly the 'lungs of the planet' and as goes their health, so goes the health of the entire ecosystem that nourishes us all."

NOTL Rotary often has an environmental com-

ponent to its international projects but was interested in doing a larger, environmentally focused project.

**"(Coral reefs) are truly the 'lungs of the planet' and as goes their health, so goes the health of the entire ecosystem that nourishes us all."**

VAUGHN GOETTLER  
GOETTLER FOUNDATION

Vaughn and Lauren Goettler suggested coral reefs, so a committee was established to explore the idea.

Rather than just donating to organizations that do coral reef work, Rotary

wanted to be more hands-on and sought a project that built around community engagement rather than just straight up reforestation.

Several months were spent researching the issue, understanding best practices, reviewing other Rotary coral reef projects and determining the highest priority reefs for conservation.

That led the club to the project with the Misool Foundation in Raja Amat, one of the most biodiverse places on the planet.

Its waters are home to more than 600 species of coral (the entire Caribbean region contains fewer than 60), six of the world's seven marine turtle species and more than 2,000 species of reef fish.

The diversity of coral

reefs is particularly impressive given that reefs cover less than 0.1 per cent of the oceans' surface area.

Coral reefs benefit an estimated 1 billion people, either directly or indirectly, from the many ecosystem services they provide.

They provide up to \$2.7 trillion per year in services, including providing critical natural infrastructure that protects increasingly vulnerable coastlines from storms and flooding, food security for vulnerable populations, tourism revenue and even raw materials for life-saving medicines.

Despite their importance, coral reefs face numerous threats, including climate change, coral bleaching, overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction.

The United Nations has

reported that 70 per cent of the Earth's coral reefs are threatened and 44 per cent are already destroyed or at imminent risk of collapse.

Conservation efforts are crucial to protect and sustain these vital ecosystems.

The Misool Foundation is a non-profit focused on marine conservation efforts.

It manages a suite of conservation programs that combine marine law enforcement, waste management, community empowerment, research and marine monitoring and species conservation that consistently deliver measurable conservation results.

A combination of Ranger patrols and community outreach ended dynamite fishing and coral mining in 2014, but some of those damaged reefs have not recovered.

The reef restoration project was developed to re-establish those coral reefs.

Using a technique called coral transplantation, the Misool team of coral farmers (including marine scientists, Misool Rangers and university students), create artificial reefs from wire mesh frames on areas of broken coral.

Living corals are transplanted onto the frames, then cleaned and monitored so they have the best chance of survival. Over time, these reefs will grow naturally, providing new habitat for fish, corals and other reef creatures.

The team now manages six reef sites in the Misool reserve with an impressive survival rate of 82.4 per cent.

The Rotary project supported the coral farmers team in transplanting more than 1,500 square kilometres of reefs, contributing to Misool's target of 2,500 square kilometres by the end of 2023.

Bill French is a member of the Rotary Club of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

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Niagara College wine professor Gavin Robertson speaks to students prior to harvesting grapes that will eventually be used to make icewine. SUPPLIED/NIAGARA COLLEGE

## Pillitteri expects to harvest about 3,000 tons

*Continued from Front Page*

peratures hit -10 C.

“We love -10 C,” Slingerland said. “(The grapes) are harder to press but we also get higher Brix values.”

Brix value is the amount in degrees of dissolved sugar in a liquid solution. The VQA standard level for the juice is 32 degrees after pressing.

“The cold temperatures had helped brown the grapes,” Slingerland said.

At one time, the Pillitteri winery made more than a dozen different kinds of icewine but now it focuses on one or two varieties with Vidal making up the vast majority of its offerings.

“It’s the most aromatic icewine of them all,” Slingerland said. “It has such

tough skin. It holds up.”

Slingerland has been heading up the icewine harvest for 35 years and he said if there is one thing that can be certain, it’s how no two harvests are alike.

