



## Back in the saddle

Temporary foreign workers return to NOTL to start pruning in the vineyards



Leroy Douglas of Epp Family Fruit Farms uses long-handled loppers to prune grapevines on Concession 2. As part of the annual return of temporary foreign workers to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Douglas and his colleagues are beginning the essential spring task of clearing away old growth to ensure a healthy harvest for the region's vineyards. Many workers returned last week to begin the season. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

## Burton firm on community vision as town's parking plan for hospital looms

Paige Seburn  
The Lake Report

Some were born there. Some said goodbye there. For decades, the old Niagara-on-the-Lake hospital held the most important moments of people's lives.

Now, as council signals a parking-focused future for the site, the James A. Burton & Family Foundation is holding firm in its vision for the old hospital.

"This building once cared for the people of this town," said chairman Jim Burton,

speaking to a packed room Tuesday night.

"Today, we are imagining how that place of care can, once again, serve the community — in a new way, for a new generation."

Addressing more than 120 community leaders, educators, artists and cultural groups, Burton laid out the foundation's hope for 176 Wellington St.: a multi-use community hub with classrooms, a daycare, performance and rehearsal areas, exhibition spaces and a permanent home for local

arts, heritage and cultural groups — along with about 250 parking spaces.

The plan would reuse the existing building. Burton said the organization won't reveal all the details about its plans for the space, as a request for proposal hasn't been issued by the town yet.

A "community voices" video featuring 14 local organizations and community members was also played at the event.

The foundation's proposal

*Continued on Page 3*



Jim Burton speaks to residents about a proposed community hub for the former hospital site, as uncertainty continues over its future. PAIGE SEBURN

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# Council approves previously defeated Paxton Lane plan

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A Niagara-on-the-Lake subdivision proposal council had already rejected is back — and now approved — in a reversal that's raising questions about cost, control and heritage protections.

Council voted to approve a previously defeated recommendation tied to the development at 46 Paxton Ln. last Tuesday night, after a lengthy debate that exposed divisions over how the project has changed since its original Ontario Land Tribunal approval more than a decade ago.

At the centre of the dispute is block 18, a piece of land flagged for its archeological significance.

At the meeting, a planning consultant for the applicant — a Toronto-based numbered company — and a lawyer involved in the original provincial decision told council the town could be on the hook for more than \$2 million in archeological costs if the proposal wasn't approved.

The proposal is also tied



Jennifer Vida and Tom Richardson speak before Niagara-on-the-Lake council during a tense debate over a previously rejected Paxton Lane subdivision, now approved in a reversal by council. PAIGE SEBURN

to a plan to restore the deteriorating David Secord House on the site. During the meeting, the applicant's planning consultant said the restoration could only proceed if the subdivision changes were approved and the house could be severed and conveyed.

However, Rainer Hummel of Hummel Properties Inc. said he has no involvement with the subdivision or its ownership and has not had any direct dealings with the developer.

Hummel said he was approached by a consultant involved in the project to take on restoration of the

Secord house, but only on the condition it would be placed on a separate lot and all associated costs covered.

He said he would not take ownership of a property tied to another party's subdivision agreement, citing potential legal and financial obligations beyond his control.

Hummel added that if the Secord house had remained subject to the subdivision's draft plan conditions, he would not have agreed to be involved in its restoration.

But resident Nicholas Colaneri urged council not to move ahead, arguing it replaces permanent protec-

tions with a temporary measure that could be undone.

Who owns the land has been a point of confusion throughout the debate, but it has remained in private ownership the entire time. Under the original plan, block 18 was to be transferred to the town after the required archeological work was completed.

The new proposal instead keeps it in private hands under a holding provision — a shift Colaneri warned weakens long-term protection.

"This is a temporary zoning tool," he said, arguing the change could allow future councils to open the land to development.

"When it is removed, every protection disappears with it."

Colaneri said council should not reconsider or weaken a decision that was already defeated, arguing the report inappropriately pushed approval without clear planning rationale.

Council also heard that Indigenous groups had been invited to participate in earlier stages of the archeological process and that engagement would continue.

But Colaneri raised concerns about Indigenous cultural material on the site and said that consultation "should be before council."

"Which ones, when?" asked Colaneri, about the Indigenous groups consulted. "What did they say?"

Jennifer Vida, a planning consultant for the applicant, defended the change and said it maintains protection while avoiding major costs for the town.

Keeping the land public, she said, would leave the municipality responsible for a site that "would not be accessible or beneficial to the public."

"The town would be required to take out liability insurance on the property and the town would need to provide constant maintenance to cut grass."

Vida said a required stage four archeological assessment — involving intensive hand digging — has an estimated price tag of \$2 million.

"The town would be taking on significant liability, with no benefit to the community," she said.

Coun. Gary Burroughs questioned how the pro-

posal had changed over time.

"My confusion is: when did it change?" he said. "Just now that the owner would prefer to own it rather than the town on it?"

The applicant's solicitor, Tom Richardson, said the 2013 decision was "a settlement" and argued the revisions stay within that framework.

Coun. Adriana Vizzari said she was uneasy with relying on planning decisions made more than a decade ago and called for more information on access and connectivity.

"As the community continues to grow, it's critical that the infrastructure keeps pace," she said, especially when it comes to walkability.

"This site is directly connected to key community amenities in St. Davids," she said, noting she appreciates improvements made so far to the application but believes "more can be done" about walkability.

Coun. Erwin Wiens supported the plan, arguing it doesn't make sense for the town to take on costly land.

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## Parents call for safer school bus stops

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Safety concerns at school bus stops in Niagara-on-the-Lake are prompting growing concern from parents, particularly in rural areas where children must cross busy roads with limited infrastructure.

Mark Squire, whose children attend Crossroads Public School, says their daily commute depends not just on the bus driver, but on whether passing motorists follow the law. His children board the bus along East-West Line near Four Mile Creek Road and must cross the street to do so.

"The bus stops, they have flashing lights, they have a stop sign out — and not every driver stops for that," he says. He estimates about once a week he has to wave at drivers he believes are not going to stop.

According to Niagara Student Transportation Services, 1,366 students in Niagara-on-the-Lake take the bus each day. Since January 2021, there have been 270 crashes involving school buses across the region, including 10 locally. Six of those resulted in non-life-threatening injuries. The agency notes there have been no student fatalities since its inception in 2007.

Still, several parents told The Lake Report they



Trinity Dodd is one of many kids in NOTL who ride the school bus. Her mother Janice, like other parents, has said they have been concerned with the safety of their kids getting on and off the bus. SUPPLIED

remain uneasy, especially at rural stops where traffic moves quickly and safety features are limited.

Janice Dodd, a Virgil resident, says she faced similar concerns when her children had to cross near Four Mile Creek Road and Lakeshore Road. "My concern is more for pick-up," she says. "I can't control other drivers on the road."

Kristen and James Stewart say they are particularly worried about a stop near their home at Line 8 and Four Mile Creek Road, used by children attending St. Davids Public School. They describe it as a busy intersection with an 80 km/h speed limit, nearby driveways and no sidewalks.

"There are supposed to be seven children at that bus stop," Kristen says. "But we are all scared to use it because of how dangerous it is."

The couple says they have been raising concerns for more than a year and a half. While they say the town has been supportive, they feel Niagara Student Transportation Services has not made changes. James says other nearby students are picked up directly from their driveways, while their children are required to walk to a more hazardous location.

The issue has also reached town council. In March, councillors endorsed a letter from the Town of Plympton-Wyoming urging the province to increase support for school bus safety measures, including stop-arm camera systems.

The letter cites estimates that drivers illegally pass stopped school buses about 30,000 times per day across Ontario, putting children at significant risk.

Coun. Adriana Vizzari, who introduced the motion,

said the concerns outlined in the letter apply directly to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"Particularly given that many of our children wait for buses along rural roads," she says.

Parents are also suggesting practical solutions. Squire says his children could be picked up on the same side of the road to eliminate the need to cross. Others have suggested adding technology, such as apps that allow families to track bus locations in real time.

Georgia MacIntosh says that kind of tool would ease anxiety.

"I always thought it would be so helpful if there was an app to see where the bus is, sort of like Uber," she says.

The Ministry of Education says it is working with Transport Canada on additional safety standards and technologies, including sensors and improved braking systems.

For parents like the Stewarts, however, those broader measures do little to address immediate concerns.

"We want Niagara Student Transportation Services to do what was done 30 years ago," James says, suggesting a route change that would allow their children to be picked up directly in front of their home.

Until then, many say they remain uneasy about sending their children to the roadside each day.

## Hundreds attend community meeting on fate of old hospital, no council members show up

Continued from Front Page

is shaped through engagement with more than 140 organizations and over 1,200 residents over the past three years. It says that process has consistently pointed to community use, not parking, as the site's primary purpose.

"We've included parking in our vision, but it's not the priority," said Burton. "The priority is all of you."

Local theatre voices are backing the proposal.

Andorlie Hillstrom, founder and artistic director of Yellow Door Theatre Project, who is featured in the video, told The Lake Report she's in support of the proposal.

"It is needed by our community," said Hillstrom. "This could make a world of difference in what we are able to give back to the young people in our community."

"We need our individuals



A packed room gathers to see the Burton Foundation's community vision for the old hospital site. PAIGE SEBURN

who represent us at council to understand that there is a driving force behind it," she said about the proposal.

Uncertainty remains around what council will ultimately allow on the site.

Whiteline Architects, which prepared concept plans and a cost estimate for the parking garage, indicates one of the requirements the town provided it was to review the feasibility of retaining all or part of the existing hospital building.

The town staff's report includes the financial implications of this proj-

ect, including \$700,000 for demolition.

During the question period, attendees raised concerns about whether a future request for proposals could be restricted to the roughly 13,000 square feet designated for community use, rather than the full site. Burton said he has not received any official indication from council on that point.

"We need over 50,000 square feet to accommodate all the things that you told our detailed planners that you need," he said, adding

that if restrictions were put in place, the group would first try to influence council's direction.

"We would delegate before that and hopefully make some impact," said Burton.

If that didn't work, he said, the group would still submit a proposal for the full site.

One resident asked whether any NOTL councillors had been invited and Burton said yes. When the resident asked the crowd if any councillors were present and to raise a hand, the room fell silent — prompting a few audible reactions.

Burton said residents' questions spoke to the depth of feeling in the room.

"I think the input we have tonight shows how passionately people are in this town that their voices be heard," he said.

"Voices are a lot more than just support."

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# Royal Oak's future at former hospital site uncertain as costs, plans come into focus

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The building is familiar. Its future is anything but. As Niagara-on-the-Lake plans to redevelop the site of the former hospital at 176 Wellington St., looking closely at the idea of parking, the future of Royal Oak School, now operating inside the building, is increasingly uncertain.

The building costs about \$181,000 a year to operate and brings in roughly \$107,000 in rent and parking revenue, including about \$20,000 from tenancy, mostly from Royal Oak.

Of the 65 students enrolled at the school, 44 live in NOTL. Children come from Old Town, Virgil, Queenston, St. Davids and Glendale.

Council approved a lease extension allowing the school to remain at the site until June 2027 but can terminate the agreement with six months' notice as it decides the property's long-term use.

That decision is now tied to a broader debate: should the town continue to subsidize the school in a municipally owned building operating at a loss?

For Royal Oak, the site is more than just a lease.

"176 Wellington is an ideal site for the school," said Julia Murray, head of school for Royal Oak. "We are connecting with our heritage."

While council explores a parking-focused plan for the site, the James A. Burton & Family Foundation envisions a multi-use community hub — focused on arts, culture and education, with space for Royal Oak, local organizations, exhibitions, performances, events, classes and parking — a vision the school is "very passionate and inspired by," Murray said.

"The power of shared space for shared programming and increased reach is exponential," she said, adding that under Burton's vision, organizations could expand and collaborate "to serve our community in even more broad and creative ways."

But some councillors say the current arrangement — originally intended to help the school get established — needs to be reconsidered.

