



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.

Council **still debating** what to cut or keep in 2023 budget

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Councillors were dazed and confused during some of their budget deliberations

Tuesday night, but managed to push through the 2023 capital budget.

Niagara-on-the-Lake council has been locked in budget discussions since February and was initially

scheduled to adopt the full annual budget March 23.

But debate and discussion on what to cut and what to keep continues.

The draft budget proposal shows a tax increase to

residents of about 8.85 per cent or just under \$105, for a home assessed at \$541,000.

Council on Tuesday approved a \$9,695,042 capital budget with some amendments.

This amounts to a small increase to the town's 2022 capital budget, which was \$9,580,042.

The increase comes at

Continued on Page 5

Speed cameras will mean big fines in NOTL safety zones

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara Region is stepping up its traffic enforcement game in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

And it could mean big fines arriving in the mail for drivers who exceed posted speed limits.

The region is installing speed cameras to automatically enforce speed limits in NOTL's community safe zones near schools, says Scott Fraser, the region's associate director of transportation planning.

The move is part of a larger traffic safety plan called the Vision Zero Road Safety Program, which aims to "eliminate traffic fatalities and injuries on the regional road network," Fraser said in an email.

Speed cameras will be used to automatically enforce speed limits in 13 community safety zones across Niagara.

In NOTL, the cameras will be used near Crossroads Public School and St.

Continued on Page 5

'A single step is a **closed door**'



Many businesses along Queen Street are inaccessible because of a single step, says resident Pamela Turner Smith. SOMER SLOBODIAN

Somer Slobodian
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A single step might as well be an insurmountable wall for Pamela Turner Smith.

In the eight years she has lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Turner Smith says she hasn't been able

to enter many of the businesses on Queen Street because she is mobility impaired.

"I cannot go into 60 per cent of the stores and support them," she said.

"If I am here with friends, I have to wait on the sidewalk."

Last year, Turner Smith, who used a mobility scooter, photographed every store on and around Queen Street.

Her research determined that 60 stores out of 100 were inaccessible.

In many cases, just a single

Continued on Page 12

Special Report: One-bedroom units **don't really exist** in NOTL

Somer Slobodian
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Second in a series

Renting a one-bedroom apartment anywhere in

Niagara is pricey, but in Niagara-on-the-Lake, one-bedroom apartments are not only expensive, they're also rare.

In fact, one-bedroom NOTL rentals don't really

exist, says Cheryl Munce, a realtor with Engel & Volkers Niagara.

There aren't many apartment buildings in town to begin with and the buildings that do exist are mainly

premium-priced condos, she said.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says this highlights the need for lower-cost, attainable housing options in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Zalepa told The Lake Report that he comes across many people who work in town and want to be able to live here – but simply can't.

As well, there's a "huge gap" in housing options for

downsizing seniors and for "that younger, maybe single individual who's working in town and can't find housing under budget," Zalepa said.

Continued on Page 2



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Mayor thinks non-profits can help with housing

Continued from Front Page

Munce is becoming increasingly concerned about that gap.

There's a lot of young workers in town and every time she encounters one, "I ask them if they live in town and every single one of them says no," Munce said.

They can't afford it and there's no apartment buildings here, she added.

However, NOTL could change that, the mayor says.

Building more along regional roads

There's an opportunity to build attainable housing along regional roads and within walking distance of public services and amenities, Zalepa said.

He said it would be appropriate to build such housing in Old Town as long as it fits the surrounding area.

Many people would benefit, including downsizing seniors who want to stay in Niagara-on-the-Lake, he said.

Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser gets excited when she sees some of the new builds in Niagara-on-the-Lake, such as in Garrison Village and in St. Davids.

She thinks it's exciting for the community, but also good for people to get used to the idea of new buildings.

"There has to be a place where we can do a tiny bit of intensification that's appropriate to make sure that people can afford to live here," she said.

Munce thinks the controversial 3.5-storey, 41-unit condominium proposal on Mary Street is not only a great idea, but a much-needed development, especially for seniors who want to downsize.

She thinks the Mary Street proposal is a smart option since "there's nowhere for them to go."

The prices of buying and renting have gone up tremendously over the years – and not just in Niagara.

"It's a pan-provincial (and) international problem," said Zalepa.

"I think in the smaller brackets, like Niagara-on-the-Lake, it becomes even more acute, because we have limited supply even to begin with," he added.



One-bedroom apartments in the Village start at \$1,800 a month. They're almost non-existent elsewhere, says realtor Cheryl Munce. SOMER SLOBODIAN

Back in 2017, NOTLer Debbie Delesky paid under \$1,000 for a two-bedroom apartment at Brockton Apartments on Lake Street in St. Catharines. Now, that same unit rents for more than \$1,500.

As Delesky's search for an affordable NOTL apartment showed in last week's Special Report, the average rental cost in Niagara-on-the-Lake is \$3,032 a month.

Driven by decades of controls

Housing advocate Scott Robinson says it's a problem that has been driven by decades of development controls in town.

"It's so expensive to rent to Niagara-on-the-Lake because for the past 50 years, Niagara-on-the-Lake planning and zoning policies made it illegal to build anything except for single-family homes," said Robinson.

No purpose-built rentals have received zoning approval in NOTL since the 1990s, he said in an interview.

"The only purpose-built rental is the one in the Village (neighbourhood) that was only built because John Hawley got the zoning in the '90s with the entire site," said Robinson, who previously worked as a



Cheryl Munce.

development co-ordinator for Hawley's company.

According to BILD, the Building Industry and Land Development Association, purpose-built rentals are projects constructed specifically for long-term rental accommodation.

The average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in the Village is \$1,800 and two-bedroom are about \$2,150.

Rental prices are often an indicator of the cost of houses in general, Munce said.

The more expensive the house, the more a landlord needs to charge to cover expenses and turn a profit.

In February 2023, the average house sold in all of NOTL for over \$1 million and the average house in Old Town alone went for more than \$1.1 million, Munce said.

She's concerned about people who have been renting for many years and are paying a low rent, only to have their landlords sell to a new



Gary Zalepa.

owner. What happens if the new owner kicks them out.

"They have nowhere to go and they'll never find a property for \$1,400 a month," she said.

Mayor thinks non-profits can help

Zalepa has hopes for the future and said he thinks non-profit organizations could help with the housing shortage in town.

"I think in Niagara-on-the-Lake, there's probably an opportunity to work with Niagara Regional Housing and a non-profit charitable group in town that wants to help bring more deeply affordable housing to Niagara-on-the-Lake," he said.

Charitable groups could work with Niagara Regional Housing to bring "small-scale, gentle buildings to really help those who need deep affordability," he said.

He cited Community Care and Bethlehem Housing as great examples.

Bethlehem Housing, for example, partners with Niagara



Scott Robinson.

Regional Housing and other organizations to bring affordable housing to low-income families in the region.

Other church and non-profit organizations also have become partners in housing provider projects, he said.

If charitable groups worked with groups like Niagara Regional Housing, they'd get the guidance they need but still "have some ownership or they have some say in how they're building or how their complex runs," Zalepa said.

"I just can't help but think we don't really have anything like that here," he added.

Robinson said he's in support of that, but hasn't seen any "examples of that in the past 20 years" in NOTL.

Zalepa said town staff will soon bring a report to council "that speaks to helping council understand and be more aware of the actual level of attainable housing in town."

In an email to The Lake Report, chief administrator Marnie Cluckie said planning staff "will gather and provide information related to affordable housing and attainability through the growth management work they will be doing as part of the official plan work."

For his part, Zalepa has a target for what is affordable. "When I think affordability, I think of any type of housing that can be financially attainable with 30 per cent of your income," he said.

That's the "kind of measure we need to get a handle on" and he expects that is what town planners will bring to council.

Meanwhile, Delesky would like to see something in town that would keep locals in the area and allow people who grew up here to stay, if they so choose.

"I never felt comfortable anywhere else," she said.

Next week: *Non-profits collaborating with Niagara Regional Housing is just one example of what NOTL can do to address the housing crisis. Scott Robinson believes secondary suites and accessory dwelling units could also be answers. What would that look like and how might that benefit residents? We'll explore those issues in part 3 of this series.*



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Niagara Regional Police **investigating** cash exchange between developer and NOTL town councillor

Richard Harley
The Lake Report

Niagara Regional Police are investigating after prominent developer Benny Marotta gave Coun. Gary Burroughs an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash on March 11.

Initially, Town of NOTL chief administrator Marnie Cluckie contacted the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate, but they referred her to the regional force.

"The Niagara Regional Police Service was con-

tacted on Wednesday, March 22, 2023 regarding a contribution investigation," police spokesperson Stephanie Sabourin said in an email response to questions from The Lake Report.

"As investigation remains on-going, with no criminal charges laid at this time, we are unable to share further information."

Police did not answer questions asking them to clarify what a "contribution investigation" entails or what potential crime is being investigated.

The Town of NOTL voted in a private meeting on March 20 to ask police to look into the matter, after a concerned Burroughs brought the money to the town's chief administrator on March 13.

Council asked that the information be taken to the OPP.

However, Cluckie said the OPP told her to take the matter to Niagara police.

"While it was originally brought to the attention of the OPP, the OPP redirected the town to the Niagara Regional Police Service,"

Cluckie said in an email.

"A reason for redirecting was not given," she said.

Neither the town nor police have named Marotta or Burroughs or provided details of the incident.

The town put out a news release last Wednesday, shortly after The Lake Report published a story online about the exchange.

The release said the town took immediate action to contact police and the town's integrity commissioner after being directed to do so during the private meeting.

Friends of the Forgotten get green light to care for NOTL's Black burial ground

Somer Slobodian
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

NOTL resident George Webber and chief administrative officer Marnie Cluckie stood before town council last Tuesday night to introduce the Friends of the Forgotten and seek councillors' support.

Webber's group is focused on improving and bringing attention to NOTL's inactive cemeteries — starting with the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground.

The town maintains one active cemetery and 11 inactive cemeteries, Cluckie told council.

Taking care of these sites is hard for municipalities with little funding and resources, she explained.

The town partnered with West Lincoln and the Town of Lincoln in 2022 to ask the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to press the provincial government to help smaller, rural municipalities fund inactive cemeteries.

It's difficult for municipalities to "bear the cost of the abandoned cemeteries and that can become a burden to already-overburdened taxpayers," Cluckie said.

"Fortunately for us, we have some passionate individuals in the town who are dedicated residents and volunteers who want to make a



George Webber asks the council to support the Friends of the Forgotten and their effort to restore the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground. EVAN LOREE

difference," she said.

Webber and the Friends of the Forgotten have been working with the town to bring this project to life throughout the past year and March 21 was the first time the group made a presentation to council.

The project started with the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground, formerly known as the Negro Burial Ground, on Mississagua Street near Mary Street.

"We want to transform the current unremarkable state of that site into something we can all take pride in," said Webber.

Members of the Friends of the Forgotten are doing extensive research to find out who is buried there.

They have the names of about 15 people whose graves might be on the

property.

"We want to honour the parishioners, both white and Black, who are currently buried at the site," Webber said.

The group has raised more than \$5,000, enough to conduct a stage one archeological assessment on the grounds.

The money is being collected through the town and everything has been done with the town's approval.

The current focus is on the Black burial ground, however, Webber explained the group's mission has grown.

Its members want to offer respect, care and attention to all of the inactive cemeteries in NOTL.

"Why should we only pay attention to one site when there are 11 sites in town

that need attention?" he said.

"When we look at all of them, we improve our entire community," he added.

Webber asked council for support of the Friends of the Forgotten in principle and be invited back to share the archeological report when it's completed.

Council unanimously supported Webber's requests, meaning the group can begin publicly fundraising.

Webber told The Lake Report the team will be coming up with a fundraising plan as well as looking for lead donors and volunteer grant writers.

"We want to be a template, we want to be a leader, we want to be a role model for others who may want to develop the other sites within our town," Webber said.

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James Wilmott's name is inscribed on the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium. COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION



Popular Bunny Trail returns on April 8

Staff
The Lake Report

Organizers are gearing up for the popular Bunny Trail and Easter egg hunt again this year.

The Easter weekend ritual at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre attracts hundreds of children and families – and helps raise money for the Niagara Nursery School and Child Care Centre.

The egg hunt is organized by members of the NOTL Kinsmen Club, while the school plans the Bunny Trail, which includes a bake sale, children's activities, Easter photo booth and the popular Touch a Truck.

It will be held Saturday, April 8, from 9 to 11:30 a.m., with the egg hunt starting at 10 sharp. Cost is \$5 per child and \$15 for three or more kids.

"As a not-for-profit, we rely greatly on our fundraisers each year, from this need the Bunny Trail was born nearly 30 years ago," said executive director Candice Penny.