“There are always challenges but we manage to make it work year after year,” he said. “It is amazing that no two years are ever the same.”

While the harvest was going on at Pillitteri and other wineries in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the next generation of winemakers at Niagara College’s NOTL campus had its own harvest to reap.

Under the supervision of Gavin Robertson, a professor in the college’s winery and viticulture technician program, about 50 students braved frigid temperatures

and snow on Tuesday to harvest grapes from the school’s teaching winery vineyards.

The resulting Vidal icewine will not be made available to the public, but rather it is a project for students.

“Groups of one or two students will be allocated the juice and will need to come up with a winemaking plan,” Robertson said, adding that if the plan is deemed workable, the process of making the icewine will begin.

“They get to handle it from juice to the bottle,” he said. “It really is an experiential learning opportunity.”

As the case is at Pillitteri, the college used Vidal grapes due to their hardiness.

“They’re resistant to

the cold,” Robertson said.

“There’s lots of good juice.”

While the size of the crop at the college – close to a metric tonne – pales in comparison to the ones being picked at NOTL’s wineries, Robertson was impressed with the haul.

“I think it’s a good-sized crop,” he said.

Back at Pillitteri, Slingerland said the industry is continuing to make a comeback from COVID-19 when crop yields had dropped close to 1,000 tons.

He expects that when complete, the 2024 harvest will be in the 2,000- to 3,000-ton range.

That’s still a long way off from pre-COVID harvests that would could about 5,000 tons.

[hutton@niagaranow.com](mailto:hutton@niagaranow.com)



This week’s riddle is “Jeopardy!” style.  
Category: “LOVE”

**It’s a nicer way to refer to the excess fat on either side of the waist.**

Last issue:

Category: **UNPACK YOUR ADJECTIVES**

Clue: There’s a double “L” in the middle of this adjective meaning morose or gloomily silent.

Answer: What is a sullen?

Answered first by: Margie Enns

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Bob Wheatley, Claudia Grimwood, Maria Janeiro, Lynda Collet, Howard Jones, Pam Dowling, Wade Durling, Sylvia Wiens, Rob Munger, Sheila Meloche, Nancy Rocca, Soleil Chauncey, Jim Dandy, Elaine Landray, Catherine Clarke, Marla Percy, Trish Gander

**\*REMEMBER TO PUT “WHAT IS” FOR JEOPARDY QUESTIONS!**

Email answers to [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com), with your name, for a chance to win a \$25 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

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# Predators bounce back with two key wins

Kevan Dowd  
The Lake Report



For the superstitious, it may be a little too early to use the word “comeback,” but that is just what the Jr. A Niagara Predators are hoping for.

Two wins last weekend against the Northumberland Stars has hopes up and puts the team one spot higher in the standings.

Now in sixth place in the Greater Metro Hockey League’s south division, the Predators are three points ahead of the Stars and tied at 29 points with the Tottenham Railers, but with two more games played.

Head coach Kevin Taylor thinks his team now has some wind in their sails and just hopes his players are feeling as confident as he is that their days near the bottom of the pack are behind them.

“We have an opportunity to get fourth place. We had an opportunity to get third but I think that’d be a dream now, but we’ll see what happens,” said Taylor. “I’m hoping they see that.”

Niagara started the weekend at home, beating the

Stars 8-2. Predator goalie Zane Clausen stopped 19 shots before Northumberland put one by him 11 seconds into the third period.

In the meantime, Niagara’s Nolan Wyers, Cameron Savoie and Nicholas Nicoletti each scored in the first period, Luca Fernandez netted his team’s fourth 3:28 into the second and Savoie managed a deuce 12 minutes later.

In the third, Reese Bisci earned a tally at the 10:34 mark and following the Stars’ second goal of the game, Shane Kaplan tacked on his team’s seventh marker at the 15-minute point, with Georgy Kholmovsky getting the eight and final goal of the night with two minutes remaining.

