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Cookies for Red Roof | Page 9

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Canada's most-awarded community newspaper

January 29, 2026

New special events bylaw has teeth for bad actors

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council passed two new bylaws governing special events Tuesday night, after voting to block a delegation request from a lawyer seeking to raise concerns about the changes.

The new special events bylaw and a related amendment set up a formal permit system for special events across NOTL and allow the town to fine organizers through its administrative monetary penalty system.

Both passed, despite opposition from Coun. Gary Burroughs.

Certain events — including gatherings expected to draw more than 200 people, events on public property or events on private property where temporary zoning or site plan exemptions are required — now require a special event permit.

And, for the first time, the town can enforce the special events bylaw when violations come up instead of relying on court-based

Continued on Page 5

Flooding prompts land purchase

Nine-acre, \$1.88M St. Davids property identified as potential stormwater solution



The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has purchased a nine-acre property in St. Davids for \$1,880,000. The property will be used for future efforts to reduce stormwater flooding in the area, and, depending on future studies, could also have a community use. SOURCED

Paige Seburn | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake has bought more than nine acres of land in St. Davids for \$1.88 million as it looks for long-term solutions to stormwater flooding.

This comes after it determined that St. Davids' Sandalwood

Pond, a stormwater pond, no longer has the capacity to handle current conditions, especially during severe weather events.

Council approved the purchase of the property north of the stormwater management facility at a Jan. 13 meeting. Staff identi-

fied the land when it came on the market just as it was brainstorming how to address stormwater challenges in the Vineyard Creek Estates subdivision.

The nine acres of land were purchased for below the asking price of \$1,950,000. The total

cost, \$1,880,000, includes fees and disbursements.

"This parcel was identified as a potential solution," said Nick Ruller, chief administrative officer.

Continued on Page 2



Frank Hayes tells his story in his new book. FILE

NOTLer's autobiography a ride through life

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Frank Hayes has worn many hats in his life: immigrant, digital security

salesman, world traveller — and now, author.

Hayes has self-published an autobiography, "The Full Cycle," which recounts his 66 years in 146 pages, or 111 pages in its Kindle format. The e-book was re-

leased Jan. 2. The title refers both to his lifelong love of cycling and to the arc of his life.

"It's been a good ride, I would say," he said of his life.

Storytelling has always

been central to his career, Hayes said, noting that sales often relies on narrative. Now retired, he said he finally had the time to reflect on his life and career and

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St. Davids property could help with flooding problems

Continued from Front Page

He called the timing “a unique opportunity” for both infrastructure planning and future community use.

“As part of our discussions with council, the property happened to be on the market right at the same time,” he said.

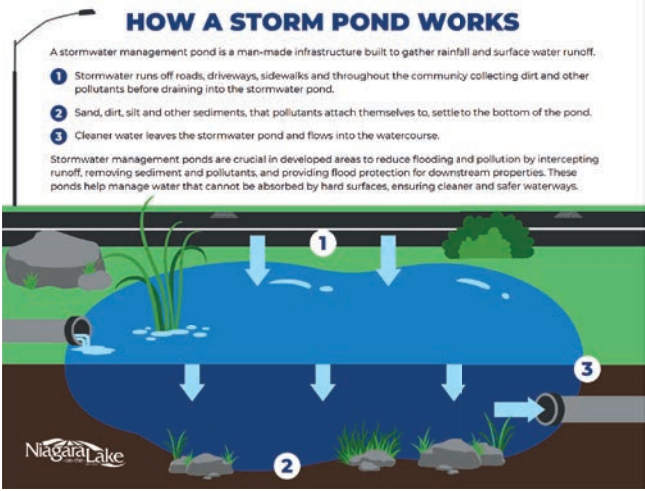
Depending on the outcome of further studies, the land could also have future community uses.

To determine the best path forward, the town will begin an environmental assessment examining the technical, environmental and community impacts of potential stormwater management solutions.

The town will also do a “visioning exercise” to help decide what, if any, community uses might make sense for the land, said Jordan Frost, the town’s director of public works and infrastructure.

“We’ll have people from our community services, from planning, the whole organization, to see what it is that we can see in this space,” he said.

The town is aiming to have construction of the preferred solution completed



by next year, Frost said.

“One option is to put a new stormwater management facility, A.K.A. a pond, on the new property,” he said. “We developed a few other alternatives.”

Stormwater management facilities are designed to collect runoff from roads and properties, control how quickly it flows out and release it downstream. Frost said the cost will depend on the option selected, but the town is not considering anything out of the ordinary for this type of infrastructure.

