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



NOTL filmmaker hits Netflix | Page 8

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Judicial review seeks to quash Royal George demolition approval

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

With council approvals now in place to allow the Shaw Festival's Royal George Theatre to be torn down and redeveloped — and the venue already closed as preparations move forward — a Niagara-on-the-Lake business has launched a judicial review challenging whether the municipality followed the law before clearing the way.

Opponents of the project argue that once the century-old theatre at 79–83 Queen St. and 178–188 Victoria St. is demolished, any heritage loss would be permanent — a concern at the centre of the court challenge.

Centurion Building Corporation, led by president Nicholas Colaneri, submitted the application to the Divisional Court in Toronto. It is awaiting issuance and no hearing date has been set. The Corporation of the

Continued on Page 3

The end of an era

Inside the final days of the Royal George, NOTL's century-old theatre



The scene inside the Royal George Theatre, where the takedown of the interior of the 110-year-old venue is underway. Staff and patrons were given a chance to say goodbye before the theatre is demolished to make way for a new one, set to open in 2028. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Andrew Hawlitzky | The Lake Report

On Saturday, the front doors opened for the last public entry into the Royal George before the careful work begins of taking apart the little theatre occupying a big place in the town's heart — without, many

hope, losing what it means to the people who made it their home for more than four decades.

Inside, the 110-year-old theatre has been stripped bare of many of its features, leaving a stark, exposed auditorium — the past three weeks, all 335 of its plush,

red seats were taken out, major equipment removed and light-bulbs unscrewed.

Shaw Festival staff packed up what they could for storage and reuse at the Niagara District Courthouse, the Shaw's new home for the next couple of years

— until the new, larger Royal George is built in the old one's place.

Upon entering the building, Reynold Scholey had the same first reaction as many other

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After long wait, Foodland opens NOTL doors

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Sixteen-year-old Colin Jones and his grandmother, Gail Morsch, were among the first customers to walk

into the new Foodland in the Village on Thursday, joining the small roster of grocery stores in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The pair, both neighbourhood residents, shopped together as part of the store's

opening moments, stopping at the bakery section and adding items like milk and flatbread pizza to their cart — possibly the first items purchased from the store's shelves.

They said the store could

become their regular grocery stop and will make it easier for Jones to pick up groceries for his mother and grandmother, something he already does every once in

Continued on Page 6



Krista Payne, vice president of operations at Sobeys, left, celebrates alongside Foodland store owner Lindsey Bridgeman during Thursday's opening. DAN SMEENK



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Council approves demolition of old barns

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council has approved the demolition of two 20th-century barns in the town's rural area, rejecting a recommendation from its municipal heritage committee to preserve at least one of the structures.

Council sided with staff, who said the buildings are not historically or culturally significant enough under the Ontario Heritage Act to prevent their removal. At its Jan. 27 meeting, council voted to allow the teardown of a large barn with an attached silo and a smaller, partially collapsed barn on a property at 766, 774 and 796 Four Mile Creek Rd. Coun. Gary Burroughs cast the lone vote in favour of keeping one of the barns.

A report by heritage planner Garrett France-Wyllie says part of the larger, wood-framed barn was built before 1934, with additions made between 1965 and 2000. The smaller, concrete barn was constructed between 1934 and 1955. A Zillow listing for the property says the site was built in 1904.

During a Jan. 14 meeting, the municipal heritage committee debated the



Council has approved the demolition of two barn structures on Four Mile Creek Road. PAIGE SEBURN

owner's demolition request, noting the barns' visual and cultural role in the rural landscape and the steady loss of similar structures in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The committee ultimately recommended that the larger barn and one of its silos be retained, while allowing the partially collapsed barn to be demolished, and suggested staff evaluate the property as a potential cultural heritage landscape.

Coun. Tim Balasiuk, a member of the committee, said the group was troubled by how quickly traditional barns are disappearing from the countryside. "A lot of these large barns in Niagara-on-the-Lake's rural areas are disappearing," he said, calling them "a bit of a landmark." However, he said images later provided by the owner showed the structure was in poor condition. "The barn does not look sound," he said. "I hate

to see it go."

In a report to council, France-Wyllie wrote that heritage staff determined the barns meet only one of the two criteria required under the Ontario Heritage Act to block demolition. "Staff would not support the inclusion of the barns as heritage attributes within a designation for the dwellings, as the heritage value is not strong enough to merit protection," the report said.

Burroughs said the committee had hoped to slow the process to allow more time for assessment and documentation. "We all, there, value driving by that property and it's a cultural, agricultural image," he said, adding the goal was to record "what was a very important farm scene in our community."

Staff said the buildings will be photographed before removal, with images provided to the town and

the NOTL Museum, and that salvageable materials must be offered to salvage companies.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said while she understands the emotional connection, staff resources need to be focused elsewhere. "These are memories," she said, "but we've got a long list of heritage properties that are designated that we've been meeting with ministers trying to save."

Coun. Erwin Wiens agreed, pointing to the Jan. 1, 2027 deadline municipalities face to decide whether to protect properties on their heritage registers. "We don't need money. We need boots-on-the-ground help to get through 200 homes," he said, also raising concerns about imposing preservation costs on the owner.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said she was conflicted, calling the silo and barns emblematic of the town's rural heritage. "So much of it is disappearing," she said.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor asked what evaluating a cultural heritage landscape would involve. Staff said it would require a process similar to creating a heritage conservation district, including assessing staff capacity, costs and the historical merit of a broader area.

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Lawsuit alleges town acted illegally in approving Shaw's Royal George rebuild

Continued from Front Page

Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Shaw Festival are named as respondents and the Attorney General of Ontario is named, as required under Ontario law.

The town's heritage committee gave the green light for the teardown of the theatre in January and Shaw Festival officials said demolition permits have been applied for, with work expected as early as late February or March — it opened its doors for the last time to the public Jan. 31.

In the application, Centurion Building argues the town overstepped its authority by approving planning changes that conflict with provincial, regional and local planning rules, including policies meant to protect heritage properties.

"This judicial review is not about whether people like or dislike the Shaw Festival and it's not about opposing theatre or culture,"



A legal filing by Nicholas Colaneri is seeking to quash the town's approval to demolish the Royal George.

Colaneri said in an email. "It is about whether the town followed the law."

The company alleges the town relied on zoning assumptions that contradict its own zoning bylaw, failed to properly apply the Ontario Heritage Act by not prioritizing conservation or fully assessing alternatives to demolition and ran an approval process that was unfair — relying on incomplete or conflicting

information and separating planning and heritage decisions instead of considering them together.

"When a municipality fails to follow those laws, the courts are the only place now that residents can go for accountability," Colaneri said.

The application asks the court to review whether the town complied with its official plan and zoning bylaws, the region's official plan, the Planning Act, the Ontario Heritage Act and the provincial policy statement, the document that governs land use planning in Ontario, when approving the teardown and redevelopment of the site.

It asks the court to quash the approvals, declare that the town acted unlawfully and unreasonably and pause the town's planning approvals while the application is decided.

"My position is simple: let the court decide first, and then allow work to proceed

only if the approvals are confirmed to be lawful," Colaneri said.

In a statement, he said the review is not an appeal of design choices or development policy, but a legal challenge focused on whether council followed mandatory legislative requirements — particularly in a designated heritage conservation district.

"Once demolition occurs, heritage loss is irreversible," the statement said, adding that Ontario law provides for judicial oversight to ensure decisions affecting protected heritage resources are made lawfully before irreversible actions are taken "and require that conservation be addressed as a first principle, not as an afterthought."

"Regardless of one's view on development or cultural investment," the statement continued, "the integrity of the planning and heritage process matters."

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Theatre-goers, crew **say goodbye** to Royal George

Continued from Front Page

visitors. He stepped into the empty venue, paused, and said, “I can’t believe it’s this small.”

“You’d have thought it would seem larger without the chairs,” he said, but instead, it sharpened his realization of how intimate the jewel-box theatre really is.

Tim Jennings, the Shaw’s executive director, spoke about the demolition of the theatre, slated for the end of March, the historical conservation work that will happen in the meantime and the future of the Royal George.

The Shaw, which has called the theatre home since 1981, is replacing the old building with a new one, set to open in fall 2028. The new theatre will be around 38,000 square feet above ground. The Shaw Festival says the new venue needs to be larger to bring it into compliance with current building codes.

“It will be the most accessible theatre in North America,” Jennings said.

The new complex is designed as a zero-carbon theatre, a shift away from an old system that still carried the memory of baseboard heaters and patchwork insulation fixes spanning the building’s 110-year-old history.

Jennings pointed to the items the Shaw Festival plans to salvage before demolition, to be restored or remodeled for the new theatre: the Royal George crest and lion ornaments mounted above the stage, a pane of glass from the old projection booth at the front from the years it operated as a movie theatre, as well as small decorative appliques that look like they have always been there, but were added in the 1980s with the Shaw’s acquisition of the theatre.

“My first day on the job, I remember being handed the engineering report that said in 10 years, this building needs to be torn down.”

That blunt reality has been building for years, on paper and in the cracks in the foundation. The building was erected as a temporary



The actors who took to the Royal George’s stage used to look out at an audience of up to 335 people — on Saturday, the view instead was of Shaw Festival staff and theatre-goers saying goodbye to the building. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

First World War entertainment and lecture hall for soldiers training at Niagara Camp nearby, a quick build that relied on clay “speed” tile and a foundation that was never meant to do this job for a century.

What was a farewell for some was something closer to a reunion for others. Several crew members of the Royal George hired by the Shaw in the 1980s returned in the afternoon.

Bill Talbot was the building’s electrician for more than 40 years and crawled through every ceiling or attic in the theatre. Cindy Emery worked in wigs and makeup in the 1980s. They spotted Daniel Bennett who worked a summer as “the flyman” at the theatre and “got to pull on ropes eight times a week,” as he described it. The group met with Paddy Parr, former director of operations for 22 years starting in 1987.