"Every year our fundraising committee puts in an incredible effort to organize a fun family event that helps our school raise funds for much-needed classroom resources," she said in an announcement.

"The Bunny Trail has

become a much-beloved annual tradition for our community," she added.

The Easter event kicks off what will be a year of celebration for staff, students and the community as the school marks 50 years of operating.

The Lake Report published a series of stories about the school's half-century last fall.

"With the nursery school's expansion opening during the height of COVID, the staff and students are looking forward to what the 2023 year will bring," said Penny.

The pandemic delayed the school's 50th anniversary, but "with life getting back to 'normal' we are looking forward to finally marking this momentous occasion properly," Penny said.

All money raised by the Bunny Trail and all future fundraisers goes back directly into programs and educational resources, such as updated tablets for the school's classrooms and equipment for its three playground spaces.

For more information on the Bunny Trail, see the school's website at niaganurseryschool.ca. The school also welcomes cash sponsorships from residents or businesses. Email niaganurserydirector2@gmail.com to make arrangements.



Kids will be running to get their hands on Easter eggs during the Niagara Nursery School's popular Bunny Trail celebration on April 8. FILE/DAVE VAN DE LAAR

THE MONUMENTS MEN

James Wilmott survived first German gas attack

It's been a century since Niagara-on-the-Lake's iconic clock tower cenotaph was erected. Then, in 1926, the Township of Niagara unveiled its own memorial in Queenston. In recognition of those who fought and died in two world wars and beyond, NOTL historian Ron Dale has been researching the stories of the people – all men – whose names are engraved on the two cenotaphs. This is one in a series of stories documenting and remembering the sacrifices of those commemorated on the municipal memorial in Queenston.

Ron Dale
Special to The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum preserves thousands of artifacts related to local history going back thousands of years. It is an amazing collection.

Among the items preserved and catalogued are two medals from the First World War, issued posthumously to James William Wilmott. He was a private in the British Army, serving in the 1st Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment.

James Wilmott was born on Sept. 27, 1885, in London, England, one of several children of labourer George Charles Wilmott and his wife Maria Fossey.

Sadly, Maria died in 1896,

leaving George with four young children, including 13-year-old James and his five-year-old brother Arthur. George was unable to care for these children and they were placed in workhouses. He lived until 1932 but does not seem to have reconnected with his children.

In 1866, philanthropist Thomas John Barnardo founded the National Incorporated Association for the Reclamation of Destitute Waif Children. Barnardo set out to aid and assist destitute and orphaned children by shipping them to Canada to work as indentured farm labourers or domestic servants.

One of these "Bernardo Boys," Arthur Wilmott, was shipped to Canada by the Barnardo organization in the spring of 1904. The 13-year-old boy was sent to a fruit farm in Niagara Township to work as a labourer. He received room and board and a modest pay for his labours.

In 1910, his brother James joined him in Canada. James was 24 at the time and was supervising a great number of young teenaged "Bernardo Boys" being shipped to Canada aboard the SS Sicilian. Presumably he was now an employee of the Barnardo organization.

James and Arthur seemed to have done well. By 1913 the brothers owned a little

over 14 acres of orchard in Niagara Township.

When the First World War broke out in August 1914, James immediately felt the call of "King and Country" and the need to enlist to defend his mother country.

While many other relatively recent immigrants from Britain enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, James took a different route. He sailed to England and joined the Royal Army there.

He enlisted in the 1st Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment and after a relatively short training period was sent to the continent to join the small British Expeditionary Force, which was assisting the French in trying to stem the tide of a major German invasion.

The British Expeditionary Force was small in numbers. Britain put most of its spending on defence toward the Royal Navy and little toward the Royal Army.

German Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany referred to them in August 1914 as "a contemptible little army." The soldiers adopted this as a badge and referred to the men who fought in 1914 until 1915 as the "Old Contemptibles."

A medal was struck to honour these men, the "1914-15 Star," known by the soldiers as the "Mons Star" due to the heroics of the British Expeditionary

Force on the retreat from Mons in 1914. A Mons Star was cast for James Wilmott, with his name, unit and regimental number engraved on the back.

He fought in the Second Battle of Ypres, April 22 to May 25, 1915, which where the Germans first used poison gas as a weapon. The casualties on both sides were extremely heavy.

In a major phase of this month-long battle at Aubers Ridge on May 9, the East Lancashire regiment suffered 449 casualties.

Wilmott survived these bloody actions but was killed in "No Man's Land" during a British assault on the German trenches on May 12, 1915.

His body was never identified and his final resting spot remains unknown. His name is engraved on the Menin Gate in Ypres along with 34,983 Commonwealth soldiers whose graves are "known only to God."

James Wilmott's effects were shipped to his brother Arthur in Niagara, his sole legatee. Arthur ensured that James Wilmott's name was included on the Township War Memorial in Queenston.

The Victory medal and war medal belonging to James were donated to the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum by the estate of the late Dorothy Webb of Niagara Falls. The location of his Mons Star is unknown.



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8.85% tax increase so far, if budget approved

Continued from Front Page

no expense to the taxpayer, town treasurer Kyle Freeborn said in an interview.

Capital expenditures were originally sitting at \$9,955,042, but council voted to remove three items after hearing suggestions from Coun. Nick Ruller.

Ruller said the town should spend money as “strategically” as possible and suggested to defer some costs, like resurfacing a tennis court in Garrison Village, a new sidewalk plow and a new truck for bylaw enforcement.

Putting off those expenditures saved \$260,000.

Council voted to defer adopting the operational budget again and is scheduling another meeting for discussions. A date has not been set for that meeting.

The draft operational budget currently shows a 9.8 per cent increase from 2022, with total spending of \$43,883,966.

The major drivers of the increase include a 6.3 per cent increase in inflation, changes to the town’s provincially mandated



Coun. Nick Ruller suggested to defer some costs, like resurfacing a tennis court in Garrison Village, a new sidewalk plow and a new bylaw truck. EVAN LOREE

pension program, rising insurance costs, increased staff salaries and the loss of a one-time reserve transfer of \$672,000.

The town’s regional tax portion is also going up about \$1.2 million for regional transit, Freeborn told councillors.

That’s because the cost of transit was absorbed by the region when it amalgamated

transit systems across Niagara’s 12 municipalities. The transit cost is still in effect paid by the town, but is now calculated as a regional expense.

The town budgeted \$900,000 for public transit in 2022, so the cost is around 250,000 higher when all is said and done.

That cost will be partially funded by the town’s

parking revenues, Freeborn explained, the same as when it was a town expense in 2022.

Multiple councillors expressed confusion over the impact of the new regional transit system on the operational budget.

Freeborn explained that the region would be funding transit through a share of the town’s tax pool to transition the cost over time fully to the region.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said this would have caused an additional seven per cent increase in the town’s taxes if the funding from parking was not present.

The funds from the parking reserve amount to about \$1 million, Freeborn told council.

Transit wasn’t the only operational cost up for discussion.

Council also debated how much it would allocate to the NOTL Library.

Wayne Scott, who sits on the library’s board, asked council to find \$840,000, an increase of \$54,000 from 2022.

Council settled on a new allocation of about \$822,000 for the library.

Fines increase as speed increases, region says

Continued from Front Page

David’s Public School.

The system uses a camera and a speed measuring device to capture “an image of any vehicle travelling over the posted speed limit,” Fraser said.

Once the image is obtained it is reviewed at a centre in Toronto by a provincial offences officer.

Regional spokesperson Janet Rose said officers “will not automatically charge drivers who are driving at or near the posted speed limit.”

So how much faster than the posted limit do drivers have to be going before they get an automated ticket?

The threshold speeds at which the system will trigger a fine “is not disclosed to the public,” Rose said by email.

“Driving at or below the posted limit will ensure a

ticket is not issued,” she added.

The ticket is issued to the registered owner of the vehicle’s licence plate, she added, because there’s no way to know exactly who was driving.

NOTL regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser told the town council Tuesday night that the region will be sharing four of these cameras among the 13 community safety zones.

“There’s no data yet to provide where the region might end up focusing them on,” Kaiser said.

“It doesn’t mean that they’ll be there permanently, nor that they’re going to be there all year round,” she said.

As the region collects more data on the effectiveness of the cameras, it will determine which community safety zones need them most, she said.

Speeders can be fined at

double the normal rate if they’re caught in community safety zones, the region’s website said.

But unlike with police-issued tickets, the automated system does not issue demerit points to drivers, Fraser noted.

The province of Ontario charges fines at incrementally higher rates depending on the severity of the infraction in non-safety zones.

A person caught driving up to 20 km/h over the posted limit can be charged \$3 for every kilometre over the limit.

Drivers caught exceeding the limit by 20 to 30 km/h can be fined \$4.50 per kilometre.

And if you’re caught driving 30 to 50 km/h over the limit, expect to pay a penalty of \$7 per kilometre. Anyone doing exceeding the limit by 50 km/h or more will be slapped with a fine of \$9.75 per km/h.

For example, someone driving at 80 km/h in a 40 zone will be fined \$280.

In a community safety zone, that jumps to \$560.

The region will set up large warning signs in the community safety zones to inform drivers that speed cameras will be installed.

The warning signs will be up for 90 days after which the region will activate the speed cameras, said Fraser.

The signs will also be displayed whenever the cameras are active.

The region is spending \$31,000 to “prepare each site” for the cameras and another \$134 per day to operate them.

The automated ticketing program is designed to run “on a cost-recovery basis,” Fraser said.

This means by the end of the year, the region should bring in enough revenue to cover the cost of running them.



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Contributed by Patty Garriock

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- Jerome K. Jerome

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A rainy Saturday



People with umbrellas shuffle under the marquee at the Royal George Theatre on Saturday, trying to stay dry. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



Editorial

Important questions for NOTL's councillors

Kevin MacLean
Richard Harley
Editors

A week ago now, we reported in great detail about an incident in which Niagara-on-the-Lake developer Benny Marotta gave Coun. Gary Burroughs an envelope containing \$10,000 in cash.

After Burroughs reported the exchange to the town, council asked for investigations by police and the town's integrity commissioner. This is a serious issue and we will leave it to those investigators to get to the bottom of it.

However, in the wake of The Lake Report's story, it is odd and disconcerting that no other media organization anywhere in Niagara (not just NOTL) chose to report the details. That is worrisome, because if we had not reported it, would anyone know it happened?

As happens nowadays when a serious issue makes the news, all manner of comment and speculation runs rampant.

That aside, in response to queries from readers and the community, last Saturday we put a series of questions to all of NOTL's elected

municipal representatives.

While these questions were spurred by the exchange between Marotta and Burroughs, they are definitely not about that encounter.

Here is an abbreviated version of the message sent in writing to your council representatives:

In response to The Lake Report's story, there has been a great deal of talk in the community, on social media and elsewhere. There also has been a lot of innuendo, nastiness and speculation, unfortunately.

As public servants, elected by the community to serve the best interests of the people of Niagara-on-the-Lake, we expect that you would want to clear the air.

So, we are contacting each councillor with a series of simple but relevant questions. We emphasize that these questions have nothing to do with any pending investigations sought by council. Those investigations are an entirely different issue.

We are giving you each a public forum to briefly describe your interactions and relationships as council members.

This an attempt to provide the community with accurate information and give council members a platform for transparency, accountability and openness – about all councillors' relationships and business dealings (if any) with people, companies and institutions in NOTL.

It is a chance for each of you to go on the record regarding any interactions or relationships you might have had with people having business before the Town of NOTL, including but not at all limited to Mr. Marotta.

Like ourselves and everyone else in a small town like NOTL, every elected official has friends in town. Some of them do business with or have business before the town, some could be developers, some could be citizen groups opposed to certain developments etc.

We are NOT looking for skeletons in anyone's closet. We simply want to give readers and the community some honest and forthright information – from you.

We will publish everyone's answers in The Lake Report. If you decline or

choose not to answer, we will report that.

Do you have a personal, private or business relationship with anyone or any company that has or may have business before the Town of NOTL? Please provide details, briefly.

Have you ever met privately with any person (including developers) having business with the Town of NOTL, discussed town matters with them in a venue other than a council or committee meeting? Who and why?

In your time as a councillor, have you ever declared a conflict of interest due to a personal, business or professional relationship you have with anyone or any company that has or may have business before the Town of NOTL? Please provide details, briefly.

Is there anything else that residents of NOTL should know about any of your interactions or relationships in your capacity as an elected member of council?

We have asked for responses in writing by this Friday at noon and will let readers know what your elected representatives have to say about these important issues.

Correction: An article in last week's paper said that Benny Marotta and his companies own the Old Winery restaurant on Niagara Stone Road. In fact, Marotta owns the building, but not the business.