“There were a couple breakdowns but that’s expected,” said Taylor.

“It would have been nice to get the shutout for Zane but I thought they played well,” he added. “There was

a lot of backchecking. They did a lot of the little things tonight that made them successful.”

The following day’s away game was much closer but still went to the Predators, 4-3. Niagara’s Isaac Locker got the only goal of the first 20 minutes, with Fernandez putting his team ahead by two going into the last period.

Northumberland fought back hard in the final 20 minutes, tightening the gap to one at the 7:41 mark and answering then responding to a powerplay goal by Guy Manco and shorthanded goal by Declan Fogarty with two markers of their own.

But it was not enough to rob Niagara of their second W of the weekend.

The two wins are particularly important and show the Predators could potentially turn things around just in time for the playoffs.

With their remaining

schedule featuring fewer top teams than earlier in the season, Taylor hopes to pick up some timely wins.

“It’s nice, we get a little bit of a break from the top teams. We’re playing against teams that we should beat,” he said. “I think we’ve underachieved as a team. We’ve been saying this is a better team and it really is.”

Taylor thinks a big issue is his players took a long time to come together as a team, which put them at their weakest point early in the season when they were playing their toughest opponents.

The resulting losses hurt morale.

“If we were winning games, everyone would have been happier. You can tell they’re happy, they played well and if that had happened a little bit more at the start of the season, the close games that we gave up we probably wouldn’t have given up because they’d have known how to win.”

The Predators are back at the Meridian Credit Union Arena this Friday, Jan. 19 at 7:30 p.m. when they play the Tottenham Railers.



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*Have some fun* 

**Across**

- 1. Limerick writer --- Lear (6)
- 5. It might be Swiss or Swaledale (6)
- 10. Computer workarounds (5)
- 11. Every airline passenger is instructed in their use, every time (4,5)
- 12. Spun a yarn (4)
- 13. Noble ape, upside down, is a tall thin one (8)
- 16. Most senior officer (5,2,5)
- 19. Share dealers (12)
- 22. Inert medications (8)
- 23. Bean curd (4)
- 26. Rip in two (4,5)
- 27. Giver (5)
- 28. Maidenhair tree (6)
- 29. Most comprehensive (6)

**Down**

- 2. Dilapidated (8)
- 3. Too (4)
- 4. --- devils, whipped up by the wind (4)
- 5. What Monty Python's parrot had done (6,2,2)
- 6.. Regular fluctuation (3,3,4)
- 7. Rarely (6)
- 8. Mass cup (7)
- 9. Grey (5)
- 14. Inaccurate (3,3,4)
- 15. Bullfighting devotee (10)
- 17. Female protagonists (8)
- 18. Courtesy title for a man (7)
- 20. Overwhelming rush (5)
- 21. Largest of what used to be the Sandwich Islands (6)
- 24. Simmer (4)
- 25. Behavioral problem most common in boys (1,1,1,1)

**Crossword Puzzle**

**Last issue's answers**

1	P	I	L	L	O	W	S	5	A	B	R	A	H	A	M			
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5	2			3		9												
1	6	8																



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# Keeping up with and ahead of cancer and viruses



**DR. BROWN**

Dr. William Brown  
Columnist

Artificial intelligence seems to be taking over the world these days — what with repeated scary predictions in the press and social media.

These days, up to 10 per cent of the articles in science and medicine journals contain some aspect of AI.

What AI is really good at is handling and identifying patterns in mounds of data to identify, for example, a specific person and even something of their mood from their gestures, voice and face.

Or, in the world of biochemistry, AI is proving to be a powerful tool for identifying patterns in the sequence of hundreds, or even thousands, of amino acids in proteins and hence

the shapes and functions of those proteins.

Given that those proteins were created from DNA and RNA blueprints, mutant versions of either can cause trouble by creating proteins better able to evade the body's natural defenses or drugs in the case of cancers, or bacterial and viral infections.