Jason Woodgate, the current technical director, walked the group downstairs to the familiar little green room, wardrobe room, furnace rooms, bar areas, electrical spaces, dressing rooms, and the small orchestra pit and trap area. He also pointed out the sump pump meant to

help prevent flooding, which has been a common occurrence since the 1980s, the group acknowledged.

“My first day on the job, I remember being handed the engineering report that said in 10 years, this building needs to be torn down.”

TIM JENNINGS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SHAW FESTIVAL

Jennings said in late January last year, a two-foot deep basement flood in the Royal George led to \$500,000 worth of damage, requiring a complete renovation of the floors, ceilings and walls for mold mitigation. He pointed to visible cracks in the clay tile foundation as the cause.

Shaw Festival’s chief financial officer, Bo Wang-Frape, added that it took about two months to finish and wrapped only a few days before rehearsals.

As Woodgate led the group downstairs, people kept pausing to point at

the empty corners where things used to be, laughing, reminiscing and taking quick photos.

Standing in the little old wardrobe room, Cindy Emery recalled how, when she started in 1986, she and wardrobe shared that space and what would become the wig room was beer storage, so she asked, “Can we not move the beer closer to the bar and let me have this little nook for the wig room?”

“They let me have that little nook,” she said.

Talbot recalled back when the Royal George was a black box, before the Shaw’s decorative additions in the mid-1980s. Back on the stage, Talbot pointed up at the gridiron, the overhead steel structure where blocks, pulleys, lighting positions and flown scenery are rigged.

The steel grid, he said, was installed with the channels running the wrong direction, a mistake that’s existed since he started and has limited where equipment could be placed for decades.

Talbot also described the Royal George as a rare “hemp house” style space, where hemp ropes and sandbags were part of how soft goods and scenic elements moved.

Emery remembered a moment from the old hemp-and-sandbag fly system when a “teeny tiny” crew member was so light “she kept going up with the rope,” and coworkers had to keep pulling her back down.

Juliana Uguchioni, a Shaw staff member of 13 years, said the auditorium’s intimacy is what people will miss.

“It’s definitely a vibe,” she said, describing the feeling of being part of something smaller and closer than a modern hall.

What she will not miss is the daily physical grind the building demanded, especially the stair-heavy layout and the lack of an elevator.

She mentioned the patron complaints around accessibility, and described how even the bar was rebuilt after the flood with future dismantling in mind, and is now being repurposed in the courthouse.

Parr laughed when asked what she would miss about the old Royal George.

“I couldn’t be happier,” she said, calling the rebuild “long overdue.” She listed the things audiences rarely see but she dealt with for 22 years: skunks, bats and mice, sewage failures, floods, and late-night calls

about odours drifting toward the audience.

Terry Babij, a longtime Shaw Guild volunteer, said he and his wife have volunteered for 18 years, and as donors they have been around the festival even longer.

“We got married late, so we don’t have any family,” he said. “This is our family.”

In his view, the rebuild is not a loss of community but a chance to widen it, with more public space and new kinds of gathering spots like the Artists’ Village.

Others framed it as history behaving like history.

Megan Gilchrist, who worked in Shaw’s education department, called herself “a historian by trade,” and said she can feel sad about the end of the building while still being excited for what comes next.

“First and foremost, it has to meet the needs of the community,” she said.

Her daughter Hannah, now working front of house at the Shaw, said she grew up coming to the Royal George and described the day as “bittersweet,” pointing again to the stair-heavy layout and how limiting it has been for accessibility.

Even among those supportive of change, there were questions about how much of the theatre’s look and feel can survive.

Adam Gardiner from Stratford, who has attended shows at the Royal George several times, said he likes that the façade will be kept, but worries the project could leave only a shell, with something entirely different behind it.

He said he would prefer to see as much of the architecture replicated as possible, and planned to reserve judgment until the final result is real.

Theatre-lovers got one last walk through a place that has always asked them and the staff to squeeze, climb, adapt and keep the show going anyway.

The building will come down, but the stories, written in the guest book and spoken out loud in the basement, were already doing what the day was for: keeping the heart of the community intact.

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New research points to key anti-slavery figure in early Niagara-on-the-Lake

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A Niagara public historian says she has uncovered new evidence of anti-slavery advocacy work in Niagara-on-the-Lake, including information about the man who may have been one of the leaders of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada.

St. Catharines historian Rochelle Bush said she came across documents three months ago detailing information about William Barr, a white man who lived in what was then called Niagara and is now known as Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Right now, based on her research, Barr “appears to be the point person” for the abolition group, she said.

“I was so thrilled to find that.”

The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada formed in 1851 to promote the worldwide abolishment of slavery and support African-American refugees seeking freedom in Canada, a decade before the American Civil War.

Bush’s research is still in the early stages, but she learned about Barr through an 1853 edition of the Provincial Freeman, a prominent abolitionist newspaper founded by Mary Ann Shadd, a free Black woman.

Barr appears in the writings of Samuel Ringgold



Niagara historian Rochelle Bush says she’s discovered a link between NOTL and anti-slavery activity on the Underground Railroad through a man named William Barr, a tailor who hosted anti-slavery activists. SUBMITTED

Ward, a formerly enslaved person who fled Virginia and later became an abolitionist activist, newspaper editor, minister and labour leader in Canada.

Ward travelled through the Niagara area in 1853, the newspaper’s first year of publication. He was accompanied by Hiram Wilson, a white American who served as the area’s contact for the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada and was also a station manager for the Underground Railroad in St. Catharines.

The pair visited what is now NOTL on March 15, 1853. Ward wrote that Barr provided hospitality and organized a meeting.

“In company with our excellent friend, Wilson, we went to Niagara on the 15th, where, through the activity of William Barr, Sen., Esp., a large assemblage was

ready to hear us at the appointed hour,” Ward wrote. “Mr. Barr occupied the chair with great ability. A most encouraging meeting was that at Niagara.”

Bush said in an email that Barr likely assisted newly arrived freedom-seekers — formerly enslaved people who crossed the river and landed in NOTL.

She described Barr as a well-known and respected member of the community. An advertisement in an 1858 edition of the Niagara News lists him as a skilled tailor.

Bush said Barr’s activities would have likely taken place throughout the town, rather than in a single location. It may also add a new dimension to Black history in NOTL.

The town’s Black history dates back to the era of the United Empire Loyalists,

when enslaved people arrived with white Loyalists and free Black Loyalists also settled in the area, she said.

NOTL later became a destination for people escaping enslavement via the Underground Railroad. One of them was William Riley, who fled Virginia in 1802 and eventually settled in the town in 1819, Bush said.

About 200 Black settlers lived in an area known as the Coloured Village.

“Most towns and villages had a section, usually on the outskirts, that was named the same or something that was identifiable as Black, such as ‘Little Africa’ in Fort Erie,” Bush said. “These areas created safe spaces for Black people. There were also plenty of people who chose to live outside the Black neighbourhood.”

While some Ontario communities had self-sufficient Black neighbourhoods, NOTL’s “Coloured Village” was more integrated, Bush said, with Black and white residents living side by side.

Bush said the community made a strong impression on Shadd.

“I am of the opinion that Shadd came to the conclusion that NOTL was without prejudice after conversing with the residents of the Colored Village and others,” she said.

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Celebrate Black history at the NOTL Museum



Jacqueline Dixon
MY STORY

Jacqueline Dixon, a certified sales professional and entrepreneur, will give a talk on Feb. 11 for the NOTL Museum’s February virtual lectures and Black History Month about Richard Pierpoint, an escaped enslaved person who later pushed the British to have an all-Black militia during the War of 1812. SUBMITTED

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Museum is celebrating Black History Month this year with a bevy of educational events that highlight Black history in Canada, the United States and the world — plus, it has reading recommendations with a list of featured titles available at the museum’s book shop.

The museum book shop will highlight titles on Black history for adults and children, including Karolyn Smardz Frost’s “I’ve Got A Home In Glory Land: A Lost Tale of The Underground Railroad,” which won the Governor General’s Award for non-fiction.

It tells the story about an escaped enslaved person who who was caught in Michigan and slated to return to Kentucky. The response from the local

Black community sparked the Blackburn Riot of 1833, the first racial uprising in Detroit’s history.

Other featured books include Natasha L. Henry’s “Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada” and “Slavery and Freedom in Niagara” by Michael Power and Nancy Butler.

On Feb. 6, the museum’s Doc Club will host a Zoom discussion of the documentary “Captive,” which follows women who escaped imprisonment by the Boko Haram group in Nigeria. The film was made by Canadian journalist and producer Mellissa Jung.

The Doc Club discussion is free and begins at 10 a.m. Participants are asked to watch the film in advance. Those wishing to attend can email Barbara Worthy at bworthy@notlmuseum.ca.

On Feb. 11, Jacqueline Dixon, a certified sales professional and entrepreneur, will

give a talk as part of their February virtual lectures on Richard Pierpoint, a formerly enslaved person who gained his freedom during the American Revolution, came to Canada and petitioned for an all-Black militia to fight on the British side.

The talk will explore the “resilience, advocacy, and struggle for belonging in early Simcoe County,” according to the museum.

It begins at 11 a.m. Registration is free and can be done at notlmuseum.ca.

The museum is also highlighting its Voices of Freedom Interactive Park, noting that “it provides an infinite online resource for information on Black settlement in Niagara.”

The museum also points to a “comprehensive online resource of videos and complementary research material focusing on early Black settlement.”

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NOTLers line up for **first look** at new Foodland

Continued from Front Page
a while.

“We’ve been excited for this for a while because it’s such a close grocery store that we can walk to,” said Jones.

Foodland held its grand opening shortly before 7:30 a.m., with remarks from developers John and Adam Hawley, store owner Lindsey Bridgeman and politicians including Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, Coun. Erwin Wiens and MPP Wayne Gates.

There was great fanfare surrounding the occasion, with a ribbon-cutting, balloons, slices of vanilla cake for attendees, bagpipes played by Kelly Buckley and the Toronto Raptors’ mascot performing a handstand and energizing the crowd before the doors opened for customers at 8 a.m.

