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The Lake Report

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Hyper-local news for Niagara-on-the-Lake



Residents respond to town's
plan to ignore media questions
Pages 10-14

Vol. 9, Issue 7

Canada's most-awarded community newspaper

February 19, 2026



The Lake
Report wins
26 more
provincial
awards

Kevin MacLean
The Lake Report

An opinion piece written by a Niagara-on-the-Lake town councillor, several stories, photos and columns by community contributors, and the journalism of staff members of The Lake Report have been singled out by the Ontario Community Newspapers Association in its annual awards.

In all, submissions by The Lake Report earned 26 nominations, more than any other Ontario publication, in the association's 2025 Better Newspapers Competition.

The awards, for items published between Oct. 1, 2024, and Sept. 30, 2025, are open to member publications of all sizes and aim to recognize the outstanding work produced week in and week out by community journalists across the province.

In April, at the association's annual convention and gala in Collingwood,

Continued on Page 4

Winter on the river

Photos show life along the Niagara River in the cold, from fishers to birds



People out fishing and photographing wildlife at the Queenston docks on the Niagara River on Monday. While many of us stay inside and keep warm, life along the river tells us a different story about the coldest months. **More photos on Pages 3, 6 and 10.** DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Town expands Old Town heritage district after cost debate

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

but only after pointed questions about what this change could cost homeowners.

About a year and a half after the review began, council voted Tuesday to adopt a new heritage conservation district plan, which expands the bound-

aries of the area in which homes are protected in Old Town, adding new homes and buildings to the district.

The expansion was launched in 2024 as part of council's current strategic plan and included surveys, research and public meetings

before returning to council this week with a finalized plan that replaces the town's 1986 Queen-Picton district and expands its boundaries.

"This is an exciting moment, it's pivotal," said Coun. Erwin Wiens. "This isn't the end. This is just a

continuation."

The updated plan identifies 255 "contributing" properties — homes and buildings that meet provincial heritage criteria and help define Old Town's historic character.

Continued on Page 2



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Mayor says heritage district owners are stewards

Continued from Front Page

That's more than 47 per cent of the properties within the new boundary. Under provincial rules, at least 25 per cent must meet that threshold for an area to qualify as a heritage district.

Heritage planner Sumra Zia said the expansion sets clearer rules for demolition, renovations and new construction and explains when homeowners need a heritage permit before making changes.

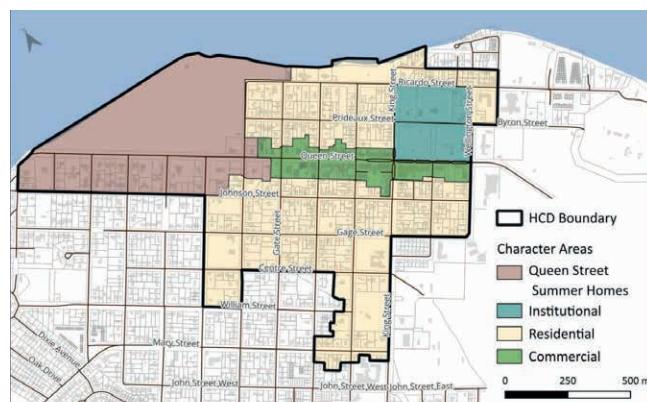
Much of the discussion Tuesday centred on money.

Coun. Andrew Niven said residents repeatedly raised concerns about potential financial impacts.

"Going through the public feedback, surprise costs were one of the main things that were mentioned over and over again," he said.

"I'd just like to see how these programs are being implemented and be reassured that there's going to be a budget for these funds to flow, if residents start asking."

Niven asked whether the town's restoration and improvement grant program



The proposed expansion would replace the 1986 Queen-Picton district and redraw the boundaries of Old Town's heritage conservation area. SOURCED

is funded and ready to support properties in the newly designated area.

Zia said the heritage grant program is already in place and a separate heritage property tax relief program is still being developed and reviewed.

"I'm just worried about the process of that," said Niven. "We're going to improve it and then there may not be any relief if there's no budget."

He initially requested a formal report outlining the town's financial capacity and available funding for properties included in the expanded district, but council agreed the informa-

tion could be provided in a memo instead.

On insurance, Zia said staff reviewed what other municipalities are doing and found misunderstandings were contributing to higher premiums.

"There were a lot of misconceptions when it came to in kind rebuild costs of heritage designation homes," she said, adding that some insurers assume stricter rebuilding requirements than the town actually imposes.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita asked if residents will lose money on selling price if their house is in a designated area.

"That's the stuff that I think residents are concerned about," she said.

Zia pointed to information on the town's heritage landing page that addresses how designation may affect property values but Coun. Tim Balasiuk, meeting chair, said a community information session "is definitely what's in the future" to clear up those concerns.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said the expansion reflects years of effort to protect what makes the town unique — "in a way that allows it to evolve."

"One of the main reasons why our town is so sought after for visitation and also, for residents to live here, is because of the quaintness of our historic village," Zalepa said, calling the plan "a really big move" to preserve the area "for the next generation and maybe the next after that."

He said there's a stewardship that comes with owning a property in this area.

"Part of that stewardship is to recognize how we all work together to continue to protect it," said Zalepa. "That's exactly what this

(plan) does."

Cheropita also raised residents' concerns questioning why some 1970s and 1980s homes were included within the district and whether individual properties could opt out.

"Certain elderly residents have said, 'I don't want my home to be a part of this,'" said Cheropita, adding some have noted "the expense of it would be something I wouldn't be able to continue."

She asked staff whether the town has a "process in place where residents can actually come to council to dispute things," but Zia said properties cannot be exempted once they are included in a heritage district.

"But there are policies and guidelines that make it clear for homeowners what's required from them," said Zia.

"There's nothing that they have to do proactively once they become a part of the district," she said. "The only change that's going to affect them is once they want to propose alterations or developments on these properties."

Coun. Sandra O'Connor

called the document a "very comprehensive report" but questioned how the town would prevent future demolition of designated properties.

"We have seen designated properties be given demolition permits," said O'Connor.

Zia said the updated plan includes more detailed rules around demolition, providing clearer guidance for reviewing applications.

Wiens said council made heritage a priority at the start of its term and followed through.

"This council did it," he said, adding it "took some heat" when it had to raise taxes "to pay for this."

"It was an awful lot of work and it was uphill."

Wiens said council will continue listening to residents, work to streamline the process for homeowners and work with insurance companies "as best we can."

Balasiuk said he was "really excited" to see the growth of the heritage district come to fruition.

"Residents have been talking about this expansion for years," he said.

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Merganser touchdown



A red-breasted merganser duck lands at the mouth of the Niagara River. This female is one of several species of large birds that call the river home. These birds are fast, powerful fliers and hunt by plunging beneath the water's surface to chase aquatic prey, gripping fish with their serrated, narrow bills. While this species breeds much farther north and tends to winter along the coasts, it also regularly occurs on the Great Lakes and rivers like the Niagara River through the winter months when there's open water and food available. Globally, their numbers are considered stable, although local populations face pressure from habitat destruction and other environmental threats. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Volunteers collect 679 pounds of pet food at Valentine's Day drive for Newark Neighbours

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

Boxes of donated pet food, cat litter and pet beds were stacked up inside a Virgil garage last Saturday, where volunteers ran their second annual Valentine's Day pet food drive for Newark Neighbours food bank clients.

Organizer Tanya Rice said the Community Initiative for Animal Rescue collected 679 pounds of pet food, treats and litter, plus 14 pet beds, and converted cash donations into \$260 in Pet Valu gift cards to cover shortfalls.

The goal was to help low-income residents avoid a choice between feeding themselves and giving up their pets, with Newark Neighbours receiving more pet owners through its doors, in need of support.

"There are people who already have those food insecurities and are trying to feed themselves, but pets are an extension of the family," Rice said. "They add comfort in a time of need and companionship."

The drive reflected a local shift toward treating pet food as part of food security, as more residents rely on food banks and face rising costs tied to keeping animals.

The animal welfare group coordinated with Newark Neighbours for a year to tailor what it collected,



CIFAR volunteers Carolyn Greenfield, Tanya Rice, Erika Buchkowsky and Melanie Haskell at the group's Valentine's Day pet food drive in Virgil. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

including supplies that can be harder to cover through donated food. The gift cards went toward items such as litter or specific foods when a gap appears.

Erika Buchkowsky, a volunteer and fundraiser with the group, said the drive aimed to keep pets with their owners when household budgets tighten.

"We don't want them to give up their pets," Buchkowsky said. "We want them to be able to feed their pets while also feeding and supporting themselves."

Stone Road Dental also ran an in-office pet food drive, which contributed to the Community Initiative for Animal Rescue's total after Buchkowsky approached the clinic. Dr. Kimberley Hill and her

team collected donatable items in about a week, including cat and dog food, treats, toys, cat litter, and a large gently used dog bed.

Donors arrived throughout the day, some carrying 50-kilogram bags of pet food. Volunteers helped donors unload their vehicles and sort supplies.

Marie Scarland-James, who donated some pet supplies to the group, said she came out after hearing about the drive from volunteer Carolyn Greenfield and wanted to show support for the volunteers behind it.

"Even though you don't have much money, a pet may be very important to you," Scarland-James said. "You might need a bit of help feeding them."

This year's results

surpassed the group's first Valentine's Day drive, which Rice said was organized in three days and collected 610 pounds of pet supplies. The 2026 drive collected 14 beds, including seven custom dog beds made and dropped off the day before by a woman who recently retired from General Motors.

The event also offered a hot chocolate bar and baked goods generously provided by Erinn Lockard from Sweets & Swirls, as well as some extra items from Coconut Quartz jeweller Cheryl Chiarelli.

The Community Initiative for Animal Rescue plans to repeat the Valentine's Day pet food drive as long as Newark Neighbours Food Bank needs support.

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Lake Report honoured for its in-depth journalism, opinion section, design and community initiatives

Continued from Front Page

the first-, second- and third-place winners among the finalists in each category will be unveiled.