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Burroughs has shown he **deserves our trust**



Coun. Gary Burroughs.

Dear editor:
Regarding your story, "NOTL asks OPP to investigate after developer gave \$10,000 to town councillor," (The Lake Report, March 23), one must leave it to the police and prosecutors to determine the motives of a developer in tucking \$10,000 in cash into an envelope and giving it to one of our elected officials and telling him to open it when he got home.

However, one thing that is perfectly clear is the sterling ethical character of Coun. Gary Burroughs. He has served our community faithfully over the past quarter-century as lord mayor, regional councillor and now town councillor. He deserves our thanks for his faithful service. Now, in addition to that appreciation, he has demonstrated that he deserves our trust due to the way he

has handled being placed in this unwanted position. As such, who can deny that Mr. Burroughs will do the right thing and faithfully exercise his duties and discretion without bias in sitting on the municipal heritage committee and helping the town decide the disposition of Benny Marotta's proposals for the Rand Estate and Parliament Oak applications?
Bob Bader
NOTL

NOTL must take **planning fight** to tribunal

Dear editor:
I am writing in response to your gloomy article, "In-depth: How new Ontario law curtails town's power over development," (The Lake Report, Feb. 23). It cited the probability of our Niagara-on-the-Lake council losing control of planning protections due to Bill 23, which would, if realized, cast a pall over long-held hopes of residents and 50 years of town planning to protect "the home of early Canadian history" that people from across the country and around the world come to see, learn

about, enjoy and respect. Then in a most welcome contrast, your March 9 edition featured an op-ed article ("Bill 23 doesn't curtail town's say on development,") by Niagara Foundation president Lyle Hall, who clearly pointed out the misconceptions in the earlier article. More importantly, he challenged town council and NOTL planning staff to use all the planning tools at their disposal to fight, and possibly win, at an Ontario Land Tribunal hearing. With this in mind, surely our lord mayor and council

will rise to the occasion and turn down the precedent-setting four-storey King Street hotel and Mary Street condo development proposals. After all, Ontario politicians, planners and the public know a crucial provincial aim is affordable housing, not hotels and high-end condominiums. As well, Region of Niagara planners have stated several times over the past three years that they are counting on the well-planned Glendale community to provide for housing – including apartments – to substantially fill Niagara-on-the-Lake's

projected 16,000 population increase to 2051. For NOTL council to champion this view and win at the Ontario Land Tribunal would be a setback for local developers who are hoping to cash in on the supposed Bill 23 open door. But far more importantly, it would be a win-win situation for those all across Niagara-on-the-Lake who care about history, environment, tourism, jobs and community spirit.
Gracia Janes
President
Niagara-on-the-Lake Conservancy



An **AI poem** about Niagara-on-the-Lake

An original poem created by artificial intelligence platform ChatGPT and directed by NOTL resident Bruce Gitelman.

In Niagara-on-the-Lake, the winter's cold embrace
Held firm, with icy grip and snowy face
But as the days grew longer, the sun shone bright
And slowly but surely, the ice began to take flight
The snowmen and snowflakes began to melt away
As the world around us slowly began to sway
And soon the trees began to bud, the flowers to bloom
As spring arrived, bringing with it hope and room
For summer, with all its warmth and light

The days growing longer, the world a delight
In Niagara-on-the-Lake, the promise of fun
Is just around the corner, waiting to be begun
The wine will flow, the gardens will grow
The laughter and joy will overflow
As we bask in the warmth of the summer sun
Our hearts filled with hope, our spirits undone
So let us welcome the change of the season
With open arms, and hearts filled with reason
For in Niagara-on-the-Lake, we know
That winter may come and go,
but spring and summer will always show.

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Our history lost – more examples that **make me wonder**



Brian Marshall
Columnist

There is no doubt that I am obsessive-compulsive. In the past, when engaged in a particular project or research, it was not uncommon for me to sit down in my office and engage in 48-hour (or longer) work marathons.

My long-suffering partner has often stated that anything outside my current focus simply ceases to register in my conscious mind, that we could experience an earthquake and I would not notice.

And, she's not exaggerating.

However, in recent weeks I have been involved with a terrific group of Niagara-on-the-Lake volunteers who are helping to compile a complete catalogue of our town's surviving 19th- and early 20th-century houses and two photos taken of important historic buildings brought them sharply back into my focus.

The sad thing is, each

of these houses has been written about in past Archi-text columns.

Locust Grove on Hunter Road was one of the earliest manor houses constructed in this town and it has had a tumultuous history.

Erected circa 1782, it was burned during the War of 1812 and rebuilt on the original foundation in 1820. Two additional fires, one in 1904 and a second in 1934, consumed the second floor.

Its owners (due, I suspect, to financial constraints) elected not to fully restore the upper level but instead abbreviated it to a half-storey loft dormitory.

By the last quarter of the 20th century, the house was in a sad and sorry condition, apparently destined for the dustbin of history. Then, in 1996, it was purchased by Jens Ramputh, who committed the next 20 years of his life to completely restoring the home to its 19th Century glory.

Working from a late 19th-century photo and other period documents, Mr. Ramputh slowly brought the building back. He restored the full second storey, searched internationally for period elements and materials that were utilized to reproduce every part of the house.

In 2016, the fully restored home was heritage designated under Part IV and Mr. Ramputh's efforts were



Locust Grove in 2018, left, versus 2023, after the assault to its historical features. BRIAN MARSHALL



recognized by the town by presenting him the 2015 Peter Stokes Award for restoration.

It seemed that this beautifully restored piece of Niagara-on-the-Lake history would be safe for future generations to enjoy ... but not so much.

You see, the property was sold in 2017, and, over the past three years has suffered several assaults to its historical integrity. The period-accurate windows, glazed with historic glass, have been replaced by inappropriate modern units.

Both its front and second-floor doors and fanlights have been removed and, in their place installed a sad, modern round-topped unit. Even the three-panel trim on the grand two-storey porch statement, which Mr. Ramputh had carefully scaled to maintain the vertical lines established by the columns, is being altered to break this sym-

metry by introducing four panels ...

How did this happen?

All of the aforementioned alterations (not to mention the new addition) should have required a heritage permit to proceed. Were such permits issued and, if so, what possible justifications could have underwritten the permits? And, if the permits were not issued, why was the alteration work not immediately halted?

In either case, in my opinion, the system has failed Locust Grove.

Now, we need to move over to St. Davids and visit one of the few NOTL survivors of the War of 1812 – the David Secord House at 46 Paxton Lane.

Built in 1799 by the man who gave his name to the Village, it is remarkable that over the span of 209 years (between 1799 and 2008), only three families held the property title: the

Secords, the Hanniwells and the Paxtons. But it is now owned by a developer.

I first raised concern over the condition and future of this old soldier in 2018 and repeated that concern in three other columns in the interim.

Bluntly, since 2018, the building's condition has not only continued to deteriorate, that process has actually accelerated as the weather gains more and more access to its structural integrity.

Folks, this historic house, which has been part of the warp and weave of Niagara-on-the-Lake for 224 years, is crumbling away in front of our eyes.

This is something I have seen developers do all over North America. They have no desire to invest in a restoration and no connection to heritage of place so they simply ignore the heritage building and allow time, rather than a wreck-

ing ball, to do the demolition. It's called demolition by neglect.

But wait, doesn't the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake have a demolition by neglect bylaw?

Yes, it does and it's been in place since 2019.

This then begs the question: if the necessary legal authority is in place, why is this authority not exercised?

Is it a choice by staff or council or both?

Or possibly, the bylaw may lack sufficient enforcement "teeth" to actually be effective.

In either of these cases, it seems that the political will to address the issues is absent. And without that "will," we will continue to lose our irreplaceable heritage.

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



Unintended consequences of privatizing health care

Dear editor:

There has been considerable recent correspondence in The Lake Report regarding our health care system.

Let me deal first with letter writer Richard Wright's concern when his brother-in-law was charged for an iron infusion, "Liberals, NDP need to act to stop privatized health care," (March 16).

A number of medical items are deemed "uninsured services" by the provincial government, e.g. if a physician has to send a letter to an insurance company on behalf of a patient.

It is incumbent on the physician to make it clear

in advance what services are not covered.

The Ontario Medical Association has provided to physicians a list of charges that it feels are appropriate for such services.

If a patient feels they have been charged for a service that should have been covered by OHIP, they should call the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and explain the circumstances.

If the college feels this was inappropriate, the patient should lodge a complaint. The college is then obliged to investigate.

Believe me, no physician wants to get a letter from the

college – "Dear Dr.: A complaint has been made ..."

The thorny issue of private health care is more complicated.

Brian Crow put it well in his March 23 letter, ("We already have a long list of private health care providers.") by pointing out that virtually all medical services outside hospitals are in the private domain.

Physicians are self-employed, for-profit contractors. They pay for their staff, equipment and rent (to for-profit corporations that own the office building).

The fee for providing each service to the patient

is set by the government. The "profit," when all these expenses are paid, is the physician's remuneration.

All too often the administrative and financial burden of running an office with no ability to take a holiday (unpaid) is too much and family doctors simply quit.

Many opt to join a walk-in clinic or go on an emergency room rotation at the local hospital where the overhead is much lower and when your shift is over you're free.

The government did have plans to create family health teams where nurse practitioners, dietitians,

physiotherapists and mental health counsellors were provided to groups of family doctors to help spread the burden.

But this has now been abandoned in many areas, which is a scandal.

Private hospitals providing services such as hip and knee surgery simply siphon off staff from regular hospitals, leaving them with the "difficult stuff" – cancer care, ER and ICU staffing.

Of course, God forbid, if you should have a heart attack or other serious complication after the hip operation in the private facility you'll end up in the

ER at your local hospital putting even more burden on its resources.

It would be far cheaper to increase funding to hospitals to allow their operating rooms to run seven days a week to decrease waiting times but I suspect staffing may be an issue, as it will be in private facilities.

As for nurses becoming millionaires in these clinics – not likely. If they want to maximize their profits, the clinics will try to pay the nurses a pittance.

We always seem to forget about the law of unintended consequences.

*Dr. Richard James
NOTL*



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Chautauqua's character is **under threat** from development

Victor Tarnoy
Special to The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake has a rich heritage and our most famous streetscapes are special thanks to the heritage buildings and the ancient trees.

A lesser-known heritage feature of NOTL is the radial plan of the avenues in the Chautauqua neighbourhood.

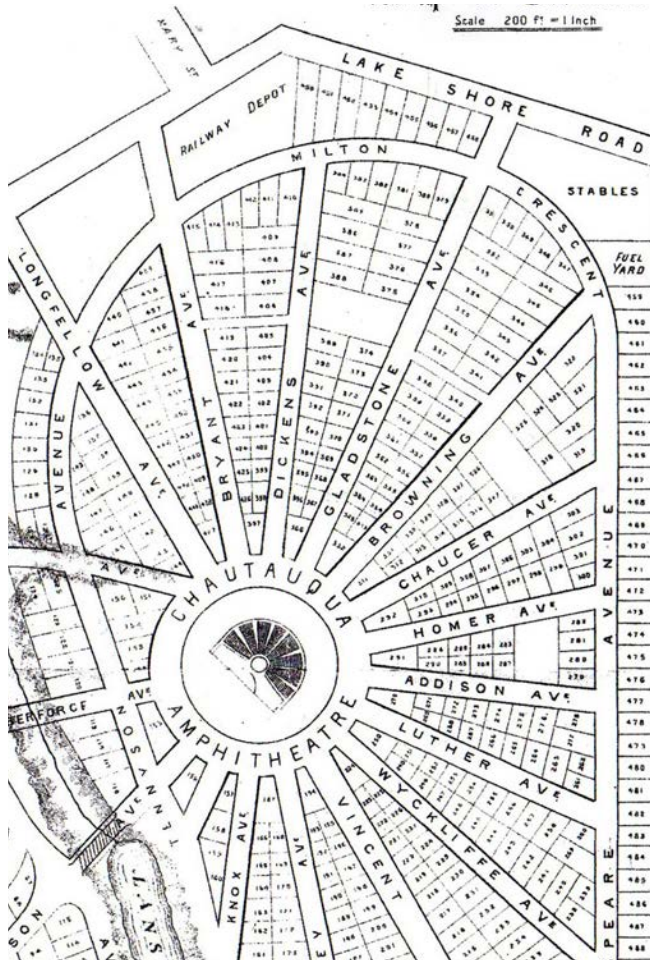
Radial street plans are quite rare and Chautauqua's original layout and subdivision of properties, published in 1886, was based on a radial plan for the entire development. It was a truly unique experiment in urban planning.

Chautauqua was not planned with streets and roads, but with avenues.

Derived from the Latin word "venire," it emphasizes the "coming to" or arrival at a landscape or architectural feature.