Inside, the left side of the entrance leads to cash registers and the bakery, while the right leads to the meat



Krista Payne, vice president of operations at Sobeys, addresses a crowd that includes NOTL politicians during the Foodland opening on Thursday. DAN SMEENK

department. Straight ahead, shoppers can see food aisles and the fresh produce section.

Nancy Widdicombe, a Garrison Village resident who has lived in Niagara-

on-the-Lake for more than 30 years, said she was looking forward to perusing the store’s variety of products.

She said she was hoping for “meats, fish, just something different.”

“Loblaws has the Independents, so you just have the same product in each, so we’re looking for different things.”

Foodland is the town’s third grocery store, follow-

ing two Your Independent Grocers locations in Old Town and Virgil.

Those involved in running the store said preparations leading up to opening day went smoothly. Bridgeman told The Lake Report that “things were feeling pretty great.”

“We had a really good team here, great support from head office, and it just went very smoothly,” she said.

Bridgeman said she hired the management team, which then hired staff. Bakery manager Carrie Corfield said this was her fifth store opening, including a Sobeys re-opening in St. Catharines and new Sobeys stores in Oakville and Stoney Creek.

“This was probably the best, most smoothest opening that I’ve ever experienced,” she said.

For some employees, like full-time cake decorator Jasmine Fortin, the job has been both literally and figuratively “sweet.” Fortin said

she has worked at Sobeys-Foodland for three months but has spent 10 years in baking.

She said she “applied to a job posting and liked what (Foodland) had to offer.” On opening day, Fortin said staff were making vanilla and chocolate cakes with real cream and fresh fruit, which they produce about “every day or so.”

The Foodland store is part of a larger commercial development that will also include a luxury hotel and Clayfield Commons, a planned area for retail stores and restaurants. John Hawley told The Lake Report developers are aiming to complete the project by summer.

He said he was pleased with the opening and hopes the full vision meets expectations.

“It’s a very different concept than just building a strip mall,” he said. “It’s like you might find in Europe.”

daniel@niagaranow.com



Participate in an Energy Mapping Workshop to Support a Community Energy and Emissions Plan

The Town is developing a Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) to better understand local energy use and identify opportunities to reduce emissions, improve efficiency, and strengthen community resilience.

Public Information Centre Details

- February 18 | 6:00–9:00 p.m.
- NOTL Community Centre – Auditorium (14 Anderson Lane)
- No registration required

Led by QUEST Canada, this interactive session will include a brief presentation, small-group discussions, and hands-on activities using maps to explore local energy use and identify priority actions.

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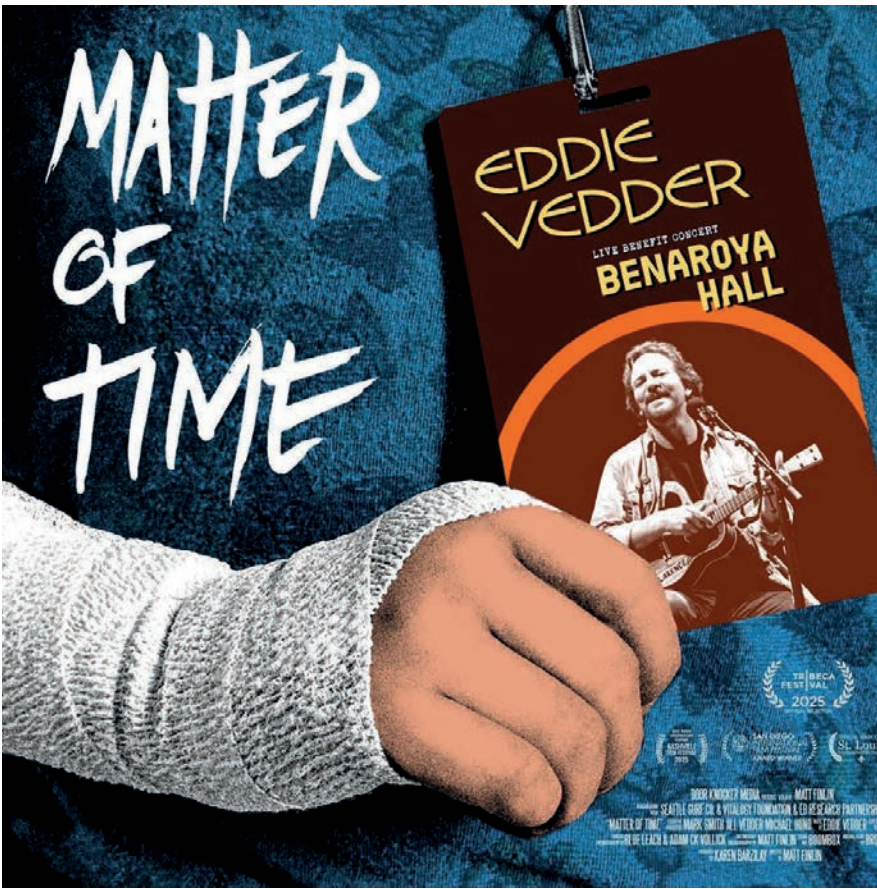
NOTL filmmaker's Eddie Vedder documentary hits Netflix Feb. 9

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake's Matt Finlin has built an accomplished career in the not-for-profit and film worlds, producing advertisements and music videos and even serving as a producer for WE Charity's WE Day. That background means he knows how to put on a performance. Now, the Door Knocker Media partner has turned those skills to another cause.

His latest documentary, "Matter of Time," will debut on Netflix on Feb. 9, the story of the fight to cure a rare genetic disorder — featuring the frontman of Pearl Jam, Eddie Vedder.

The film premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival last June and has since found success on the festival circuit. It won Best Music Feature Documentary at the Nashville International Film Festival and Best Film at the San Diego International Film Festival, leading to a 30-theatre run across the United States and Canada. "Matter of Time" focuses on people living with a rare genetic skin condition called epidermolysis bullosa, often shortened to



NOTL film producer Matt Finlin's new documentary "Matter of Time" will appear on Netflix on Feb. 9. SUBMITTED

EB. The condition causes extremely fragile, easily blistered skin that can make everyday life painful. Those with EB are sometimes called "butterfly children" because of the delicacy of their skin. Finlin said he met a young boy named Eli who has the condition in 2019, an encounter he said

changed his life. "When you meet someone with EB, it puts your life into perspective pretty quickly," he said. "Because they're living with, you know, wounds that may never heal and it's sort of the equivalent of third-degree burns in a large part of their body." Despite those challenges,

Finlin said Eli's spirit wasn't broken, describing him as a "vibrant, funny kid." The documentary also highlights Vedder, who appears in the film during a series of solo benefit concerts in Seattle in 2023. The concerts raised money for the EB Research Partnership, an organization

Vedder and his wife, Jill, co-founded. Finlin, who listened to Pearl Jam as a kid, said Vedder's efforts have helped raise \$35 million for EB research. He said there are now 120 clinical trials underway and three Food and Drug Administration-approved treatments for the condition.



He credited the Vedders for using their celebrity to support a cause beyond themselves. "They were such lovely people really trying to find treatments and cures for this," he said. "I just said to them, 'If there's anything I can do to help, I'm in.'" Finlin said he does not yet know how much money the documentary has raised, but described the amount as "significant." "I think Jill says this in the film," he said: "EB used to be called like the worst disease you've never heard of, but we've kind of hopefully changed that — that it's, hopefully, the worst disease we'll find a cure for." The film concluded its run with a sold-out screening in Toronto. Finlin said the experience was especially meaningful because many people living with EB attended. He said he continues to promote the film and encourage support for the cause, and he remains in touch with Eli. "I'm happy to say we're still doing pretty well, and we're still close," he said. Donation options are available through the EB Research Partnership at ebresearch.org. daniel@niagaranow.com

NOTL musician Ryan Gaio gets song on Hockey Night in Canada

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

By his own admission, former NOTL resident Ryan Gaio was never a standout hockey player and knew a professional career was never in the cards. But the 33-year-old musician and Toronto-based high school teacher still landed a moment tied to the sport he loves. Gaio, a lifelong Toronto Maple Leafs fan, had his 2024 song "Always On Your Side" played twice on Hockey Night in Canada, including during the Leafs' Jan. 17 game against the Winnipeg Jets. The song aired as the broadcast cut to commercial and later played again during the late game between the Edmonton Oilers and Vancouver Canucks, when broadcasters also identified Gaio and the track. It was later featured in a similar way on Hockey Night in Canada broadcasters Kyle Bukauskis and Elliotte Friedman's podcast, 32 Thoughts. Gaio said the song



NOTL-proud artist Ryan Gaio was a hockey fan before he was a musician and a teacher. One of his songs was played during Hockey Night in Canada in January. SUBMITTED

reached Hockey Night in Canada after he found the show's music supervisor on Instagram and pitched it directly. The supervisor liked the song, reinforcing a lesson Gaio said he believes in: "You don't know unless you ask." He said the exposure is a welcome bonus. "It's cool to have new people check it out," he said. "I really do this, first

and foremost, for the joy it brings me and the joy I think that it brings the friends I work with, so anything that comes is a cherry on top." The song reflects Gaio's lifelong loyalty to the Leafs, who have not won the Stanley Cup since 1967. Its lyrics open with, "The buzzer's drawing near/and the time's running out/yeah, the time's running out/my

loyalty is clear." He said his parents instilled that loyalty early on. As a child in 1999, Gaio was upset after the Leafs lost a conference final series to the Buffalo Sabres and dreaded facing Sabres fans at school. He said his parents reminded him that you "win with your team, and lose with your team," a lesson he now applies more broadly

to life. "I've always been struck by this loyalty we have to our sports teams even when our teams are last in the league or bombing like the Leafs currently are this year," he said. "Most people, myself included, never jump ship." Gaio released the song on Oct. 9, 2024, the day the Leafs opened their 2024–25 season against the Montreal Canadiens. It was also the day his daughter, Lucy, was born. That coincidence gave the song added meaning, Gaio said, noting, "No matter what happens, I am on your side," when speaking about his daughter. "The lifespan of the song took an interesting turn with that," he said. "Now, every time when I play it, I think about both of those things, and especially the second." Gaio is a guitarist and singer who began playing in Grade 7. As his focus shifted to music — including playing in bands and taking lessons from a NOTL instructor he described as a "cool hippie guy" — his interest in hockey faded for

a time. As an adult, he said he felt pressure to grow up and get serious, setting his guitar aside for a few years while it "collected dust." He eventually returned to both hockey and music, realizing that playing guitar brought him joy. He has continued playing for the past decade. "It's really important to have outlets and passions," he said. "Hobbies that you do for the love of the game." Gaio attended the University of Western Ontario and later completed teachers college at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, where he met his wife, Sarah Howden. He said reconnecting with hockey helped him feel closer to home. Despite living in Toronto, Gaio said his ties to NOTL remain strong. His parents, sister, uncle and aunts still live there, and he visits often. He also wears a NOTL baseball cap, including on stage. He said he always tells people where he is from: "It will always be home to me." daniel@niagaranow.com

NOTL backs Niagara conservation agency's stance against amalgamation

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake is standing up to the province against its plan to merge Niagara's environmental conservation agency with several others in southern Ontario — a move some councillors say could weaken local decision-making on flooding, water quality and environmental protection.