"Currently, the site supports approximately \$20,000 of the \$180,000



Royal Oak head of school Julia Murray, left, stands with a Grade 1-2 class alongside teacher Robin Forlin at the old hospital at 176 Wellington St. PAIGE SEBURN

in annual carrying costs through tenancy, with the remaining costs borne by taxpayers. That is a fact," said Coun. Maria Mavridis. "This is not a criticism of the school."

It's on council, Mavridis said.

**“Currently, the site supports approximately \$20,000 of the \$180,000 in annual carrying costs through tenancy, with the remaining costs borne by taxpayers. That is a fact,”**

MARIA MAVRIDIS  
TOWN COUNCILLOR

"Councillors are aware that taxpayers are covering these costs and need to assess the feasibility of these costs," she said.

"If the public is comfortable with their tax dollars subsidizing this type of arrangement, then I respect that."

Mavridis said councillors are responsible for ensuring residents have "all the facts" and suggested Royal Oak "present on its own merits" why its location should remain at 176 Wellington St.

Murray reviewed the town's budget documents for the site and said "the majority of these costs largely exist whether the building is tenanted or vacant."

Royal Oak board member Robin Ridesic said the school's rental revenue actually helps offset those costs.

"The tenants that are in

that building are helping offset some of the carrying costs that the town has on that site no matter what," she said, pointing to a massage therapy clinic paying rent in the basement.

Nonetheless, Ridesic — who has two children currently attending the school and two who previously went — said the building is currently a "financial loss."

"That is why the town needs to decide what they're going to do with that site, so that it won't be a financial loss going forward," she said.

Without knowing exact figures, Ridesic said Royal Oak pays slightly less than \$20,000 in rent, but with other tenants included, that figure is "roughly correct." Murray declined to share exact figures but said it's in line with other non-profits in town.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said it's important the school eventually begins to earn revenue while also benefiting the "broader NOTL community."

"NOTL taxpayers have supported the Royal Oak School through the use of municipal property — at a significantly reduced cost," he said. "That support was provided by the town to help the school establish itself within our community."

"As we move forward, we have a duty to ensure that any use of municipal assets reflects both community benefit and financial responsibility."

Wiens said the school, "like all other organizations," will be encouraged to put forward a proposal during the request for proposals process for redeveloping the old hospital site.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says discussion should

hold until the town takes a broader look at what the site should become.

"I think that's a premature question," he said when asked about specific uses for the property.

"An amount of community space has been identified as important for redevelopment — whatever that community space is going to contain would be a decision pointed at another date," said Zalepa.

Coun. Adriana Vizzari said any decision must balance the needs of students, families and the wider community and Coun. Sandra O'Connor said while the school is a valuable part of NOTL, the question remains how it should be supported.

"There are many ways to support it," said O'Connor, noting that the Burton proposal is one way — but "until we get to the point that they're all laid out, I really don't want to say one way is better than another."

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she wants to see more proposals brought forward before council commits to a single path.

"I did vote against the staff going forward without adding a (request for proposals)," she said. "I think that it is so important for our community to be able to compare different proposals."

Royal Oak, she said, is a great school and so are the programs it runs in the summer.

"It was local families, a handful of them, that got together and they were the ones that actually developed the idea of Royal Oak," she said.

"That story should be told."

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com



Photo courtesy of the NOTL Museum.

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## No decision on patios until later this month

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake town council deferred a decision on whether to permit outdoor patios on Queen Street after running out of time during a meeting that lasted more than five hours.

Council will revisit the issue at its next meeting on April 28.

During Tuesday's meeting, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa proposed allowing temporary patios on Queen Street, until the Queen Street secondary plan, which the town is currently working on, is in force and effect.

Aimee Alderman, the director of planning, said the proposal would allow patios only in municipal parking stalls on Queen Street.

According to the proposal, the Queen Street secondary plan — which would establish specific policies for the area — could take up to two years to complete.

Zalepa's motion also directed staff to develop minimum requirements and conditions for the patios, including prohibiting them in



Will temporary patios return to Queen Street? Council will have to wait until later this month before it can make its decision. FILE

accessible parking spaces.

It also called for staff to report back in April with several items, including a minimum design requirements guide and a draft Queen Street temporary patio permit and encroachment agreement.

The proposal follows the end of the town's temporary patio program last year, which was introduced during the pandemic to help restaurants continue operating during lockdowns.

With the program now expired, restaurants cannot currently operate outdoor patios under that framework.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita cited town polling conducted a few years ago that showed strong support for summer patios.

"The statistics were all very positive for the patios, I think you (Coun. Andrew Niven) commented on 93 per cent of all survey goers said they loved the patios," said Cheropita. "There's no doubt that there's desire."

Coun. Sandra O'Connor opposed the proposal, calling it "piecemeal planning" and arguing council should wait for the Queen Street secondary plan before making a decision.

"I think it's unfair to the

other businesses that only certain ones are allowed," she said. "I think it promotes an unstable business environment because we keep changing our minds."

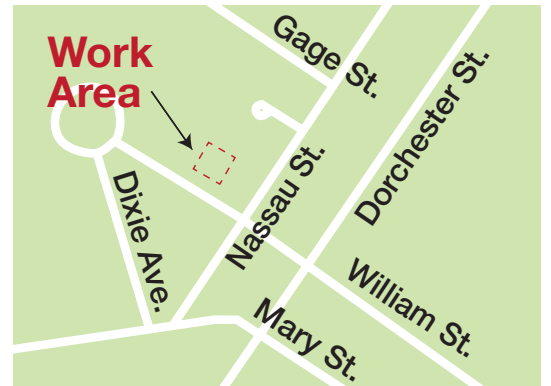
Coun. Erwin Wiens said he was interested in expanding patio permissions beyond Queen Street to the Queen-Picton area, including nearby businesses such as the Irish Harp on King Street.

He also questioned whether businesses would pay for the parking stalls used for patios and whether the town has a fee structure in place.

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For comments, questions or for more information on the project, please contact any of the following project team members:

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This notice was first issued on March 23, 2026.



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# Vote for NOTL: Museum finalist in national 'Next Great Save' competition with \$50K prize

Zahraa Hmood  
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is among a dozen historical organizations from across Canada up for a \$50,000 prize in a national competition — which the museum plans to use to turn a 115-year-old house into its own research centre.

The Next Great Save, an annual competition held by the National Trust of Canada, aims to help restore cherished historic places in the country.

Public voting is set to begin April 7 — the organization that receives the most votes will win \$50,000, while the second and third-place winners will get \$10,000 and \$5,000, respectively.

If it wins, the museum has big plans for this money: it's looking to transform the historic home of Janet Carnochan, the woman who brought the Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum to life, into a research and archival centre. Shawna Jarman, interim curator at the museum, said the museum honoured to have placed as a finalist in the competition.

"I think it's really great, no matter what, we're bringing recognition to the amazing programs and the amazing sites that we have across Canada," she said.

Carnochan founded the Niagara Historical Society and led the construction of Memorial Hall, the museum's main building, which opened in 1907 and was the first building erected as a museum in Ontario.

A few years later, in 1911,



A peek at the future of the NOTL Museum, with Memorial Hall connected by a walkway to the Janet Carnochan House, which will become a branch of the museum. SUPPLIED

her new home was built next door to the museum, at 25 Castlereagh St., where she would live out the remainder of her days until her death in 1926.

In May 2024, the museum bought the house for \$1.425 million.

The museum applied for the competition with hopes of furthering plans to renovate the house into a space for people to access archival and research materials. It would be for those interested to learn more about the area's history, be they academics, students, artists or visitors, she said.

"Our archives are bursting right now. We don't have a lot of space left to continue to collect the Niagara-on-the-Lake community's amazing history that we have here, but there's

a lot of space next door in Janet's house," she said.

The house has three levels: two above-ground floors and one basement. Jarman said the upper level would host staff offices, the main level would be a research centre for people to access secondary source information and history books in a library and the basement would house its archives.

The rest of the museum's archived materials will remain in the Niagara High School building and large artifacts will be moved to the basement of a new building behind Memorial Hall the museum plans to erect as part of its ongoing \$10-million expansion project.

Winning the National Trust of Canada's competition would be significant

for the museum, Jarman said: not just in being able to transform Carnochan's home and further her legacy, but also seeing the community rally together to support its local museum.

"We know we're heading in the right direction with our vision and our mandate and our outreach within the community and we really want that support as we go forward into this new, expanded, renovated and vibrant museum space," she said.

Public voting for the competition opens April 7 at 1 p.m. and closes April 24 at 1 p.m. The winner and two runner-ups will be announced later that day at 5 p.m.

To cast your vote, visit [nextgreatsave.ca](http://nextgreatsave.ca).  
[zahraa@niagaranow.com](mailto:zahraa@niagaranow.com)



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# Nominations open for NOTL business awards

Staff  
The Lake Report

From entrepreneurs to community leaders, Niagara-on-the-Lake residents are being invited to put forward nominations for the town's annual Business Achievement Awards.

Formerly known as the Spirit Awards, the program, hosted by the NOTL Chamber of Commerce,

highlights individuals, businesses and organizations across a range of sectors, including entrepreneurship, hospitality and tourism, agriculture, arts and culture and community service.

The awards gala is scheduled for May 20, at Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery.

Residents and members of the business community are invited to submit nominations for those demonstrat-

ing leadership, innovation and a commitment to NOTL's economic growth. Nominations close April 27.

Award categories include: Business of the Year, the Dan Patterson Awards for Entrepreneurial Spirit, the Celia Liu Award for Excellence in Hospitality and Tourism, the Christopher Newton Award for Arts and Culture, Outstanding

Achievement in Agriculture, the Peter Ling Award for Community and Business Leadership, and the Lord Mayor's Award of Excellence: Citizen of the Year.

Sponsorship opportunities are also available for organizations interested in supporting the event.

Nominations can be submitted through the chamber's website, at [chamber-notl.com/business-awards](http://chamber-notl.com/business-awards).

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# Board game nights aim to **keep seniors' minds sharp**

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

A new board game night in Niagara-on-the-Lake is aiming to help seniors stay mentally active — and have some fun along the way.

The initiative, launched by local resident John Hale, invites older adults to gather twice a week at Sweets & Swirls Cafe in the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre for casual games designed to keep the brain engaged and encourage social connection.

Hale said the idea was inspired by a personal experience with dementia after visiting his mother-in-law in England.

"It's a horrible illness. It really is," he said.

"When I went to see my mom, she didn't recognize me for the first 30 minutes, and then the spark came on, 'Oh, John, what are you doing here?'" he said. Ten minutes later, she forgot again.



John Hale will be hosting board game afternoons on Mondays and Fridays at the NOTL Community Centre. The first game night will be on April 17 at 1:30 p.m. RICHARD HARLEY

On the flight home, Hale said he read a newspaper article that suggested playing board games can help

maintain cognitive health in people over 60 — and decided to act on it. "So I thought, why not

try and set up a games club here in Niagara-on-the-Lake to help people stave off any cognitive decline,"

he said — and have a little fun in the process.

The sessions will run Monday and Friday afternoons starting April 17, from 1:30 to 4 p.m., during "quieter hours" at the cafe.

The format is intentionally informal. There is no cost to participate and no need to register — participants can simply drop in, play and leave whenever they like.

"Anybody that wants to come and play, they're very, very welcome," Hale said.

"Just walk in, come sit down, play. If you lose and you want to go home, that's fine. If you win and you want to go home and celebrate, that's absolutely fine as well."

Hale will supply a range of games, from chess and cards to his favourite games like cribbage, Monopoly and Trivial Pursuit.

He said even a small turnout can make the program worthwhile.

"I don't know how many people we're going to get,

but if I only get one more person, we can play chess, we can play Jenga, we can play cards, we can play whatever," he said.

"It only takes one other person — and it helps me."

He added the initiative is as much for himself as it is for others.

"It's my cognitive decline that I want to stop," he said. "And if I can (do the same) for everybody else that's playing, great."

Hale, who has lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake for about 12 years, said he hopes the community will embrace the idea and help it grow over time.