Richard Harley, the founder and editor-in-chief of The Lake Report, said he was proud to see the paper recognized for its professionalism and high-quality journalism — coincidentally amid a spat with the Town of NOTL over access to information.

“Our staff and contributors work really hard to bring real news and important feature stories about Niagara-on-the-Lake to readers every week in print and on our website,” he said.

“With government agencies, the police and civic institutions nowadays keeping a tighter rein on the information the public and media have access to, our jobs have gotten a lot more complicated,” Harley said.

“It would be easy to just follow the example of some media organizations and simply regurgitate government press releases and call it news. But that is public relations, not journalism, and it would be a disservice to our readers and the community.”

He credited the dedication of The Lake Report’s staff for the paper’s success, but also the dozens of contributors from the community who take time to help out.

“Every week, whether they’re writing letters or columns, submitting photos or passing along news tips or suggestions, people in town contribute to The Lake Report — because they really care about NOTL and want what’s best for the town,” he said.

Among those contributions was one from Coun. Wendy Cheropita, which earned her an award nomination.

“Niagara’s hospital system is in crisis,” a Nov. 27, 2024, opinion piece, documented her experience during two visits to the emergency department of the St. Catharines hospital after she fainted, fell and suffered a head injury.



Award-winning Lake Report photographer Dave Van de Laar is nominated once again to be the province’s top shooter at the Ontario Community Newspaper Association’s Better Newspapers Competition, for several photos taken between Oct. 1, 2024 and Sept. 30, 2025, including these three images that highlight his diversity and talent.

The story is a finalist in the Best Guest/Freelance Column category.

A Jan. 16, 2025, photo submission from Jamie Slingerland of Pillitteri Estates Wineries depicting thousands of starlings feasting on frozen grapes awaiting harvest in a NOTL vineyard is nominated for Best Spot News Photo.

Staff photographer Dave Van de Laar, winner of the Ontario Photographer of the Year award in 2023 and 2024, is again a finalist in that category.

His entry consisted of a portfolio of four images: an action shot of NOTL native Kaleb Dietsch playing in an OHL game for the Ottawa 67’s versus the Niagara IceDogs, the mayhem of the Kinsmen Club’s annual Easter egg hunt at the community centre, a dynamic shot of two road cyclists and a series of photos of last year’s blood moon.

Van de Laar’s unique low-angle photo of Hilary Bellis and Liz Klose helping set up the poppy display at the NOTL Museum is nominated for the Most Creative Grip and Grin photo. That’s

a category recognizing ingenuity in photographing what might otherwise be a boring or mundane image.

Reporter Paige Seburn’s lengthy in-depth investigative series on the “Wild West of Wine” was recognized in several categories.

The project outlines in-depth how some wineries skirt municipal bylaws and how the town doesn’t bother to enforce many of those same bylaws. Those instalments, plus a story about farm workers’ complaints about work and living conditions, earned Seburn a nomination in the Reporter of the Year category.

The Lake Report is a finalist in the General Excellence Awards in the largest circulation class, 8,001 and over. Judges grade submissions from February and July 2025 for overall achievement in more than 10 categories to determine each paper’s ranking.

Separately, The Lake Report is also a finalist for Best Front Page.

The paper’s annual International Women’s Day project, last year with

an “elbows up” theme, is a finalist for the association’s prestigious Community Service Award.

And the summer 2025 edition of our twice-yearly glossy magazine, “NOTL: A Guide for Distinguished Explorers,” is nominated for Best Vertical Product.

The paper’s advance coverage of Remembrance Day 2025, with stories, photography and themed advertising, is nominated for Best Feature Pages.

Niagaranow.com, the paper’s news website, which is updated daily, is nominated for Best Community Newspaper Website.

The Lake Report’s creative advertising was also recognized.

An ad for Maple Leaf Fudge in “NOTL” magazine is finalist for both Best Creative Ad and Original Ad Idea. As well, the magazine ad for Art Space 106 is in the running for Best Use of Colour.

And “That’s a wrap for 2024,” our multi-page pre-Christmas feature with scores of images of festive artwork created by Crossroads Public School

students, is nominated for Best In-House Promotion.

A cartoon depicting Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa as a caped crusader was nominated for Best Editorial Cartoon. Created by Harley with an assist from AI, the image highlights Zalepa’s new “strong mayor” powers courtesy of the provincial government.

The Lake Report receives tons of letters most weeks, making for lively and engaging opinion pages. The five-page opinion section from our Dec. 5, 2024, edition is nominated for Best Editorial Page or Section.

It features a strong mix of an editorial about town secrecy over public documents, several topical letters, plus columns by Brian Marshall, Garth Turner and New Democrat MPP Wayne Gates.

Seburn’s “Wild West of Wine” stories also are nominated for Best Investigative Series. The stories outline the conflict between Ferox by Fabian Reis winery and the town’s bylaws — and the town’s refusal to enforce those bylaws.

As part of the investigation, Seburn tracked Ferox’s social media postings going back a number of years outlining events it held that appeared to be in contravention of NOTL’s rules.

The series also examines the ongoing court battle among the town, Konzelmann Estate Winery and grape grower Ed Werner alleging that unpermitted events have been allowed on the winery property despite zoning rules that say otherwise.

Further instalments in the “Wild West of Wine,” published in January, March and July 2025, are also finalists in the Best Feature or News Series.

Former reporter Julia Sacco’s April 17, 2025, story about the massive fire that destroyed the historic Glencairn Estate on the Niagara River Parkway — and was later determined to be arson — is nominated for Best News Story.

One instalment of “Heartbeat of the Harvest,”

a series of feature stories by Jill Troyer about the migrant workers who are so crucial to Niagara’s agricultural industry, is nominated for Best Rural Story.

The Oct. 31, 2024, episode follows workers Oral Walters and Wayne Blake as they care for the vines at Stratus Vineyards.

Three headlines by Harley — “Scoop Dogg drops it like it’s cold,” “There’s a new Ruller in town” and “Root of the problem: Neighbour’s tree is causing foundation damage” — earned him a nomination for Best Headline Writing.

Four stories by Kevin MacLean about court cases involving NOTL native Richard Moore are finalists for Best Police or Court Series.

The stories document the devastation felt by the family of Nestor Chemerika, an 84-year-old cyclist struck and killed by Moore in a hit-and-run in 2023.

Moore’s eventual guilty plea last June is covered along with his arrest in cottage country less than a month later after a work colleague is badly injured by a boat piloted by Moore.

He was sentenced to 11 months in jail in the Chemerika case but still faces charges in Bracebridge of impaired operation causing bodily harm, refusing to provide a breath sample, failing to stop at an accident causing bodily harm and failing to comply with a release order.

Two of our columnists also received honourable mentions. Garth Turner was recognized in the Columnist of the Year category and Ross Robinson received a nod for his humour writing.

Seburn received an honourable mention in Education Writing for her detailed account of student overcrowding at St. Davids Public School.

Since 2020, The Lake Report has garnered 170 provincial and national awards for its work, more than any other community news publication in Canada.

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Should survival swim lessons be mandatory for Ontario's kids? Some say yes, absolutely

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Garrison Village-based swimmer Peyton Leigh has been swimming for nearly all her life — she was first in the pool at five months old.

While her focus is on feats of speed and endurance in the water in competitive settings, she also knows that basic swimming skills can save your life.

Leigh said she could do survival-level swimming at age two. She said that all kids should get a taste of some of the training she has received.

"I know a lot of kids don't have access to being ... put into swimming lessons and a lot of children don't know how to swim. I think it's a great life skill."

Her assessment comes in response to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake voting to urge Ontario's Ministry of Education to make survival swimming lessons mandatory in elementary schools across the province.

"I think it should have been done a while ago," Leigh said.

Town council passed the motion last Tuesday after it was introduced by Coun. Adriana Vizzari, a St. Davids-based councillor with four children attending St. Davids Public School.

The Swim to Survive program, offered by the Lifesaving Society of Canada, teaches basic water survival skills for situations such as falling into a pool or lake. The requirements are rolling into deep water, swimming 50 metres and treading water for one minute.

The Lifesaving Society of Canada reported 189 drowning deaths in Ontario in 2021, the most recent year for which data is available, according to its 2025 Ontario Drowning Report. Drowning is the third-leading cause of injury-related death for children under 14, which is why Vizzari believes this program would be a good idea.

Vizzari said she remembers taking Swim to Survive lessons as a child and wants



David Ling, a swimming coach at Brock University, is in favour of a mandatory Swim to Survive program to help kids from drowning. The town is urging the province to implement a program like this. DAN SMEENK

the program offered to her children and students across Ontario.

"When I went to school, there was Swim to Survive," she said. "We went to Brock and all kids learned how to survive."

That tradition continues. Leigh's coach, David Ling, teaches Leigh and other swimmers at Brock University and was lifeguard certified for 20 years. He agrees with Leigh's and Vizzari's assessments.

"We want them to be safe around bodies of water and not get to the point that they're in their early teenage years, their friends are jumping into a quarry and they're having a good time, they jump into a quarry thinking it might be OK and it's not," he said.

"There are high, high, high consequences to not being water safe."

Vizzari said making the program mandatory would ensure equal access for all children.

"I think water safety should be treated as a basic life skill and provincial support creates consistency across communities," she said. "(It's about) making sure safety doesn't depend on income or opportunity."

Vizzari said the proposal remains in the early stages and she has not yet discussed it with town staff or the province. However, she said she has received positive feedback and noted

that other Niagara region municipalities, including Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, have expressed support.

Parents in NOTL have also voiced support.

Janice Dodd, who has three children, said swimming skills are essential.

"100 per cent we think swimming is very important," she said.

She added that her family is fortunate to have access to a pool.

"We are lucky that we have a pool," she said. "Mike (her husband) and I grew up with parents recognizing the importance of swimming as a survival skill."

Ella Loewen, whose 12-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter have both taken swimming lessons, said she supports a school-based program.

"Having grown up in Germany, I experienced a system where swimming education was integrated into the public school curriculum," she said. "Instruction was mandatory, fully funded and delivered during school hours."

"Coming from a family of 10 children, private swimming lessons would not have been financially feasible. School-based programs ensured that every child, regardless of economic background, learned this essential life skill."