Council unanimously endorsed a motion from the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority opposing the province's plan to fold its group into a new Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority, spanning Niagara, Hamilton, Halton and Peel — an area serving 28 municipalities and almost two million people across roughly 4,900 square-kilometres.

This is part of the Ontario government's goal to reduce its 36 conservation authorities into seven larger bodies that would cover much bigger geographic areas and populations.

The endorsement, brought forward last Tuesday by Coun. Sandra O'Connor and seconded by Coun. Gary Burroughs, backs the one passed by the conservation authority on Dec. 5.

"This motion would place us with several other municipalities, letting the province know where we stand on the issue and how important flood protection and water quality, along with the environment, is to



Sandra O'Connor pressed council last Tuesday to speak up as Ontario weighs a plan that would fold the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority into a larger regional body — a move she says could sideline NOTL on key environmental decisions. PAIGE SEBURN

us," O'Connor told council.

She said the scale of the proposed authority risks sidelining NOTL and other Niagara municipalities, even though the region makes up a significant share of the land base affected.

"Niagara, the region, is almost 50 per cent of the land area jurisdiction of this new conservation authority," she said. "This change would be risking local representation at the Niagara region."

She said conservation authorities are designed to operate on a watershed basis to prevent flooding, conserve natural areas and protect water quality — work that depends on local knowledge and accountability.

"Restructuring at this scale would erode local decision-making, weaken municipal accountability and disrupt long standing community partnerships that are central to delivering responsive watershed managing," O'Connor said.

She added that NOTL lost its direct appointed representative on the conservation authority following an earlier restructuring of its governance, leaving Niagara with representation but not the town.

O'Connor also pointed to the funding model, noting the province contributes about 0.5 per cent of the conservation authority's budget.

"Considering that the provincial transfer payment is only 0.5 per cent of the budget," she said, "we think municipalities should determine the direction of the organization."

She said both the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario have raised concerns that the size and pace of the changes could undermine emergency response, increase costs and reduce responsive local decision-making.

"I understand the province wants to build things faster," O'Connor said, "but this particular development, I don't think, is going to help them in their long-term goal."

The "silver lining" of this situation, said Coun. Erwin Wiens, is that the province's proposal highlighted the importance of the conservation authority and local representation.

"We represent 50 per cent of the land affected, yet we have no real representation," he said. "That's a concern."

Wiens said the town had "some offline conversations" on the matter at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and thanked O'Connor for bringing "this very important issue" forward.

The province set a deadline for people and organizations to submit formal comments on its proposal through the Environmental Registry of Ontario — a deadline that has already passed.

But O'Connor said it's still critical that council formally states its position.

"I know we've passed the official date," she said, "but I think it still is important for us to stand up and have our position known to our residents — and to anyone else who is viewing this particular situation."

"It's basically to urge the province to look at these issues," she added. "We think there's a better way of going about this."

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Valentine's drive supports four-legged friends

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

This Valentine's Day, Niagara-on-the-Lake residents are showing a little extra puppy love — filling bowls for pets across the community in support of the Newark Neighbours Food Bank.

The Community Initiative for Animal Rescue, founded by NOTL volunteer Tanya Rice, is hosting its second annual Valentine's Day pet food drive Saturday, Feb. 14, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 456 Line 2 Rd.

Donations of dry or canned cat and dog food, pet toys, litter, treats, doggie pads and new or gently used pet beds are welcome. Open items cannot be accepted.



Margot Richardson and CIFAR treasurer Carolyn Greenfield stand with pet food donations from last year's Valentine's Day drive, which collected 610 pounds for Newark Neighbours Food Bank. SUPPLIED/TANYA RICE

"Newark Neighbours is such a vital fixture in the NOTL community," Rice said in an interview. "It's our goal to ensure that clients — pet own-

ers — have food, not only for themselves, but for furbabies."

Last year's fundraiser brought in 610 pounds of pet supplies — a total Rice

said organizers are hoping to exceed this year.

"With community support, we're hoping to surpass that in 2026," she said.

Newark Neighbours food bank manager Cindy Grant said the donations make a meaningful difference for clients and their pets.

"It's important to be sure that food security extends to the furry members of their families," said Grant, adding that both food bank staff and clients are grateful for the ongoing support from Rice and the group.

Adding to the Valentine's Day spirit, a hot chocolate bar will be available, thanks to Sweets & Swirls Cafe and Coconut Quartz. The group is "very grateful to our co-sponsors," Rice said.

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Nearly one year later, businessman has adapted to Trump’s tariffs

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

It’s been almost a year since U.S. President Donald Trump flipped the economic relationship between Canada and the United States on its head by announcing 25 per cent tariffs on all Canadian goods, prompting counter tariffs, American products being pulled from shelves and a boycott of U.S. travel and goods.

Today, the tariff regime is not total, but tariffs remain on some products, particularly steel and aluminum. They were first imposed at 25 per cent in March of last year and raised to 50 per cent in June.

And, in response to Canada and China thawing its icy economic relations, announcing a potential new trade agreement this winter, Trump has been threatening a “very substantial” response if that trade deal is enacted.

For some residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake, the tariffs have become a part of daily life, though some are finding ways to adapt.

Paul Mace, a Niagara-on-

the-Lake resident and vice-chair of the NOTL Museum, owns Luxyclad, a luxury cladding system company based in St. Catharines. The business manufactures and sells aluminum products designed to look like wood.

“It’s an absolutely spectacular product,” said Mace. “Very expensive, but spectacular.”

Mace said the introduction of tariffs abruptly shifted the company’s trading environment. He said Luxyclad moved from a “zero tariffs” regime under the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement to an “unpredictable” situation.

“(This) makes it difficult for the end purchaser to make a decision,” he said.

Before the tariffs, about 25 per cent of the company’s annual volume went to the United States, Mace said. Afterward, that figure dropped to 12.5 per cent, a decline of about 50 per cent.

Despite the drop, Mace said the business has continued to perform well and often experiences exponential growth. He said that trend has continued this year.

He attributed part of that success to diversification,



Paul Mace, a partner in Luxyclad in St. Catharines, said his company has adjusted to the American tariffs. DAN SMEENK

saying the company has developed “six or seven” new products, giving customers more options in the marketplace.

He also opened a separate \$12-million area in his factory to be able to make his product more efficiently. It opened last July, though the processed started in 2023.

He called it good timing.

Mace said customers have

also begun budgeting for the tariffs, noting that the past three months have seen a rebound in orders from American buyers.

“People are just learning to live with it,” he said.

Still, Mace said the company likely would have seen even greater growth under previous free-trade rules.

Mace said he has one competitor on the West

Coast that operates at a larger scale and is also doing well.

He said he doesn’t think a stable trade deal is coming under the Trump administration. While the trade agreement with China involving electric vehicles and canola products doesn’t affect his business, he said it was a “strong move” on Carney’s part.

But in general, he said he tries not to let geopolitics affect him because he “can’t do anything about it.”

Asked about the state of Canada-U.S. relations and the broader global situation, Mace said he separates business from emotion and avoids becoming overly concerned. “I don’t worry about emotion.”

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BKind Grateful
With Bradley Hamilton
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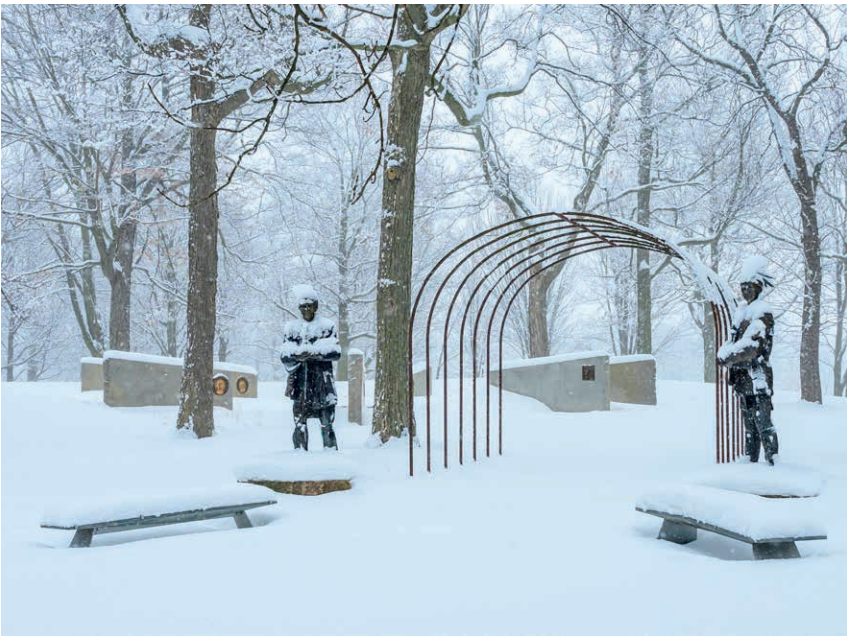


Contributed by Patty Garriock
“What we see depends mainly on what we look for.”
- John Lubbock

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A historic winter
It's been a season for the record books, with historic levels of snowfall hitting our part of North America. Regardless of what you may have heard from a famous groundhog or two on Feb. 2, meteorologists say to look out for very cold conditions in Canada throughout February. Over at Queenston Heights, Dave van de Laar captured a photo of freshly fallen snow over the Landscape of Nations Memorial.