He said that if a new facility were to be implemented, it would not only address current capacity issues, but would be designed

as a long-term solution that accounts for the town’s growth and conditions in the future.

Expanding the existing facility was “not a viable option,” he said, because the town owned only the land immediately around it.

“We’re at a point, now, where the capacity of that facility is just not enough,” he said.

“The flooding is widespread — drainage is a challenge everywhere,” Frost added, referring to municipalities near and far.

“We can’t control the weather,” he said. “The most we can do is try to work with the weather.”

Frost said the environ-

mental assessment will explore several options — and, “in the coming months,” residents will have a chance to review and provide input through a public information session, before a preferred solution is selected.

“There will be notices going out,” he said.

“Once we have that, we’ll move forward with design,” added Frost.

The Sandalwood stormwater management facility was built in 2005 to serve nearby development and according to town officials, was properly designed and met all engineering standards at the time.

“The original engineers did the correct job on the design,” said Darren Mackenzie, the town’s manager of public works. “You’re looking 20 years later, where you have land-use change, you have more hardening of surfaces.”

Frost said the stormwater system was also originally designed when fewer surfaces were paved. Over time, added driveways, patios, pools and other hardscaping have reduced how much rain can soak into the ground.

The town is also seeing more frequent and intense storms, increasing runoff into the system and contributing to localized flooding, he said.

“With different weather patterns,” Frost said, “we experience different impacts to our infrastructure.”

“There’s been a change in the way we design our infrastructure because of this,” he said.

The town experienced two major storms within six weeks in 2024, including one that Frost said approached the scale of a one-in-500-year event, though he said he did not have the exact figures. It has already dredged the existing facility to restore its full storage volume, but he said that alone is no longer enough.

“The frequency that (storms) are happening — we’re seeing an increase in,” said Frost.

Town officials stressed the land purchase also preserves future flexibility. If a new stormwater management facility is not the preferred option, the property could still be used for community amenities or open space.

“If the (environmental as-

essment) says there’s a better option,” Mackenzie said, “we can decide community benefit, or whatever the best thing to do with that piece of property.”

Ruller said the purchase benefits both the town and St. Davids.

“It’s a great investment for the town as a whole and it’s a great opportunity specifically for the village of St. Davids,” Ruller said. “We’re excited to see what the potential can be for that property.”

Frost said residents should feel reassured the town is moving quickly by infrastructure standards. He also emphasized the facility is municipal infrastructure and not intended for recreational use.

“We are acting relatively quickly in infrastructure terms — and the final solution we are looking at isn’t just a stop gap to address something today,” he said.

“Not as just a member of the town, but as a member of the community and a member of St. David’s, I do see this as a significant investment in protecting the people’s homes and looking after our livelihoods.”

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Hitting the NOTL slopes



Aaron McInerney catches air as he launches off a snow ramp at Fort George's popular tobogganing hill, affectionately known to locals for years as "Killer Hill." January snow squalls have cancelled school twice this year, forced the cancellation of a day of the Icewine Village festival and shuttered businesses and municipal offices. Still, the wintry weather has also drawn people outside to make the most of the snow.
DAVE VAN DE LAAR

New director wants to help public better understand planning decisions

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The town's new planning director is entering into her role at a time when she says planning for developments in Ontario, including Niagara-on-the-Lake, is becoming more complex. "As we have less land for development, things continue to be a little bit more difficult, maybe a bit more contentious," said Aimee Alderman. "We need more studies to support new developments."

However, she says, the changing nature of planning is also an opportunity to learn and adapt.

As Alderman becomes the director of planning, building and development services this winter, she said her focus is on informing residents about how provincial rules influence planning decisions and how public input helps shape the outcome.

"We really appreciate all of the public interest in our planning applications," Alderman said. "It shows that we have a very engaged community."

Alderman said she is also focused on finding ways to improve the department's work while maintaining a consistent experience for residents when dealing with staff.

"I do have experience working on a range of development files," she said, from "more simple consents and minor variances" to "more contentious files that draw more public scrutiny and more public interest."

Before joining the town,



Planning decisions aren't made in isolation, says NOTL planning director Aimee Alderman, pointing to policy, technical review and public input behind each one. PAIGE SEBURN

Alderman worked at Niagara Region, reviewing planning proposals across all 12 municipalities. She later served as NOTL's manager of development planning for about two years, beginning in the spring of 2024, after working for about a year as its senior planner — work she said helped prepare her for the position she has now. "Everybody here at the town is extremely supportive," she said.