The more malignant the cancer, the more mutations are likely to be found. Cancer cells, especially the really malignant of them, are prime examples of evolution on the fast track — the more cell divisions, the more mutations, the greater the chance that one or more, or perhaps many mutants, will prove capable of overwhelming the body's natural defences and any treatment.

That's why some cancers, such as glioblastoma multiforme, the most malignant of all brain tumours, are next to impossible to treat.

The five-year survival rate is less than five years and hasn't budged for many years. Genomic studies of this cancer exhibit different mutant versions of genes in different regions of the



affected brain — different colonies of malignant cells working out their own evolutionary solutions for survival.

Mutations are a big problem with some bacterial infections that manage to mutate their way around antibiotics, or the COVID-19 virus, which has continued to mutate over the three to four years of the pandemic.

Most of COVID's mutant versions cause no trouble, but some as we witnessed during the pandemic, conferred advantages to the virus by making some

variants far more catchable, others more lethal and yet others find their way around protections offered by earlier vaccines.

And much to our chagrin, we've also learned that the protection offered by vaccines lasts only six or so months before the need for booster shots and even updated shots.

The problem is that COVID, like other viral infections, has billions of human hosts — to say nothing of nature's other creatures — which can harbour the virus, which is free to mutate.

Updating mRNA vaccines has helped, but those versions are already old news and don't take account of potential future mutant threats. That's where AI comes in.

Given enough data about evolutionary changes in the COVID genome and spike protein collected over the last four years from around the world, it should be possible for AI to predict possible new variants before they take place and identify which ones are most likely to cause significant clinical outbreaks.

That would make it possible to design mRNA vaccines that are based not only on yesterday's variants but possibly yet to develop future variants. That way, we stay ahead of the virus, not always a step behind.

Fortunately, unlike other vaccines, mRNA vaccines such as Moderna's and Pfizer's are much easier to modify and produce within short periods.

There is one major problem with the current mRNA vaccines — protection doesn't last long. This was apparent as early as 2021 in Israel where the evidence suggested that booster shots were necessary in as little as six months following the first shot. The reluctance of so many to continue booster shots compounds this problem.

There is another solution. Develop a universal vaccine based on all prior variants of SARS-Cov 2 and selected closely related viruses including some in animals in close contact with humans.

The U.S. National Institutes of Health recommended this strategy twice before

as did the now-retired Anthony Fauci, but it died for lack of funding and the pressing need in 2020 to get the mRNA vaccines as early as possible in the pandemic.

This year the Nobel committee awarded a Nobel Prize to two scientists who overcame repeated funding and other obstacles to put mRNA technology on a solid foundation, without which we would not have had two highly effective mRNA vaccines within a year of the start of the pandemic.

But the work isn't over to create more effective, longer-lasting versions of the mRNA vaccines for COVID and possibly for the flu and even the common cold.

Remember to get your flu shot and updated COVID shot soon, and if you are 60 or older, consider getting the RSV shot, though for now, that requires a script and charge.

*Dr. William Brown is a professor of neurology at McMaster University and co-founder of the InfoHealth series at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library.*



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## EXPLORING HISTORY WITH NOTL MUSEUM



### Steamship dock at Chautauqua

This photo postcard shows Lake Ontario from Chautauqua at One Mile Creek. The wooden stakes leading into the water were the remnants of the former steamship docks that were located there. Built on a 92-acre lot at the northwest end of Niagara-on-the-Lake, cottages and a hotel were developed by the Niagara Assembly of the Chautauqua movement, a semi-religious social and cultural phenomenon that swept through North America. It was a summer resort where guests could focus on intellectual development as well as physical education. The hotel offered religious and educational courses for guests of varying ages, botany and drawing classes, music concerts, swimming, tennis, lawn bowling, fishing, boating and croquet. The steamships docked right in front of Chautauqua, allowing visitors a short and convenient commute to their cottages or hotel rooms.