Opinion

The mayor, the build and the nasty writer




THE TURNER REPORT
Garth Turner
Columnist


“I am seriously considering running given what has transpired over the past couple of years,” he says. Actually, it looks like a done deal. We have the first challenger about to throw his crown in the ring to be the next lord mayor of this august little kingdom. “There are just a couple of people I need to give a heads up to first,” he says, “and then I will let you know when to print.” The election’s this autumn. Betting is among senior members of the rebel NOTL residents rabble that the current monarch, Gary Zalepa, will be buried if he choses to run again. Some see him as a part-time ruler, balancing his public duties with his career as a real estate executive. They look at the new hotels, the building spurt, the tourist hordes and the assault on built heritage and say Lordy Z has lost that balance. In fact, this council may have played a role in polarizing our bucolic home town. And — as incredible as it may seem — in heap-



The first contender to knock off Lord Mayor Zalepa this autumn (if he runs) is about to make an announcement. A rush to build, sacrifice heritage and court more tourism has polarized NOTL, as Garth Turner attests. FILE
ing criticism upon your hapless reporter. “I would like to counter Garth Turner’s ever negative reporting,” Peter Rand wrote to Mr. Editor last week, “the most recent being his worst possible view of the rebuild of Shaw’s Royal George Theatre.” As regular addicts of this space will know, the local theatrical-industrial complex plans to demolish four heritage buildings in the town’s epicentre, then spend three years erecting a 53,500-square-foot, six-storey monolith with a faux façade on Queen Street, where a real one now stands. There is nothing like this \$85-million mass in NOTL’s core, which will take several thousand truck visits to complete by some time in 2029. The number of extra theatre seats created: almost none. The fastest-growing demographic for Shaw attendees: people over 80. The amount of public money going into this: about half. Local heritage rules broken: all of them. Peter Rand ain’t buying it. “During the George’s building we can celebrate and be thankful it is being done,” he says. “To pass negative judgement ... would seem unnecessary, indeed trivial. To highlight the increased trucking and traffic during construction of the George as a disaster, it can be seen as a small cost for this theatre being rescued in a modern and permanent way. At least that trucking is in a commercial area; and is temporary.” The cost to businesses whacked by this mega-project is unlikely to be “small”, and the trucks — every single one of them — will be travelling through residential streets, past more

than 30 heritage properties. For three years. But wait. Liz McElheran wants to pile on regarding “the negativity of Garth Turner’s columns”. “Spewing “snarky” remarks every week does not take talent nor intelligence,” she says, suggesting I have neither, which may well be true. “Surely you can find someone new to write ‘opinion’ pieces — hopefully opinions that are not peppered week after week with myopic political views and nasty subjective angles that only serve his own ego. He’s been given a forum for far too long.” Talentless, dumb, myopic and egocentric. And negative. Off with my head! See what I mean about polarization? So let’s have a few words from Trisha Romance, internationally known artist and resident who NOTL recently feted. How does she see this issue? “I don’t know how the residents surrounding this mess tolerate the assault on their senses?” she says of the construction mayhem to come. “I really wanted to thank you for your outstanding reporting! You dig deep and we all wait for your weekly findings!” Well, not everyone. This might be a helluva year in town. Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister. garth@garth.ca

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When I stand up for truth, I get banned?

Dear editor:
Let me get this straight.
A “private” Facebook group (Residents 4 a Better NOTL) — one that mentions me and my family in what feels like every second post — can freely speculate, criticize and spread misinformation.

But when I join the conversation to correct falsehoods and provide context, I’m removed.

Not for being abusive. Not for violating community standards. But because my participation disrupts a preferred negative narrative.

That should concern everyone.

I was told by the group moderator that I was banned because I shared a screenshot of a conversation that was “taken out of context.”

No, sir. The only thing taken out of context is the information being circulated about me — and about others — without facts, without balance, and without accountability.



Residents 4 A Better NOTL >

Private group · 551 members

Maria Mavridis says she was banned from this Facebook group after trying to correct misinformation. SOURCED

When misinformation is repeated often enough in an echo chamber, it starts to feel like truth. And when someone directly affected steps in to correct the record, suddenly that becomes the issue.

That is not discourse. That is control of narrative.

Groups that claim to want a “better Niagara-on-the-Lake” but refuse to allow council members to engage, listen, or respond are not fostering solutions—they are fostering division.

If you truly care about the future of this community, you should want elected officials

to understand: what frustrates residents, where misinformation is taking root and what people actually mean when they say “better NOTL.”

Banning engagement doesn’t strengthen democracy. It weakens it.

Your group rules state that nothing can be shared or screenshotted.

So let me ask the obvious question: If the goal is inclusivity, transparency, and improving NOTL — why remain private?

Why restrict visibility while discussing public officials, public decisions, and public policy?

Private groups that shape public opinion without allowing accountability should make everyone uneasy.

This isn’t just about one councillor or one ban.

It’s about whether we are willing to challenge misinformation when we see it, allow respectful engagement from those directly involved and have honest conversations without silencing voices that don’t fit a preferred storyline.

Shame on the administrators who choose exclusion over dialogue. And shame on any member who sees this happen and stays silent. If we truly want a better Niagara-on-the-Lake, we need fewer echo chambers — and more courage to hear the full story.

And let me be clear: I am a public figure, you can direct your upset and dissatisfaction towards me. Our families, with all due respect, are off limits.

Maria Mavridis
NOTL

Time to amalgamate NOTL into a bigger Niagara

Dear editor:

Some new group calling themselves NOTLRA is claiming that they are going to be speaking on my behalf and representing my best interests. That is what I understood when I read a recent news bit about this newly created group of activists.

Nobody speaks for me, and we already have a duly elected council and I don’t think that the town staff need to feel obligated to deal with these folks in the way that this group is thinking.

I interpret the “RA” part of NOTLRA stands for “righteous activists,” a collective group of people that impose their moral advoca-

cy upon others. No, thanks.

There are other hobbies one can attend in this area of Niagara, lots to do here.

The idea of amalgamation has never been more pronounced than currently as a direct result of this motley crew collective. Amalgamation will solve all the primary problems like tax revenue and service delivery efficiencies as the number one priority, and issues like single-serve plastics and NIMBYism would be better managed at higher levels of governance, instead of even more adverse, confusing and unnecessary chaos that will be created by this new gang.

The entire organizational structure of this group is so

absurd that it is destined to implode prior to the municipal election this fall.

With amalgamation, we will get quicker development of the airport expansion and won’t have to listen to this group’s agenda items like “climate adaption and community resilience” — what?

Any group that asserts itself above the in-place democratic governance we have and aggressively promoting itself as being good for the entire community, is a template of communist control by a few in non-democratic self-positioned authority over the interests of individuals.

Vote for amalgamation in the fall elections and keep

an eye out for the confusion and mayhem this group is going to impose on the peace and quiet of NOTL in the meantime.

We already have everything being managed by the town with virtually the same mission statements and objectives being sold by these folks.

Clearly, the only thing different is this group’s pursuit of communal control by this carefully cloaked collective leadership. And, they are seeking donations for what? Gas masks, signs and whistles probably.

It’s going to be a lot of fun to watch all of this unfold — just stay off my lawn.

Peter Rusin
St. Davids

The constantly negative ‘Turner Report’ has got to go

Dear editor:

It was encouraging to read Peter Rand’s letter to you in the Jan. 29 edition regarding the negativity of Garth Turner’s columns (“Letter: A lot of positive things are happening, too”).

His “opinion” is not indicative to many of the residents living in NOTL. Spewing “snarky” remarks every week does not take talent nor intelligence.

His obsession with the Shaw and the real estate

market is not only repetitive — it’s downright boring.

Surely you can find someone new to write “opinion” pieces — hopefully opinions that are not peppered, week after week,

with myopic political views and nasty subjective angles that only serve his own ego.

He’s been given a forum for far too long.

Liz McEltheran
NOTL



This week’s riddle is “Jeopardy!” style
Category: HAVE I GOT NEWS FOR YOU

Dug up in France, in 2019 one of these from WWI was mistaken for a potato and sent to a chip factory before police detonated it.

Last issue category: SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Clue: As a California high schooler, he saw Led Zeppelin in concert, which would greatly influence his own music-making.

Answer: Who is Eddie Van Halen?

Answered first by: Lynda Collet

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Michael and Becky Creager

Email answers to 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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Why reusing the old hospital site makes sense



ARCHITEXT

Brian Marshall
Columnist

Round and round and round we go on what to do with the old hospital on Wellington Street.

It appears that the majority of town residents do not support razing the building and replacing it with a new wellness-tourism facility cum condominium as what was proposed by Nick Vaccaro (RegenaLife and Wellness Estates) of Niagara Falls.

Although the results of the public survey report commissioned by the town, through the firm NPG Planning Solutions, was largely inconclusive.

The consultants did suggest that respondents — many cases by very slim margins — felt the community needs housing for an aging population, parking, medical services, community programming,

arts and culture, a welcome area, community spaces and a school.

This lack of definitive community preference renders the question of future best-use of this property a political “hot potato” and hence there will be no “safe” position for our elected councillors.

But, before contemplating a possible future use, let’s talk about the building itself.

The original 1951 centre block boasts an impressive glass paneled double door entry surmounted by a fanlight in an opening that sports limestone impostes and keystone. This entry is approached by a wide double-rise (from grade to porch level) staircase establishing a grand street-view presentation.