Chautauqua's radial plan focused on the Circle, where a 3,000-seat amphitheatre was built.

However, the feature that truly makes the original plan of 1886 different is that each avenue offered build-



An 1886 plan for Chautauqua. SUPPLIED

ing lots that varied greatly in size and aspect. This encouraged a wide variety of house styles and budgets.

This was a Victorian social experiment to create a diverse and inclusive com-

munity.

The radial design celebrated the reality that not everyone had the same needs and desires – but could live in the same neighbourhood.

Small houses built on small lots, large houses were built on large lots on the same street, sharing the same amenities.

Instead of encouraging uniformity and exclusion, it was an invitation to be different and inclusive.

Thomas More's book "Utopia" (1516) introduced the idea of a perfect world, where planning and architecture were instrumental in the betterment of society as a whole.

The radial plan was an idealistic concept of perfection and unity, hoping to provide a solution to the terrible mayhem of early urban centres.

The avenues of Chautauqua were laid out with a commitment to the Utopian ideal that the plan itself would encourage a diverse and inclusive community.

The radial plan encouraged a wide variety of house styles, sizes and budgets, promoting inclusivity and diversity – which is exactly what happened in Chautauqua. This was enough for sustainable development of the old avenues, until today.

The powerful symbolism of a centre with streets

radiating from it looks great on paper, but is difficult to resolve in reality.

Unfortunately, our planners have chosen to treat the smaller lots, which are of various shapes and sizes, as if they are uniform-sized lots that are 5,000 square feet in size.

This planning practice is beginning to threaten the oldest and most successful neighbourhood in NOTL.

Chautauqua's planning heritage is valuable and fascinating on many levels. There is ample proof that the original 1886 Chautauqua Heritage Plan is a rare experiment in planning that cannot be found anywhere else.

Today there is only a fraction of this experiment left and it is the avenues of the original 1886 plan that are facing the greatest development pressures.

On smaller lots, new houses are proposed that are outlandishly too big for their properties, their neighbours and the avenues they are on. And these proposals are approved by our very own planning department.

Defying the intent of

the official plan, zoning bylaws and common sense, these incompatible houses threaten both the intentions of the original planners and the qualities that today's residents feel are most valuable.

Certainly, over-sized single-family houses on Chautauqua's teeny-tiny lots do not increase the availability of affordable housing.

Mistakes are not easily undone. A new house that is absolutely too massive for one of Chautauqua's smaller properties sets a precedent and the original intentions of the neighbourhood's heritage plan can be undone for good.

And what for?

Chautauqua is Niagara-on-the-Lake's oldest and largest, most inclusive and diverse neighbourhood.

All of us who come to NOTL and Chautauqua, whether to live or just to visit, must realize the uniqueness and fragility of this place, and our role as stewards.

Victor Tarnoy is a NOTL architect and designer. He lives in the Chautauqua neighbourhood.



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Surely town staffing costs can be explained and simplified



Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson
Columnist

For years when we were unable to understand the finances of a large company or a level of government, my old high school buddies and I would explain away our ineptness by saying, "I'm just a small town greaseball from the Garden City of St. Catharines. I'll have another beer, please."

Frighteningly, one of us even rose to the lofty business card of senior deputy governor of the Bank of Canada. He signed our folding banknotes for about 10 years, which was very cool for his S.W.C. pals.

In about 2006, he tried his level best, using no words over six letters long, to explain to me how the central banks set the U.S. dollar exchange rate.

He slipped in the phrase "international monetary trilemma" and that did me in. I have since been content to be known as an economic doofus.

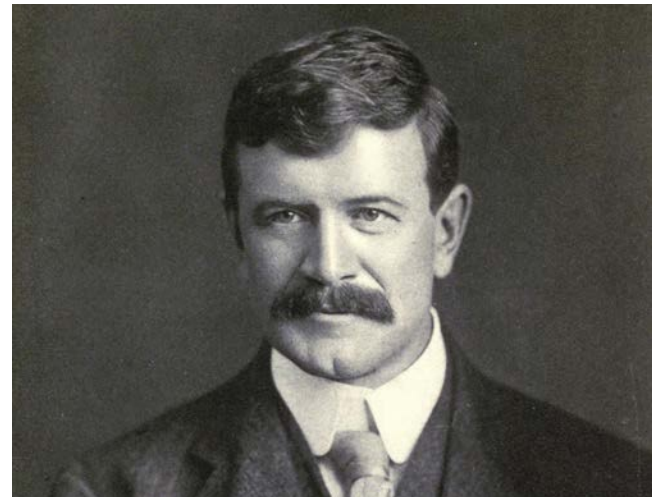
Not too many years ago, I watched in wonder as the world economic wizards bailed out Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. How had they tricked the wise world bankers for so many years, at so many costly summit meetings?

In their countries, not many people were doing much work and not many people were paying income taxes. It was simple. The banking czars talked billions and trillions like they understood the problems.

At the same time, these countries known as the PIGS were all in the soccer World Cup semifinals, taking to the field like so many sporting peacocks, preening in their effulgent and stretchy uniforms. Diving with apparent impunity.

Which brings me to the weighty issue of a story last week in The Lake Report, a headline on Page 10 read, "Town of NOTL proposing to hire 16 new staffers for 2023."

To spend almost \$900,000 on these new town workers. Plus soft costs and



Ross's idol, Stephen Leacock. WIKIPEDIA

benefits, which quickly could bump the number over \$1 million.

Now, I try to think a bit like my role model Stephen Leacock over in Mariposa on the shore of Lake Couchiching. He was never mean or sarcastic. He looked for something absurd and poked fun at it. With a message, eh?

In the past year, I have had to bite my tongue several times and not ramble about million-dollar spills in ditches, or big money, multi-month public works projects (how ya doing with the new culvert at Simcoe and Johnson streets?)

Wouldn't one of them three-foot pre-cast concrete pipes have been suitable and able to be finished in a month or two?

OK, we'll give you three months. How about those ribbed aluminum pipes our farmer friends have successfully used to move water for so long.

Back now to the proposed 16 happy new staffers. Thankfully, some of the proposed positions were not approved, but they all were under serious consideration.

Hey, I have been up front and admitted I don't understand all this public sector stuff. I read the article a second time and cherry-picked a few new job titles.

My antediluvian attitudes to town staffing and costs force me to grimace at some of the job names. Asset management co-ordinator, legislative committee co-ordinator, climate change co-ordinator (apparently every other small town in Niagara has one, so it must be necessary?) mayoral assistant, programming specialist for parks and recreation, digital records co-ordinator, and I'm not kidding you, a landscape worker to service Victoria Street.

I admit to not understanding the game, but

please, say it ain't so. This is 18,000-strong NOTL, not even Milton or Orangeville.

Since I am admittedly treading on new soil, I will not even mention my shock at the salaries recommended by town staff for their new colleagues. The new communications co-ordinator would be paid "about \$92,000" and the legislative committee co-ordinator about \$52,000.

Again, plus office space and other soft costs. Yikes, more dashing red vehicles on our roads.

I have talked to a few people who seem to understand this issue and I realize that it is not all "cash out the door." There are government grants, deferrals, bogies, accruals and more. And no town can hire too many consultants.

Years ago, I read a book about the U.S. military. Yes, the Founding Fathers wanted to have influence and power around the world. But further, these intellectual giants also wanted to create the world's greatest and most sustainable make-work project.

Now, in war time or in peace time, the entire American economy rolls along, with millions of military personnel, and many more millions of support folk supporting the military bases.

Tailors, printers, farmers, cooks (I was one, for six months, supporting Operation Deep Freeze in Christchurch, New Zealand) and countless other civilian jobs. In 1973, at that faraway base, the U.S. and seven other counties were doing research in Antarctica. There were 400 military personnel and some 300 of us in support.

It may be a huge and rambling stretch to discuss the U.S. military and our Town of NOTL staff in the same column, but I asked then and I ask now, "Who is paying for this?"

Everyone's a naturalist at Niagara College's BioBlitz



Keeping it Green 

Kyra Simone
Columnist

This spring, anyone with an interest in nature and the outdoors is invited to participate in the annual Niagara College BioBlitz. The one-day "scavenger hunt" on April 15 promises fun and food while participants contribute important data about local ecosystems.

When we think of the word "naturalist," we might think of the historical vocation: an explorer who documented the weird and wonderful things they found in nature.

Today, some curious minds do continue this practice, by keeping notebooks with detailed sketches and observations.

At the same time, modern technology has broadened our definition of "naturalist" and opened the door to anyone willing to step into these adventurous shoes (or more likely, hiking boots).

Smartphones now allow us to catalogue species in a similar way by recording images, locations and physical traits of species, and

even sharing and cross-referencing notes with others.

Many organizations host an annual BioBlitz, which is a short-term, dedicated effort to observe and document as many species as possible in a given area.

The upcoming Niagara College BioBlitz is a chance for our community to learn about wildlife in our own backyard from local guides who are excited to share their knowledge.

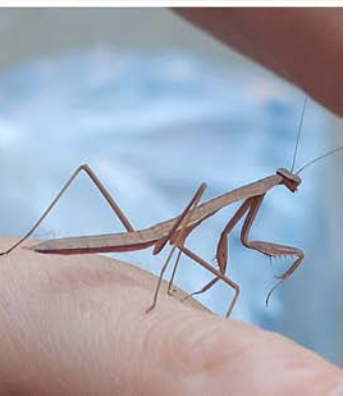
Such events provide an opportunity for anyone interested to become a naturalist: to actively contribute to scientific research and help protect the environment in their region.

Because BioBlitzes focus on local ecosystems, all data collected provides valuable details for environmental managers.

For example, the information can be used to track changes in population sizes or species distribution, and even indicate areas that would benefit from conservation efforts.

Participants will use iNaturalist, a platform and app that connects enthusiasts, researchers and naturalists alike, and allows people with different expertise to "consult" on species sightings. This makes it possible for absolutely anyone to take part.

You might have no idea what species you're looking at, but by taking a picture and uploading it to iNaturalist, other experts around the world will chime in to help.



Top row, from left: Turkey tail mushrooms, leopard slug, northern clearwater crayfish, mossy rose gall wasp. Bottom row: turfgrass slime mold, rocket moth pupa, black-legged meadow katydid, juvenile mantis. KYRA SIMONE

This also makes sure the data are cross-checked and validated.

The photo collage here shows a few observations of Niagara species I contributed to iNaturalist over the last year. I discovered a purple bean-like growth on blades of grass, which turned out to be a slime mold (*Physarum cinereum*).

I kept a bright blue cocoon from a locally grown potato and watched it transform into a moth a few days later.

A weird moss-like growth on a rose plant is caused by a wasp laying eggs in

the stem – the plant grows tendrils in response to the irritation.

I also stumbled across an invasive leopard slug, a species about four inches long, that has been introduced from Europe.

The April BioBlitz will be an eye-opening chance to see tiny life forms that you might never have noticed before. You might even spot larger animals, like muskrats or great horned owls.

In the past, on the Niagara College campus, community scientists have come across these species, as well as American giant milli-

pedes and even fungi called "green cheese polypores" and "chocolate tube slime."

It's remarkable what you can discover when you look closely.

Everyone is free to show up at any time from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. and stay as long as you like. Niagara College does, however, require registration in advance to be able to provide sufficient food around lunch time.

You can sign up either as a participant or expert (for individuals confident in their knowledge and willing to lead hikes) at niagaracollege.ca/sustainability/stu-

dents/bioblitz.

Pets must be left at home so they don't reduce potential sightings by scaring off wildlife.

Come out on April 15 to learn about the local environment and contribute data that will help protect the species that live alongside us in Niagara.

Kyra Simone is a PhD student in environmental science, with master's degrees in biology and science communication. When not researching climate change, she advocates for a sustainable future, picks up litter and makes recycled jewelry.

Budget and hiring focus should be on existing programs: Ruller

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report



Coun. Nick Ruller.

Of all the new positions the town was considering in the 2023 budget, a climate change co-ordinator is no longer one of them.

Town staff initially included the position in their draft of the budget proposal, evaluating it at about \$54,000.

Council voted to defer the expense until next year despite pressure from Coun. Sandra O'Connor to include it and acknowledgments around the table that the town needed to do more to address climate change.

"I can't believe where the priorities are," O'Connor told the budget review committee last week.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa called the comment

flooding risks, O'Connor said.

"I see this as a very high priority linked with the other two planning positions" the town was considering, she added.

Others argued there was greater need elsewhere.

"I'm not supportive of proceeding with this," Coun. Nick Ruller said.

"I have concerns that we aren't funding existing initiatives adequately and we're looking to add positions to better support other initiatives," he said.

"We need to support existing programs."