Accessibility was also

raised by Christy Vanderloos, who has a seven-year-old daughter.

She said the government must ensure adequate access to facilities.

"We have a pool, and getting my daughter lessons she needed wasn't easy," she said. "If we are losing facilities like the Y, that cuts back on availability of places to teach those skills."

"Ontario would benefit from adopting a similar approach."

Amarjog Johal, who has four children, said learning to swim is especially important in communities with easy access to water.

He referenced a news story in which a 13-year-old in Australia swam four miles to shore to get help for his mother and two younger siblings after their kayak tipped over in bad weather.

"I think it's a good idea overall, especially given the local water access," he said. "Also it becomes very important when you learn of some stories like this one."

Asked about logistical challenges such as liability, Vizzari said the program could be handled in a manner similar to school field trips, though she was unsure how that would work at the Ministry of Education level.

She said she does not yet know what success would look like but said zero drowning deaths would be ideal.

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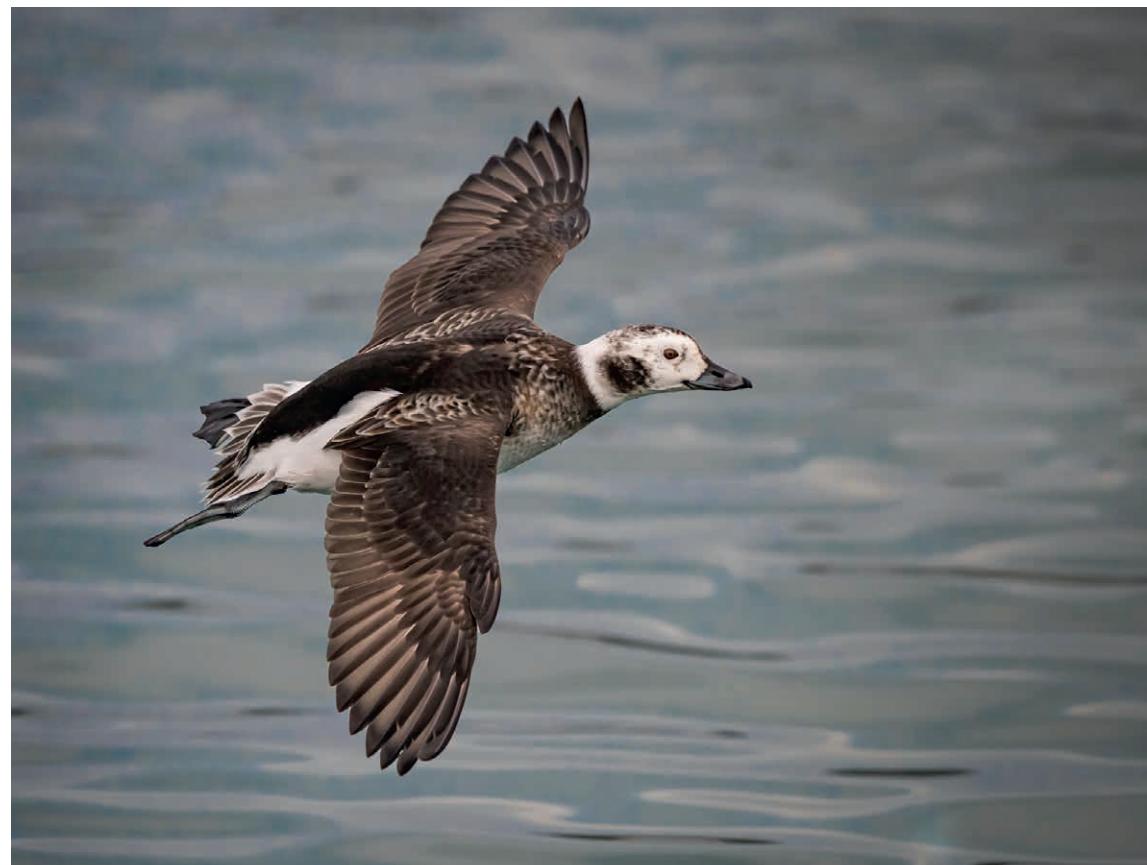


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Long-tailed duck stops in

A female long-tailed duck flies up the Niagara River. A hardy Arctic-breeding species, it is well adapted to cold water and is a regular winter visitor to the Great Lakes and the Niagara River, where open, fast-moving water provides reliable feeding habitat. Long-tailed ducks are powerful fliers and skilled divers, spending much of their time offshore or in swift currents as they search for small fish, crustaceans and other aquatic prey beneath the surface. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

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THIS NEEDS NO EXPLANATION

KADHAI LAMB
BONELESS LAMB IN CINNAMON FLAVORED SPICY PREPARATION

SAAG ALOO (V)
POTATOES IN A SPINACH BASED PREPARATION

PANEER MAKHANI MASALA (VG)
PANEER IN A SPICY AND BUTTERY GRAVY THICKENED WITH CASHWES

DELHI STYLE BUTTER CHICKEN
NOT THE USUAL GLORIFIED KETCHUP. THIS IS MILDLY SPICED.

GOAN FISH CURRY
BASA FILLET COOKED IN A TAMARIND & COCONUT BASED SPICY PREPARATION

ACCOMPANIMENTS
CHOOSE ANY 2

ROTI
BUTTER NAAN
GARLIC NAAN
RICE

DESSERT
CHOOSE ANY 2

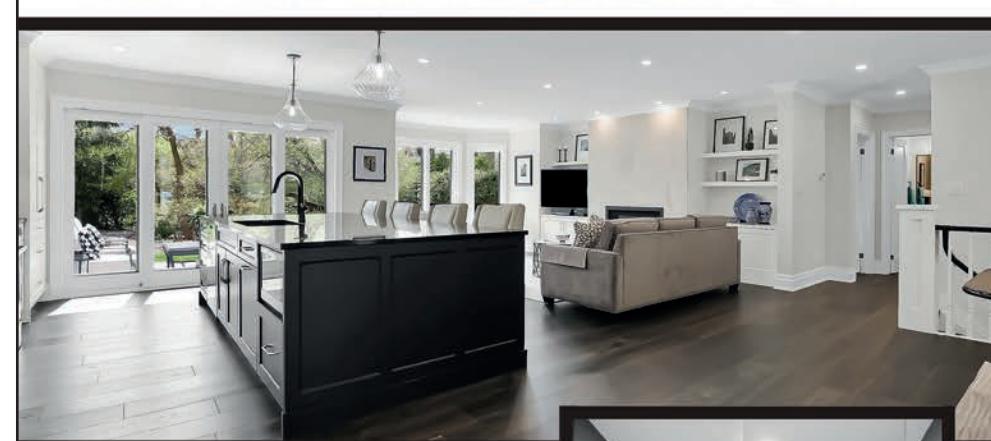
RICE KHEER
AFFOGATO
RASMALAI

BOTTLE OF WINE

CABERNET SAUVIGNON
PINOT NOIR
PINOT GRIGIO
CHARDONNAY

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Visit the museum for free all February

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

If you're a resident of the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, it may be hard to find the time to check out everything this town has to offer — life can get busy with all kinds of affairs, after all.

But, if you happen to have a bit of downtime this month and have always thought about checking out the local museum, now couldn't be a better time.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is once again opening its doors to visitors this February, offering free admission from 1 to 5 p.m. until the end of the month.

With regular admission at \$5, waiving the fee helps draw visitors in during what can be a slow, snowy time of year, said Amy Klassen, the museum's interim executive director.

"The free in February definitely helps increase the traffic," she said.

The museum is also ex-



Visiting the NOTL Museum is free this February. SUPPLIED

anding programs for families, offering free EarlyON sessions three mornings a week, along with free learning "for everyone in the family."

Klassen said the museum typically attracts older visitors and tourists and wants to reach more families.

"It's really worked quite well," she said. "They've had great turnouts and a lot of new people that we haven't seen that didn't know that there was a museum here."

She said families are also exploring the exhibits while attending EarlyON programs.

The museum has additional events scheduled this month. On Feb. 23, it will host a discussion about Gus Calderone as part of its Famous and Infamous series. On Feb. 25, Kerry Abel will speak about the life of Elizabeth Simcoe during a virtual lecture.

Alongside these activities, the museum is also in the midst of fundraising:

Miller Waste Systems will match donations to its capital expansion project up to \$75,000. Klassen said the partnership with Miller has existed for the last year.

The expansion project aims to raise \$10 million to add features including an elevator and new exhibition and storage space.

Klassen said the museum will provide a fundraising update in the spring. She added it is "hard to have a completion date at this time" because of several variables.

For example, the museum must wait until spring for an archeological assessment. Klassen said plumbing and foundation permit approvals should be completed "very, very soon." She hopes there will be "significant work going on" by fall.

To donate, visit notlmuseum.ca/donate-now. For a list of EarlyON times and upcoming events, visit notlmuseum.ca/whats-on/upcoming-events.

daniel@niagaranow.com



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- **Electronically** from a bank account using your 19-digit roll number
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NCF is supported by many volunteers such as the **NOTL Fund Committee**. Founded in 2016, the NOTL Fund Committee is a group of residents working to empower local charities. **Committee members include:** Mike Berlis (Chair), Nancy Bailey, Pat Darte, Andrew Niven, and Debi Pratt

To get involved and find out more visit:
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905-684-8688 | 301-8 Church Street, St. Catharines
info@niagaracommunityfoundation.org
OR contact a Committee Member



Historian tells stories of the Underground Railroad to NOTL

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Within the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake once existed a community of people who escaped a life in captivity and worked to forge a new future for themselves and people like them.

During the 1800s, in a section of what's known today as Old Town, roughly 200 people settled in what was then known as the "coloured village," a community of freedom seekers and free Black people, many of whom arrived via the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad is famously known as a network across the United States that helped enslaved people escape to freedom in Canada. According to Parks Canada, by 1861 — four years before the U.S. government abolished slavery — an estimated 30,000 people had fled to what is now Ontario through the network.

Beyond those numbers are individual stories of people who built new lives in what's known today as Niagara-on-the-Lake and found belonging among each other.