"I'll just keep bringing them down," he said. "And then, if I'm ever not here for any reason ... I'll have somebody else that brings them down. So it keeps going."

Residents interested in joining can attend starting April 17, with sessions continuing weekly on Mondays and Fridays.



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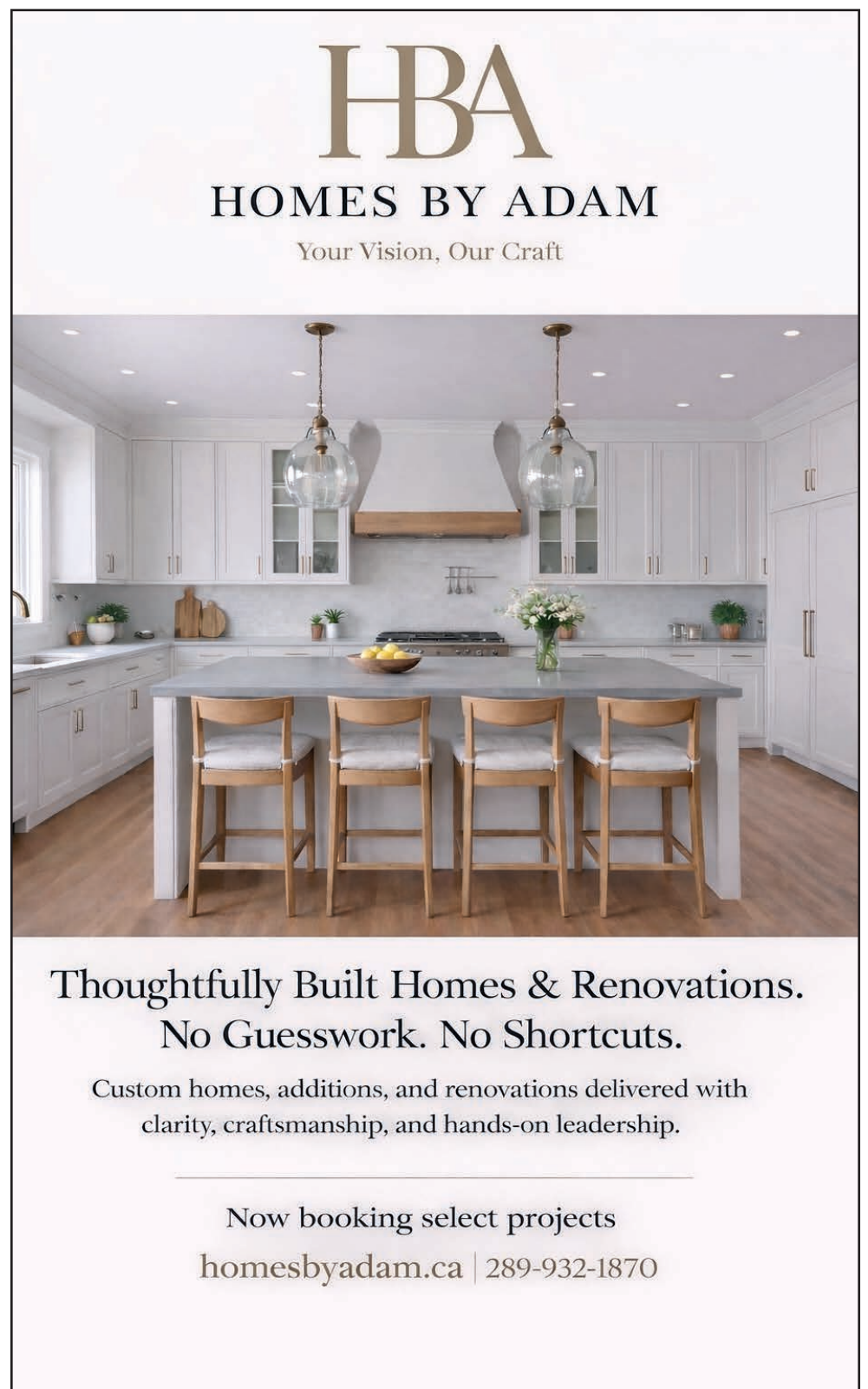
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# Fundraiser helps HIV/AIDS programs

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Global funding for HIV and AIDS programs is dropping. A Niagara-on-the-Lake fundraiser is here to help — and is warning that shrinking international aid has left frontline groups with a fraction of the funding they once had.

The April 23 event, hosted by Nyanyas of Niagara in support of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, will feature former Ontario premier and Canada's former ambassador to the United Nations Bob Rae and the foundation's executive director, Meg French.

It will run from 6 to 9 p.m. at Central Niagara on York Road.

Cindy Grant, a member of Nyanyas of Niagara, said the timing is critical as "international aid, particularly from the U.S., but also across the globe, has been drastically cut," affecting community-led programs



Two women in sub-Saharan Africa, where HIV and AIDS programs face deep funding cuts — efforts a Niagara-on-the-Lake fundraiser aims to support. SUPPLIED

across sub-Saharan Africa.

"So the Stephen Lewis Foundation has put out a plea to all of the grandmothers groups across Canada," Grant said: "Please raise as much money as you can."

The group, which has operated for about a decade, sends 98 per cent of what it fundraises directly to the Stephen Lewis Foundation. It has contributed more than \$130,000 to date.

Funds support efforts including health care, schools and basic services for communities where "grand-

mothers were raising these children with absolutely no supports," said Grant.

"It's just the right thing to do."

This week, Canada is saying goodbye to the co-founder of the foundation, Stephen Lewis, who died on March 31 at the age of 88 after a battle with cancer.

Lewis was the leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party for eight years and the Canadian ambassador to the United Nations for four years. In the 2000s, he was part of the UN's special en-

voy for HIV/AIDS in Africa and created the foundation with his daughter Ilana Landsberg-Lewis.

In a written statement, Grant said the Nyanyas of Niagara members are "very saddened" to learn of Lewis' passing.

"One of our founding members Sandra Hardy had the privilege of meeting him a few times and remembers his warmth and passion for his work combatting the effects of HIV & AIDS and related issues in Africa," she said.

"Our Grandmothers group in Niagara-on-the-Lake is proud to support this important work as a tribute to his foundation and as an honour of his legacy."

Grant encouraged residents to support local work, charities and projects — "but it's also important to support the work internationally," she said.

The goal is simple, Grant added: "Raise some money and raise awareness."

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



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# Big Brothers Big Sisters **drag brunch** at Queen's Landing funds youth mentorship

Andrew Hawlitzky  
The Lake Report

"Having something like this would have impacted me so much 15 years ago." That message from drag performer Empress Claudia Silva set the tone Sunday as more than 200 people gathered at Queen's Landing for Big Brothers Big Sisters' Big Brunch fundraiser supporting youth mentorship.

The brunch ran from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and included a catered buffet through Queen's Landing, a raffle for a year's worth of brunch, and a prize wall. The fundraiser aimed to raise \$40,000 for the organization's in-school mentorship program.

The event brought together Pride Niagara drag performers and a youth-serving charity in a deliberate pairing, one that organizers say reflects a real overlap in the populations they serve: young people who may not find acceptance or stability at home.

Franklyn Searle, director of fund development and communications at Big



Empress Claudia Silva wows the crowd, and collects tips, during the Big Brothers Big Sisters' Big Brunch at Queen's Landing on Sunday. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

Brothers Big Sisters, said the money raised will go directly to the in-school mentorship program, including its work at Crossroads Public School in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"It's a really important program and we've had a lot of student engagement and attendance increase because these youth are able to have a mentor in school."

In that program, volunteer mentors visit the school once a week and spend an hour with a student, working through activity bins stocked with board games, crafts and sports equipment,

or simply talking through difficult situations.

"A lot of people are always convinced that our mentors are a bunch of young 20-year-olds that are lively and are cool and hip, but a lot of our mentors are actually retired," said Searle.

The need for that kind of steady, consistent presence is sharper for some youth than others.

In Canada, one in four 2SLGBTQ+ youth reported suicidal thoughts in 2021, compared with one in 20 of their heterosexual, cisgender peers, according to

Statistics Canada.

"Mentorship is such a big part of their lives and they go through a lot of having a chosen family, because sometimes their family isn't as welcome to them," said Searle.

Empress Claudia Silva, one of three drag performers from Pride Niagara alongside Macy Manolo and Kristy Kenzie, spoke from the stage about growing up in the Niagara region.

"If this would have been something that I knew was there, I would have just started so much earlier," she said.

"I would have given back to my community so much earlier. I would have felt stronger and more empowered so much earlier."

Searle pegged the fundraising target at between \$30,000 and \$40,000, depending on how the raffle and prize wall performed.

"This is our second annual, so we're really hoping to come back here, third annual, and every year we're trying to make it bigger and better," said Searle.

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

# Aura on the Lake will be a part of **drag brunch** show

Staff  
The Lake Report

A Niagara-on-the-Lake restaurant is set to take centre stage as a television crew rolls into town to film an episode of "Drag Brunch Saved My Life," bringing a burst of colour to the local dining scene.

Aura on the Lake owner Nittin Sharma says the opportunity came unexpectedly when the show called him up. He was all in.

While the show often focuses on struggling restaurants and dramatic transformations, Sharma said that won't be the case for Aura on the Lake.

"We have been told that that is not the focus this year," he said. "There will be an element of upgrading the ambiance, maybe the decoration, make it a bit more colorful, maybe a bit more loud, but that's about it."

Instead, the emphasis will be on hosting a lively drag brunch and filming the experience for the series.

Filming is scheduled

for next Wednesday and Thursday, which means the restaurant will be closed to the general public during production.

"Unfortunately, we'll have to close down for a few extra days," Sharma said, though residents are invited to take part in the drag brunch.

The event will feature a specially curated brunch menu created just for the occasion.

"We have some special brunch items. We have a special menu of four brunch items, meals in by themselves, especially curated for this event," Sharma said.

Seating will be limited due to the size of the restaurant, and organizers expect tickets to sell quickly.

Tickets are available through Eventbrite.

Beyond the show and the spectacle, Sharma says the goal is simple: bring something fun and different to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"In the end, it brings a new festivity into the town," he said. "That's what it is, just something fun to do."

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# Therapy horses raise \$6K for rescue reeling from brutal winter

Andrew Hawlitzky  
The Lake Report

Two ponies named Kate and Ruby were left tied to a fence post at Last Chance Horse & Pony Rescue & Sanctuary late last fall, their hooves so overgrown they could barely walk.

A fundraiser held this weekend in Niagara-on-the-Lake raised \$6,000 to help the rescue keep taking in unwanted animals like them.

The Community Initiative for Animal Rescue ran the two-day fundraiser for Last Chance, selling spring floral arrangements, baked goods, jams, handmade chocolate, pickles and custom pet bracelets by Coconut Quartz.

Supporters came from as far as Toronto and London, including one couple who drove out after spotting a photo of one of the therapy horses in The Lake Report's preview story last week.

The animal welfare group's founder, Tanya



Volunteers (from left) Mia DiBartolomeo, Shyanne Journeay, Ella Grantham and Noa Houghton with therapy miniature horses Chewy, 2% and Houston at the Community Initiative for Animal Rescue fundraiser last Sunday. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

Rice, said the group chose to support Last Chance this year partly because 2026 is the Year of the Horse, and partly because the rescue's financial strain over winter was plain to see on social media.

Frozen barn pipes forced cancellation of a planned Family Day event that would have brought in significant revenue through bake sales and merchandise. "When that happened to them, we knew it was even

more important that they were chosen as our recipient," she said.

Three of Last Chance's registered therapy miniature horses, Chewy, Houston and 2%, were on site both days for three hours. Houston

is 25 years old and visits hospitals, senior homes and preschools regularly.

Jennifer Navaroli, a volunteer with Last Chance for 15 years, described the reaction patients and residents have when the horses arrive.

"They go crazy. They love it. It brings them so much happiness," she said.

The horses are insured and certified under Ontario's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which means venues cannot turn them away.

Navaroli has watched the rescue grow from eight animals to 40 and said the calls don't stop for them to take in even more animals.