Asked if staff could meet the responsibilities of the proposed position without hiring someone new, Cluckie said, "It will be a challenge" though "perhaps not impossible."

"We are behind on our

legislative requirements related to energy conservation," she added.

"That is because there is no person here available to do the work."

Coun. Erwin Wiens was on the fence.

"I knew this was going to happen the second we declared a climate emergency," he said.

After declaring an environmental emergency people start asking, "What are you doing about it?" Wiens said.

Declaring an emergency on the matter was "symbolic only," he said.

Still he had trouble squaring his view with pressures from the province.

"At the provincial level, every question revolves around 'What are you doing about the environment?'" he said.

"I'm talking out of both sides of my mouth," he added, "But that's the conundrum I'm in."

Coun. Maria Mavridis said she was worried that if approved, they may have to hire a whole team next year to support the climate change co-ordinator.

"Which positions do we cut out of this list so that we're being financially responsible to the taxpayer," she asked.

Earlier, Coun. Tim Balasiuk acknowledged the need for a climate change co-ordinator but argued it would be better to allocate those funds to more planning staff.

Cluckie said the position could be contracted out in the meantime but that it was becoming harder to secure contractors to fill positions. She also said the position

was a "good candidate" for grant funding.

O'Connor was not convinced.

"The province is asking us, 'Do we have this, are we doing this?'" O'Connor said. "We need this position."

She added that the role of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority has been reduced by the province and that the region also has limited resources when it comes to environmental regulation.

"If we don't pick it up, no one will," she said.

Balasiuk raised the motion to cut the position from the budget until next year.

It passed with Couns. Balasiuk, Wendy Cheropita, Mavridis, Ruller and Adrianna Vizzari in favour.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa was not present for the vote.

Alarm raised about **accessibility** to stores on Queen St.

Continued from Front Page

step is the barrier. In fact, Turner Smith found that to be the case at half of those 60 retailers.

“A single step is a closed door,” she said.

In some cases, the solution is more complicated. Customers need to climb more than one step to enter some popular spots, including Balzac’s Coffee Roasters, Greaves Jams and Corks Restaurant, to name a few.

Last June, Turner Smith sent a letter to the town and to NOTL council outlining her frustration with accessibility on Queen Street.

“The mayor and the council (were) all about access and inclusion. This is the time for action. It’s the right thing to do,” said Turner Smith.

She also sent her letter to the new council and received a written response from Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa expressing his support.

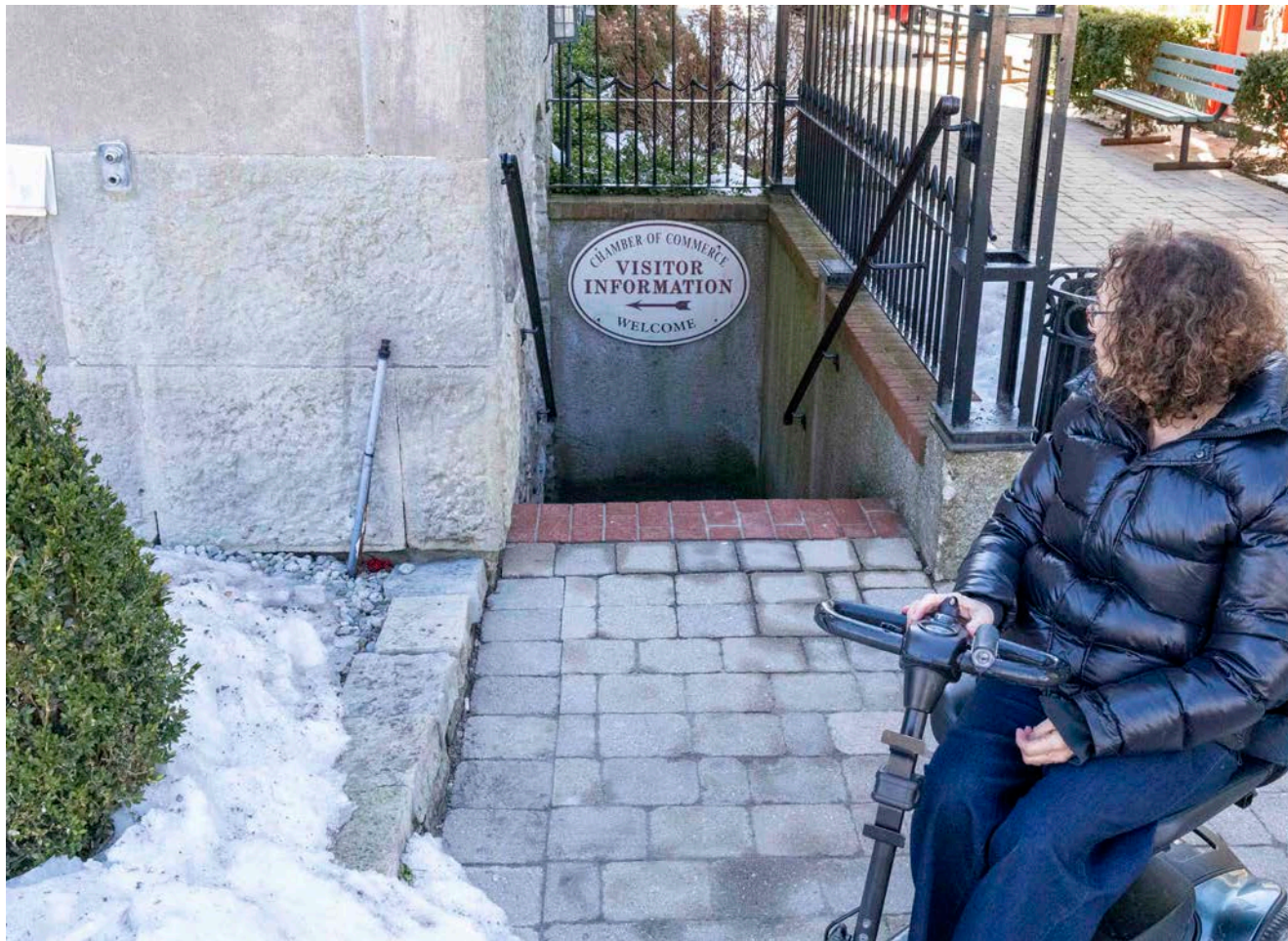
In her letter, she “offered an immediate solution that was low-cost and high impact,” she said.

She introduced StopGap, a Toronto-based foundation that makes portable ramps to allow people with mobility issues to enter any store that has a single step at the entrance.

The StopGap costs \$280 to \$460, a small price for something with such an enormous impact.

To bring StopGap to stores that need it along Queen Street would cost no more than \$15,000, Turner Smith said.

“It will increase revenues because it’s throwing open the door to all of those tourists and residents like



The NOTL Chamber of Commerce is difficult to access for people who are mobility impaired. SOMER SLOBODIAN

me that have not been able to go in and support them,” she said.

The ramp could be an affordable option for a historic or heritage building.

In 2017, about 6.2 million (22 per cent) of Canadians aged 15 and older had a disability, says Statistics Canada.

And according to the World Health Organization, about 16 per cent of the world’s population lives with some form of disability.

Niagara-on-the-Lake expects more than three million visitors annually, bringing in revenue of about \$648 million, according to the town’s website.

About 65 per cent of that number comes from domestic tourists while 35 per cent

is generated by people from other countries.

That revenue potentially could be much higher if more stores were accessible, Turner Smith says.

NOTL Chamber of Commerce president Minerva Ward says tourists have complained about the lack of accessibility along Queen Street.

Even the chamber’s headquarters isn’t “ideal for people with disabilities,” she admitted.

The chamber’s basement office space is accessible through the old Court House, but she’d like the agency to have a space where it’s easily accessible to everyone.

She’d also like to see every store have a removable

ramp if it needs one.

Luke Anderson, co-founder of StopGap, says, “being able to access space is a human right.”

Anderson has used a wheelchair since 2002 when he was injured doing tricks on a bike ramp. He started the StopGap Foundation in 2011.

Last year, he travelled to Niagara-on-the-Lake and described his visit as “horrible, very unpleasant, disappointing (and) frustrating.”

“I think maybe I could get into a quarter of the locations,” he added.

He described NOTL as a “gem” but said it has many barriers that still need to be removed.

Once that happens, he thinks business owners will

see the economic value of having an accessible space.

Turner Smith has been in contact with the town’s chief administrator, Marnie Cluckie, since last summer.

Cluckie said she has been taking steps to address the accessibility problem in Old Town and noted it is the responsibility of individual businesses to make stores more accessible.

“That said, of course, as a town, we’re interested in making sure that we have an inclusive environment and that includes removing any barriers,” she said.

Since a StopGap ramp would be temporary, a retailer wouldn’t need a heritage permit, but would need to consult with the municipal heritage committee, Cluckie

said in an email to The Lake Report.

It would be similar to what businesses need to do with temporary structures like A-frame signs, she said.

“If a program such as the StopGap Foundation program were in place, the town would seek to streamline the process with its partners,” said Cluckie.

The town and the Chamber of Commerce plan to work together to bring accessible options to store owners.

The town has applied to the province’s Seniors Community Grant Program to try to get funding for ramps.

“We hope to be successful as offering free temporary access ramps to local businesses could help support them in their accessibility efforts,” Cluckie said.

Melissa Achal of NEOB Lavender says her storefront in Elora, Ont., had a step out front and the town invested in getting ramps for many of the businesses.

With a new storefront location in downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake, she’d like to see a similar program here.

She also foresees maybe getting together with other businesses to buy the ramps, as long as they don’t pose a tripping hazard or stick too far out onto the sidewalk.

“I would totally be into that,” she said.

Ramps, temporary or permanent, would not only open doors to those with mobility issues, but to new parents with strollers, aging seniors or someone who is injured and using crutches, said Turner Smith.

“There is no person that I have ever encountered that says accessibility is not a good idea,” she said.


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Chris Semple, chair of the Shaw Shivarree organizing committee, works on plans for the April 15 affair. SUPPLIED

Shaw Shivarree features some 'money-can't-buy' auction items

Arlyn Levy
Special to The Lake Report

Seven years ago, Chris Semple attended her first Shaw Shivarree and was hooked.

"It was so much fun and a great way to connect with other NOTL residents invested in the future of the Shaw," she says.

"I decided, then and there, to participate in an even more meaningful way."

Flash forward to today. A group of eager volunteers and members of the Shaw Festival development team sit around Semple's dining room table.

As the 2023 committee chair, she calls the meeting to order and they discuss the finishing touches on the April 15 Shivarree – an event that's not only become seminal to the Shaw, but to the community.

What started 25 years ago as a friendly get-together to raise money has evolved into a large-scale spring ritual.

Charitable revellers come from across Niagara and as far as Toronto for a spirited celebration (it's a shivarree after all), enjoying culinary stations, live music and a silent auction featuring noteworthy items and "money-can't-buy" experiences.

"Our motto is Eat, Drink, Dance and Bid Merry," says Semple. "And that's easy to do when you offer the best of the best."

She's referring to the food – from some of the most popular spots in the area, including Ruffino's Pasta Bar & Grill, Treadwell Cuisine, the Garrison House, Wellington Court, Tide & Vine Oyster House, Yorkshire

Puttling Catering and Niagara Juice Co.

"Then there's wine from Niagara vineyards and beer from Oast House Brewers – all against the backdrop of the George St. Kitts Band. They get people – of all ages – up on their feet."

A highpoint of the Shivarree is the auction, accessible on mobile devices throughout the evening.

Donations from residents and businesses across the region include popular winery, dining and hotel experiences, hard-to-get tickets and local art.

And then there's an element that Semple says sets it apart.

"It's unique because attendees also have a chance to bid on priceless opportunities. From a walk-on part in a Shaw Festival production, to canapes on a yacht,

or a private party for 40, the experiences are truly one-of-a-kind," she says.

The money raised supports NOTL's world-class theatre, which attracts more than 250,000 people each year.

That's why the location (the Jackie Maxwell Studio Theatre) and the date (April 15) are intentional.

"The Shaw Festival is a cultural gem, so we chose a venue that reflects what it's come to mean for audiences – entertainment, ideas and connection," says Semple.

"The timing coincides with the kick-off of another outstanding season, with two productions already in full swing."

Tickets to the Shivarree are \$175 per person and can be purchased at shawfest.com, or by calling the box office at 1-800-511-7429.



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.
Category: SURVIVING PROHIBITION

This brewery bought a Colorado ceramics company & sold porcelain under the brand name; the ceramics co. is worth billions today

Last issue:

Category: 30-SOMETHING

Clue: Sir John Buchan wrote this spy novel that Hitchcock made into a big screen thriller.

Answer: What is 39 Steps?