Lezlie Harper, founder



The Steward House at 507 Butler St. stands as a reminder of what freedom seekers who fled on the Underground Railroad built for themselves when they came to Canada, says tour operator Lezlie Harper. DAN SMEENK

of Niagara Bound Tours, shares the stories of those who escaped to Canada in her work. She said her own family came from Kentucky, while many people she has researched came from eastern seaboard states such as Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas.

Harper said while experiences varied from person to person, slavery was inherently oppressive.

"They wouldn't have been able to have a mind of their own," she said. "They would almost have the life of an animal."

"The mothers were not allowed to cry when their children were being taken away from them. They were told to sing."

Despite the brutality, Harper said many enslaved people were highly skilled and resourceful. They helped each other meet cotton quotas and sometimes flattered slaveholders to appear less capable than they were.

Whether someone chose to flee depended on several factors, Harper said.

Some, like Harriet Tubman, escaped to the Niagara area and later returned to rescue family members. Others fled despite leaving family behind, or to prevent their children from growing up enslaved.

In some cases, the decision was immediate. Harper said one enslaved person, facing punishment for ar-

riving late to church, chose to leave, saying "enough of this."

"When you're being beaten and whooped all the time, you might decide that enough is enough," she said.

Before 1830, escape carried even greater risk because no formal network yet existed, Harper said.

The journey's length varied. Travellers moved at night, without lanterns, despite common depictions, and risked encountering hostile individuals. The time spent in safe houses differed from place to place.

Many travelled between American Thanksgiving and New Year's, when winter conditions could slow progress.

"It would depend on the weather, it would depend on if someone was chasing them, it would depend on their own willpower, it would depend on how quickly they would move," Harper said of the pace of escape.

Some began the journey without shoes, she added. Outcomes could include death, tending to injured family members or burying loved ones.

Those who reached Niagara-on-the-Lake built new lives, Harper said.

"We'll do it on our own," she said, describing their attitude. "People in NOTL were entrepreneurs."

She pointed to a barbershop on Queen Street founded by a formerly enslaved settler, as well as William and Susannah Steward, who operated a livery business. Their home, known as Steward House, played a role in local political activity, including a key part in the Solomon Moseby affair.

Moseby, a freedom seeker from Kentucky, stole his enslaver's horse and escaped the United States in 1837, settling in Niagara. When his enslaver arrived a few weeks later with an arrest warrant and extradition papers, more than 200 people surrounded the Niagara-on-the-Lake courthouse, where Moseby was being detained, to prevent his return to the United States.

William Steward was one of 17 people who signed a petition asking Lt.-Gov. Sir Francis Bond Head to refuse the extradition of Moseby.

Others worked as farmers and labourers, Harper said. While many who escaped slavery "did keep to themselves," there was also integration. Some found togetherness in spiritual-

ity, forming, for example, a Black church in Virgil.

Eventually, this community of people left the Niagara region, Harper said: the area was relatively unsettled, the winters were harsh and competition for jobs was stiff.

Some went back to the United States after the American Civil War to find their families, she said. Others went to places around Ontario, such as Toronto and other larger city centres. The Stewards ended up in southwestern Ontario.

She said those who fled rarely spoke about their experiences.

"The stories would be lost because everybody had the same kind of story to tell," said Harper.

Harper advocates teaching and celebrating this history, not focusing solely on its painful aspects. She said many of these stories remain little known, despite their influence on Black life in Canada today.

"I hope someday that we will make Black History Month about the early Black history," said Harper. "Because there's so much out there that people think, 'I didn't know that.'"

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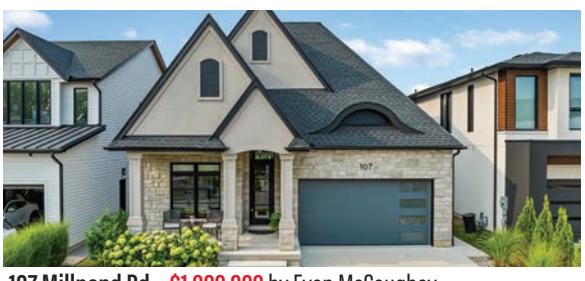
12 Pinot Trail, Niagara on the Lake - \$850,000



13 Wilberforce - \$575,000 by Evan McCaughey



3 Fedorkow Lane, Niagara on the Lake - \$2,250,000



107 Millpond Rd - \$1,999,999 by Evan McCaughey



433 Four Mile Creek Rd, Niagara on the Lake - \$3,888,000



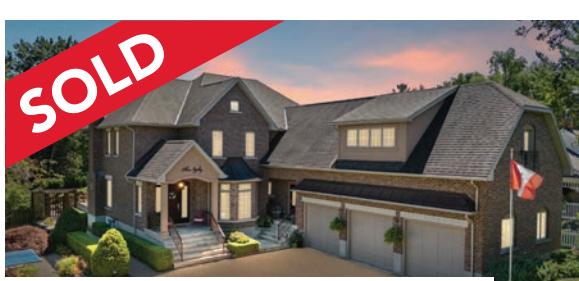
1074 Niagara Stone Rd, Niagara on the Lake - \$4,500,000



3 Summerhayes, Niagara on the Lake - \$930,000



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 With Bradley Hamilton

#63: If you own a business, put a sign on the front door letting customers know that if they come in dancing, they receive something like a free drink or coffee. This makes everyone feel great.

This tiny column gives tips to help promote kindness in our lives and spread joy and happiness.

POSITIVE POWER

Contributed by **Patty Garriock**

"The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you."

- B.B. King

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Mallards a staple of Niagara

A female mallard flies up the Niagara River. One of the most familiar and widespread duck species in North America, mallards are year-round residents in many parts of southern Ontario and are especially common around rivers, wetlands and shorelines with open water. The mottled brown plumage of the female provides camouflage when nesting, while the species' adaptability allows it to thrive in both natural habitats and urban waterways, feeding on a mix of aquatic plants, seeds and small invertebrates. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

Mea culpa: Why the town had a cow



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
 Columnist

In the fluorescent bowels of town hall one snowy afternoon a few weeks ago, I read a forbidden report. My presence was physically monitored. It had taken weeks to get in there. Outside of some staffers, it seems, I was the only one to see it.

In a now-infamous column I told you about the guts of the document, which politicians have yet to read. Maybe they never will ("Hey NOTL, hope you like trucks," Jan. 22, The Lake Report).

The "construction mitigation" report lays out the mayhem, disruption and impact the Shaw's mega-build will have on our Old Town epicentre. Between now and 2029, expect a war zone, the report suggests.

Several thousand trucks will visit. Every one will travel residential streets. For at least seven months of digging, there will be a dump truck trip every nine minutes.

Tourists will be forced to walk on the road. Victoria Street will be a no-go. Adjacent businesses will surely be impacted. If you think summers are busy now, just wait.

And when it's all over, the downtown of NOTL will be forever altered. Less

heritage. More mass. Less history. More Mississauga. A giant, tattered-up industrial complex plunked in our midst.

But this is not to rag on the Royal George fiasco. Can't change that now.

It's about transparency. Honesty. And the stuff that has driven a wedge between local officials and us locals.

"This is a turning point for us," says veteran councillor and former mayor Gary Burroughs, "and we're not coming out of it well."

Mea culpa. I accept my role.

My Lake Report column named staffers I had to cycle through to reach the Shaw's secret doc. And it referenced the town's PR lady, Marah Minor, who finally confirmed the town knew everything about the Shaw's messy building plans — but wouldn't share online.

As the local government's info gatekeeper, I called her "the Karoline Leavitt of NOTL."

OMG. The SHTF.

The guy in charge of NOTL's government, Nick Ruller, was lit. On his own volition he wrote a memo stating, "Moving forward, town staff will no longer respond to information requests made in support of opinion, advocacy, or commentary pieces."

He singled out this newspaper, alleging it (which meant Garth) had engaged in "personal criticism and appears to be motivated with social shaming rather than journalism."

War broke out. Mr. Editor choked on his luncheon martini and wrote a fiery



An excavator takes a first bite out of a heritage home the Shaw tore down in recent days for the mega-complex it will soon build. Details of the construction process have ignited war between the town and this newspaper. GARTH TURNER

14,000-word rebuttal, printed last week. Ruller dug in. Public servants were cut off from the public media, which toils to inform the public. Sure, print our press release. No, don't comment.

I wondered what the people we elect think about this. So I asked them all.

The lord mayor responded by attacking the media as a failed business model. "Opinion articles are increasingly replacing articles by journalists," he added, which is unsupported by fact.

"I support the CAO's decision," said Adriana Vizzari. "Staff deserve a respectful workplace, and transparency remains fully intact."

Ditto for Andrew Niven: "I support the CAO's efforts to ensure staff interactions

with the media remain professional and respectful, protecting municipal employees from undue personal criticism," he said.

Wendy Cheropita echoed that, adding the town, "continues to provide appropriate mechanisms for access to municipal information."

But others, like Burroughs, are troubled now.

"This was not a smart move," he said. "It was improper and incorrect. I feel badly because people like you are trying to make things better."

Maria Mavridis bristled at my reference to Minor, while adding: "I want to reiterate my appreciation for your professionalism when reaching out to me directly. You have always provided fair timelines for responses and have used my words accurately and in context."

Sandra O'Connor told me she wants "to de-escalate" things ASAP. She, too, was stung by the Leavitt quip, but says the Shaw report should have been made public and will be working for more transparency.

Deputy mayor Erwin Wiens backs Ruller, claiming opinion commentary (which you're reading now) and reporting have "different levels of editorial oversight." In other words, I'm not to be trusted (probably a wise conclusion).

So, citizens, there ya go. We'll know what they tell us. Just don't think about it.

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

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NOTL's info gag order should be undone, but public should behave respectfully, too



David Israelson
Special to The Lake Report

Here is a bit of unsolicited advice for, well, just about everyone in Niagara-on-the-Lake: chill out.

It would be a good idea for everyone to dial back the unseemly conflict that's growing about "opinion-based" inquiries.