"We get calls all the time and it's sad. Most of the rescues are full, and there's a huge need for more," she said.

Horses that are too old to race, too slow to pull carriages or too costly to keep are often shipped to slaughter, she said, a fate she considers a poor return for animals that spent their

lives in service.

"Horses were your transportation many, many years ago. Horses fought your war, horses plowed your fields. Horses won you money at the track, so they need some kind of respect," she said.

Rice suggested that people who cannot attend the animal welfare group's events can still help by following local rescue groups on social media and donating when they can. A common misconception Rice noted is that humane societies receive government funding — they don't.

The Community Initiative for Animal Rescue plans to continue making smaller donations to local rescue groups throughout the year between its larger fundraising events.

Last Chance also takes volunteers of all ages with its youngest being seven-years-old and its oldest being in his 70s.

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## Smoke on the water

Fort Niagara rises through dense fog as seen from Queen's Royal Park, moments before rain swept in and cleared the mist.  
 DAVE VAN DE LAAR

## Opinion

# A town where you don't ask questions



**THE TURNER REPORT**

Garth Turner  
 Columnist

One dreary, wet, dark and lonely night, I sat in the deserted waiting room of the Windsor airport. Waiting for the last flight out.

Looking up, I saw the enemy. He approached, drenched from the rain outside, rivulets of water flowing down his briefcase.

I braced. Our gaze met. Herb Gray was a senior Liberal cabinet minister. I was a Conservative opponent. In the House of Commons, we were foes.

This night, we were both moist and tired after public events, eager to get back to Ottawa and bed. We were also both hungry in an airport where the only option was a vending machine.

"Snickers or chips?" I asked him.

So, Snickers it was. Together we munched through six of them. And got to know each other, as people.

Turns out he wasn't a monster in a blue suit, but the son of Belarusian immigrants who became a lawyer, then an MP, the first federal Jewish cabinet minister then deputy prime minister.

Herb was also a rocker, happily trading his briefing dossiers for a piano

keyboard to hammer. He mesmerized. That night taught me pre-judging others is dangerous and wrong. In this world there is no black and white.

And this brings us to the lord mayor. Plus the Shaw. Last week, in case you missed it, this column did a dive into the festival's financials, now that the theatrical charity is engaged in almost \$100 million worth of construction projects in our bucolic little burg.

I wanted to know the viability of its business model, the source of funding and the endgame. Is this still an artistic enterprise worthy of oodles of tax money, the sympathy of donors and exemption from all heritage rules? Or, has it become a non-tax-paying corporation heavy into real estate development?

After all, were it not for government cheques and tax-deductible donations, the Shaw would have lost about \$20 million last year on its theatre operations. But here it is, throwing up a five-building artists' village and about to erect a \$85-million, 55,000-foot mega complex.

Meanwhile it's taking tens of millions more in public funding while having a \$40-million investment portfolio managed by a Montreal firm.

It seems appropriate, given the impact on all of us, to have clarity and transparency. Yes, the Shaw brings huge economic benefits to NOTL.

It's also tearing down heritage structures, reducing the tree canopy, irrevers-



Workers watch as an excavator takes initial bites out of a heritage home on Victoria Street, demolished as part of the Shaw's real estate expansion.

ibly altering the Old Town, erecting a massive industrial building in our midst and turning prime residential streets into dump truck corridors for the next three years.

So, I asked some questions of Shaw boss Tim Jennings. Alas, he has decided not to speak with me.

"An interesting article on Shaw in that you have sounded a few alarm bells on its future," writes Michael Eagen. "We have been supporters for a number of years but have been concerned about so much expansion and the source of income to support all. Keep up the good work even though there are a few 'sensitive' souls out there."

And one of those souls belongs to our lord mayor.

Gary Zalepa has super-mayor powers bestowed by the province, is a big booster of the Shaw Festival and its property developments, works at being mayor part-time and remains an executive with real estate firm Century 21.

Mr. Zalepa ran a real estate brokerage in town before joining C21 and has served as a director of the Niagara Association of Realtors, plus the provincial and federal industry bodies.

Last year, while serving as mayor and helping approve the Shaw's expansion, Mr. Zalepa was named one of the Top 100 Most Influential Voices in Canadian Real Estate, crowning his 30-year career in the business.

But he clearly doesn't like me. The note below arrived the evening after last week's column was published — from Mr. Zalepa's private email account.

The lord mayor and I have never spoken. It may be time for a few Snickers.

"Mr. Turner, As a resident of Niagara-on-the-Lake I was deeply troubled by your remarkably uniformed (sic) written opinion.

I wish to add my comments to the hopefully numerous residents and those who care deeply of our Town, who will take exception to your poor judgment.

Your comments do not reflect the true community leadership of Mr. Jennings and his remarkable commitment to our Town.

I say unfair to you Mr. Turner.

By the way, no person is compelled to speak to you. I certainly am not compelled to write that.

Gary Zalepa"  
 Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.

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## Cutting councillors is **poor governance**

Dear editor:

Perhaps our lord mayor and council should take a long, hard look in the mirror when contemplating “governance reform.”

At last week’s council meeting, buried at the end of the agenda there was “Information Item 15.1: Council Composition — Lower Tier Municipalities in Niagara Region.”

Hardly the kind of agenda item one would expect to engender a basic change in the structure of our current council structure with no staff recommendation, or public discussion: simply, a couple other towns have jumped off the bridge, so maybe we should too? (“NOTL votes to reduce number of councillors from eight to six,” March 26)

In the town’s reply to the province on March 4 (“NOTL council will fight ‘tooth and nail’ against amalgamation,” March 5), our lord mayor states, “Council has expressed clear concerns that amalgamation could dilute local representation, redistribute responsibly managed reserves and tax base capacity, disrupt responsive service delivery, compromise agricultural and heritage stewardship. Structural consolidation does



Letter writer Bob Bader says Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa has betrayed constituents by bending the knee to the province’s proposed governance changes — including reducing council size and supporting weighted regional voting — without public consultation, evidence or a clear mandate, warning it could weaken local representation and shift power to larger cities like Niagara Falls, Welland and St. Catharines. FILE

not automatically produce efficiency.”

Further, “Niagara-on-the-Lake supports collaboration. We support modernization where it is evidence-based and outcome-driven ... We cannot support structural change imposed in the absence of demonstrable benefit.”

Where is the evidence-based-outcome driven benefit of reducing council to six from eight? How is springing a change like this on the citizens of Niagara-on-the-Lake with no opportunity for discussion or study “good governance”?

And, now in an email letter dated March 31, nine of our 12 mayors have written to the premier betraying

their constituents by suggesting “on the question of regional governance structure, we are united in our support for a weighted distribution voting model that balances representation by population with fairness and ensures every municipality has a meaningful voice.”

Without doubt, the three heavyweight cities will control the region by a weighted distribution system, which will likely be a mayors-only regional council, with Niagara Falls, St. Catharines and Welland controlling the votes and the smaller municipalities footing the bill.

In the rush to appease the bully tactics of Premier Ford’s desire to usurp any

sense of local governance by municipalities, our local mayors have rushed headlong into a major amalgamation with no study, no citizen mandate and no planning.

Maybe this is Premier Ford’s ultimate vision for his strong mayors powers?

Bob Gale was at least forthright and open about wanting to abolish our municipal governance in favour of a three-city or one-big-city model.

What a shame these nine mayors didn’t really get what Mayor Redekop was saying in his rejection of Bob Gale and the premier’s three-city design in early March.

**Bob Bader**  
NOTL

## Why create **more red tape** for businesses?

The following letter was sent to Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and members of town council. A copy was forwarded to The Lake Report for publication.

Dear lord mayor and members of council,

I am writing to formally oppose the proposed master business license program.

This proposal moves Niagara-on-the-Lake in the wrong direction.

Across Ontario, there is increasing discussion around municipal amalgamation and reducing layers of government. In that context, introducing a new layer of local regulation, oversight and cost is difficult to justify.

It runs counter to where public policy is heading — and to what taxpayers expect.

The direction should be clear: fewer layers, simpler systems and lower administrative burden.

During the last election, residents and business owners were clear — reduce red tape and control costs. This program does the opposite.

It introduces new licensing requirements, new fees and additional compliance obligations for businesses already dealing with inflation, labour shortages and complex provincial and federal regulations.

From a business perspective, this is not support. It is added friction.

From a governance standpoint, the timing is also questionable. Council and staff are already under significant pressure managing complex files — planning, infrastructure and ongoing

policy challenges — while facing increased public scrutiny and limited resources.

This program does not solve a defined problem. It creates new administrative work, new enforcement requirements, and new points of conflict.

The staff report itself acknowledges that additional personnel and resources will be required. That means higher costs for taxpayers and further strain on staff capacity.

It also means council takes on a permanent new program that will require ongoing oversight, adjustment and justification.

This is not a minor change. It is a structural expansion of municipal responsibility.

If specific issues within the business community

need to be addressed, they should be handled through targeted enforcement of existing bylaws. A blanket licensing system treats all businesses as liabilities to manage, rather than partners in the local economy.

Niagara-on-the-Lake’s strength comes from its business community. Adding cost and complexity at the municipal level risks discouraging investment and weakening that foundation.

At a time when the broader conversation is about streamlining government and reducing duplication, this proposal moves in the opposite direction.

I urge council to reject the master business license program.

**Scott Gauld**  
NOTL



This week’s riddle is “Jeopardy!” style  
Category: 7-LETTER WORDS

**Named for its inventor,  
it’s a brand of hot tub  
with underwater jets.**

Last issue category: DOUBLE TALK

Clue: The “ants go marching” rhyme took this double-talk phrase from the Civil War song “When Johnny Comes Marching Home.”

Answer: What is “hurrah, hurrah”?

Answered first by: Margie Enns

Also answered correctly (in order) by:

Lynda Collet, Emma Balsas, Jeff Lake, Howard Jones, Catherine Clarke, Donna Pearce, Nancy Rocca, Ted Wiens, Bob Wheatley, KC King, Wade Durling, Jim Dandy, Katie Reimer, Margaret Garaughty, Stuart Vandermeer

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

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

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# What our buildings are saying – and **why it matters**



**ARCHITEXT**

Brian Marshall  
Columnist

For years, I spent way too many hours as a passenger in a jet flying around the globe. Very early, particularly on flights spanning multiple time zones, I learned how to maximize sleep time to adjust my internal clock.

However, given that I need to average only about four to five hours sleep per day and many of the flights exceeded that, the rest of my time was devoted to reading.

For those who are young enough not to recall the days before laptops, this meant my carry-on was filled with hardcopy reports augmented by the newest publications on business theory; the latter to serve as a current lexicon to translate the latest buzzwords used by the consultants who authored many of those reports.

Thank God, architecture is far less susceptible to new catchy words and phrases, tending to be underwritten by expressions rooted in tradition.

Take, for instance, the term “architectural language” (as used at several junctures in our new heritage conservation district plan’s policies and guidelines) originated in the architectural theory of 18th-century France where it was described as “architecture parlante,” translating to “speaking architecture.”

The theory suggested that the forms, materials, scale, styles, etc., of buildings in a specific area communicate their purpose, identity and context, to function much like a language.

This understanding continued to evolve through the 19th century with British architect John Ruskin, for example, emphasizing that architectural design should use materials and styles reflective of the existing “spirit” of the surrounding district or neighbourhood — this “spirit” being a result of how the existing buildings and landscape combine to establish a unique local character.

So, if we consider the built architecture of a defined area including, but not limited to, placement on the



The next time you go for a walk in the neighbourhood, look closely at the houses — they’ll communicate their architectural language, revealing the area’s character. FILE

lots relative to the street and each other; scale, materials, building forms and styles; and decorative and detail elements, all set within established landscapes, it is possible to understand the unique, specific, cohesive architectural language of a character area.

That understanding is vital to guide change while preserving the area’s character.

Moreover, for those who plan on building or altering an existing dwelling within an established streetscape or neighbourhood, embracing that character and its sense of place is one of the fundamental keys to creating good architectural design in harmony with its surroundings.