Alderman said finding a balance between growth and protecting heritage and the environment is a challenge cities and towns across Ontario are facing, but noted NOTL is unique because of the scale and concentration of its heritage buildings and other assets.

"We want to manage growth, but we also want to guide it in a way that strengthens the character of this community," she said, while protecting heritage and environmental assets for the long term.

Staff must follow provincial planning law and

applicable policies when dealing with proposals, but town staff, outside agencies (such as consultants) and the public also shape recommendations.

"We consider all comments evenly," she said, noting that feedback can lead to "meaningful changes to applications."

Alderman said improving communication is particularly important in light of recent provincial changes and the downloading of regional planning responsibilities, adding new planning duties for local municipalities.

The Ontario government's new provincial planning statement came into effect on Oct. 20, 2024.

"We deal with new announcements about planning on a regular basis," she said. "So, we are reacting."

"I think that we can continue to communicate and educate the public on what those changes have been — and how that impacts how we do planning at a local level."

Alderman said the department communicates clearly by explaining the rationale behind planning reports to council and the public, co-ordinating with other departments, being present at public meetings and open houses and sharing information online.

"That's something that we're looking to continue — and actually increase — our presence online," she said.

Looking ahead, Alderman said success would mean a department recognized for strong technical work, transparency and responsiveness — and a community that feels more confident navigating the planning process.

"Something that I am looking to commit to, or am committing to, is increased public education."

Alderman said residents with questions about ongoing applications can contact planning staff by calling 905-468-3266 or visiting town hall at 1593 Four Mile Creek Rd.

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Conservation authority to manage **Niagara Shores** until 2031

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

People visiting Niagara Shores Park can expect changes over the next five years, including habitat restoration, more trees and what officials say should be a better overall visitor experience, as the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority enters into a new management agreement with Parks Canada.

The move could be welcome news for a park that has suffered from erosion and environmental damage for decades. A 2019 Lake Report investigation found the park had lost about 90 metres of land since 1950, while Parks Canada has said shoreline erosion continues at a rate of roughly 1.1 metres per year.

The park's bank swallow population has also been under threat as eroding banks collapse into Lake Ontario. The species has experienced an overall population decline of about 90 per cent since 1972.

Jennifer McQuillan, communications and marketing specialist for the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, said the authority is undertaking the Lake Ontario Coastal Resilience Pilot Project to better understand shoreline erosion and



The bank swallow population at Niagara Shores park has been in decline due to erosion of natural habitat. Since 1950, Niagara Shores Park has lost more than 90 metres of shoreline and more than a dozen large trees to the lake. FILE

habitat preservation, with findings that will apply to Niagara Shores Park.

"Niagara Shores Park represents a natural hazard site within the watershed and is well positioned to be included in the case studies and technical assessments undertaken through this broader regional effort," she said.

"The outcomes of the Lake Ontario Coastal Resilience Pilot Project will help inform practical, locally

tailored solutions to reduce shoreline hazards — such as the eroding bank at the Niagara Shores property — while also considering natural habitat protection."

"While it is still early in the process, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority staff will be developing an internal work plan for the Niagara Shores property, anticipated to be completed by Spring 2026."

Under the agreement, the conservation authority will

manage Niagara Shores Park until 2031.

Julia Grcevic, public relations and communications officer for Parks Canada, said the authority will "administer these park lands, making them responsible for any infrastructure, environmental impacts, visitor needs and public safety."

McQuillan said the agreement allows the conservation authority to carry out habitat restoration and tree planting, as well as ecologi-

cal research and site studies.

She said the authority can also collaborate with Parks Canada and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake on site planning and management, including visitor improvements such as trail maintenance and new signage.

Ownership of the land will remain with the federal government, she said.

Niagara Shores Park is a 14-hectare forested area west of Old Town along Lakeshore Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Parks Canada currently manages the park under the National Historic Sites program. The agreement, which took two years to complete, is intended to allow the conservation authority to, as Grcevic said, "manage land to increase biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and natural cover" and "create equitable access to greenspace for the health and well-being of people."

The agreement establishes a licence of occupation, a temporary arrangement that allows the conservation authority "some privileges" to manage the property "without completing a transfer of lands."

Those privileges include conducting research and studies, caring for the land and working with the community and interested partners on a land manage-

ment plan to determine "the appropriate use and management" of Niagara Shores Park.

The agreement also allows the site to be considered as a case study location for the Lake Ontario Coastal Resilience Pilot Project, which addresses ongoing natural hazard issues.