Town staff have been directed to "no longer respond to information requests made in support of opinion, advocacy or commentary pieces," NOTL's chief administrative officer Nick Ruller said in a statement he released on Feb. 5.

Nobody has asked for my opinion on this, but I do feel compelled to offer a bit of advocacy and comment. It would be helpful for everyone on all sides of this dispute, right or wrong, to lower the temperature, in print, online and in social media.

End the personal attacks

First, a bit of empathy for our town staff and members of council. Many people in NOTL do not like many of the decisions they have made.

There's concern and even some despair about issues ranging from large-scale development to heritage protection to a perceived lack of vision about what is needed to protect and enhance "Canada's Most Beautiful Town."

While criticism may often be reasonable and valid, a level of nasty invective and personal attacks has been creeping into our public discourse, and that's not appropriate.

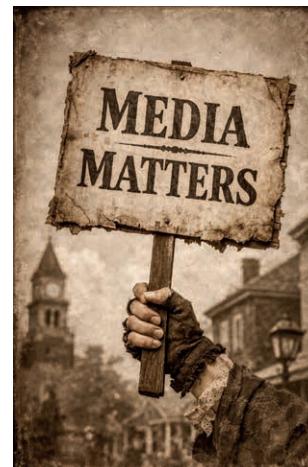
Public and elected officials do not deserve this, and we should not let the ugly circus that has infected politics south of the border grow here. It's not fair to our officials and it's mean-spirited.

We may think our decision-makers are making a lot of wrong decisions, and if expressed reasonably, it's valid for people to point out what they believe are mistakes.

It's completely unfair to launch personal attacks on the decision-makers though. This is supposed to be Canada's most beautiful town, so let's not be ugly.

Town went too far

At the same time, the town is clearly too far over its skis when it calls for vetting the questions — and the questioners — who it will choose to answer and those it will decide to ignore.



Writer David Israelson says the town should rethink its ill-advised "we-won't-answer" statement.

True, there are sometimes reasons why an official answer can't be given. For example, the town may have information which, if made public, would interfere with competitive bidding for taxpayer-funded work or give away someone's private business data or personal information.

But the town's edict about not answering questions goes way too far for what is appropriate or likely even legal in a free society. At the basic level, the public has a right to know the details about how decisions are made by its elected and staff officials.

If the town is not going to answer a question, there had better be a good reason or it should be required to answer. Any refusal should

be an exception to the basic rule that we have a right to know, and the reason should be stated and explained.

This is completely different than what the town is trying to do — a blanket refusal to answer only questions or questioners it likes.

The media matters

Town officials should also remember that in asking questions of public institutions, the media is no different than an individual member of the public. We all have the same right to know.

It's presumptuous of the town to assume that anyone who might have an opinion — your neighbour, or someone's podcast or your widely read local newspaper — is an enemy.

Refusing to answer sounds an awful lot like some of the unpleasant political talk over the river. Please let's not let Niagara-on-the-Lake descend into a U.S.-style sloposphere.

Again, nobody asked me, but I think the town should rethink its ill-advised Feb. 5 "we-won't-answer" statement.

The rest of us need to think twice too: rather than yelling, let's have a real, constructive dialogue about NOTL's future.

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



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: BANGERS

In 2020 he was on a
"watermelon sugar, high,
watermelon sugar, high."

Last issue category: LOUNGE WEAR

Clue: Although this company sells Nulu fabric casual wear in lichen lime, it has another citrus fruit in its name.

Answer: What is a Lululemon?

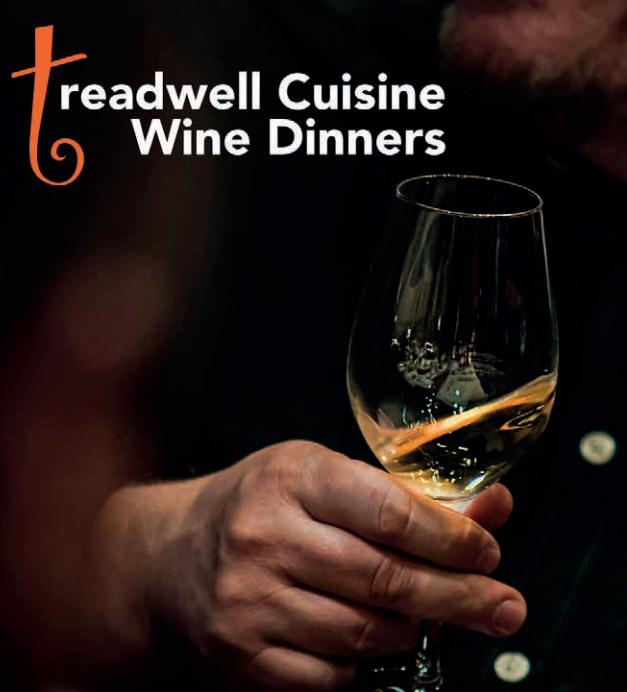
Answered first by: Bill Hamilton

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Bob Wheatley, Sue Rautenberg, Margie Enns,
Randie Topps, Jane Morris, Claudia Grimwood,
Bob Stevens, Becky Creager, Jane Andersen,
Alison Parsons, Esther VanGorder, Howard Jones,
Jim Dandy, Nick D'Amore, Wade Durling,
Emma Balsas, Katie Reimer, Donna Pearce,
Nancy Rocca, Jeff Lake, KC King, Tuija Johansson,
Adam Nyp, Janice Dimou, Tammy Florio,
Catherine Clarke, Pat & Amanda Jankowski,
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Chief administrator Nick Ruller's move a slippery slope to eroding role of the press

Dear editor:

Reading Richard Harley's impassioned editorial in The Lake Report from Feb. 12 felt like a gut punch to the stomach ("Editorial: Transparency and the role of local media").

In the editorial, Richard speaks about a letter from NOTL CAO Nick Ruller published in The Lake Report.

In the letter, Ruller complains of inaccurate reporting from local media outlets and goes on to state that he has "directed that town staff no longer respond to these types of opinion-based requests, and to focus only on matters of fact and policy by reporters acting in a reporting capacity."

Really? So now it is up to town staff to analyze requests from the press to determine if they focus on matters of fact?

According to Ruller's directive, town staff will also have to determine if the request is from a fact-based or an opinion-based journalist. What criteria will they be using to do that? What about a journalist who does both?

If government employees are now the arbitrators of what the public is allowed



NOTL CAO Nick Ruller.

to know, does that not go completely against the idea of an independent press? Is not one of the roles of government to keep the public informed and allow the press to examine their actions and report on what they find?

While I have a lot of respect for Nick Ruller's service to this community I think he's got it wrong on this one and Richard's editorial does a good job of explaining why.

Governments don't like being criticized; who does? But in a democratic society, that is exactly the role journalists are expected to play. Without a press that is free to report on issues that affect the public, democracy does not exist.

Our local press does a good job of identifying which of their articles are opinions and which are reporting news. Readers can make up their own minds

when reading an opinion piece, and can decide for themselves if they agree with the author or not.

Many of the things columnists write about are important to the community and stimulate public discourse and debate, essential to a democratic society.

Do the press always get it right? Of course not. They often under-report stories, print press releases verbatim without checking facts, or get the facts wrong when reporting on an event.

They are far from perfect, but what is the alternative? The one Ruller suggests is a slippery slope that diminishes the role of the press in holding governments and the powerful accountable.

I have my own issue with freedom of speech. In July 2024, I received notice of a \$2-million libel suit from Benedetto Marotta and Solmar regarding a Facebook post I made over Parliament Oak. This was after many councillors reversed their position and voted to change Parliament Oak's zoning from institutional to commercial, allowing for the construction of a four-storey, 130-suite hotel and convention facility in the middle of a residential

neighbourhood.

While I can't comment on the suit as it is still in litigation, we are currently waiting for an appeal court decision on a motion to have the case dismissed. What is most troubling, however, is what the news of the lawsuit has done to quiet the citizens of NOTL.

Public discourse about Parliament Oak and other developments in town has diminished. NOTLers have become afraid to speak out. I have been told or heard on multiple occasions things along the lines of: be careful what you say or you could end up in court.

And who can blame people for this fear? Being sued for libel by a powerful corporation is no fun. Our constitution affords more protection to writings from the press than it does for individuals.

In a time when politicians openly criticize and diminish the media and limit access to information, a free press is our best recourse to hold those in power accountable for their actions.

Kudos to Richard Harley for standing up for this fundamental, democratic right.

*Stewart Hall
NOTL*



Writer Derek Collins notes that low approval rates with the current council and mayor Gary Zalepa aren't new.

Absence of transparency in this term's council

Dear editor:

The opinion and editorial pages of The Lake Report on Feb. 12, pages 14 to 16, have a great deal to say

about the lack of trans-

parency and public input involved in the activities of this elected town council and unelected staff in its recommendations and decision-making process.

As a taxpaying resident of NOTL, while I am in agreement with your comments, I am not in agreement with the claims and opinions expressed by Mr. Ruller or Mr. Zalepa.

In fact, in my opinion (with the exception of two councillors), this town council is the worst council led by Mr. Zalepa, in terms of criticism, public input and the lack of transparency,

that I have experienced in several years — and I believe that many other residents of NOTL would agree.

A couple of years ago, The Lake Report carried out a survey that gave results (again with the exception of two councillors) which were so low, even to the point of embarrassment, that clearly indicated that council, again, led by Mr. Zalepa, could not claim to be representatives of the electorate ("Mid-term approval rate for NOTL council is extremely low, survey finds," June 27, 2024) —

and it was suggested by this writer at the time that some of them should consider resigning.

*Derek Collins
NOTL*

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Cussin' Canadian curlers cause curling crisis



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

A sport is not a sport without sportsmanship. I am going to ramble about the big kerfuffle playing out at the Winter Olympic Games. Not on a mountain or in an ice rink. At the curling rink. Do you believe it?

In the past, sometimes one incident or character has become the enduring memory of a particular Games. Think Eddie the Eagle in Calgary in 1988 and Jesse Owens in Berlin in 1936. Now, we jump all the way to this year in Milan-Cortina (or is it Milano Cortina?)