This presentation is, in turn, raised to a grander level by the classically styled colonnade with four sets of paired columns supporting a deep, elegantly simple entablature and flat roof sheltering the entry.

Between 1954 and 1968, further additions were made to complete the long, low building that graces this property in the current day.

Allow me to observe, the architecture of the old hospital is a superior example



The architecture of the old hospital is a “superior example” of mid-20th-century institutional design, writes Brian Marshall. FILE

of mid-20th-century institutional design, which is compatibly couched within the context of the associated streetscapes.

Despite occupying nearly a full town block, it does not dominate, but rather, serves as an end-bracket to the surrounding buildings. Its brick cladding and form contextually speaks to the broader character of Old Town while serving as a gentle contrasting backdrop to St. Vincent de Paul and Simcoe Park.

Unfortunately, nearly without exception, all the proposals to date have either endorsed the total demolition of the building or loosely suggested that the existent building had passed its best-before date and should be consigned to the dust bin of history.

Let’s set aside the benefits of preserving historical architecture ...

Here’s why adaptive reuse of an old existing building makes financial sense.

It has been reliably reported that adaptive reuse of existing buildings results in a 15 to 19 per cent lower cost than new construction. In fact, a Deloitte study and analysis revealed that compared to new construction, adaptive reuse projects cost around 16 per cent less and are completed in 18 per cent less time.

And these savings are considered very conservative. In an article published by the US architectural firm Weber Murphy Fox (“Why Developers Are Turning to Adaptive Reuse”), those savings are “up to 20-30 per cent compared to new construction.”

From an environmental perspective, a milestone National Trust study entitled “The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse” unequivocally found that a new building, even if 30 per cent more energy-efficient than an existing one, requires between 10 to 80 years to offset the carbon emissions generated as a result of its construction — a finding that has been substantiated in a wide variety of international studies on the topic.

Realistically, it will be our kids or their children who will live to see that “new” building finally break even on its environmental carbon debt.

I could go on but, quite frankly, there are no viable general arguments (financial, environmental or otherwise) that can be made to justify demolition and rebuild over adaptive reuse.

So, let’s return to the question of future use for the old hospital.

Since there is no general consensus, why can we not blend the community’s opinions into a true socially responsible multi-use facility?

Let’s take the central core, introduce a glass skylight system into the roof to allow natural light to illuminate the interior and devote this space to an arts and Niagara-specific cultural show piece.

Bracket the rear of each wing with a glass corridor that serves as a walkway with views onto the parklands behind and access to a series of doors which, to the right, provide entry to approximately 20 affordable rental housing units (evenly split between age-in-place seniors and younger employees of the town’s businesses).

In the left wing, the existing school could be incorporated with the unused remainder of the space devoted to affordable rental units.

And, since we are blue-skying here, let’s demo the loading dock extension and introduce a greenhouse (reflecting Niagara’s farming tradition) that, tended by residents, could be both a healthy food source and a public educational feature.

Landscaping?

A series of Carolinian edible food forest gardens augmented by typical tender fruit plantings which demonstrate to the world what Niagara has to offer.

Moreover, since we have not altered the basic building footprint, there would be plenty of space available for a parking address.

Of course, we would introduce cutting-edge technologies to make the building largely self-sustainable and carbon-neutral.

In short, the old hospital could become an adaptive reuse example to the world — provided the political will is brave enough to move forward.

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



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ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

It would have been so easy to simply cancel the Fish Fry last Thursday at Branch 124 of the Royal Canadian Legion. The furnace was being temperamental, and there were some concerns with the aging water pipes. But cancelling wasn't really an option, apparently. Prolonged really freezing temperatures, ice and persistent accumulations of snow had basically shut our town down. But our Fish Fry crew had thawed the haddock, and it just isn't right to thaw it again. Something about texture, mouth feel and taste. A whole lot of fish would have to be tossed, at substantial cost. The weekly Fish Fry is more than just a meal. It's

many things, including a social event. An anticipated weekly opportunity for many locals to get together for a chinwag with friends. The quality of the haddock, french fries and cole slaw draw a good weekly crowd. The meal is consistent, with no surprises. All at a very fair price. But also, as they sang in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," tradition must be respected. Here in our wee town, the Fish Fry is on Thursday. Tradition. Tevye the Milkman attempted to shelter his seven daughters from changes and the outside world. His little world worked just fine, so why accept change? The Fish Fry would go on, just not on Thursday this week ... I get confused, but fry day isn't Friday. It's Thursday. Regular communications channels were used, and the "NOTL Bush Telegraph" kicked into gear. I personally learned about the one day postponement from Henry Adamowski, as he drove past me in his very macho pickup truck. The Legion's Email list, their Facebook, and random



Ross Robinson commends the Legion for switching its fish fry plans to the next day after some technical issues cause the branch to close on Thursday last week. FILE

telephone calls. Victoria and Al and our enthusiastic Legion leaders determined to get the word out, and respect the old mantra, "The show must go on." So, here's what ultimately happened. Hungry people who showed up on Thursday to eat in or take out were advised of the date change, and advised that not only would the same great meal be served on Friday, Jan. 30, it would be two bucks cheaper. And, with live music. Niagara entertainer Terry Upper was already scheduled for Friday, and sang from several genres. Some country western, some folk, some real oldies and no hip-hop. Normally done by local cadets, Legion branch members volunteered to

deliver the meals to tables or the take out counter, with smiles on their faces. By any measure, the turnout for this Fish Fry on a Friday night was awesome. It was unspoken, but obvious that people really appreciated the big effort made by the Fish Fry crew, local branch. They had gone the extra mile, and a very surprising number of people enjoyed dinner.

Personally, the folks at my regular table had the opportunity to learn more about the true story from Ukraine. NOTLer George Dyck has moved to Manitoba, but was back home for a visit. He is totally committed to helping ease the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. The brave ancestors of so many Niagarans came from Ukraine, and they need our help. If anyone wants to learn about the history of our now popular and quickly developing town, spend some time listening to George and his old Niagara District buddies. For us "new" residents, these stories are a great reminder that agriculture is hugely important. It's not all wine and Shaw. The other fun conversation topic at the Legion Fish Fry last Friday was the lack of nicknames in our current society: Dip, Fluffy, Dizzy, the list was endless. Think about it, and perhaps ramble with some friends. Invent a nickname for a friend or family member. rossrocket9@gmail.com



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Ontario 

Icebreakers Comedy Festival returns to Prince of Wales

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

The Icebreakers Comedy Festival returned to the Prince of Wales last weekend, bringing nationally known comics back to a venue residents may have remembered from the festival's early years.

The 12th annual festival ran Jan. 29 to 31 across three Niagara-on-the-Lake locations, with the Saturday night CBC Laugh Out Loud Gala anchoring the weekend at the Royal Cambridge ballroom at the Prince of Wales. The move followed a criticized stop at NOTL's community centre last year.

Festival founder and executive producer Jeff Paul, a NOTL native, said the decision to change venues centred on production quality and atmosphere rather than size.

"It just wasn't up to snuff for what we like to do. We don't want them folding up basketball nets so we can do a show," said Paul.



Comedian Sam Burns performed during the Icebreakers Comedy Festival, delivering a set that dealt with growing up and his father's financial struggles. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

Shows earlier in the weekend took place at Oast House Brewers on Thursday and Corks Wine Bar and Eatery on Friday, before the CBC gala on Saturday night. All events were 18-plus, with 19-plus required for alcohol service.

Paul told the audience Saturday the festival began at the Prince of Wales ballroom 12 years ago and had not returned to the room in nearly a decade. The gala also marked CBC Radio's 10th consecutive year participating in Icebreakers.

"We're not looking to expand or get bigger. We're just looking to have what we have and keep it a good quality and not overreach," Paul noted.

The gala was hosted by CBC Radio's Ali Hassan and featured a lineup of comedians from across Canada, with Martha Chaves closing the show. Chaves, a Humber College comedy instructor and re-turning performer, drew on everyday observations and personal experience.

Hassan addressed last year's venue switch early in the evening, after learning more about it on arrival.

"I was told last year was a good show, and now I find out a year later it was a debacle. I had no idea," said Hassan.

Paul said audience loyalty has allowed the festival to stay small while continuing to sell out, even as some residents remain unaware it exists.

"They're paying money to see something, and we give them the satisfaction of spending that money so they want to do it again," he said.

The festival's timing in late January has also remained deliberate, especially in a town that quiets after the holidays.

"At the end of January,

everybody wants to get out of the house. They tell themselves all month they're going to be better this year, and then a couple weeks go by and they get itchy," said Paul.

Icebreakers began more than a decade ago alongside Niagara-on-the-Lake's ice-wine celebrations, after Paul got some encouragement from comedian Christoph Davidson. Paul later took full control of the festival, with support from a small local team including Councillor Tim Balasiuk.

Paul announced his plans to record a comedy special in town this spring, continuing the festival's connection to local venues.

"It's pretty much going to be my top hits of my 15-year career in comedy, and I'll slap it all onto a nice video and hopefully people click on it," he said.

The special is scheduled for April 11 at Navy Hall, with two ticketed shows planned later that night.

andrew@niagaranow.com



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Niagara Foundation lease of Foghorn House comes to a close

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Niagara Foundation’s decades-long stewardship of a historic building in Niagara-on-the-Lake’s waterfront district has ended.

The foundation’s lease on the Foghorn House from the town expired this past Saturday, with the town to take over paying for the maintenance and repair of the old lighthouse building in the future — what’s next for the 122-year-old property, however, will depend on the town finishing its masterplan for the historic dock area.

“I don’t think we ever intended to keep it forever,” said foundation president Lyle Hall. “When we negotiated the lease the last time, which I guess would have been in ’22, the discussion with the town then was, ‘We’ll do one more extension, then it’s probably time to wrap it up.’”

The Foghorn House, at



Control of the historic Foghorn House is going back to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, as the Niagara Foundation’s 40-year lease comes to an end. DAN SMEENK

99 River Beach Rd., was built in 1904 as a warning signal for incoming ships. As navigation technology improved, the building became obsolete and was decommissioned in 1978,

Hall said. At the time, it was in disrepair, he said.