That said, for those who are unfamiliar with some of the architectural terms I’ve used in this column, here

are a few quick definitions.

An architectural “style” is a defined design classification distinguished by specific characteristics of structure and ornament that are in accordance with a set of criteria and parameters which have been established for each style. In Ontario, there are 23 distinct architectural styles and the Eclectics (a group of revival expressions).

“Form” is the building’s three-dimensional shape and configuration. Essentially, the form is the blank canvas upon which the details and decorations of a particular style are expressed.

For example, many Edwardian designs are based on an American foursquare form, while a ranch is based on a bungalow form.

“Materials” refer to all the physical substances

that are assembled to create the building. For the purposes of understanding the architectural language of an area’s character, these are the substances you see on the exterior of the buildings.

We define “scale” as the size of a building relative to either being comfortable and proportional to the average human body (human scale) and/or, compatible and in-keeping with the surrounding buildings (contextual scale).

Typically, residential streetscapes and neighbourhoods are considered to be small scale; that is, fine-grained, intimate areas which are geared to human scale first and contextual scale second.

“Detail elements” are features such as rooflines (including roof type, slope, eave treatment, etc.), window treatments (size, style, placement, etc.), entrance details (door, surround, placement, etc.), and the treatment of facades including arrangement of openings and decorative design elements.

Using this information, if you go for a walk in your neighbourhood, look at the houses — what you’ll see on the streetscapes will begin to communicate its architectural language. Then, the

building blocks of the area’s character will become self-evident.

I find it appalling that any architect worth their salt would not familiarize themselves with an area’s architectural language and character before putting a pen to paper in the design phase of a project. But that is what we have seen far too often of late.

The proposed designs of the hotel on the Parliament Oak site and Shaw’s redevelopment of the Royal George (both of which have been granted exemptions from the provisions of the new heritage conservation district plan) are diametrically opposed to the architectural language and character of Old Town.

Both will radically damage that character — in the case of the Royal George, something that ERA Architects, acting as the town’s heritage planner, categorically attested to.

Similarly, on a smaller scale, the proposed garage addition off the facade of 187 Queen St. will do the same.

Apparently, where money talks, all good sense walks.

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

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# Don't it always seem to go? NOTL's parking lot push



David Israelson  
Special to The Lake Report

What timing. Niagara-on-the-Lake's town council picked the week that Joni Mitchell was receiving a lifetime achievement Juno Award to make her words become real.

They voted to pave paradise and put up a parking lot.

Well, maybe paradise is an exaggerated description of NOTL's former hospital site at 176 Wellington St. But the property did offer some attractive opportunities to make the community a better place to live, work and visit.

Never mind. What can be more attractive than a park-

ing garage at the entrance to an historic town?

Apparently that was the council's thinking on March 24, when it rejected a simple proposal that would have allowed philanthropists, educators, arts, music, cultural and Indigenous organizations to formally put forward ideas for using the property for more than just dumping your car.

Instead, council ordered staff to look only at one idea: parking.

Never mind that community stuff. Why waste time with peoples' ideas? We can only imagine the day, a few years from now, when a future lord mayor dedicates the new parking lot: "People tried to suggest other uses for the community, but we showed them. Time to park."

Town staff now have firm direction. They have been instructed to spend up to \$200,000 of taxpayers' money to look at how to make this public land in



David Israelson doesn't doubt a design team will present some attractive drawings of a future parking garage for Wellington Street. But it's not certain the actual buildings will match up to those renderings, he says. SOURCED/WHITELINE ARCHITECTS

Niagara-on-the-Lake into a daycare for peoples' cars.

No doubt a design team (or maybe its AI helpers) will come up with some attractive drawings. But actual buildings have a funny way of not looking exactly like the architectural renderings that were presented before they were built.

What will the footprint of this giant parking lot be on the site? What happens to the trees in front and to the side of the existing building?

Put 'em in a tree museum?

In any case, have you

ever seen a parking lot, anywhere, and said, "My, what a beautiful building?" Thought so.

According to early estimates, it could cost up to \$18 million to build this parking palace. Not to worry: within one or two decades, the parking fees might start paying back the investment.

Or not. The parking lot could be in the black as long as there aren't additional salaries and expenses to manage it, provide security and maintain the place when the pavement and the

pillars get worn down between now and the 2040s.

Some members of council apparently believe that their vote ordering staff to do a parking lot study still leaves the door open to other ideas for the property. It's about "timing," they say.

This may come as news to the James A. Burton & Family Foundation, which wants to donate substantial funds to help establish 176 Wellington as a hub for some of the arts and cultural activities that make this town vibrant and a great place to live.

The foundation says its concept would include parking, which could provide revenue for the town. While parking would be part of the project, it wouldn't dominate the property the way the town's proposed parking lot would.

The foundation can be forgiven if they take the town's vote to look at only one option — parking — at face value. Council's argument is that it's just not ready yet to entertain other imaginative ideas for the site. But it's hard to see how a vote ordering only one option to be considered can be called keeping your options open.

Will NOTL's council ever be ready to consider other options for this public property? Based on what we've seen so far, you don't what you've got till it's gone.

*David Israelson is a writer and non-practising lawyer who lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake.*



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## Don't mischaracterize Shaw Festival

Dear editor,  
I was taken aback by Garth Turner's attempt to financially vilify the Shaw Festival in his latest opinion, "The little troop that became Shaw Inc." (March 26). As a chartered professional accountant with a 30-plus-year career in the non-profit sector, I feel compelled to set a few things straight.



Letter writer Carolyn Bodnar-Evans says columnist Garth Turner was unfair to the Shaw.

Few would question that non-profit organizations serve a vital role in civil society, doing what neither government nor for-profit organizations are in the business of doing or, quite frankly, interested in.

In recognition of this, non-profit organizations pay zero income tax at the provincial and federal levels, and those registered as charities with the Canada Revenue Agency are permitted to issue tax deductible receipts to encourage financial support.

Non-profit organizations in Ontario may also apply for an exemption from property tax, so it's true that despite some non-profit organizations owning or leasing property, those approved by the province pay zero property tax.

If Mr. Turner believes these provisions are too generous, he should advocate for amendments to federal and provincial legislation that govern non-profit organizations — not mischaracterize organiza-

tions operating entirely within the law.

Balancing a budget is no small feat whether an organization is for-profit or not: the key difference is that non-profit organizations operate under CRA restrictions on how much profit is permissible.

The Shaw deserves credit for doing exactly that in 2025: matching its expenses with revenues in such an uncertain economic and geopolitical environment.

Despite eight per cent lower ticket revenue from the prior year, the board of directors, staff and volunteers achieved an impressive 16 per cent jump in fundraising revenue.

Mr. Turner refers to "almost \$40 million in liquid assets" when citing the Shaw Festival Theatre Endowment Foundation. I doubt any foundation would describe its investment assets as "liquid."

The CRA defines a public foundation as one that generally gives more than 50 per cent of its income

to other registered charities — which is precisely what foundation assets do. They generate income to fund charitable purposes.

Establishing a foundation is a common measure for long-term financial stability. As for the Shaw Festival Theatre Foundation (USA), establishing a U.S. registered entity so that donations from our American friends can receive tax benefits they are entitled to under IRS rules is simply sound organizational planning.

Regarding Mr. Turner's comment that "The fastest growing demographic among ticket buyers ... are people over 80," I say welcome to the science of demographics.

Non-profit organizations have been responding to our aging population for many decades, adapting their revenue and engagement strategies accordingly.

As a newcomer to the community with our "20 somethings" in tow, I was heartened to see affordable ticket prices for students and those under 30 years of age.

The Shaw's successful outreach programming, supported by its expanded facilities, will serve to boost audience development in younger demographics. So will its partnership with Harbourfront Centre in Toronto and bringing bold and brave theatre such as

the new work from 2025 Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning playwright, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins.

Finally, I found Mr. Turner's comment, "Word on the street, or at least among some neighbours, is that the Shaw has not secured all of the funding required to finish the mega complex" catty.

It is not an uncommon practice amongst non-profit organizations to begin significant, multi-year capital projects before 100 per cent of the funding is secured. In my experience, a sound project plan with realistic revenue projections, strong governance and good execution by management often outweighs the opportunity cost of delaying a project.

In closing, Mr. Turner is right. The viability of non-profit organizations "hangs off the largesse of donors and governments." It always has. This is what makes working and volunteering in the non-profit organization sector so challenging.

But in times like these, a healthy non-profit organization sector matters more than ever.

As a newcomer with no affiliation to the Shaw beyond buying tickets to a few performances, I am proud to have such a well-governed and managed organization call Niagara-on-the-Lake home.

**Carolyn Bodnar-Evans**  
NOTL

## Council, this isn't a fairyland for tourists

Dear editor:  
Town council (key word here, town):

It is a town, with real people, not a fairyland for tourists who need a convenient parking garage.

Shame on you town council, where is your future thinking?

You can't have a town without children and children need a school.

You can't have a happy, healthy, diverse town without realizing it is a town first, not a money-maker.

**Elaine McCaughey**  
NOTL



A rendering of the new Royal George. FILE

## Reconsider plans for the Royal George

Dear Editor:

After extensive studies and polling, I don't recall the community ever suggesting that the hospital property should be used for parking. This council, however, appears to have ignored the residents' wishes and hired people to design a parking garage on the site of the old hospital ("Town pitches parking," March 26).

As council had previously approved the construction of a new theatre without any parking, I wonder if the proposed parking garage was to correct this oversight.

I'm sure that no one thinks that it should be the taxpayers' responsibility to build a parking garage for anyone, including the Shaw theatre, especially when other, more acceptable uses were being privately funded.

Speaking of which I was surprised to learn that the Shaw's attendance was down eight per cent last year, and that the average age of the ticket buyer was 80 years old ("The little troop that became Shaw Inc.," March 26).

It also appears that ticket sales accounted for only half of the Shaw theatre's expenses and that the province donated \$15 million and individuals gave more than \$16 million to keep it going.

These are not encouraging financial results for the Shaw, which appears to have kept operating only through the charity of others.

Regarding the theatre

design, I've always believed that any new building in this unique village should respect its neighbours in scale and appearance. With the latest proposal for the Royal George Theatre, it appears that the Shaw doesn't share that opinion.

Perhaps it considers itself more important than the town itself, a town that has been here for over 200 years and previously had been protected by its residents from projects like this.

Another valid criticism is that facadism is never an acceptable solution to any problem and shouldn't have been approved as a compromise to poor building design.

The local columnist Garth Turner wrote about the turmoil in our streets that would be caused by the heavy truck traffic during two years of construction of the new theatre. But what if you build it and they don't come?

Hopefully it's not too late to reconsider the wisdom in building a new Royal George Theatre in light of changing tastes, declining attendance and recent financial information, which has to question the ability of the Shaw to support itself without continuing to rely on government grants and private donations.

Also, don't forget that the proposed building also is a colossal eyesore being totally out of scale with the Old Town.

**Wayne Murray**  
NOTL

## Let's build a NOTL fit for young families

Dear editor:  
I was disappointed to learn council voted to spend \$200,000 on advancing a plan to develop 176 Wellington as a mixed-use building with 150

parking spaces ("Town pitches parking," March 26).

We talk a lot in NOTL about attracting young families to the area, and yet we have no public school, no

hospital and few spaces for families to gather, outside the community centre.

Given these needs, and the fact that it's so rare a public space comes up in

the Old Town, I'm surprised that quadrupling parking on the site has been designated as a priority.

**Brendan McLeod**  
NOTL

## Why not turn hospital into seniors' residence

Dear Editor:  
I believe that the hospital site owned by the town is actually owned by the taxpayers. Therefore, the taxpayers should determine what it should be used for. Let this be an issue voted upon at the next local election in NOTL, not by council.

From my limited knowledge of the various proposals considered, let me point out that the worst is turning this precious piece of land into a parking lot. What a shame.

The NOTL hospital is located in one of the most central areas of this

historical town. It also has a solid building that can be converted and built upon to provide small residential units for our aging population.