Here at The Lake Report, my filing deadline is forcing me to write this Ross's Ramblings while the

games are about half-way completed over in Italy. So the defining incident may not have taken place yet. As the games continue, let's cheer, cheer and cheer for our wonderful Canadian athletes as they do their absolute best.

They are all giving it their all, and some will get to the podium to receive an Olympic gold medal. Or silver or bronze.

Here goes.

What a shock! Usually some hockey coaches are the premier cursers. It is beyond belief what the NHL allows, and one doesn't have to be a skilled lip reader to comprehend the profane words and thoughts. Hockey players, some of those crazy snowboarders, and a few aggressive short-track speedskaters. Rather potty-mouthed, in both official languages.

Since the first Winter Olympics in 1924 in Chamonix, curlers have politely competed sometimes. Usually barely being noticed. The players enforced the rules, and all seemed well. No referees or officials noticeable on the ice.



Ross Robinson is cheering on Canadian athletes in the Winter Olympic Games.

But the cussin' curling story has hijacked these 2026 Winter Olympic Games. I have already had several calls and emails from sports fan pals in the States about the unpleasant, expletive laced yelling match between our Mark Kennedy and Sweden's Oskar Eriksson.

This rather bizarre story has taken on a life of its own. Olympians, national sports organizations and sports officials at the highest levels are weighing in, and already officials have appeared near the hog lines to keep the games as fair as possible.

In my crystal ball, at the 2030 Winter Olympic Games, I think we will have curling referees in black and white striped shirts, blowing whistles to signal infractions.

Hey, not that long ago here in Canada, the fitness levels of our international curlers had to be formally legislated. A few too many pot bellies were in the house, near the hack. Also, no smoking, and no alcohol on the ice. Not to be repetitive, but not that long ago.

So now let me ramble on to some really interesting information about the stones that have purportedly

been "double touched." Well O.K., maybe sort of interesting.

Every single curling rock used in the Olympics is made from granite quarried from one small uninhabited Scottish island in the Firth of Clyde. The island is Ailsa Craig, Northwestern Scotland. Remote.

Allow me to quote Matt Slater of the Athletic, as printed in the Feb. 16 edition of the New York Times: "They are shaped and polished at an old factory in a small town on the mainland and approved by a craftsman who does not even play the game."

Curling stones from Kays Scotland cost from USD\$960 each.

Yes, I am rambling, but years ago when I was a curler, the stones fascinated me. How could two rocks, each weighing 44 pounds, collide at high speeds and not chip or crack? The curling paths of the stones were possible because the sheet of ice had been "pebbled" by a very talented ice technician.

This, at curling clubs across Canada and in some other spots in the world.

Canadians have dominated curling for many years. Now, let's be good sports and help out as curlers from other nations catch up to us.

Pebbled? Stones? Rocks? I'm confused.

Cheer for the Canadians as these Winter Games wind up. C'mon, cheer harder.

And let us wonder why Lindsey Vonn's medical team didn't tell her she couldn't compete, after suffering a ruptured ACL only a few days earlier?

But what do I know?
Go, Canada, go!

rossrocket9@gmail.com

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NOTL Residents Association needs to show it deserves our town's support

Dear editor:

On Feb. 14, the NOTL Residents Association published a response on their website to Mr. Ruller's Feb. 5 statements. What a shockingly flaccid response.

It's not only Mr. Ruller out there peddling these ideas. Mr. Ruller wouldn't have issued this kind of statement on his own without the prior approval of the mayor and possibly town council (the municipality).

The NOTLRA has not noticeably challenged and disagreed with the municipality's statements.

By not criticizing, challenging or disagreeing with Mr. Ruller's statement, the NOTLRA is tacitly agreeing with Mr. Ruller et al. that the media has published opinions that encourage abuse/the erosion of public trust/well-being/professional reputation/workplace morale. This is an unacceptable position.

It appears that the NOTLRA wants to control narratives/opinions publicized in the public domain fearing they might potentially offend town council and individuals within town staff that Mr. Ruller identifies as "not public or decision-makers."

Realistically, town staff became public figures through the town's own public announcements, and became part of the decision-making process because of the overwhelming reliance town council has on town staff's analysis and recommendations. To suggest otherwise is nonsense.

Let's not forget that we residents paid for all the information town council/staff have in their possession. In a democratic transparent world, that information should be available for public scrutiny without having to go through the financially punitive Freedom of Information.

What's not perfect in this world is that informa-



Letter writer Gienek Ksiazkiewicz says by not condemning the town's statement that it will selectively choose which questions to respond to from the media, the NOTL Residents Association has essentially endorsed the town's position — something he says residents should not accept.

tion seems to be increasingly restrictive and the NOTLRA feels comfortable with this approach. Now you have to pay twice to receive anything.

The NOTLRA is unfortunately looking like a mirror image of the existing municipal government that they are trying to replace with their own candidates. I don't think we want an organization that proposes to advocate for candidates that mimic the existing mayor/town council's views, do we?

It's hypocritical on the one hand for the NOTLRA to state it advocates for residents, when on the other hand, the NOTLRA isn't prepared to defend freedom of the press, access to what should be public documents, unwarranted accusations, etc.

One would expect the NOTLRA website, including media outlets, to be effusive with how it is advocating resident's views and expectations, but it's hard to identify any advocacy.

A member of the NOTLRA can't even express their views, or make contributing comments on the NOTLRA website.

It's a good way for the NOTLRA to control workloads true, but also to eliminate free untoward

questions/commentary, the exchange of ideas, and to manage what strategic information the NOTLRA has behind the curtain that may be inadvertently divulged.

The NOTLRA is running a copy-and-paste website. There are numerous links to the town, the province, financial archives, policies, etc., but where is the NOTLRA's advocacy page where it can identify what specific issues they have been advocating for to further the betterment of the community?

There doesn't seem to be any — just position papers. What a disappointment.

The NOTLRA is organized into functionality groups as opposed to geographic groups representing each of the villages. It's a strategy to aggregate/consolidate the collective thoughts and ideas of contributors, to form a library of the numerical number of voters linked to the politically sensitive topics. Reference points to identify where to spend resources for the upcoming electoral campaign.

However, creating groups within geographical areas stocked with individuals knowledgeable about their specific geographic issues would make more sense.

How is someone from Old Town going to be up to date on Glendale or St. Davids issues that have been percolating for years, or vice versa? They're not going to be.

From that perspective, the NOTLRA is malfunctioning and will continue to be organizationally challenged.

I feel that the NOTLRA believes they do not have to prove itself and its choice of candidates in the upcoming municipal election. A considerable amount of voter distaste of the existing town council et al. is already in play.

That will ensure a turnover of the mayor/coun-

cillors in the NOTLRA's favor. So, why challenge the existing municipal authorities, create controversy, and alienate some potential electoral fence-sitters? A vote against the existing town council rather than a vote for a new candidate.

Being conciliatory with the municipality hasn't historically proven productive as the disbanded urban design committee found out when their views were not in sync with members of town council.

Peter Neame, who sits as a director of the NOTLRA, would surely have brought the rest of the executives of the NOTLRA up to speed on the sordid theatrics there. A lesson not learned.

Sure, there are forgivable things the NOTLRA might do better, but I would draw the line when the NOTLRA doesn't defend freedom of the press, transparency, the rights of NOTL residents and the values of the community.

How can I now trust NOTLRA's candidates being the "right/suitable" ones for the community? Mr.

Hummel foreshadowed that cautionary perspective in one of his comments in The Lake Report.

Respect should be reciprocal. If town council wants respect, they should provide the same to the media and the people that elected them. It's a two-way street. The municipality works for us, not for anyone else.

Similarly, if the NOTLRA wants to be an organization geared for change and make recommendations for community focused candidates in the next municipal elections, it needs to prove themselves, vigorously advocate and show us they deserve our support.

They need to work for our votes, not become subservient to the existing municipal government.

**Gienek Ksiazkiewicz
St. Davids**



Writer Tony Giordano says the town's heritage committee's support of the Royal George rebuild shows it has been compromised by "corporate greed." FILE

Heritage committee's integrity has been compromised

Dear editor:

As a resident of NOTL, I would like to thank Nicholas Colaneri for launching a court challenge to halt the demolition of the Royal George Theatre.

Isn't the heritage committee's main function to designate and preserve historical homes and buildings?

**Tony Giordano
NOTL**

STANDING UP FOR DEMOCRACY

This community needs paper's fair reporting

Dear editor:

I would like to add my sincere thanks to The Lake Report and staff for the incredible yet in my humble opinion totally credible reporting and invaluable service to the NOTL public.

As demonstrated by the recent unshinged (again, my opinion) statements from the town CAO and lord mayor (no names) regarding the role of local media, our little community needs your fair reporting and demand for public servant accountability now more than ever.

Please keep pursuing this noble cause and the industry awards I am sure will continue to pile up.

On another note, and as a long-time donor to The Lake Report, I would make a friendly request to all your readers to keep in mind that The Lake Report is a non-subscription paper and as a small but aspiring business, any financial contribution that can be made to support The Lake Report will help to guarantee the continuation of its battle on behalf of the community for improved transparency and accountability from our public servants.

Contributions can be made by accessing the site lakereport.ca and clicking on "donate now."

**Cal Cochrane
St. Davids**

We have to call out questionable behaviour

Dear editor:

Congratulations to you, your reporters and associated staff, for standing by what you believe to be right and for pointing out wrongs when you see them.

In this era of dictators and would-be dictators there have been far too many institutions, companies, etc. that have simply lacked the spirit to fight back against the bullying, lies and half-truths.

Instead, they shrug their collective shoulders and hope, just hope, that better days will come back.

However, as Prime Minister Mark Carney intimated in his recent memorable speech in Davos, don't just look the other way when you see bullying and other unacceptable behaviours — the old days are not coming back.

We have to call it out when we observe people who should be our role models involved in questionable behaviour, otherwise that behaviour will simply continue.

While we citizens don't all have your platform to present our views, we should still make our voices heard and our intentions known. Obviously our best opportunity is at the ballot box, but that does not mean we should remain mute between elections.