## Aging characters contribute to character of NOTL



### Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

The festive season is well behind us and I had plenty of time to be thankful for the characters of Niagara-on-the-Lake. They have a big influence on our town.

Yes, we have built heritage and Fort George and so much other history here in Niagara, including the oldest working graveyard in Upper Canada, next to St. Mark's Anglican Church.

I learned while reading the "Brigadoon" playbill that noted French writer Voltaire once said, "History is just a collection of agreed-upon lies."

As the sartorially resplendent Donald Combe reminded me, "We historians love to tell stories" and

that history often includes some gossip.

A major reason I love living here is the diverse collection of aging and interesting senior citizens.

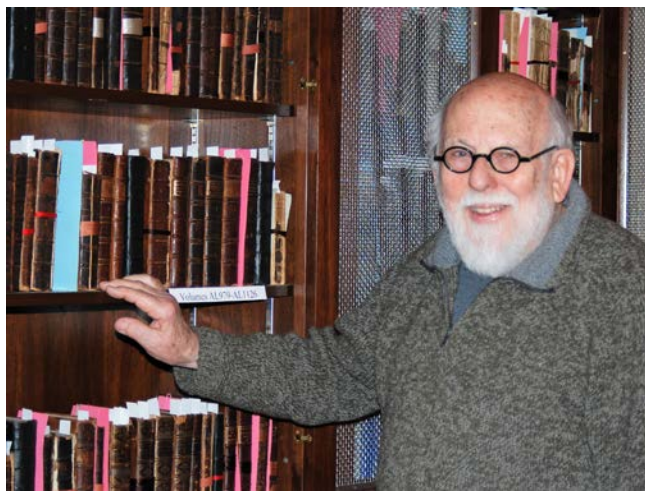
My son Scott recently told me that the sardonic social commentator Fran Lebowitz once wrote in Vanity Fair that you know you are old when people start telling you how good you look.

True, isn't it? When I was 60, only the occasional friend would say, "Wow, you look good." But as I shuffle past my 75th birthday, I regularly and gratefully hear, "Wow, you look good."

I spend lots of time downtown and at our wonderful public library, and delight in chatting with so many NOTLers who qualify as "not youngsters." At least, according to the date on their birth certificates, which is certainly one key indicator.

They inspire me and tacitly encourage me. It's mostly about good luck and good health and good attitude, eh?

Over the holidays, I bumped into a good number



Donald Combe is one of NOTL's great characters. FILE

of my tribe who have been around for more than a while. Permit me to mention a few and I know I will miss some of my favourites.

It's always a delight to chinwag with Patty and Bill Garriock, who eagerly read and think, and often express their opinions to me.

In fact, they happened to drop by while I was writing this Ramble at the library, so I was able to personally spellcheck their names. Note: The editors at The Lake Report take accuracy very seriously.

And happily, I see Nancy Butler almost weekly in aisle four of the ValuMart (I

know, I know, the Independent.) She has travelled the world since her childhood in Barbados and has a well-thought-out comment on almost everything.

Nancy Mouget, Sally Adamson and Joy Rogers add elegance and joy to NOTL, and each of them almost always has a well-considered opinion about current events.

Their range of interest is wide, from on-street restaurant patios to noisy garbage and recycling trucks to the current gong show that is question period in our House of Commons in Ottawa.

And I love that paragon to mature physical fitness Bill Dickson, who is continually out and about town.

When I encountered my former Wallbanger blue team captain over the holidays, he was at ValuMart buying a 12-pound, bone-in ham for Christmas dinner with his wife Cathy.

I don't need to listen to the sports news on the radio, and with Bill, I get an unvarnished analysis of the current Leafs, Canadiens and Bills.

My tennis pal and sometimes doubles partner Richard Berti and his wife Monica are ubiquitous here in NOTL when they are in town.