The suggestion that this will only cater to the rich lacks a familiarity of rich people's habits. The rich will find a place just as luxurious as where they live in now.

What we need at our hospital site is a mixture of residential units for aging local taxpayers. Applicants can be based on a point system, assessed according to length of residency in NOTL alone, age, etc. Abut-

ting towns and cities should not be included, because the taxpayers of NOTL should come first.

There are many ways of giving back some benefits to the local taxpayers. Aside from providing a familiar and central area to live, additional health-related services can be available. We need a small walk-in clinic, X-ray and blood test services, if possible.

The pharmacy can be relocated to this area, as well as massage, physiotherapy and health store, so that other aging residents of Old Town can walk to this location instead of a need

for someone to drive them for their needs.

Those who cannot walk to this location will not have to spend a lot on gas or Uber fees. It also saves money and time that we do not have.

Besides, with all the massive current construction going on, it might turn off the hordes of tourists who clog the parking spots in Old Town and we won't need additional parking for a while.

The use of the hospital site must not be a parking project. We must have more common sense than that.

**Cecilia Bennett**  
NOTL

# Les Quizerables prove teamwork wins at trivia



## ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

Yet another fundraiser for yet another good cause. And what fun our trivia team made it. No cross words, no accusatory glances and no cussing. How refreshing in today's society.

A big shout out to Megan Vanderlee, who had cleverly assembled our team of eight. Certainly a demographic jumble. A diverse mish-mash in several ways, which was unquestionably the main reason for our success as a team.

Two of Megan's pals, Wendy Kulp and Dan Smeenck, were certainly our superstars, with everyone else contributing here and there.

Objectively observing,

I was the weak link, proffering only two or three correct answers. Ah, the curse of demographics. In a music category, I want more "Man in Black" and less Pink.

Camp David is in the state of Maryland, and a FIFA World Cup soccer ball has 32 panels. Now, what is the main element emitted by a volcano, and when did the first ship transit the Welland Canal? Somebody knew the answers.

As I ramble this week, I hesitate to sound immodest by mentioning that our team ended up with the most points. But as they say out west in Alberta, "It ain't braggin if ya done it."

There were 10 teams, all with clever names, and we were Les Quizerables. In the end, we got a few more correct answers than Quizzical Fitness, the Hopeful Guessers and the Oast Busters. Huzzah.

There are regular trivia nights around Niagara, and it is hard to make organizing appear easy. From our public library, community engagement co-ordinator Debbie Krause



From left, Ross Robinson, Wendy Kulp, Lou-Anne Cairns, Rick Cairns, Marie-Michelle LaLande, Wendy Midgeley, Megan Vanderlee and Dan Smeenck won big at trivia night.

was the quarterback, bringing together all of the components.

On a technical level, there was a great sound system and clear visuals, and hospitality with Ken Slingerland and several of our local Kinsmen taking care of the beverages.

Coming up with fair and understandable questions is an absolutely critical aspect of an enjoyable trivia night. There is no room for ambiguity. Chapeau to Sarah Bowers and her enthusiastic helpers from our library.

had prepared six rounds, each with 10 questions. So a total of 60 questions. Our winning team got 46 points, 77 per cent. More than fair, wouldn't you agree? Next year, I really hope Megan includes me on Les Quizerables.

I know, I know, we got lucky.

Our library trivia night host last week was NOTLer Mike Balsom, no stranger to microphones and group dynamics. He was blessed with competent and enthusiastic helpers, enabling him to move the program along at a good clip. No technical breakdowns, no needless patter, so all in all a very professional trivia night.

Even the technically complex category, called something like "Muted Musical Movie Posters," was presented without a glitch or hiccup. Amazing, and what preparation and attention to detail. I was almost totally clueless in this category.

Really rambling now, what type of soup is traditionally served at the Robbie Burns Night

Suppers? Before the main haggis course? I answered leek soup, but the powers-that-be wouldn't give us the point. They insisted on cock-a-leekie. Chicken and leek. Sheesh. Details, details.

And what is the world's smallest and shallowest ocean? Even with two ladies named Wendy on our team, as host Mike pointed out, we couldn't get that answer. Hint: It is approximately 1.5 times the size of the United States.

This year's Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library Trivia Night was a resounding hit. Remember, it's hard to make something look easy.

There is so much going on at the library. "More than books. More for you." Discover stories, skills and community one chapter at a time. Always welcoming.

On June 8, 1800, the Niagara Library, the first circulating library in Upper Canada, was established "to diffuse knowledge" among area subscribers.

As I often conclude, not that long ago..

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# One for the Pot



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# Comic Jeff Paul returns home to film **first standup special**

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Comedian Jeff Paul is returning to familiar ground — but this time, with cameras rolling.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake native is set to record his first standup comedy special and second album at Navy Hall on April 11, marking what he calls a milestone moment in a career more than a decade in the making.

“It’s like pretty much the culmination of the last 15 years,” Paul said.

“All my best stuff I’m gonna put forward and try to put it in one special that all works together, and then pull a new album out of it, too.”

The performance will feature about an hour of material from Paul, with a 15-minute opening set by fellow NOTL comedian Joe Pillerteri, whom Paul describes as a “local legend.”

The special is being filmed by Macaw Studios, a

Canadian production company with a track record in comedy. Paul said the goal is to shop the finished product to streaming platforms, though he’s open to wherever it lands.

“I hope it gets sold somewhere. Whoever wants it, they can buy it,” he said. “But if it just ends up on YouTube and you get the views, that’s kind of what we’re after as well.”

While Paul is now based in Toronto — where he runs weekly shows and performs regularly — he still spends much of his time touring across Canada, with recent stops in Montreal, St. Catharines and Ottawa.

Despite the growing reach of his career, returning to Niagara-on-the-Lake carries particular significance.

“I grew up down there, and I run the Icebreakers Comedy Festival. We do that every year,” he said.

“It’s always been nice to come back home and kind of do it for the town,



Comedian Jeff Paul is bringing his raunchy humour to the Navy Hall on April 11 as he films his first-ever standup comedy special. NOTL’s Joe Pillerteri will open the night.

because there’s not really comedy in Niagara.”

Paul said the material in his set draws heavily from his own life, rather than politics or current events.

“I don’t really hit on

politics. It’s mostly just about my life,” he said. “It gets a little dirty, little dark sometimes, but it all comes out of reality.”

Navy Hall was chosen not only for its historic char-

acter, but for its intimate setting — something Paul and his team plan to use to their advantage.

There will be two shows, starting at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Each will be capped at

roughly 80 audience members, with the stage placed in the centre of the room in a 360-degree “in the round” format.

“We were looking at all the walls, and we’re like, which one would we want as the backdrop? And we’re like, we want them all,” he said.

The production will also include complimentary drinks for attendees, with support from local beverage partners Ravine winery and Oast brewers.

Paul said audiences can expect a mix of styles between himself and his opener — even if the contrast is stark.

“He tells stories and I tell dick jokes. So it’s two different worlds that collide together, but we work good together,” he said.

At its core, the night is about one thing: a good time.

“I’m gonna tell jokes. People will laugh ... Hopefully.”

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# Artist brings **longings for Scotland** to Niagara Pumphouse

Andrew Hawlitzky  
The Lake Report

For most of her adult life, Julie Forrester Clark couldn’t explain why Scotland kept pulling her back, only that it did, over and over, more times than she can count.

On Sunday, she shared her exploration of that question on the walls of the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

The exhibition, called “Cianalas,” takes its name from a Scottish Gaelic word meaning a deep longing for a place or a strong sense of belonging to one.

It runs until April 25 in the Joyner Gallery at the Pumphouse, and presents semi-abstract acrylic paintings rooted in Clark’s repeated travels to Scotland.

Clark was born in Glasgow and has spent decades returning to Scotland, drawn to its coastlines, its open landscapes and something harder to name. The feeling, she eventually learned, had a name in Gaelic culture.



Julie Forrester Clark shares a booklet featuring her abstract artwork alongside the reference photographs she captured during her travels. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

“There’s a belief that places don’t belong to people, rather that people belong to places, and I definitely belong to Scotland,” said Clark.

For years, she had no framework for what she was experiencing. When she discovered the concept

of cianalas, the recognition shifted something.

“Learning that cianalas is a real thing, and that I’m not the only one who experiences it, has actually been great therapy for me,” she said.

The paintings do not depict specific Scottish locations. Instead, they translate

the sensation of being there: wild coastal weather, vast open space, the particular quality of light on a Scottish hillside.

Clark works in vivid blues, yellows, pinks and oranges, building each piece through layering, sanding, spraying ink and water and

mark-making with unconventional tools.

She works flat on a surface rather than at an easel, rotating the piece constantly, sometimes folding it, sometimes pressing physical objects into the paint.

“I’m pretty rough with them. I sand them sometimes, and I even put a power hose on one once just to see what would happen,” said Clark.

Nothing is planned in advance. A composition emerges slowly, through accumulation and revision, until something begins to resolve itself into form.

“I paint intuitively, so I don’t have any plan when I start. I just start making marks, and eventually something begins to show itself,” she said.

Clark came to painting through photography, training at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography in Montana in 2009, then working through encaustic techniques, an ancient method using heated beeswax and pigment, before shift-

ing to acrylics during the COVID-19 pandemic when ventilation constraints in her basement studio made the wax-based process unworkable.

Rima Boles, director of the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, introduced Clark at the March 29 opening reception.

“Her paintings move beyond literal representation and invite us into emotional landscapes shaped by memory, sensation, and personal connection,” said Boles.

Clark reflected on what she now understands the paintings to have always been doing.

“I realized that all of it was not just about documenting this place that holds on to me so tightly, but it was also about helping me cope with the struggle,” she said.

Clark will host an Artist Playdate workshop on April 11 and 18, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Pumphouse. Program and registration details are available at [niagarapumphouse.ca](http://niagarapumphouse.ca).

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# Memorable performances for Wolves in provincial tourneys

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

Two Niagara-on-the-Lake rep hockey teams that competed in last weekend's provincial championships encountered some high-calibre opposition while turning in some exciting performances to cap off their season.

At the Ontario Minor Hockey Association tier 2 championships in Halton Hills, the U15 NOTL Wolves rode a strong team performance and Tomas Nolan's stellar goaltending to a berth in the semifinals, where they lost a close match 4-2 to the eventual champions the Frontenac Flyers.

And after two tough round-robin losses, the U13 Wolves lost a heartbreaker 4-3 in overtime to the Bruce Grey Bulls on Saturday morning. That win put the Bulls into the knockout round, where they lost in the semifinals.

U15 coach Rich Andres was immensely proud of his team's performance.

"They battled right to the end and played their hearts out," he told The Lake Report. "They really did leave everything out on the ice."

"We were a very hard-working group. We played as a team and got contributions from each and every player at different times of the season."

Eight teams qualified for the U15 tournament but only the top two in each of two divisions advanced to the semifinal round.

Following an opening game loss to the South Grey Spartans on Friday, the Wolves bounced back Saturday morning with Nolan's 2-0 shutout of Strathroy.

Easton VanBerkel had the winning goal and Dean Olsen added an empty netter with one second left to play.

That set up game 3 Saturday night against Sturgeon Lake, where a tie would guarantee second place and a spot in the semis.

Players, coaches and parents from the U13 Wolves, who already had been eliminated from competition with their OT loss, joined the crowd to



Above: U15 goalie Tomas Nolan was a key to the Wolves success in reaching the OMHA semifinals versus Frontenac on Sunday morning.

Left: Lucas Woods (88) and Dean Olsen celebrate during their semifinal. Frontenac won 4-2 and went on to be crowned provincial champions.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
CHRISTIAN BENDER/OMHA.

**PHOTO GALLERY**  
See more pictures at [niagaranow.com](http://niagaranow.com)

cheer on the U15 team in what turned out to be a real barn-burner finish.

"We went up early in the second period on a great individual effort by Henry Buffington," Andres said. "He outraced two defenders, broke in under pressure and beat the goalie to open the scoring."