Answered first by: Margie Enns

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Larry Mantle, Jane Morris, Bob Wheatley, Pam Dowling, Jim Dandy, Wade Durling, Hedy Wiebe, Mac Phillips, Sheila Meloche, Jim Derbyshire, Victor Zilinskas, Elaine Landray, Yvonne DeSouza, Nancy Rocca,

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Huge turnout for NOTL author's book launch **Jazz Collective** launches series at Hare Winery

Somer Slobodian
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Author Diane Martin was in awe of all the people who showed up at the NOTL Community Centre to support the launch of her book last Wednesday night.

"I've had, I'd say, close to 80 people said they were going to come tonight, so if they do that will be really overwhelming," Martin told The Lake Report.

Thirty minutes into the book launch, the room was packed with dozens of supporters, many holding their own copies of Martin's book. "This community is amazing," she said.

Her book, "When Time Stands Still," is the first in a three-volume children's mystery adventure series called the Medallion Mysteries.

The characters are based on her four children, Megan, Nicholas, Brooke and Tanner.

She wrote the first book 16 years ago while she



The room filled up by 7:30 p.m. for Diane Martin's book launch. SOMER SLOBODIAN

was pregnant with one of her sons.

"I sent it out to a bunch of publishing houses, all rejected," she said.

"So I just put it away," she added.

It wasn't until the first lockdown in 2020 that her daughter Brooke suggested she should get back into writing — and eventually, she did.

When she decided to publish it, she took the self-publishing route.

She had lots of help, especially from another NOTL author, Kathryn Recourt.

She saw her featured in a story in The Lake Report, "so I reached out to her and talked to her and she helped me through the process of doing the self-publishing," Martin said.

Recourt said it's hard to produce your own book, but noted it's "even harder to get a publisher."

With three self-published tomes under her belt, she

was more than happy to help Martin on her journey.

Recourt called Martin's book a "good read" with great "twists and turns."

"I gave it to my grandson. He's nearly 10. He loved it," Recourt said.

Martin's next instalment of the Medallion Mysteries comes out in November, with the third one by 2024.

The book can be bought on Amazon and Chapters online, or purchased at One Earth Boutique in Old Town.

Staff
The Lake Report

The Canadian Jazz Collective is kicking off the latest edition of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival's Twilight Jazz & Blues Series at the Hare Winery Co. in Niagara-on-the-Lake on April 3.

The collective is a collaborative group of award-winning jazz artists who came together to celebrate live performance of original Canadian jazz.

The band is fronted by three of Canada's most acclaimed and accomplished jazz musicians: saxophonist Kirk MacDonald, guitarist Lorne Lofsky and trumpeter Derrick Gardner.

Other members include clarinetist Virginia MacDonald, pianist Brian Dickinson, bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Bernd Reiter.

"The idea is to put

together musicians with a similar aesthetic, who approach the music with openness and respectfulness of each other's personalities, and to bring them to the forefront," said MacDonald.

"It's the idea that the whole should be greater than the sum of the parts."

MacDonald, a two-time Juno Award winner and recipient of the Toronto Music Association's Lifetime Achievement Award, is one of the most well-established Canadian musicians of his generation.

Other shows in the series include: April 17: Duncan Hopkins Quartet: A Tribute to Kenny Wheeler, featuring Reg Schwager, Ted Quinlan and Ted Warren; April 30: For International Jazz Day, Juno Award-winning vocalist Caity Gyorgy; May 15: Denielle Bassels Trio; June 5: Bentley Collective, four-piece electric blues.

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sports Wall of Fame honours and recognizes residents who have made a significant contribution to the sporting community or have attained a significant athletic achievement.

Nominations can be submitted in two categories:

- **Athlete** - Must be or have been outstanding in their athletic field of endeavour.
- **Builder** - Trainers, coaches, officials, or executive members who have dedicated significant time to enhancing the Niagara-on-the-Lake sporting community.

The deadline for submissions is **May 5, 2023**. Nomination forms are available on the Town's website, and at the Community Centre (14 Anderson Lane), and the Town Administration Building (1593 Four Mile Creek Road). A Committee selects two individuals to be honoured on the Wall of Fame at the Meridian Credit Union Arena in Virgil. This ceremony will take place in August. Please visit notl.com for more information.

NOTLers meet up in middle of the Atlantic

Staff
The Lake Report

It really is a small world after all. Two Niagara-on-the-Lake couples booked a trans-Atlantic cruise together to Portugal from Aruba aboard Oceana's MS Sirena this month.

It was a two-week repositioning cruise and part way through it, in the middle of the North Atlantic, they discovered some neighbours from NOTL were taking the same trip.

Not just one or two, though. Six other folks from NOTL.

"Pure serendipity," said Tim Taylor, who was aboard with his wife Kathy.

They were travelling with their friends Larry and Joan Bourk, also from NOTL.

"It's a small ship, 600 passengers," said Taylor, who when he's not being Santa for Palliative Care is a frequent feature writer for The Lake Report.



Halfway between Aruba and Portugal, five NOTL couples discovered each other. From left, Larry and Joan Bourk, Dawn and Jim Senyi, Kathy and Tom Birchall, Luba and Warren Fraser, and Kathy and Tim Taylor. SUPPLIED

Word got around quickly that all these other Canadians – also from NOTL – were aboard and in short order, they met up.

Among them were Luba and Warren Fraser, who are neighbours of the Taylors in

the Village neighbourhood.

As well, Dawn and Jim Senyi, and Kathy and Tom Birchall – who both live in St. Davids – had booked passage on the Sirena to Portugal.

Which all seems to

prove the notion that, serendipity aside, it certainly is a small world.

"It's a funny feeling, seeing people you would normally meet at the post office, so far from home," said Taylor.



Barbara Ahluwalia just turned 90. JANICE WHITE

A 90th birthday surprise

Staff
The Lake Report

Friends held a surprise gathering Sunday to celebrate Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Barbara Ahluwalia's 90th birthday.

She has been a prominent community volunteer and organizer for some 50 years.

Among her many other achievements, Ahluwalia was one of the people who helped get the Pumphouse Arts Centre and Newark Neighbours off the ground.

A fine athlete, she's also been a champion tennis player and golfer here in NOTL.

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U18s have arena rocking with **last-second** playoff win

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

The Meridian arena in Niagara-on-the-Lake was rocking Saturday night as the NOTL Wolves U18 rep team staved off elimination in the Niagara District hockey finals.

They'd lost game 1 of their best-of-three series against the Fort Erie Meteors on Thursday, making Saturday a must-win back at home.

Goals by Jack Marotta and Noah Ostromecki, plus another superb goaltending performance by Mateo Grusso, gave NOTL a 2-1 lead heading into the third period.

With less than a minute to play in regulation, Fort Erie called a timeout and then pulled their goaltender for an extra attacker.

It paid off. They tied it at 2-2 with just 45 seconds to go.

But NOTL wasn't finished.

"On the very next shift, a well-placed breakout pass from Reese Gordon found Griffin Dyck streaking up the wing," team trainer Jeff Dyck said afterward.

"Griffin fought off a defender and put the puck over the shoulder of the Fort Erie goaltender to score the winning goal with only nine seconds left in the game, giving NOTL the 3-2 win."

"The atmosphere in the building was electric."

That set up a winner-take-all matchup Sunday back in Fort Erie.

Fort Erie struck first with an early goal, but NOTL played some inspired hockey, killing off several penalties before Ethan Peters scored his first of the season to cut the deficit to 2-1 with five minutes left.

"Despite sustained pressure in the Fort Erie zone and several chances, NOTL was not able to convert those scoring opportunities to a goal," Dyck said.

He and the rest of the coaching staff, head coach Tim Marotta and assistant Jim Denham, were full of praise for the players.

Marotta said all season the team's goaltending tandem was the backbone of the team and he credited Grusso and Theo VanderKaay for again keeping the Wolves in every game versus Fort Erie.

With 12 of the team's 18 player "retiring" from minor hockey after this season, the team has had a memorable finish.

There is still one more big task on horizon.

Along with Fort Erie, the Wolves qualified for the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship tourney in Barrie this weekend.

They kick things off Friday with an 8 a.m. game against the South Muskoka Bears and a 1 p.m. match with the Napanee Stars.



NOTL Wolves forward Jack Marotta (#21) battles with a Fort Erie opponent during Saturday's 3-2 win at home. NOTL scored its winning goal with just nine seconds left. Below, captain Griffin Dyck and goaltender Mateo Grusso in action. JULIA SACCO



NOTL skater **Ashleen Hale** wins provincial gold and silver

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake figure skater Ashleen Hale won gold in the STAR 9 O14 women's competition at the Ontario championships in Stratford on the weekend.

The teenager, representing the NOTL Skating Club, also took a silver medal, finishing second in the Gold Women's event.

Her clubmate Samantha Frydryk placed fourth in the STAR 9 O13 women's category, narrowly missing the bronze medal by 0.07 at her first provincial competition.

The NOTL club's Ophelia Xie also skated well and finished 17th in her STAR 6 women's event.

As the club wraps up its 55th season, it hosts its STAR Challenge and Program Showcase this Saturday.



NOTL's Ashleen Hale, left, skated to gold in the STAR 9 O14 women's competition at the Ontario championships. She also won silver in the Gold Women's category. Teammates Samantha Frydryk and Ophelia Xie, both pictured with coach Judi Boyle-Krzeczkowski, also competed. SUPPLIED

Wolves win league championship in dramatic shootout

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

As playoff hockey goes, it had just about everything.

High-energy, end-to-end action, big saves, a late-game comeback, three periods of overtime – including a penalty shot, a shootout, then a joyful celebration for one team, heartbreak for the other after more than 55 minutes of play.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Wolves U11 rep team, a force all season but second to the Thorold Blackhawks in the standings, beat Thorold 3-2 Tuesday night at Centennial Arena to capture the Niagara District Hockey League championship.

With a raucous crowd packing the bleachers, cheering on their respective teams, NOTL was down 1-0 to start the third period and then 2-0 when Thorold notched another.

“Before the third period started, I told the team if they won that period, they’d win the game. Well, they won it but then we went to overtime,” head coach Joe Pagnotta said afterward.

Charlie Rowaan narrowed the gap with NOTL’s first goal and then Eil Perng tied it up late in the third to force OT.

One 10-minute frame settled nothing – though there was plenty of drama.

NOTL goalie Mason Nichols stopped a penalty shot after a teammate handled the puck in the crease. The penalty shot save was a precursor of what was to come in the shootout.

After five minutes of 4-on-4 hockey and five more with three skaters a side, the game went to a three-player shootout.

NOTL’s Luke Simpson, who led the league in points this year, was the game’s hero, as he was the only shooter to find the net.

After Nichols stopped Thorold’s final attempt, the arena erupted, with NOTL players, coaches, parents and fans embracing and cheering.

“Both goalies played phenomenally,” Pagnotta said. And his team never gave up.

Winning the Niagara District championship is just the latest accomplishment for this NOTL squad.

They ousted Thorold previously to qualify for the prestigious Ontario Minor Hockey Association championships on Easter Weekend in Barrie, then had to play the Blackhawks again this week in a winner-take-all league final.

Pagnotta was impressed how his team dealt with the adversity they faced against a tough opponent, especially since they’re next going up against seven of the top teams in their age group from across Ontario.

After the big win, it was time to soak it all in.

“They were on cloud nine last night,” said Pagnotta.

“It was it was fun to see, to be part of and I reminded them it’s something that they’ll remember the rest of their lives regardless of our outcome going forward. It’s something they’ll talk about forever.”

Now, with more than a week until their next scheduled game (first up in Barrie is the Mount Brydges Cougars on Good Friday morning), Pagnotta is hoping to arrange an exhibition game or maybe some practices.



Top: Miller Davis (#18) fires a shot on Thorold’s goaltender while teammate Ben Bayne (#11) cruises in looking for a rebound. Below: Luke Simpson, the league’s top point-getter, scores what turns out to be the winning goal during the shootout. Bottom: Tuesday’s championship win won’t soon be forgotten. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



“Rest is not a bad thing. We don’t want to overwhelm them. We’ve played a lot of hockey this season. But we don’t have to go every day,” he said.

The Wolves haven’t lost a game in the playoffs, dating back to mid-February, so the team is looking forward to riding that eight-game streak into the OMHA tournament.

No matter what happens in Barrie, they have a lifetime of memories from Tuesday night’s victory.



Badminton club seeks new members ahead of next season



David Taylor winds up to send the birdie back. EVAN LOREE

Evan Loree
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake men’s senior badminton club is looking to fill out its roster with a few more players for next season.

And it’s offering free sessions in April to try to recruit newcomers.

Club president Brian Law took over the club after former president Ted Little left in December.

“In the past, we’ve filled three courts,” Law said.