The town acquired the property in 1982 — four years later, in 1986, the foundation took over.

During that time, it spent

about \$225,000 on repairs and paid \$100,000 in rent and \$180,000 in property taxes, Hall said. The town was responsible for all capital costs to maintain the building.

Hall said foundation records dating back 40 years indicate repairs included shoreline protection, a sewer connection, a new roof, furnace and ducting, electrical upgrades, landscaping and replacing flooring and the staircase, among other work.

In a recommendation report to council from October, staff said the town will put off “major capital investment decisions” for the Foghorn House until the dock area masterplan is complete. It said that the town will “absorb costs associated with the assumption of maintenance and repair obligations” for the property.

A long-term tenant occupies the building and will remain there after the property reverts to the town. The town negotiated a year-long tenancy agreement with them back in October.

Hall said preserving the Foghorn House is important because it has retained its heritage appearance in

the dock area, where many homes have been modernized and excluded from the heritage conservation district study.

“It’s one of those unique structures,” he said. “Its purpose is of historical value.”

In 1991, the Foghorn House was designated a heritage property under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Hall said he trusts the town will continue to maintain the building as the foundation has for the past 40 years, although he expressed disappointment over what he described as a lack of recognition from some council members.


“I’d be less than honest if I didn’t say I was disappointed at the lack of acknowledgment or gratitude shown by council — at least some members of council on this — which is disappointing. But that’s life,” he said. “I think we’ve ended up in a good place.”

daniel@niagaranow.com

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NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION, OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

What: Notice of **Complete Application, Open House** and **Public Meeting** for a **Official Plan Amendment** (under Section 22 of the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13*, as amended)

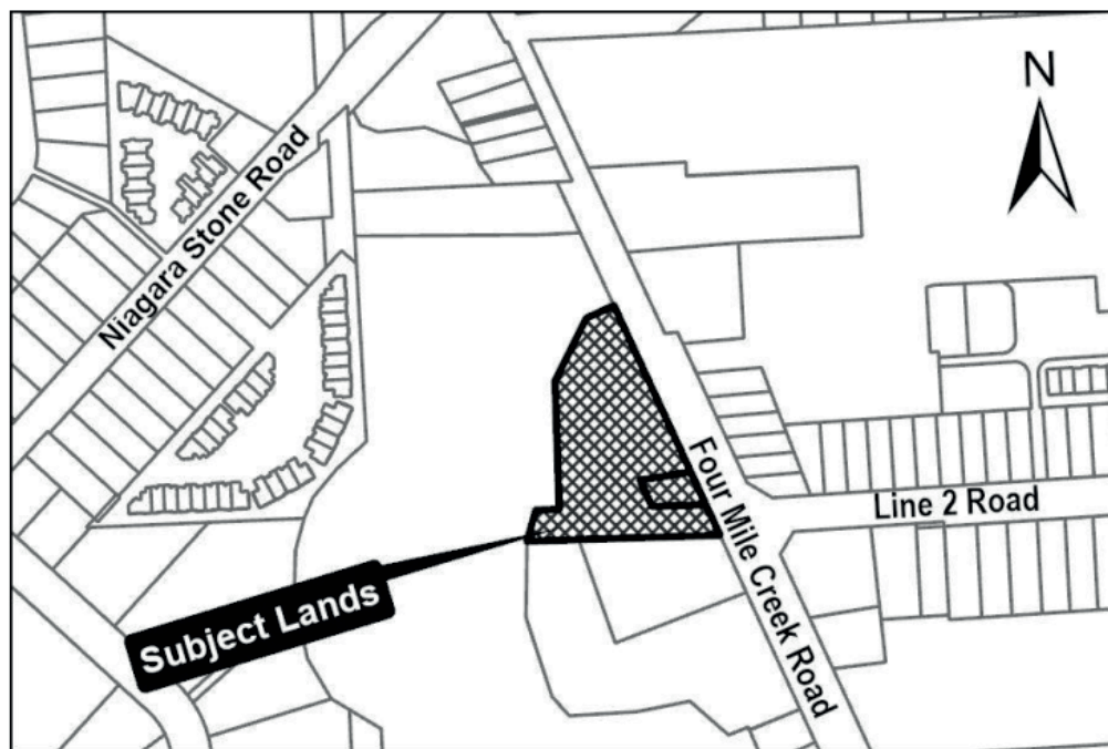
When: Open House: **Monday, February 23, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.**
Public Meeting: **Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.**

Where: Open House: Electronically via the directions below
Public Meeting: In-person at Town Hall, Council Chambers, 1593 Four Mile Creek Road, Virgil, or electronically via the directions below

Regarding: File No. OPA-01-2026 | 1544-1546 Four Mile Creek Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake

What is this?

An application has been received for an Official Plan Amendment on the subject lands (see location map). The Application is proposed to facilitate commercial and residential uses on the subject lands, including the construction of a two (2) storey commercial building and a five (5) storey residential building with 31 residential units and rooftop amenity space. The Application also proposes 241 surface and underground parking spaces. The requirement for an Official Plan Amendment was identified through the processing of the associated and concurrent Zoning By-law Amendment, being Town File ZBA-04-2025. The Official Plan Amendment proposes to redesignate the lands from "Service Commercial" to a site-specific "Service Commercial" designation to permit the proposed apartment building, residential density, and parking arrangement. The existing "Conservation" designation would be maintained on the property.



Dialogue is encouraged:

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

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

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

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

- **Open House** – Victoria Nikoltcheva (victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com or 905-468-6451)
(register as soon as possible but prior to noon on Monday, February 23, 2026)
- **Public Meeting** – Clerks Department (clerks@notl.com or 905-468-3266)
(register as soon as possible but prior to noon on Monday, March 2, 2026)

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

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

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

For more information:

A copy of the application and supporting documents for the proposal may be obtained on the Town's website at <https://www.notl.com/business-development/public-planning-notices>, or at the Planning, Building and Development Services Department within Town Hall. Please contact Victoria Nikoltcheva, Senior Planner, at 905-468-6451 or via email at victoria.nikoltcheva@notl.com if additional information is required.

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

If a person or public body would otherwise have an ability to appeal the decision of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Ontario Land Tribunal but the person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body is not entitled to appeal the decision.

If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting, or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the opinion of the Tribunal, there are reasonable grounds to do so.

Please note that third party appeals are restricted for this application as per Bill 185, Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024. *Planning Act* appeals may be filed by the applicant, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, a "specified person" (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)), and any "public body" (as defined by the *Planning Act* 1(1)).

Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, February 5, 2026

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

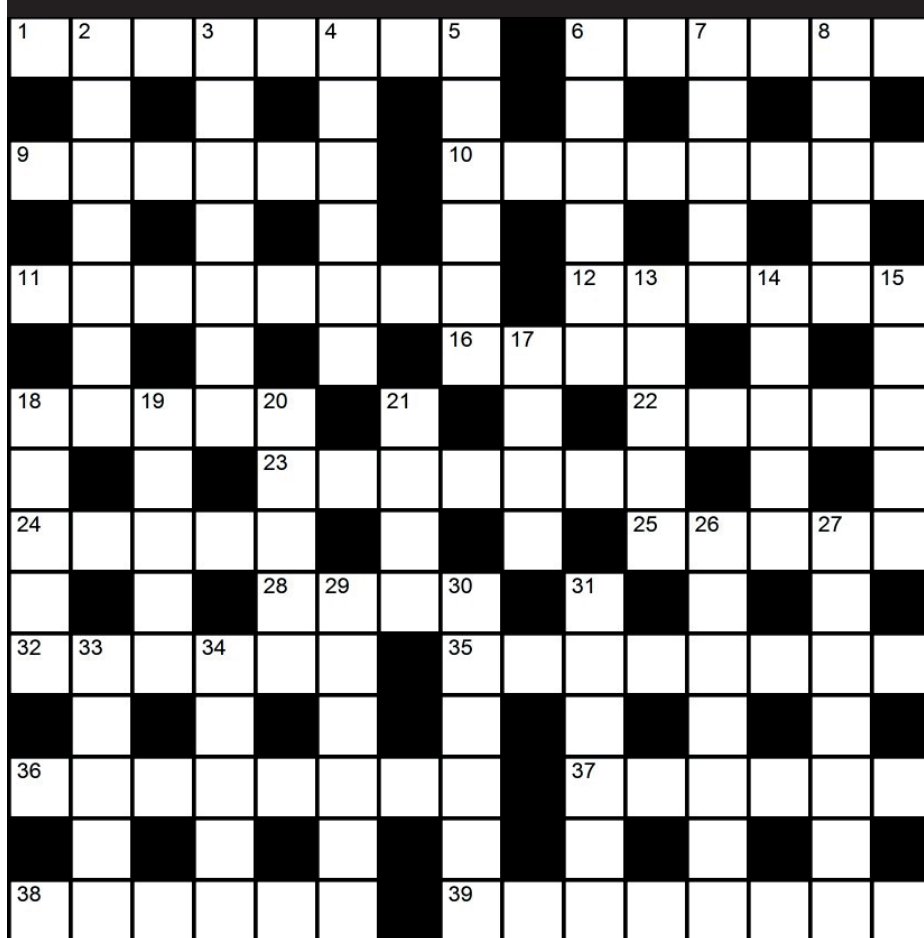


1. Fall apart (8)
6. Calls on (6)
9. Second-smallest banknote (6)
10. Wide view of an extensive area (8)
11. Resident of e.g. Tobermory,
Portree or Ventnor (8)
12. Fast (6)
16. Reflected sound (4)
18. Storage centre (5)
22. Ruin (5)
23. Dense collection of housing (7)
24. Give consent (5)
25. The devil (5)
28. 60% of us live here (4)
32. 25% (6)
35. Snakes (8)
36. Appreciative (8)
37. Self-dressing and preparation (6)
38. Insecure knot (6)
39. Slaughter (8)