In addition, the conservation authority may work with the town on "parking enhancements at a nearby property to provide a safe entry and crossing to Niagara Shores Park."

McQuillan said the agreement is expected to be finalized in February and that "visitors can expect the park to continue being managed as a natural area, with no significant changes to the experience in the near term."

The conservation authority said the agreement has no financial implications beyond an annual \$100 administration fee, with costs already included in its operating budget.

The conservation authority previously managed the park from 1980 to 1993. A report outlining the agreement noted that "due to vandalism and repeated damage to the grounds, vehicular access to the park has been restricted and Parks Canada encourages access by foot or active transportation."

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Town denies lawyer's delegation request

Continued from Front Page

enforcement.
The bylaw also lays out how permits will be issued, refused, suspended or revoked, and establishes terms and conditions organizers must follow.

Staff said applications for special events would be processed through the clerk's department and reviewed by multiple town departments, including planning, fire, public works and parks, with each area assessing impacts such as zoning, safety, roads and facilities.

Those reviews would inform whether an application proceeds, with the clerk issuing the permit based on that input.

The permits are intended for occasional events — staff said properties seeking to host frequent or recurring events would be directed to the planning department to pursue appropriate zoning or site-specific approvals.

The votes came after council refused to hear from lawyer Tom Richardson, who was representing resident Ed Werner and had asked to address council before the bylaws were passed.
Werner, president of Brox Company Ltd., repeatedly urged clearer, enforceable rules for special events and previously took legal action against Konzelmann Estate Winery and the town over alleged bylaw violations. He said Richardson's presentation was going to point out problems with the new bylaw.

He said council's stated aim of clarity and proper enforcement is sound in theory, but the new bylaw's wording creates ambiguity and leaves interpretation to the clerk's office.

Richardson is now writing a letter to council and staff, setting out what he would have said if he were allowed to delegate, Werner told The Lake Report Wednesday morning.

Delegation request denied on procedural grounds

Council first voted on whether to permit Richardson to address council.

The town clerk denied Richardson's delegation request over email on Jan. 26, citing procedural rules related to agenda timing,



Lawyer Tom Richardson exits the council chamber after Niagara-on-the-Lake council declined his request to delegate on new special events bylaws. PAIGE SEBURN

committee-stage delegations and potential litigation concerns. Richardson disputed that decision and renewed his request on Jan. 27.

“This virtually wipes out any protection that zoning provides for residents and puts them at the mercy of whatever the clerk's office determines is an appropriate event. The passing of this bylaw will forever change the face of Niagara-on-the-Lake.”

ED WERNER
NOTL RESIDENT

Council then voted at the Jan. 28 meeting not to allow his presentation.

Burroughs, as well as Couns. Erwin Wiens, Adriana Vizzari and Sandra O'Connor voted to allow Richardson to speak, while Couns. Wendy Cheropita, Maria Mavridis, Andrew Niven, Tim Balasiuk and Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa voted no. As a two-thirds majority is required, the motion to allow the delegation failed.

During discussion, Wiens said he wants all residents to have the ability to address council, even when

requests come in late, but also raised concerns about last-minute agenda changes.

How the new rules work

Under the bylaw, an event is considered a “special event” if it is expected to draw more than 200 people, takes place on public property or is held on private property that requires zoning or planning exemptions.

The definition also lists exclusions, including events entirely on private property that are explicitly allowed by site-specific zoning, small informal gatherings in town parks, garage or yard sales, protests or demonstrations and events held entirely on provincial or federal land.

The bylaws establish a permit system and amend the town's administrative monetary penalty system for non-parking offences to include special events, allowing the town to issue fines for violations.

Werner said the bylaw was rushed, without adequate review, and warned that the wording of it could significantly alter how special events are handled across the town.

“This virtually wipes out any protection that zoning provides for residents and puts them at the mercy of whatever the clerk's office determines is an appropriate event,” Werner said. “The passing of this bylaw will forever change the face of Niagara-on-the-Lake.”

He said he supports the

goal of clarifying special events, but believes the bylaw falls short.

“I think that council has the right intention to clarify the special events that are going on in Niagara, but this bylaw does not reflect what council wants.”

Mixed views emerge during council debate

Some councillors say the bylaws fill a gap in the town's rules. Others raised concerns about process, clarity and enforcement.

Burroughs questioned whether the bylaw would limit how many large events could take place on the same day and whether the 200-person threshold automatically triggered a permit.