He is a number of years older than me, but also a number of levels fitter than me. He quietly reminds me that fitness is, partially, a state of mind.

Naturally, many of my favourite NOTL seniors have left us lately. That is the way the world turns and we enjoyed the friendship and guidance of Derek Shervill, R-r-r-ramsey Morrison, Judy MacLachlan and many others for many happy years.

Passing by the golf course just isn't the same any more, without catching a glimpse of past club champions Al Derbyshire and Doug Garrett.

They played the game well, well into their back nines, and always knew they were lucky to be able to play golf as they aged so gracefully and skilfully. "Everybody has to play from 70 yards in and I can still putt with anyone."

Over the Christmas holidays, I remembered the wise words of my Cochrane-born northern Ontario mother.

As she aged at her own pace, she would say that the Bible had it right.

Everyone should get exactly three score and 10 years on Earth, and be healthy until their last day. "Growing old isn't for sissies," she would opine.

As she passed 70, she said, "Well, with medical research and better foods, maybe we should all get four score years."

Let's all take more time to chat with the golden agers who contribute so much to NOTL. It feels good all around.





## NOTICE OF OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

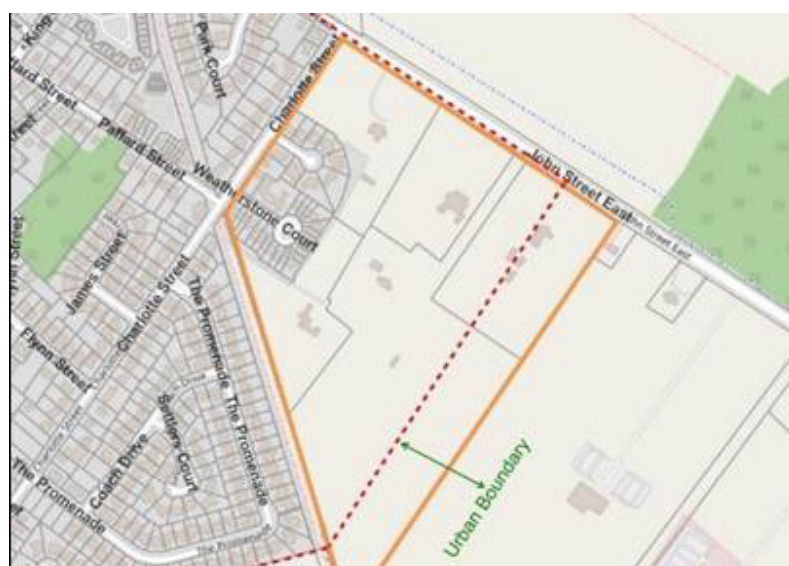
**What:** Notice of Open House and Public Meeting for an Official Plan Amendment (under Section 22 of the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, as amended)  
**When:** Open House: Monday, January 29, 2024 at 5:00 pm  
Public Meeting: Tuesday, February 6, 2024 at 6:00 pm  
**Where:** Open House: Electronically via the directions below  
Public Meeting: In-person at Town Hall, Council Chambers, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, or electronically via the directions below  
**Regarding:** Character Study for Rand Estate and John Street East (File OPA-01-2024)

### What is this?

The purpose of the Character Study for the Rand Estate and John Street East area (the "Study") is to define the character of the area and provide policy to guide future change. The Official Plan Amendment is based on the results of the Study, fundamental principles of good planning and urban design, and follow the following principles:

1. Conserve, integrate and maintain significant cultural heritage features.
2. Protect, enhance and maintain significant natural features and functions.
3. Ensure cultural and natural heritage features are visible to the public.
4. Accommodate active transportation connections through the area as part of a system of connected natural and cultural heritage features.
5. Maintain compatibility and cohesion between distinct places.
6. Accommodate a mix of housing types and sizes and compatible commercial uses.
7. Respect the scale and character of existing development in the area and in adjacent neighbourhoods.