But Sturgeon Lake fought back to take a 2-1 lead, forcing NOTL to try to salvage a tie by pulling the goalie with a bit over two minutes to play.

Sturgeon Lake had three

chances to score on NOTL's open net shot but missed.

Then, "with 53 seconds left Jake VanSpronsen's rocket shot from the point found the net through a screen to tie the game and put us in a position to advance," Andres said.

Sturgeon Lake didn't give up, pulling their goalie and putting immense pressure on NOTL.

That's when the Wolves' goalie came through again.

Andres noted, "With three seconds left, in a mad scramble around our goal,

the puck popped out to one of their players wide open on the left side with our net seemingly wide open."

"The player shot at the empty net, but Tomas Nolan sprawled with his stick behind him to somehow keep the puck out of the net. That save was as good as any save made in any hockey league this year, and it meant we would be playing in the OMHA semifinals on Sunday."

On Sunday morning, the Wolves faced Frontenac and were outshot by a wide mar-

gin, but Nolan again kept them in the game.

Thanks to goals by Cian Doyle and Olsen, NOTL was only down 2-1 midway through the final period but some tough calls led to two late goals and the Flyers 4-2 win, Andres said.

"Nolan was an absolute game changer in net and Olsen carried our offence at times, but our success really was a team effort. The coaches believed in this group from the beginning, but we exceeded almost everyone's

expectations throughout the season," he added.

"Winning our league playoffs and getting to the semifinals at the OMHAs is a testament to our boys' work ethic and commitment, they certainly made their families, the coaches and NOTL Minor Hockey very proud."

U13 coach Gary Friesen noted that with 12 teams in their tourney, NOTL's first two games (both losses) were really to determine seeding.

"From the start, we had our sights set on Saturday, knowing that was the day that truly mattered with elimination on the line," he said.

"We faced a very beatable Bruce Grey Bulls team in the play-in game and found ourselves in a strong position, leading 3-2 late in the third," Friesen added.

"Unfortunately, we gave up the tying goal with just 20 seconds remaining. From there, the game went to overtime, where we ultimately came up short, bringing our season to an end."

When they qualified for the OMHA tourney by winning the Niagara District title, Friesen and his coaching staff knew they would face some tough competition.

"We went in with the attitude of 'Let's go there and just give it our all.' There were some good teams, we gave everything we had and the kids should be proud," he said.

It was a hectic hockey weekend for the Friesen family.

After coaching the U13s and cheering on the U15s, Friesen headed to Whitby on Sunday morning to watch his younger son Brock and his U10 Garden City Falcons AA team competing in their OMHA tournament east of Toronto in Whitby.

Brock and fellow NOTL resident Auston Cwierniewski had a memorable season as their team went 25-1, losing only one regular season game.

They made it to the OMHA semifinal, losing 5-4 in overtime to the host Whitby Wildcats, who went on to win the title.

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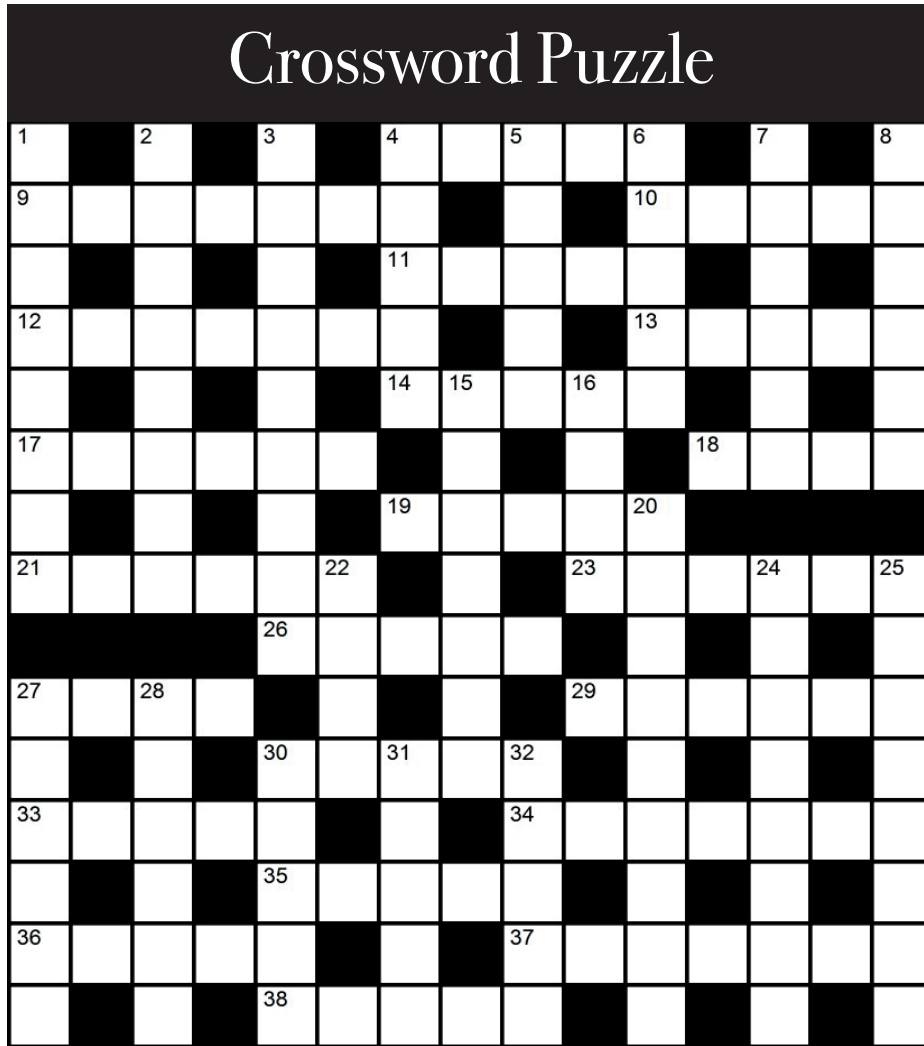
# Have some fun

**Across**

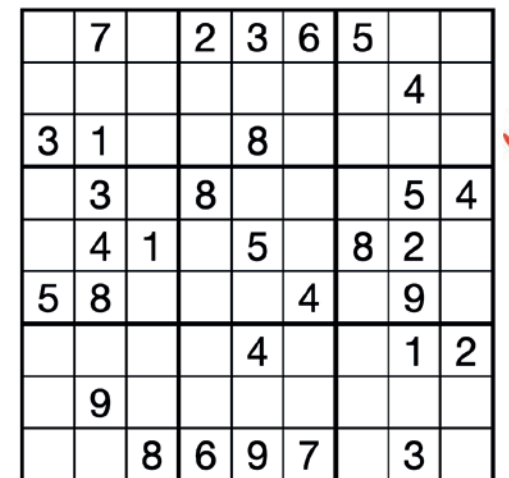
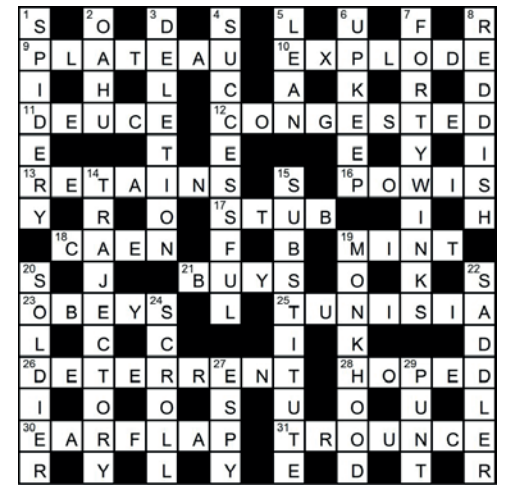
- 4. Thick slices (5)
- 9. Greyish-fawn (7)
- 10. Result (5)
- 11. Efface (5)
- 12. Recover (7)
- 13. Path (5)
- 14. Common people (5)
- 17. Type of gum (6)
- 18. Cried (4)
- 19. Wet (5)
- 21. Elephant (6)
- 23. Swiss city (6)
- 26. Vends (5)
- 27. Bog (4)
- 29. Bitter conflict (6)
- 30. Armed strongholds (5)
- 33. Thank you (French) (5)
- 34. Type of bath (7)
- 35. Cowboy display (5)
- 36. Metal spikes (5)
- 37. Diviners (7)
- 38. Adjusted (5)

**Down**

- 1. Invariable (8)
- 2. Natives of e.g. Venice (8)
- 3. Calming medicines (9)
- 4. Doze (5)
- 5. Diminish (5)
- 6. Prophets (5)
- 7. Guarantee (6)
- 8. Forsake (6)
- 15. Notice (7)
- 16. Stopper (4)
- 20. 24 hours ago (9)
- 22. Make over (4)
- 24. Qualified (8)
- 25. Purple quartz (8)
- 27. Instant (6)
- 28. Vile (6)
- 30. Being before all others (5)
- 31. Radioactive gaseous element (5)
- 32. Offered oneself for election (5)



Last issue's answers



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## The house that Janet built, ca. 1911

The Carnochan House, pictured to the left of the museum, was built by Janet Carnochan more than a century ago. It stands as a testament to her lifelong dedication to preserving Niagara-on-the-Lake's history. Janet, who donated the land for Memorial Hall, Ontario's first purpose-built museum, built her house next door, ensuring that she remained close to the museum she was so passionate about. Today, the house continues to connect the community with the legacy of one of Niagara-on-the-Lake's most influential figures, and will soon offer a space for researchers and for our archival collection.

### The Lake Report

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# The nature of consciousness — and what it means for AI



**DR. BROWN**

Dr. William Brown  
Columnist

One of the supposedly "big questions" that continues to baffle scientists is the nature of consciousness.

Some of the biggest names in science, including three Nobel Prize winners, Erwin Schrodinger (1933 Nobel), Francis Crick (1953 Nobel) and most recently Roger Penrose (2020 Nobel) took on the question of what was the nature of consciousness, not as part of their Nobel-winning efforts, but as part their broader interests.

Curiously enough, all three were physicists and Schrodinger and Penrose were accomplished mathematicians.

Both Schrodinger and Penrose thought of consciousness as part of the universe — indeed. Schrodinger held that consciousness was in some manner, a quantum phenomenon. Penrose suggested that consciousness made up as much as one third of the universe.

Francis Crick, on the other hand, considered consciousness to be a property

of the brain and set about trying to find the "seat" of consciousness. He failed in several decades of studies.

Oliver Sacks, a neurologist, neuroscientist and friend of Crick, dismissed efforts to understand consciousness as fruitless.

These days, the nature of consciousness is hotly debated by several competing groups, with no consensus or clarity emerging in the debates between them.

But whatever the arguments the subject has attracted the attention of theologians, philosophers, psychologists, neurologists and neurosurgeons and no surprise in this age, the artificial intelligence universe raises new questions.

Is AI conscious, sentient and possess cognitive powers equal to or exceeding humans?

Within the domains of clinical neurology, neurosurgery, neuroscience, epilepsy, anaesthesia and neuroimaging, there are well-established correlations for consciousness.

For example, small lesions such as an intracerebral hemorrhage involving the thalamus may expand to compress the adjacent diencephalon and upper brain stem, leading to drowsiness followed by coma.

Other lesions, whether an ischemic stroke or trauma affecting the same region, are commonly associated with a similar loss of consciousness.



Human consciousness, understood as awareness, is limited in some respects, including when we are asleep and experience dreaming, most of which we are unaware of. UNSPLASH

A seizure may begin in the medial temporal lobe and, with spread, lead to loss of consciousness and a grand mal seizure. Or, should the cardiac output suddenly drop because of an arrhythmia, the whole brain may be deprived of blood and oxygen and the patient drop unconscious to the floor.

The point is that consciousness may be lost if critical areas in the upper brainstem and adjacent diencephalon or perhaps far more extensive areas of the brain are affected. And there's no shortage of drugs that alter awareness and consciousness.

In the day-to-day world of our experience, a more useful way for me to think about consciousness is

awareness.