To mangle the well-known quote by Rev. Charles Aked: "The only thing necessary for bad outcomes is for good men to do nothing." The truth of his message is all too obvious in our neighbour to the south.

Keep up the good work.

**Al Sproule
NOTL**

Thanks for taking a stand against bullies

Dear editor:

Thank you for taking a stand against the bullying which is still pervasive in municipal politics. I would urge my fellow NOTL citizens to let you know with their letters and phone calls that they support you in your efforts.

Your arguments against bullying are in fact arguments for more democracy at the municipal level, something which is, and will always be, necessary.

Please continue to uphold your high standards.

**Shirley Worsley
NOTL**

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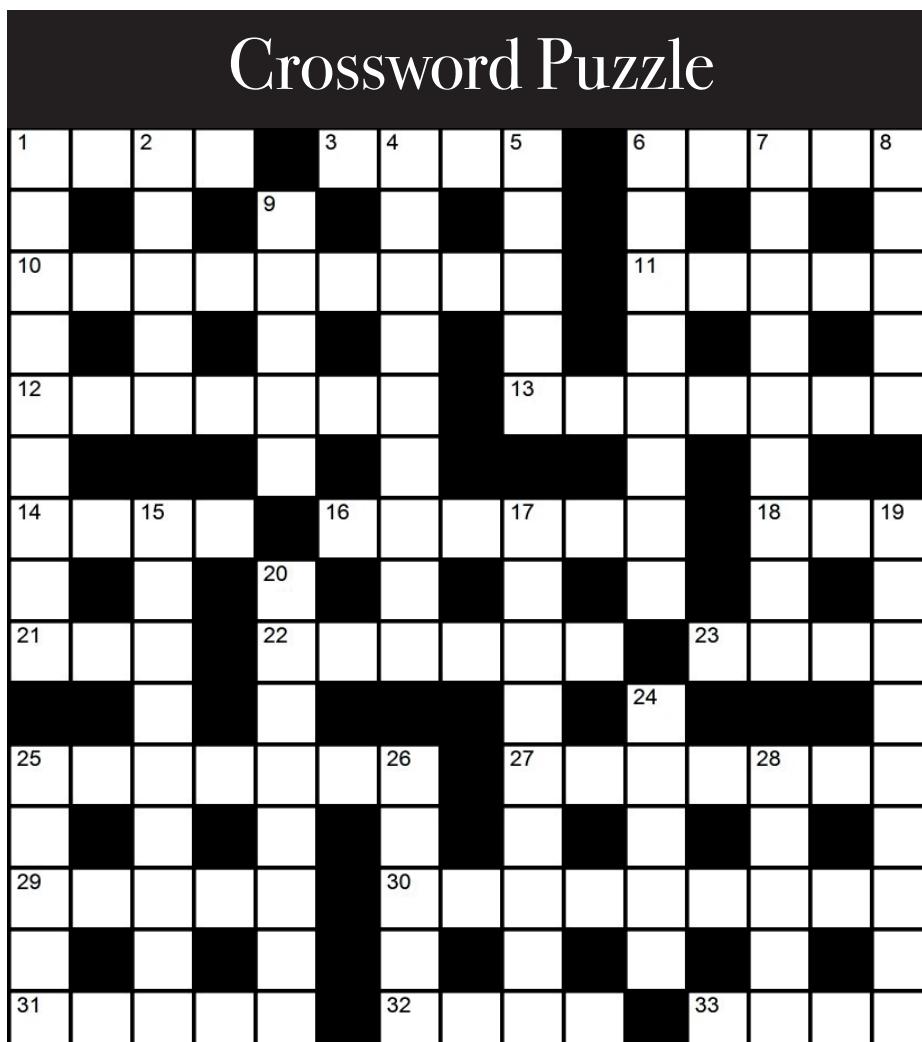


Across

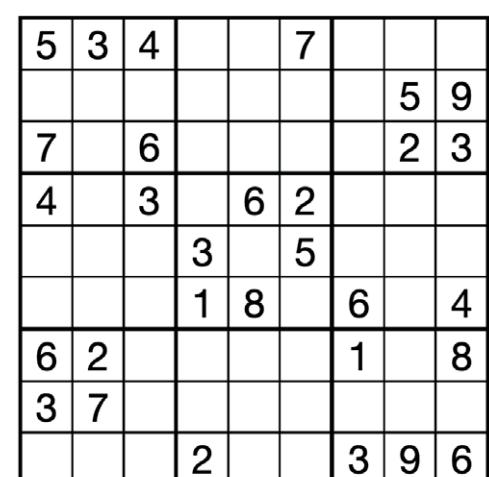
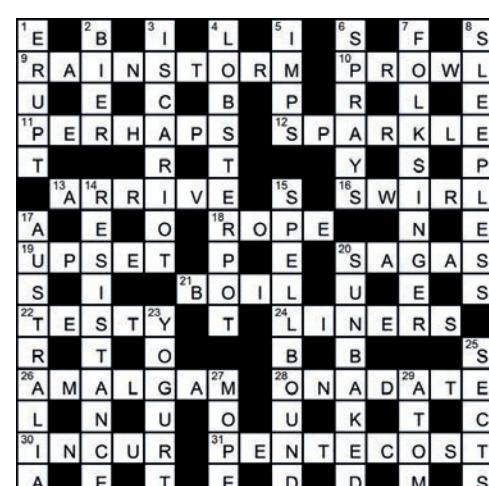
1. Tasks (4)
3. Thin layer (4)
6. Expiry (5)
10. Repentant (9)
11. Tooth top (5)
12. Possible cause of skin cancer (7)
13. Glitter (7)
14. Excess of expenditure over income (4)
16. Ignominious failure (6)
18. Conditions that are possible but uncertain (3)
21. Silent (3)
22. Long narrow excavation (6)
23. Version still being developed (4)
25. Slackens (7)
27. Animate (7)
29. Serious wrongdoing (5)
30. Icy pellet (9)
31. Snake (5)
32. Entertain in a public place (4)
33. Lugs (4)

Down

1. Capital of Israel (9)
2. Started (5)
4. Childish (9)
5. Thaws (5)
6. E.g. Mussolini (8)
7. Adjoining (9)
8. Pivot (5)
9. Fix a computer program (5)
15. Use of metaphors (9)
17. Organizations (9)
19. Rust-resistant (9)
20. And so forth (2,6)
24. Sudden burst of light (5)
25. Doctor's replacement (5)
26. Indian form of address (5)
28. Violin's bigger sister (5)



Last issue's answers



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DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

The creation of symbols to represent ideas, concepts or feelings using language, gesture, dance, music, drawing or painting, is at the centre of all art and arguably, the most important cognitive trait acquired throughout the several-hundred-thousand-year history of modern humans.

Studies in South Africa, for example, reveal pierced seashells, which were probably strung together to form necklaces and other decorative jewelry and the use of pigments such as ochre 70,000 years ago.

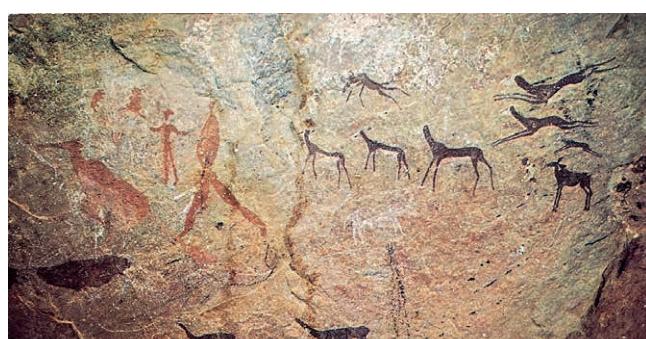
But nothing on the scale and beauty of the famous cave art in what is now Spain, France and Germany, was seen until 50,000 years ago, which continued in fits and starts for the following

ing 40,000 years. Subjects often included now extinct animals such as the ibex, saber-toothed tiger, and cave-lion, as well as stick figure representations of humans and countless outlines and imprints of hands.

For a long time, the common view was that humans created art, of which our heavier-muscled and larger-brained cousins, the neanderthals, were judged incapable, as was the proposition that they might have used symbolic language analogous to humans.

That view, at least with respect to art, changed with the recent stunning revelations that neanderthals not only could create cave art such as handprints and animal figures similar to what modern humans created, but their artwork antedated human cave art, in some instances, by thousands of years.

Cave art created by neanderthals was found in three separate complexes in Spain. The challenge was to date the artwork precisely because most cave art contains little in the way of carbon residue. For this reason, and the fact that carbon dating becomes inaccurate



Evidence that Neanderthals made art carries major implications, indicating that symbolic thinking existed hundreds of thousands of years before modern humans emerged, writes Dr. William Brown. WIKIMEDIA

much past 40,000 years ago, a new method for dating the art was necessary.

Fortunately, for the task of dating ancient cave art, ground water leaks into some caves, sometimes depositing minerals on the walls, which sometimes covered underlying artwork. These calcite layers form what are called flowstone.

The calcite often contains a tiny bit of uranium, which decays steadily to thorium, with the happy result that the ratio of thorium to uranium provides a highly accurate clock for dating the flowstone and hence the underlying artwork. Of course, the latter may have been created much earlier than the flowstone, so those

dates are minimums.

Given that there is no evidence that modern humans lived in Europe before 45,000 years ago, findings that point to neanderthals living in Europe well before modern humans — and the now compelling findings of much older symbolic art on cave walls in Spain than modern humans could have created — should make even the most skeptical of archeologists rethink long-standing prejudices that our ancient cousins, the neanderthals, were incapable of imagination and art.

Indeed, in one example in France, jewelry was dated using the same technique to 115,000 years ago — that's almost 70,000 years before

modern humans reached what are now called France and Spain.

The startling evidence that our cousins, the neanderthals, were capable of symbolic art raises a very important question — how far back in human and neanderthal history does art go?

Could the imaginative impulse and skill necessary to create art have begun in Africa as early as 600,000 years ago, when the lines leading to modern humans on one hand, and on the other hand to neanderthals and their cousins, the denisovans, diverged?