The subject area includes the land bounded by the Heritage Trail, Charlotte Street, John Street East and in proximity to the urban area boundary in Old Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, as shown in the map below.



### Dialogue is encouraged:

You are invited to attend the Open House and Public Meeting to gather information and provide input regarding this matter.

**Town Hall is open for the public to attend Committee of the Whole and Council Meetings, including Public Meetings, in-person. Alternatively, the public will continue to have the option to register in advance to participate electronically.**

**The Open House will continue to be held electronically at this time.**

**If you wish to participate electronically at the Open House or Public Meeting, you must register in advance with the Town Staff noted below. You will receive an email on the date of the meeting with instructions to connect to the Open House and/or Public Meeting on your computer, tablet or telephone.**

- **Open House** – Aida Nasr ([aida.nasr@notl.com](mailto:aida.nasr@notl.com) or **905-468-3266**)  
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, January 29, 2024)
- **Public Meeting** – Clerks Department ([clerks@notl.com](mailto:clerks@notl.com) or **905-468-3266**)  
(register as soon as possible but prior to 12 noon on Monday, February 5, 2024)

If you wish to attend the Public Meeting in-person, registration with the Clerk is appreciated.

If you wish to view the Open House and/or Public Meeting for information purposes, registration is not required. The meetings will be recorded and available for viewing after the meetings on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/council-government/mayor-council/meetings-agendas-minutes>

**Please Note:** Written comments on the application are encouraged and must be submitted to the Town Clerk, at 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0 or via email at [clerks@notl.com](mailto:clerks@notl.com) referencing the above file number. Unless indicated otherwise, all submissions, including personal information, will become part of the public record.

**For more information:** Information on the Study and the draft Official Plan Amendment may be obtained on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/node/3011> or at the Community and Development Services Department within Town Hall.

The Town also invites you to get in touch at any time if you have any questions or comments about the Study. Please contact Kirsten McCauley, Director of Community and Development Services, by phone at **905-468-3266 ext. 243** or by email at [Kirsten.McCauley@notl.com](mailto:Kirsten.McCauley@notl.com).

If you wish to be notified of the future decision with respect to the amendment, you must submit a written request to the Town Clerk including your name and the address to which such notice should be sent.

**If a person or public body does not share their views in writing to the Town Clerk or orally at a statutory Public Meeting before a decision is made, the person/public body:**

- a) Is not entitled to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal; and
- b) May not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, January 17, 2024  
Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

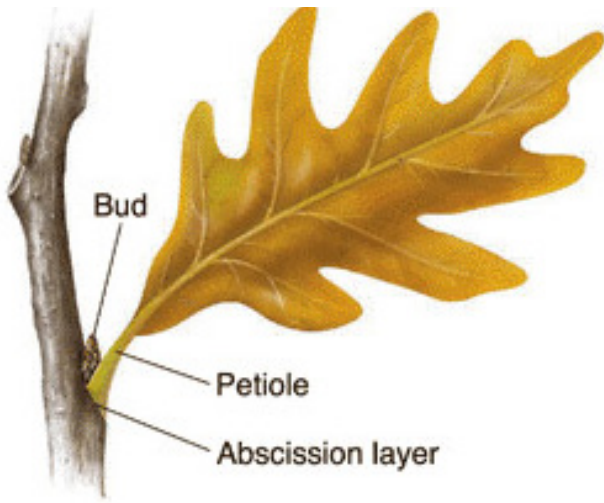


# The magic of **marcescent trees**



**GROWING TOGETHER** 

Joanne Young  
Columnist



Some scientists theorize that marcescent leaves provide a fresh layer of mulch around the tree. SUPPLIED

There is one thing that you can always count on in the world of horticulture – there is always more to learn about.

I am always fascinated to learn the details of what is happening on the inside of a plant that we may not be aware of.