For example, in this moment, I'm aware of my fingers typing out letters and words, the faint sound of air passing through the room vent and the top of my desk cluttered with papers, books and pens, but little else — certainly nothing of what's going on in my innards a few hours after my last meal and all the other sensory activity, which must be going on but of which I'm mercifully unaware.

In that sense, I'm subjectively and selectively conscious, but certainly not of the universe or anything else other than my running thoughts, which seem to be almost synchronous with my typing.

Focusing on a small bit of what's going on is our salva-

tion, because if we were fully aware of all the neural activity in our nervous system and other systems and organs, we would be helplessly overwhelmed in no time.

So, I can describe a selective, very tiny fraction of what's going on in my brain but nothing else. And when I'm asleep, I might dream, most of which I won't be aware of, but sometimes am, in that twilight awareness between sleep and becoming fully awake.

What about AI? Are current advanced AI systems aware of what's going on inside them as they go about their business of grasping whatever questions we might pose, search for whatever related information they might possess and

compose an appropriate response to us?

A good way to answer that question is to ask the same of ourselves: are we aware of all the goings on in our brain as we respond to some question?

My answer is no, although I'm aware of prompts and somehow, as I type this, some sort of answer comes out in my thoughts and in typewritten form.

Put that way, AI is as aware as we are and perhaps more.

A related hotly debated question is whether AI is intelligent and, more provocatively, as intelligent or more so than us — to which my answer would be similar.

For sure AI is intelligent, very much so, and given its capacity to grow and handle much larger databases, will, if not now, then soon, develop general intelligence the equal of teams of humans, not just you and me.

Finally, is AI sentient? If not, it's well on the way to sentience, just as the character Data was found to be in "Star Trek: The Next Generation" in the 1990s, when that question was asked by some scientists and lots of science-fiction writers.

Have I confused you? Probably, but not intentionally. I'm in the same boat.

*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.*



# OBITUARIES & IN MEMORIAM

## Maureen McCormack



MCCORMACK, Maureen Ann —  
1956 - 2026  
The family of Maureen McCormack (Gallagher) sadly announces her passing, peacefully at the United Mennonite Home, surrounded by her loving family on March 23, 2026.

Beloved wife and soulmate of 39 years to the late Paul McCormack. Together again after a profound loss, their love remains a guiding light for all who knew them.

Maureen was a devoted and loving mother to Clare Jacob (Paul) and Connor McCormack (Charlie), who were the center of her world. She was a cherished sister to Pauline (Ed), Brian, Ann Marie (Clive), John (Lynn), and Andrew, and a dear daughter of the late Patricia and Charles Gallagher.

Maureen lived a life full of love, adventure, and deep connection to those around her. She had a passion for travel and experienced the world with curiosity and joy. Her heart always returned to her favourite place — Anguilla — her island home, where she felt most at peace.

She spent part of her career supporting individuals with special needs, a role that reflected her natural compassion and kindness. Above all, Maureen was an incredible mother. She was strong, fun-loving, supportive, and endlessly caring, the kind of person you could always turn to, no matter what. Her warmth, strength, and love will be forever cherished by her children and all who knew her.

The family extends their heartfelt thanks to the incredible staff at the United Mennonite Home for their care and compassion. A very special thank you to Stacy Yarrow for the exceptional care and companionship she provided during the last few years of Maureen's life. We are deeply grateful.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Dodsworth and Brown Funeral Home — Burlington Chapel (2241 New Street, Burlington) on Thursday, April 9, 2026, from 6 to 8 p.m.

In honour of Maureen's calm, cool, and effortlessly chic spirit, we invite you to wear something that reflects her style. It may be a little too cold for her favourite white linen, but anything relaxed, elegant, and true to you would be just right.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Maureen's memory to the United Mennonite Home in Vineland.

Kindly take a moment to leave a favourite memory or kind word on her virtual guestbook at [www.dbburlington.ca](http://www.dbburlington.ca).

## Henry Beckman



BECKMAN, Henry  
1933-2026  
After a happy and joyful life, at the age of 92, Henry passed away peacefully at home on March 27.

He will be sorely missed by Heather, his wife of 35 years, his four stepchildren and his seven grandchildren.

Born and raised in Ottawa, Henry moved to Toronto to work successfully in magazine publishing, which he

loved and which enabled him to travel much of the world. He was always supportive of his staff, enabling them to be the best version of themselves.

His interests included squash, golf, fishing, bridge, poker, travel, painting, cooking and hosting friends. Spending 30 winters in Florida was a happy chapter in his life because of the time he and Heather spent with family and friends.

In Niagara-On-The-Lake, retirement allowed Henry to pursue his passion for painting. His work reflected Henry's bold and colourful personality. His artistic legacy lives on in the many homes where his beautiful paintings bring joy and fond memories of Henry.

Diagnosed with Parkinson's 12 years ago, Henry and Heather, along with Mario Toffolo, brought Rock Steady Boxing to White Oaks Health Club to help other Parkinson's patients. Its success benefited many Parkinson's patients physically and socially. Henry's positivity and determination, having lived with Parkinson's into his 90's, was an inspiration to scores of Parkinson's patients.

Henry was kind, loyal, generous, entertaining and an interesting storyteller who had a great sense of humour and was always great fun to be with. He was a true gentle man. Henry was a wonderful husband, father, grandfather and friend. He deeply loved his family and friends and they loved him right back.

Henry received excellent care and he would want special love and gratitude extended to Dr Karen Berti, Helen Ferley and Paul K Joseph.

For a more detailed description of Henry's life go to [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com).

A celebration of Henry's life will be held at home on May 24, at 3 p.m.

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



**DENISE LUNDY**

A loving Wife, Mother and Grandmother.  
Born January 16, 1961  
Passed away April 1, 2019

Your life was a blessing, your memory a treasure, you are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure.  
Always loved, forever missed.

Tony, James, Michael, Jen and Granddaughter Rose.

*For obituary and memorial inquiries, please contact [megan@niagaranow.com](mailto:megan@niagaranow.com)*

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FESTIVAL 26**

Saturday April 11

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2026

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craft beer from The Exchange Brewery. Dance to the sophisticated sounds of the Toronto All-Star Big Band and bid on coveted auction items and once-in-a-lifetime experiences – all in support of The Shaw.

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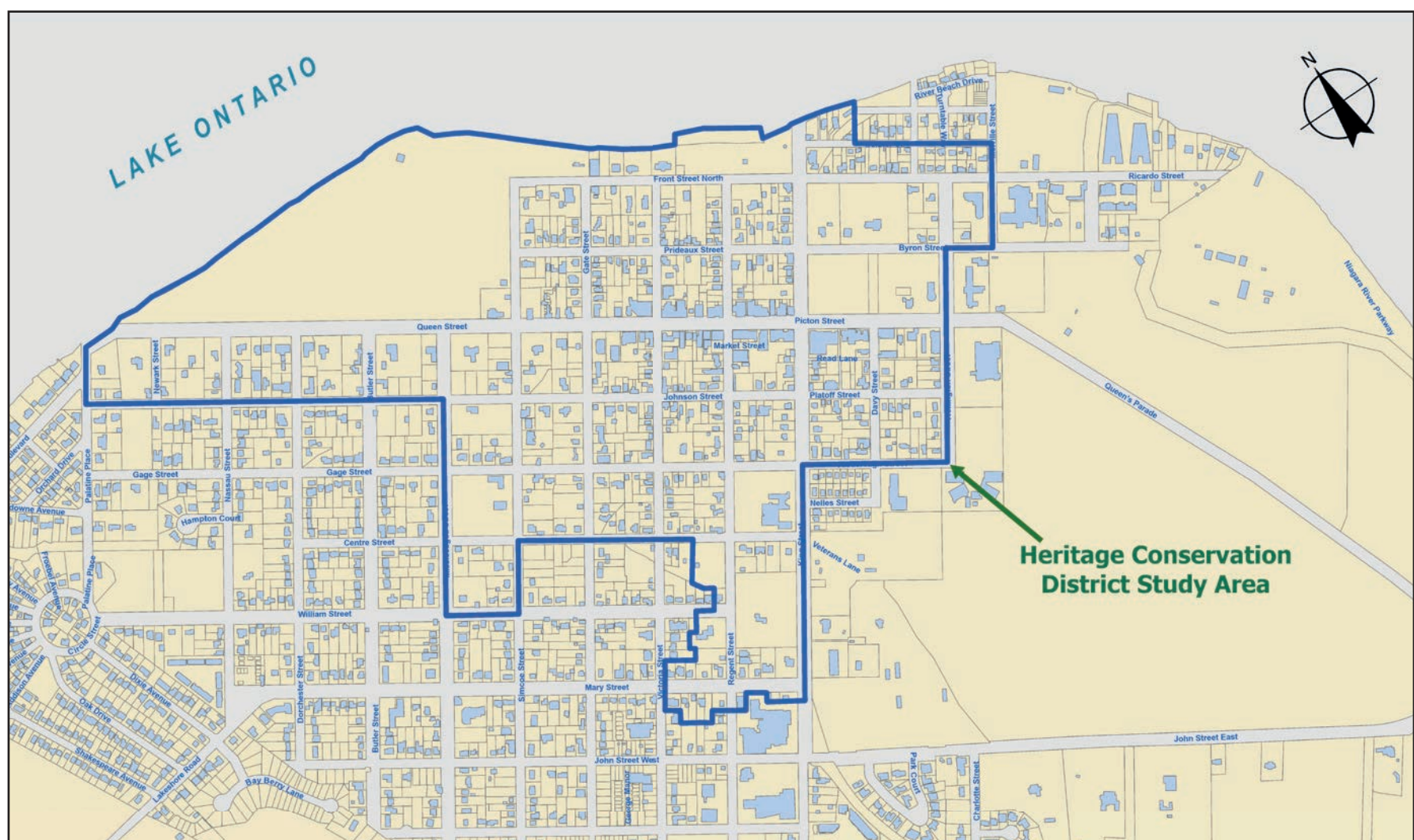
# NOTICE OF PASSING OF DESIGNATION BY-LAW AND PLAN FOR OLD TOWN HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT (REVISED BY-LAW)

TAKE NOTICE that Council of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake previously passed By-law 2026-009 on February 24, 2026 to designate a portion of Old Town as a Heritage Conservation District and to adopt the Old Town Heritage Conservation District Plan under Section 41 and 41.1 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Subsequently, it was identified that Schedule "B" was not included in the final version of By-law 2026-009. To ensure the completeness and accuracy of the By-law, Council, on March 24, 2026, passed By-law 2026-016 to repeal By-law 2026-009.

AND TAKE NOTICE that, on March 24, 2026, the Council passed By-law 2026-015 to designate a portion of Old Town as a Heritage Conservation District and to adopt the Old Town Heritage Conservation District Plan under Section 41 and 41.1 of the Ontario Heritage Act. By-law 2026-015 includes all required schedules and reflects Council's original intent.

The boundaries of the Old Town Heritage Conservation District are delineated in the image below.



Further information about the Old Town Heritage Conservation District Plan and associated Staff report is available at:  
<https://www.notl.com/heritage-planning/queen-picton-heritage-conservation-district-study>

## Explanation of Purpose and Effect of By-law

The by-law designates all the properties within the boundaries of the Old Town Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act and adopts a district plan to guide the conservation and management of heritage attributes within the district.

## Notice of Objection

Any person who objects to By-law 2026-015 may appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal within 30 days of April 2, 2026 by filing a notice of appeal with both the Tribunal and the Clerk of the municipality. The notice of appeal must set out the reasons for the objection and be accompanied by the fee required by the Tribunal, in accordance with subsection 41(4) of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Please note that, pursuant to subsection 41(8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, the Tribunal may dismiss all or part of an appeal without holding a hearing if the appellant did not make oral submissions at a public meeting under subsection 41.1(9) or provide written submissions under subsection 41.1(11) prior to the adoption of the by-law.

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake  
1593 Four Mile Creek Road, P.O. Box 100, Virgil, ON, L0S 1T0

Dated this the 2nd day of April, 2026

Contact: [heritage@notl.com](mailto:heritage@notl.com)

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