We don't know. But it may be that the impulse to create spirit worlds and supernatural associations and beings began much earlier than previously thought.

And as those myths became systematized and incorporated into the political and cultural worlds of the time, organized religions may have taken root — a body of beliefs, passed on from generation to generation, which found expression in the case of neanderthals and later modern humans, in symbolic and representational art on cave walls.

The evidence that neanderthals created art has important implications and suggests that symbolic thinking antedates the emergence of modern humans by several hundred thousand years.

This suggestion and evidence that much lower on the evolutionary scale animals, such as aplasia, with 20,000 nerve cells and the octopus with 1,000 nerve cells, are capable of learning, remembering what they've learned, and in the case of some such as wasps (with a million or so nerve cells) able to learn new tricks and recognize individual members of their clan.

All this suggests that the evolutionary trail to cognition in highly evolved species such as humans had very broad and deep evolutionary origins.

That's a humbling perspective for a species so enamored with our importance.

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



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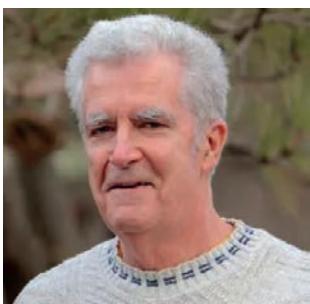
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Obituary

Robert 'Bob' Tebbutt



TEBBUTT, Robert "Bob" — With grieving hearts, we announce the passing of our husband and father Robert George Tebbutt, on Saturday, January 10, 2026, in his 81st year, following congestive heart failure complicated by Parkinson's disease.

Bob will be dearly missed by his wife Sharon of 43 years, as well as by his son Andrew (Elena Young) of Toronto, and grandson Leo, and by his son David (Lisa Tebbutt) of St. David's, and grandchildren Nora, Tessa, and Nathan. He is survived by his brother John of Farnborough, England. They

will remember Bob for his generous and serving spirit, his love of being a Dad, and his sense of humour. "Uncle Bob" will also be remembered by his many nieces and nephews, along with his brothers- and sisters-in-law, for always having his video recorder handy to capture memories of hiking trips, vacations, and family gatherings.

Bob was born on November 4, 1945, in Melksham, in Wiltshire, England, and grew up in Cove, in the county of Hampshire, along with his brother John and parents Reginald and Joan Tebbutt. He was a skilled "footballer" and played in several leagues in and around the Cove area as a student and young adult. Bob enjoyed returning to the UK for summer holidays with his family, and he particularly loved hiking through the lochs of the Scottish Highlands.

Bob moved to Canada in 1970 and worked for several electronics companies in the Niagara and Greater Toronto areas. He was an active community member and volunteer, serving as a moderator and care group leader at Orchard Park Bible Church, a soccer coach and referee coordinator with the NOTL Soccer Club, and videographer for Eden High school's senior volleyball team. He had a passion for studying Scripture and enjoyed leading Bible study groups at church. Bob also developed a love for Indonesia after visiting with his brother-in-law and nephew in 1991, and returned to visit friends there seven times, most recently in 2013.

Services have taken place and a private family interment was held at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery. To share a memory or to plant a beautiful memorial tree in Bob's memory, please visit tallmanfuneralhomes.ca/obituaries/Robert-Bob-Tebbutt?obId=46902080.

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per table of 8

Single tickets \$30

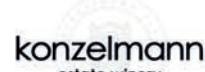


Test your knowledge, bid on exciting auction items, and support your local library. Reserve your table today!

For registration & further Information scan the QR code or visit our website notlpubliclibrary.org.

Proceeds from the evening will be used to enhance NOTLPL collections, programs & services.

Sponsored by:



Special thanks to:





We're open!

Come see what our new store has to offer.
We look forward to seeing you!

111 Garrison Village Drive, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON

Lindsey Bridgeman
Foodland Niagara-on-the-Lake Franchise Owner and Operator



SCAN HERE FOR OUR DIGITAL FLYER

Products may not be available at all locations



Foodland.ca

FEBRUARY 2026

PRICES EFFECTIVE FROM
FEBRUARY 19-25

THUR
19

FRI
20

SAT
21

SUN
22

MON
23

TUE
24

WED
25

LOCAL 1.99 /lb

CONESTOGA MEATS
Pork Loin Combo
Chops cut in-store by
your meat expert 4.39/kg

Fresh Atlantic Salmon Fillets
26.43/kg **11.99 /lb**

Compliments
Wieners selected 450 g **1.99**

Ontario RAISED PORK
No Added Hormones
No Antibiotics
Responsibly Farmed

3 PK
Romaine Hearts
product of Mexico
or USA 3 pk **3.99**

ANDY BOY
Romaine Hearts
3 Romaine Hearts / 3 coûtes de romaine
300 g / 10.6 oz. / 17.6 oz. / 1.76 kg
Sealed For Freshness Scellé pour retenir la fraîcheur
SAUCISSES FUMÉES
GROS CŒUR DE LAIT ULMERÉE
PLEASE WASH BEFORE USING
LAVER LA LAITUE AVANT D'UTILISER

PRODUCT OF ONTARIO
Honeycrisp Apples Canada extra
fancy grade 4.39/kg **1.99 /lb**

Buy any one
1 ACE BAKERY
Demi Baguette
200-280 g
get
1 ACE BAKERY
Baguette
350-380 g or
Bistro Bread
595 g
FREE

4.97
KRAFT Peanut Butter or
Hazelnut Spread 725g-1kg

4.94
DR. OETKER Giuseppe
Rising Crust or Thin Crust
Pizza 439-785 g

4.77
ARMSTRONG Cheese 400 g
or Shreds 300-320 g or SAPUTO
Mozzarellissima 500 g

5.95
HELLMANN'S Mayonnaise
710-890 mL

3.99
CHAPMAN'S Premium
Ice Cream, Frozen Yogurt,
Sorbet or No Sugar Added
Ice Cream selected 1-2 L

6.49
LIBERTE Greek Yogurt
650-750 g

Scene VALUE

300 PTS
when you buy 2
7.99

WATSON RIDGE
or TA'AM
HALAL Boxed
and Breaded
Poultry
selected 800 g

2.19
/100 g

200 PTS
when you buy
300 g or more

Sliced FRESH

100 PTS
when you buy 2
5.99

Compliments
Cooked Ham

ROYALE
Bathroom
Tissue 9-12-24
rolls, Paper Towel
3-6 rolls or Facial
Tissue 6 pk

MEAT

7.99
100 PTS
when you buy 2
SCHNEIDERS
Bacon 100-375 g

6.99
FARM COUNTRY
Pepperoni Sticks
225 g

4.99
MEMBER
\$1
5.99 without
Scene+
Card
COMPLIMENTS
Stuffed Chicken
Cutlettes 284 g

10.99
COMPLIMENTS
Lasagna or Macaroni
& Cheese 1 kg

4.99
40 PTS
when you buy 1
COMPLIMENTS
Breaded Fish
Burger or Boxed and
Breaded Seafood
454-700 g selected

9.99
75 PTS
when you buy 1
COMPLIMENTS
Smoked Salmon
140-150 g

BAKERY

Baked IN-STORE

6.99
150 PTS
when you buy 2
Gourmet Cinnamon
Buns plain or
cream cheese icing 4 pk
690-750 g

5.29
without
Scene+
Card
Raisin Bread
450 g

7.99
MEMBERS
\$2
9.99 without
Scene+
Card
Small Bar Cakes
325-575 g

BUY 1, GET 1
FREE
of equal or lesser value
Greek Yogurt
Cheesecakes
lemon or strawberry 125 g

CALL ANGELIKA = SOLD!™

CALL OR TEXT (289) 214-4394



Top Rated
Niagara on the Lake Real Estate Agent
Angelika Zammit

ANGELIKA ZAMMIT
REALTOR® / OWNER / TEAM LEAD

**TOP RATED AGENT IN
NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE!***

★ FREE HOME EVALUATION! ★
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Cornerstone
Association of REALTORS®

listglobally

LUXURYHOMES.COM™



- Free packing of your house / estate cleanup/decluttering services***
- World class videography, photos and drone footage, high quality hard cover print brochures & advertising in print media
- Large social media presence and extensive unique marketing techniques
- Your property will be globally listed gaining world wide exposure and will be seen on all real estate boards in Ontario
- Home renovation experience
- Help Elderly Relocate

- Passionate to be of service
- We offer a 24/7 open line of communication
- Several testimonials and 5 star reviews

★★★★★

- Long term presence in Niagara-on-the-Lake. **Local Right at Home Realty Team Office in NOTL** (Over 6000 in GTA, #1 independent brokerage in the GTA for 10 years**)
- Angelika previously owned a highly successful marketing/media business in Toronto for over 20 years. Built relationships with Fortune 500, big banks, CTV, Global, Olympics, Film Festival.

- Respected by colleagues and community
- Over 12 years of real estate business
- Knowledge in all aspects of real properties (waterfront, residential, agricultural, commercial and leases)
- Up to date on Mortgage trends and state of economy, strategy to sell
- Contribution to charities
- Your property is advertised on all 23 Real Estate boards in Ontario plus globally listed in over 200 countries

FEATURED LISTING OF THE WEEK

21 TULIP TREE ROAD, ST. DAVIDS

NEW PRICE!
NOW \$1,199,000



**MAIN FLOOR LIVING AT
ITS BEST!
2 SPACIOUS BEDROOMS &
2 BATHROOMS ON MAIN**

OPEN HOUSE SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22 2:00 - 4:00 PM



496 MISSISSAUGA ST, NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE TEAM
Bringing GTA Buyers to Niagara-On-The-Lake

**#1 BROKERAGE IN THE GTA FOR
10 YEARS****

*Based on reviews from Rate-My-Agent.com, a triple verified review platform **TRREB Jan. 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2022, combined units sold.

FREE GIFT OF 10 HOURS OF PACKING AND DECLUTTERING SERVICES - excludes tenanted areas *Based on closed transactions in the Burlington / Niagara Right At Home Realty Office, 2022, 2023, 2024

Angelika & ASSOCIATES
LUXURY REAL ESTATE