A club member for about four years, Law remembers

before the pandemic there were almost 35 members.

After lockdowns, the membership had dwindled to closer to five.

The club now has grown to about 15 members, half of what it was before the pandemic.

“This coming year, we’re going to start with two courts,” Law said.

Neil Robinson, who has been playing with the club for about a year, said they need at least 20 players if they’re going to use three courts next season.

The club’s average turnout is about eight to 12 players,

Robinson said.

Sessions run from October to April and members pay \$150 for the season, but new members can play for free this April as part of an effort to boost membership in time for next fall.

“We cater to all levels of play,” Law said.

The club mostly serves men over 50 as it gets a discount on court rentals so long as the majority of the club is over 50.

While Law and Robinson said it’s a casual club, Law said some games can get “quite competitive.”

“For those that really

play, even in doubles, you really get a good workout.” He added. “It’s a pretty fast game.”

They don’t hold tournaments but members often go for post-match lunches and other social outings.

The players say the social aspect of the club is as important as the actual games.

Sessions are every Monday and Friday from 10:30 to 12:30 in the auditorium of the community centre.

The club is open to all men over 50. Anyone interested in playing can contact Law at brianlaw1828@gmail.com or by phone at 289-630-1828.

EXPLORING PHOTOS
WITH NOTL MUSEUM

The Bell Telephone Exchange

This Queen Street building, built in the circa 1880s, was home to the Bell Telephone Exchange for many years. The first operators hired were young men who had worked in telegraph offices, but they were later replaced with young women of the town. Niagara-on-the-Lake had telephone services to all hotels, Camp Niagara, two public phones on Queen Street, three long-distance lines (two to Toronto and one to Buffalo) and more than 100 subscribers using the party line system by 1916. Since then, this building also has been home to various establishments including, Rolly's Jewellers, the Elsdale Shop and Silkeborg. Today, residents can enjoy a locally crafted beer in this heritage building courtesy of the Exchange Brewery. If you want to learn more, visit the NOTL Museum's YouTube page for a digital Doors Open tour.



Ironwood is raising money for Gillian's Place with a cocktail competition and silent auction on March 31. FILE

Cocktails for a Cause at Ironwood supports Gillian's Place shelter

Katie Ryan
Special to The Lake Report

Ironwood Cider House, in partnership with Limited Distilling, is hosting a cocktail competition and silent auction to support Women's History Month.

Proceeds from the Cocktails for a Cause auction will go to Gillian's Place women's shelter.

The fundraiser will be held at Ironwood Cider House on March 31 at 6:30 p.m., with live music by Riley Michaels.

Richard Liu, owner of Ironwood, said it's important to him to support

women survivors who face gender-based violence.

Gillian's Place is a shelter for those experiencing abuse. The team at the shelter provides in-person or over-the-phone support services.

The cocktail contest is open to anyone who wants to put their concoctions to the test. Participants can sign up when they arrive at the event.

The cocktail competition starts at 7 p.m.

Tickets can be purchased online for \$30 at ironwood-cider.ca.

Guests are asked to keep their online receipt as proof of purchase to the event.



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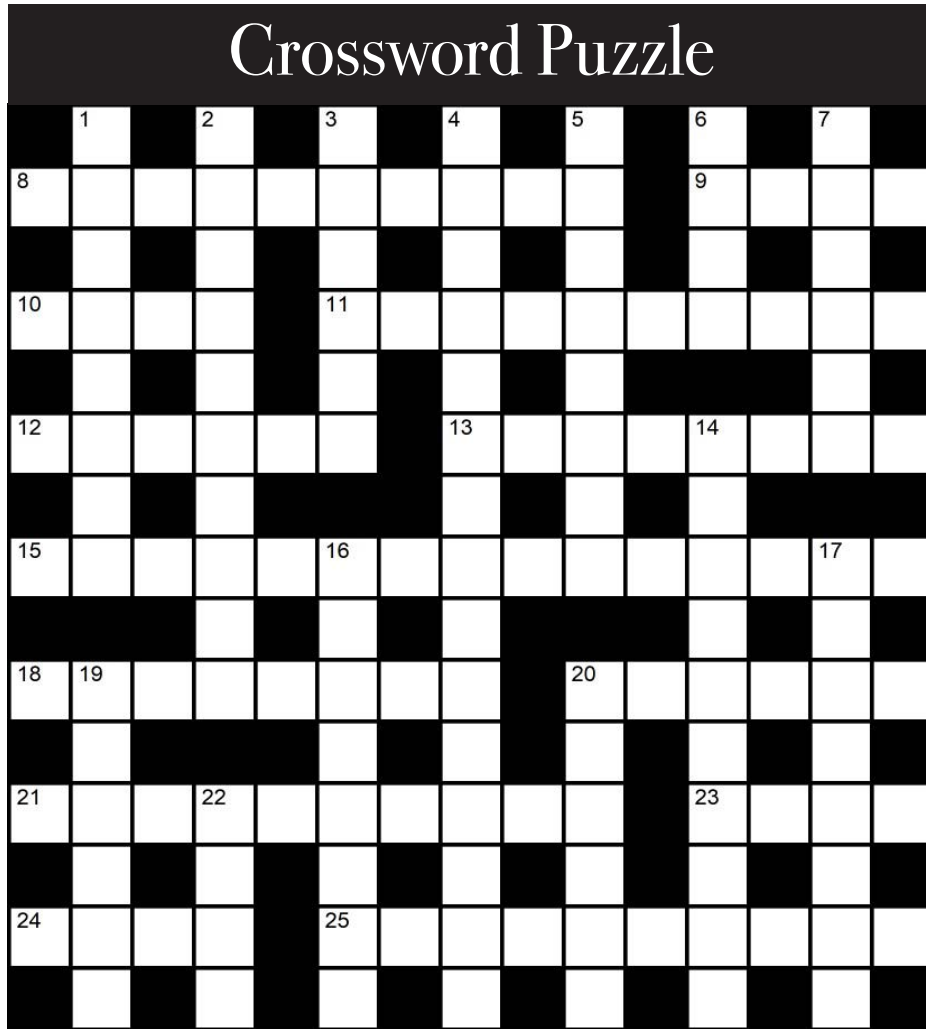
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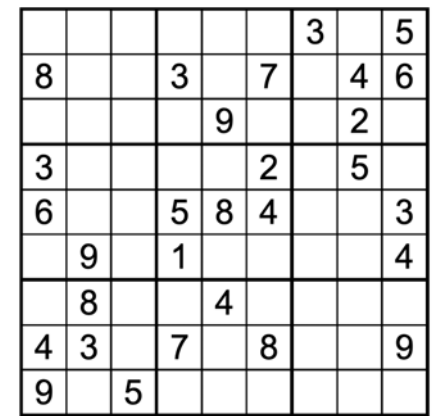
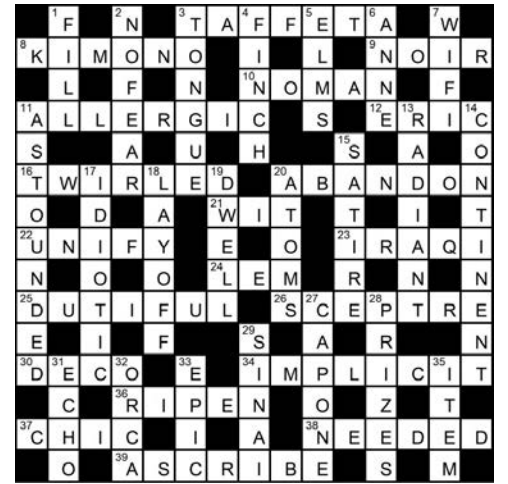
Have some fun



- Across**
- 8. Middle period of many stays at university (6,4)
 - 9. Boater's floater (4)
 - 10. Pronto (1,1,1,1)
 - 11. Wreck site (5,5)
 - 12. Parched feeling (6)
 - 13. The Bard's wife (8)
 - 15. Increasingly near (6,3,6)
 - 18. Former Berkshire county town, now in Oxfordshire (8)
 - 20. Ice cream feast (6)
 - 21. Code writer (10)
 - 23. Cut, maybe (4)
 - 24. A half-way house, perhaps? (4)
 - 25. "Actually, I like that more" (4,6)
- Down**
- 1. Discoverer of Uranus (8)
 - 2. Assessment of one thing against another (10)
 - 3. Expert (6)
 - 4. Calling requirement (9,6)
 - 5. Wildly excited centre if messed about (8)
 - 6. First Biblical murder victim (4)
 - 7. Colombian capital (6)
 - 14. Decorations (10)
 - 16. Sends out (8)
 - 17. Grilled (8)
 - 19. Lighters (6)
 - 20. Surgeon's outfit (6)
 - 22. Secure (4)



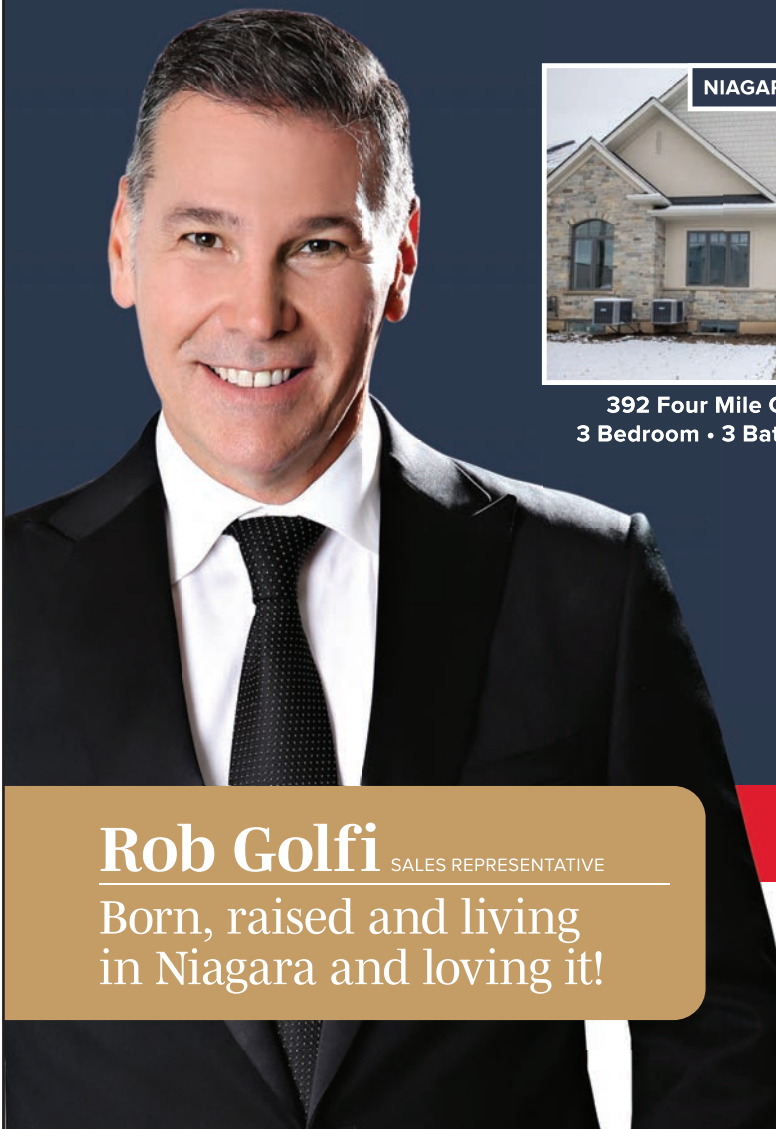
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Bows and arrows from childhood to 54,000 years ago



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Special to The Lake Report

When I was a boy growing up in London, Ont., life was framed by the few blocks surrounding my home on Oxford Street, the nearby Thames River, and the adjacent bushy forested areas that flanked it, Gibbons Park, and alleyways in the middle of the city blocks.

All was fair game for kids full of energy, adventure and lots of time after school and before dark. With no adults in charge, we were free to explore, make up games and get up to no good, where the only rules seemed to be to show up on time for supper and be back home before dark.

Sometimes things got out of hand.

My eldest brother, Bob, was a Dakota (DC3) pilot in the Second World War,

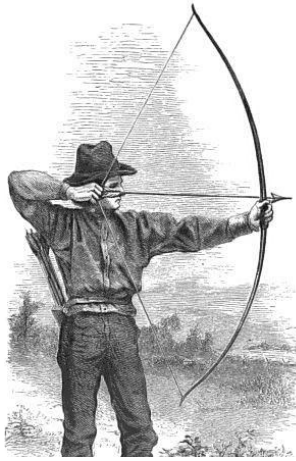
whose job was to fly supplies to Allied troops behind Japanese lines in Burma or across the Himalayan mountains into China from northeast India.