I recently came across a term that I had never heard of before: that term is marcescence (pronounced “mar-CESS-enss”). The word comes from the Latin marcescere meaning “to fade.”

So, what is a marcescent tree?

In the fall, as the temperatures drop, we are all aware of what happens with deciduous trees – the leaves first turn beautiful colours then drop off and float to the ground.

Not all hardwood trees participate in this pageantry though and they decide to hang onto their leaves until spring. Their leaves will still turn colours in the fall, eventually turning tan to brown and remaining on the

tree throughout the winter.

This is a common occurrence with most oaks, beech, hornbeam and witch hazels. Oaks will hang on to most of their leaves for the winter, while beech and hornbeam tend to hang on to the leaves on their lower branches.

These are examples of trees that are practicing marcescence:

In most deciduous trees, leaf drop occurs in autumn when cells between the twig and the petiole (the leaf stem) create an abscission layer (at base of petiole).

The vascular tissue (xylem and phloem) slowly closes, allowing the layers of cells called the abscission layer to completely close off the vein allowing the tree to rid itself of the leaf.

With marcescence, this doesn't occur until spring. Instead, the base of the petiole remains alive throughout winter.

While scientists have

named the process, they are unsure why it exists. I believe that everything that happens in nature happens for a specific reason.

So, is there an advantage to the tree to keep its leaves until spring? Some people theorize that marcescent leaves provide a fresh layer of mulch around the tree by adding nutrients for growth in the new year.

This is particularly advantageous when the tree is growing on a dry, infertile site, which is where oaks and beeches are often found, outcompeting other species growing around them.

Another thought is that these leaves will help conserve soil moisture in the spring by adding shade to the forest floor.

Additional hypotheses hold that marcescence is tied to wildlife. The dried leaves will provide a certain amount of shelter from winter winds for birds.

It may also be that the process is a defence mechanism against browsers such as deer. Scientists speculate that the tree limbs retain the dry and untasty leaves to discourage browsing animals.

Deer prefer to feed on more tender and nutritious buds and twigs. These dried leaves may make it difficult for browsers to nip the new buds, or they simply hide the new growth.

Even if we do not know the purpose of marcescence, we can still enjoy the effect that it creates in our winter gardens.

I think mostly of the pyramidal English oaks that are commonly used as an upright privacy tree. The fact that the leaves remain on the trees for the winter is an added bonus to help provide continued privacy for the winter months as well as the rustling sound of dried leaves.

So, now you have learned your first new word of 2024 and can show off to your friends and family as you point out all the marcescent trees in the area.

Also, a great word for your next game of Scrabble.

*Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at joanneyoung.ca.*

**Correction:** Due to an editing error, last week's column featured an incorrect photo caption. The photo was of blueberries, not a monarch caterpillar on butterfly weed.

## Obituary & In Memoriam

### Beatrice Smith



Smith, Beatrice (Sarlin) – It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Beatrice Smith on January 12, 2024, in St. Catharines, at the age of 98. Beloved wife of Sidney Smith for 47 years.

Devoted mother of Alexander (Linda) and Claude. Adored grandmother of Sasha.

Loving great grandmother to Joaquin. Dear sister of Golde Nash (Leon). Beloved aunt of Jonathan, Bernard, and Mitchell. Fondly remembered by many cousins and friends in the Tai Chi community.

The family will receive friends at Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, on January 19, 2024, from 1 – 2pm followed by a service to celebrate the life of Beatrice, at 2pm. In keeping with Beatrice's wishes Cremation has taken place. As an expression of sympathy, those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism.

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com)



### MacKenzie King



May 16, 1995 - Jan. 22, 2021

*The most painful state of being is remembering the future, particularly one you'll never have.*

Miss you always,

Tom and Blakely



Thanks to everybody who donated to our Gifts From the Heart holiday campaign, we were able to raise more than

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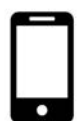
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Have an opinion you want heard?

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