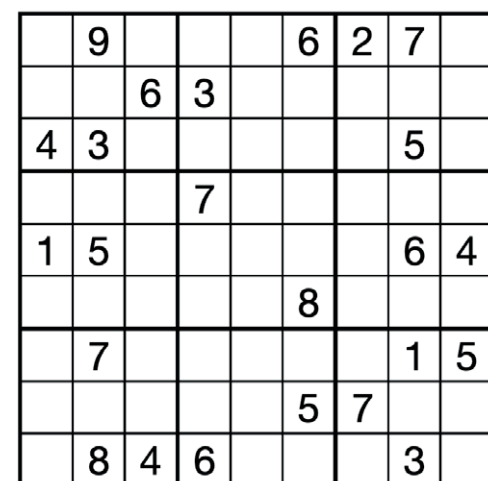
2. Supervise (7)
3. Once upon a time (4,3)
4. Procession (6)
5. Die (6)
6. Disappear (6)
7. Rush (5)
8. Shy (5)
13. Welsh county (5)
14. Wield (5)
15. Territory in NW Canada (5)
17. Musical staff sign (4)
18. Diminutive being of folklore (5)
19. Hidden (5)
20. Something special (5)
21. Positions (4)
26. The New World (7)
27. Aardvark (3,4)
29. Evasive (6)
30. Institution for mentally ill (6)
31. Boxes (6)
33. Contrasting (5)
34. Argument (3-2)

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Crossword Puzzle



Last issue's answers



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The science behind ‘that gut feeling’



DR. BROWN

Dr. William Brown
Columnist

In 2021, Arden Patapoutian and David Julius shared the Nobel Prize in medicine for their elegant work on sensation — light touch-pressure sensation for Patapoutian and for Julius, temperature and pain sensation.

Their work was elegant because they linked the genes responsible for creating specific types of receptors that were uniquely sensitive to specific types of stimuli, which if the threshold for activation of the receptor was exceeded, generated electrical signals which were transmitted to related systems in the central nervous system.

For neurologists and neurosurgeons, testing sensation can be very helpful in sorting out which parts of the nervous system are affected, and the probable location of the responsible lesion(s). For example, le-

sions which affect the first sacral root (S1) — perhaps related to a disk protrusion at the L5-S1 level — are often associated with tingling and numbness in the lateral toes and side of the foot and sometimes the back of the calf.

That correlation between anatomy, physiology and pathology remains a powerful tool in the hands of knowledgeable examiners, as do examinations of other parts of the peripheral and central nervous systems, even in this era of high definition imaging studies, which too often see more than is relevant to the case at hand.

However, sensation is not limited to the parts of the nervous system accessible to the standard clinical neurological examination.

Most of the sensory and much of the motor system, for example, is hidden inside the body: for example, in the oesophagus, gastrointestinal tract, genitourinary system, cardiovascular and respiratory systems, much of which involve peripheral and central components of the autonomic nervous system.

When everything works normally, we’re usually not aware of our heart, blood pressure and pulse or breathing, or, for example the transit of food and drink



While smart watches and other portable devices these days monitor our sleep quality, blood pressure, pulse and more, so far, we have little information about what’s happening in our gastrointestinal tract and related organs.

through our oesophagus and gastrointestinal system from stomach to anus or the urinary system — except when it comes to the urge to empty one or the other.

The activities of those systems are co-ordinated by the autonomic nervous system and all depend on receptors (enteroreceptors) to provide the necessary sensory feedback to the central nervous system about what’s happening in systems we’re scant aware of — until something goes wrong.

Much has changed these days. Smart watches and

other portable devices can continuously monitor the quality of our sleep, our blood pressure, pulse rate, the electrical activity of the heart, respiratory rate, oxygen-saturation levels and even blood glucose levels but, so far, little information about what’s happening in our gastrointestinal tract and related organs such as the liver, pancreas, spleen or kidneys.

When diseases affect these autonomically regulated and monitored systems, we know about it — especially if something like a ureter is blocked by

a kidney stone or the bowel is distended or obstructed for some reason, or possibly we ate the wrong food or caught a virus, which affects the gastrointestinal system — and suffer the consequences.

It’s common enough when we’re worried or upset for our feelings to be accompanied by an increase in heart rate, perhaps even a skipped or extra beat, hyperventilation, skin turning pale or flushed, changes in the size of our pupils and even abdominal cramps.

But what if, as some scientists suggest, the opposite happens? False signalling from enteroreceptors in the gut, genitourinary system or other internal organs or tissues trigger unintended emotional changes.

That possibility was suggested in an article by Diana Kwon, titled “Signals from Within” in the January 2026 issue of Scientific American.

This hypothesis is an alternative to the common explanation for some visceral symptoms: we’re upset first, and whatever symptoms and changes ensue, are secondary to the emotional upset. Hence, manage the emotions first and any related somatic or autonomic symptoms should improve.

The trouble with that way

of thinking is that managing emotions first sometimes doesn’t work and may miss significant physical problems that needs to be addressed.

But to return to the point raised by Diana Kwon — is there evidence that abnormal signalling from enteroreceptors triggers emotional changes? The answer is no — at least, not yet.

Indeed, one of the problems with the hypothesis is that most sensory receptors in internal organs have not been studied with anywhere near the same rigor Patapoutian and Julius applied so successfully several years ago in their studies of more accessible — and therefore, easier to study — receptors.

That doesn’t mean that Kwon is wrong. What it means is that supportive evidence is missing.

That’s the way of science: observation and hypothesis first, solid evidence second. That applies whether we’re talking about quantum physics, cosmology or, in this case, enteroreceptors and emotion. A gut feeling may not be enough.

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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Audrey Wright




WRIGHT, Audrey — Passed away peacefully with her loving family, and her dear friend Agnes, by her side at St. Catharines Hospital on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at the age of 76. Beloved wife of John for 57 years. Loving mother of Carmen Bowron (Tom Casagrande). Devoted and deeply loving Nana of Jack Bowron (Maddie Murdock) and Molly Bowron, who brought her endless pride and joy. She will be missed by her former son-in-law, Christopher Bowron. Dear sister-in-law and friend of Susan (Greg) Tashjian and Colin Wright. Predeceased by her three brothers and three sisters. Fondly missed by her many nieces, nephews, and extended family.


Audrey was known for placing great importance on her friendships and for her remarkable ability to build strong, lasting connections. She cherished the people in her life and was a loyal, thoughtful, and devoted friend to many.

Audrey worked for many years at Sears as a department manager, where she formed numerous lifelong friendships. After retiring from Sears, she worked as a sales representative for Niagara-on-the-Lake Realty. In her spare time, she enjoyed racing alongside John in their sailboat, Rainbow Chaser, throughout Lake Ontario. Audrey will be greatly missed by her beloved dog, Haylie, who provided her with much comfort. Some of her fondest memories were spent on Fort Myers Beach with friends and family.

Cremation has taken place. A celebration of Audrey's life will take place at a later date. Arrangements entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home, 415 Regent St., Niagara-on-the-Lake. In lieu of flowers, those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Niagara SPCA and Humane Society. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.



Mary Salter




SALTER, Mary Annabelle (Huffman) — Mary Annabelle Salter (Huffman) of Niagara-on-the-Lake; born May 6, 1936, in Blenheim Ontario; died peacefully with family at her side on Jan. 26, 2026, after a six-year decline from lung fibrosis.

Annabelle was a primary-school teacher with specialization in English and French languages. She was a mother of three and a proud and keen business-owner of Mai Thai Silk. In her youth, Annabelle enjoyed sailing on Rondeau Bay; she practised judo, yoga and Tai Chi at various stages in her life; and was ever the dedicated swimmer. Moreover, she was an intrepid traveller, a keen historian and a much-appreciated gourmet cook!


In recent years, Annabelle continued to be intellectually astute, despite the deterioration in her physical health. She remained in her own home and oversaw the care of husband Chuck, enjoying reading, watching historical and detective dramas, playing games on her iPad, following politics, and spending time with her family.

Annabelle was a great source of comfort and inspiration to her family and will be dearly missed. She is survived by her children Dave, Laura (Michael) and Bob (Louise); grandchildren Arthur, Joe, Camille, Anna, Kelton, Molly, Vicky and Charles; and a brother, Art Huffman of Calgary. She is predeceased by her Husband of seventy years, Chuck (2025); parents Mary Isabel Huffman (Winrow, 1953), Dr Arthur Huffman of Blenheim (1991), and stepmother Ervine Huffman (Scherle) of Erieau (2019); as well as her siblings Bruce Huffman of Stratford (2005), Doris Sikora of Erieau (2021) and Joe Huffman of Erieau (2019).

Her Family would like to thank all the caregivers and healthcare providers who have helped their parents these past few years. Commemoration will be a small family gathering. Donations in Annabelle's honour, if desired can be made to a charity of your choice. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.




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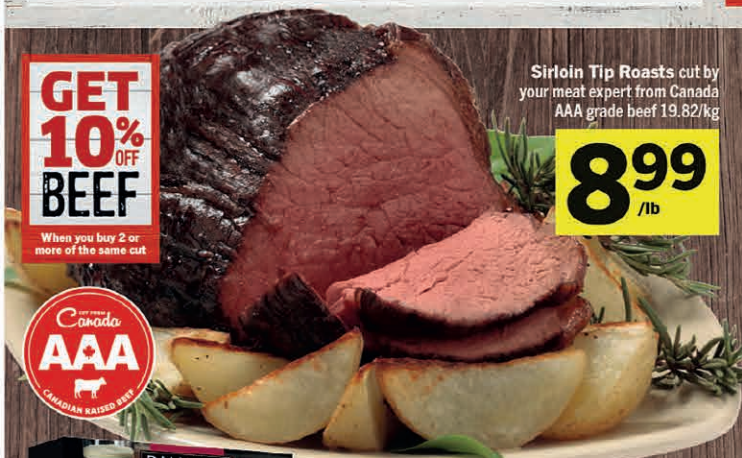
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