Among the many treasures he brought home were several belts of rifle-calibre machine-gun bullets, safely hidden, he thought, in his trunk in our family attic.

It wasn't long before we discovered those belts and together with friends, we separated bullets from their brass casings following which, with great glee, we struck the bases of the casings and were rewarded with big bangs to the consternation of some neighbours.

No one found out, nor was anyone hurt but it wasn't the smartest thing to do. Later when my brother found out what happened to his cache of bullets, he was furious with me – with good cause.

We also made our own bows and arrows. They were simple affairs modelled on what we thought Robin Hood's bows might look like. We fashioned them from maple and the result was a bow capable of projecting nail-pointed arrows



Drawing a bow, from a 1908 archery manual. WIKIPEDIA

30 or so yards with reasonable accuracy.

Then one day, I shot an arrow straight up from my backyard, only to lose sight of it in the sun. Seconds later there was an angry expletive from my next-door neighbor's yard.

Fortunately, moments before he had risen from his chair only to hear a crack and discover to tip of my arrow buried in the back of his chair. Needless to say, that affair ended my bow and arrow days but not my boyhood fascination with them as a weapon given the role English long bows played in

defeating the French in the Battle of Agincourt.

Recently, my long-ago fascination with bows and arrows was rekindled by the question of when bows and arrows were invented.

A study of a site in France, called Grotte Mandrin in the Rhone Valley, revealed hundreds of flint points whose remarkably uniform size and shape strongly suggested they were used as tips for arrows, in much the same way similar tipped arrows are used by modern day hunter-gatherer groups to fashion their arrow tips.

The tips often revealed fracture lines created by high-velocity impacts characteristic of arrow tips.

The site was dated to 54,000 years ago and pushes back the date when modern humans were found in western Europe by almost 10,000 years, raising the question of just how early did modern humans settle in western Europe.

The point is important because some earlier cave art was attributed to Neanderthals, based on the assumption they were the only homo species in western

Europe much before 45,000 years ago.

Evidence of similar finely worked arrow heads in South Africa, dating back more than 70,000 years ago, suggests that even earlier origins for bows and arrows elsewhere in Africa.

Oddly enough, despite evidence that Neanderthals were fully capable of bringing down huge elephants of a species long extinct, there's no evidence they fashioned and used bows and arrows in their hunts.

Instead, these large animals were apparently killed at close range using spears and even hand-held hafted stone weapons. The risks to the hunters at such close range must have been mitigated somewhat by employing longer range weapons such as bows and arrows.

Clearly, modern humans and Neanderthals overlapped for more than enough time for Neanderthals to have observed and learned how humans employed bows and arrows. Which begs the question – Why not?

I don't know why. But in the see-saw debate from

considering Neanderthals as dimwitted and crude to newer studies suggesting they were near cognitive and creative equals to modern humans, perhaps the balance is swinging back to the view that Neanderthals were not the equal of modern humans and were slow to adopt newer technologies that might have ensured their survival.

To which, recent mini-brain and genetic studies support somewhat diminished cognitive skills of Neanderthals compared to modern humans.

For modern humans as a species, the question is not whether we lack innovation – we are masters of innovation – but without the collective wisdom to control our worst instincts and impulses.

Climate change for the worst is bad enough but perhaps, for very different reasons, the result for us will be the same as the Neanderthals: extinction.

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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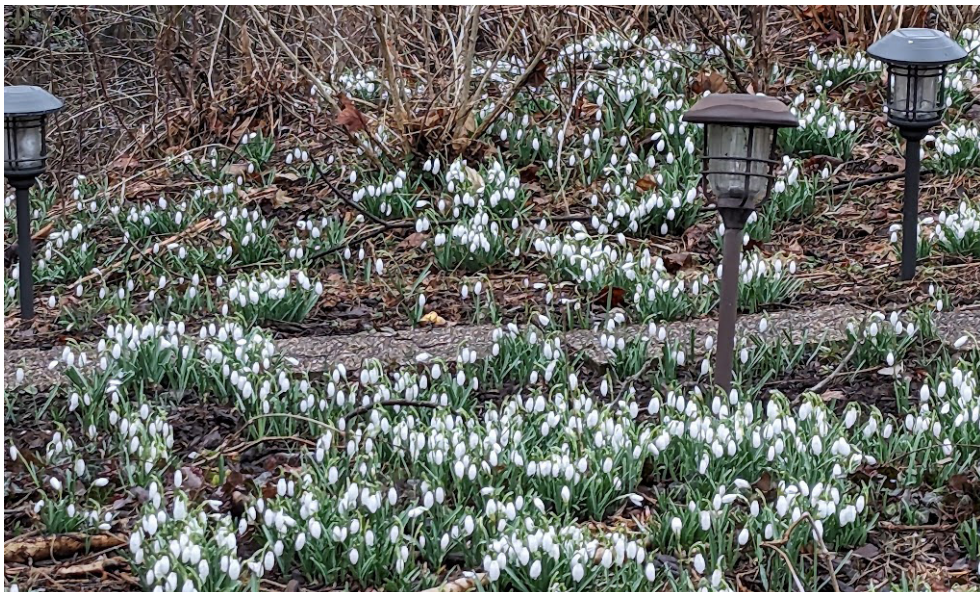
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Spring is off to a **bloomin'** start



GROWING TOGETHER 

Joanne Young
Columnist



Winter aconite (top) and snowdrops are signs that spring has sprung. JOANNE YOUNG

We are one week into spring and we are already seeing things come into bloom.

No matter whether you thought this past winter was good or bad, those first signs of flowers in the garden are always a welcome sight. It gives us hope of warmer, sunnier days ahead.

Some of the first blooms in the garden (already out in full bloom) are our spring bulbs. Two of the earliest flowering bulbs are snowdrops and winter aconite.

These bulbs are ones you would purchase and plant in the fall, along with tulips and daffodils. Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) are the earliest to come into bloom, often poking their white, nodding, bell-shaped flowers up through the snow.

These bulbs are known for the way they naturalize themselves in the garden. Once you have planted them, there's nothing more to do except enjoy the flowers year after year.

And the best part is every year they return, they get more and more flowers due to the new small bulbs that they produce. I like to refer to them as "free spirited."

They can also be planted in lawn areas. Since they are so early to bloom, they will be finished flowering before the lawn needs to be cut and so the leaves can just be mowed down.

There are many varieties available, including both single and double flowering ones.

Winter aconite (*Eranthus hyemalis*) has bright golden/yellow, buttercup-like flowers that will cheer up any spring garden.

Do not dig up the plants

when they are done blooming. Allow the foliage to die back naturally. If growing in the lawn, by the time your lawn is ready to mow, the leaves on the winter aconite will be withered and browned.

This tuberous bulb is stunning in borders, along walkways, in rock gardens and underplanting of shrubs and trees. It also looks great in a cottage-type garden.

Winter aconite is another plant that will naturalize given the right conditions. However, please note it is toxic when consumed by humans or animals.

One of the earliest perennials to bloom is the Lenten rose (*Helleborus*), aptly named as it is often in bloom during the season of Lent.

Although it is considered a perennial, it keeps its foliage during the winter months as well. As soon as the snow melts away, the *Helleborus* flowers start to emerge.

There are many different varieties available and its

long-lasting flower colours include whites, pinks, reds, apple green to almost black.

Hellebores love a shadier, moist area and benefit from the addition of lime around their roots. They are hardy to zone 5.

Some flowering shrubs will start to bloom as soon as the signs of winter begin to melt away. One of the earliest shrubs to bloom is Chinese witch hazel (*Hamamelis mollis*).

A larger growing shrub, it can reach a height (and width) of 10 to 15 feet. It is known for its sweetly fragrant, golden yellow, unique shaped flowers. There is also a reddish/orange flowering variety of witch hazel named "Diane" (*Hamamelis x intermedia 'Diane'*), one of which is blooming in front of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre now.

Witch hazel prefers a slightly sheltered location in full sun or a dappled shade. In fall, the leaves turn yellow to orange to

red, making it showpiece in the garden. It is hardy to Zone 5.

Winter heath (*Erica carnea*) is another shrub that will provide you with flowers from late winter through mid-spring. This evergreen has masses of tiny flowers covering the entire plant.

There are many varieties, with flowers ranging from white to light pink to magenta and purple. Heath is a low-spreading evergreen growing about 18 inches high and two to three feet wide.

So if you cannot wait to get back out into the garden come spring and just yearn to see flowers opening up, you might want to consider adding some of these early bloomers to your landscape.

You will be welcoming spring into your homes that much sooner and who wouldn't want that..

Let the seeding begin.

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

Obituary

Richard Careless



Careless, Richard Edward- Resident of Niagara on the Lake, Ontario, Canada, originally from Pinner, Middlesex, UK, died peacefully but too soon in January 2023. Born in 1941, Richard immigrated to Montreal, Quebec in 1967 and worked for 28 years as an electrical engineer for Air Canada in Montreal. He

was a graduate of Blackwell County Secondary School, and Harrow Technical College. He was a member of the Niagara on the Lake Sailing Club. He was the loving husband of the late Dolores Moffatt Careless. In retirement they lived in St. Lambert, Quebec and Nova Scotia before settling in Niagara on the Lake. He is survived by his sister Jane Starkey, his niece Michelle and nephew Paul, and four stepchildren. His quiet disposition, kindness and cheerful character are fondly remembered and missed.

Arrangements entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON L0S 1J0.

In Memoriam



Denise Lundy: a loving Wife, Mother and Grandmother.
Born January 16, 1961
Passed away April 1, 2019.

*Our hearts still ache with sadness,
And secret tears still flow.
What it means to lose you,
No one will ever know.*

Always loved, forever missed.
Tony, James, Michael, Jen and Granddaughter Rose.

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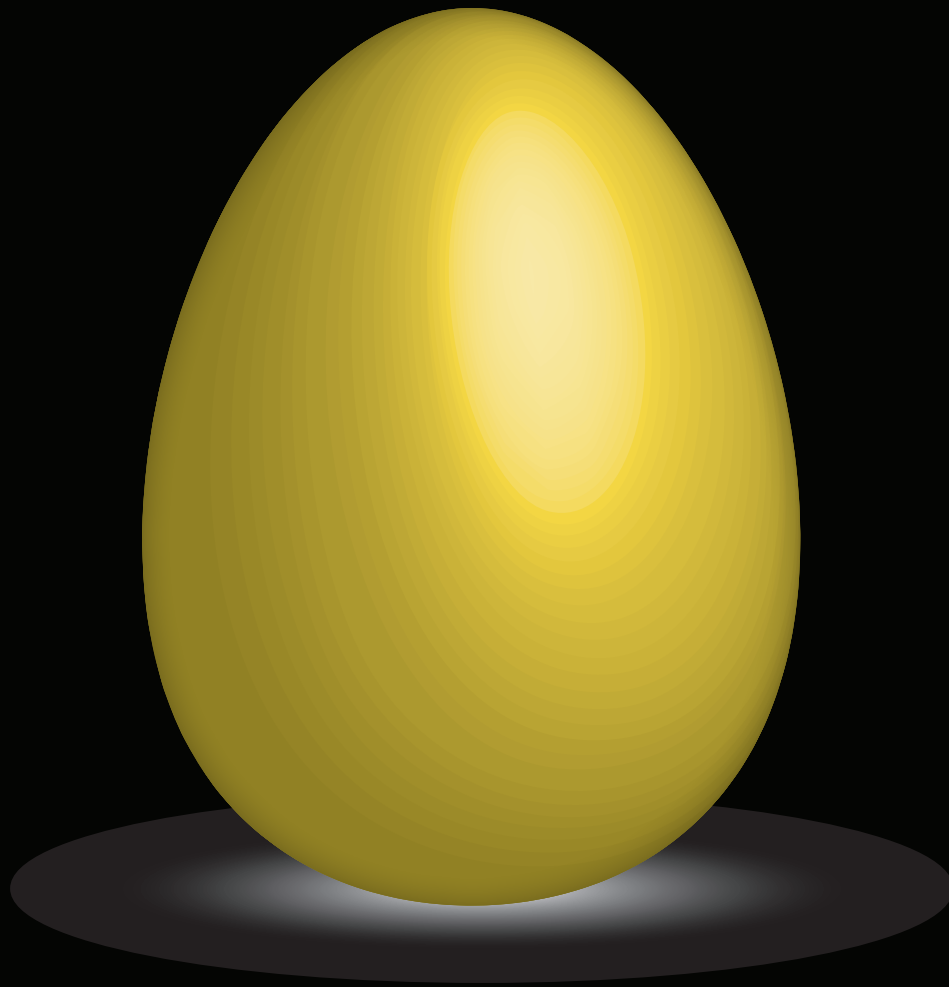


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