Staff said there is no set cap on the number of special events per day and multiple events could occur on the same day if they are spread out, but large events in the same area at the same time would typically be discouraged.

Staff also clarified that the 200-person threshold is not the only factor that determines whether a permit is required. Events held on public property, or on private property without appropriate zoning or approvals, may still require a special event permit, regardless of size.

After staff's explanation, Burroughs said he was “more confused than ever.”

O'Connor questioned what new enforcement authority the bylaws would give the town, with staff saying it replaces an unenforceable policy with a bylaw that allows permits to be denied, conditions enforced and violations penalized through administrative fines.

Other councillors argued the bylaw was overdue: Mavridis said the policy now “covers pretty much every concern” she's had “for the last three years” and responds to resident concerns as well.

Cheropita said she appreciates how the new framework, developed over months of staff work, focuses on community impact rather than event size alone.

“This is a more robust policy than what we had in the past.”

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Photographer Dave Van de Laar braved the cold on Sunday to get some winter photos and captured this shot of Canadian geese at the NOTL Sailing Club. The birds appear to be in it for the long haul this winter.

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Snow dumps on NOTL

Sunday's storm covered Niagara-on-the-Lake with 20 centimetres of snow. The storm caused widespread closures and schools were closed on Monday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Staff
The Lake Report

The people of Niagara-on-the-Lake had their hands full at the start of this week as they dug out of a turbulent snow storm on Sunday that buried the Niagara region in up to 20 centimetres of snow.

Conditions on the road meant schools and offices closed for the day on Monday, including St. Davids Public School, Crossroads Public School and St. Michael Catholic Elementary

School.

The conditions on Sunday led to the early closure of the Icewine Village on Queen Street, while indoor events for the Icewine Festival carried on.

Due to the snowfall, the takedown of the annual festival took longer than anticipated — Queen Street, between King and Victoria streets, stayed closed for an extra day longer than planned, until Wednesday evening instead of the original reopening of Tuesday.

“We appreciate everyone’s

patience and understanding, and we’d like to thank the Icewine Festival organizers and crews for their continued work in challenging conditions to safely complete the takedown and restore the area,” the town wrote in its Facebook post.

Despite the temperature hitting a low of -22 C with the wind chill on Sunday, some still ventured outdoors, either to help with the takedown of the icewine festivities, plow the streets, or make the most of the weather in NOTL.

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What’s on the library’s reading list for Black History Month

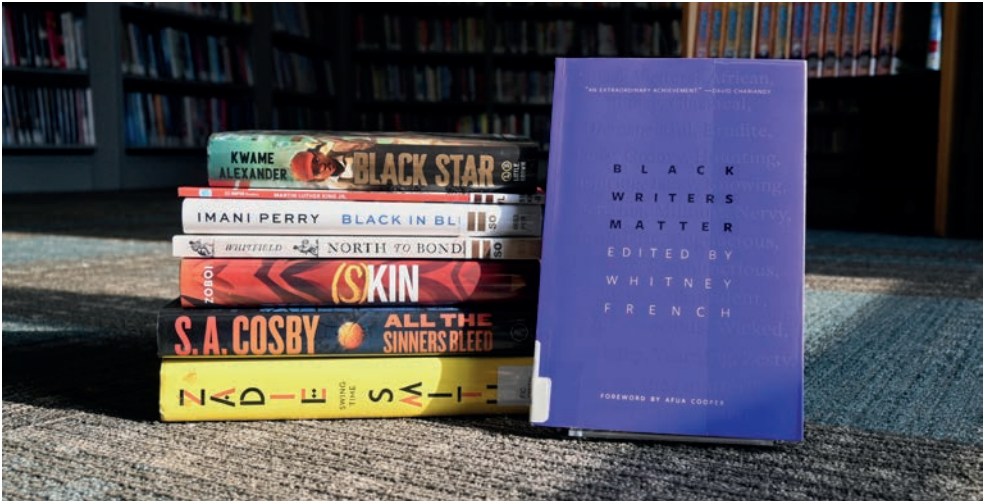
Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

This February, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library is honouring Black History Month with a collection of books that reflects the spirit and history of the people celebrated during the month and puts Black authors front and centre in the world of literature.

Sarah Bowers, the library’s technical services co-ordinator, said it will offer in-house book displays and a curated reading list available through its online public catalogue throughout next month.

The library’s initiative highlights the importance of preserving Black history in Canada and North America, Bowers said. This collection includes dozens of fiction and non-fiction titles by Black authors, for both children and adults, covering topics from Canadian Black history and Black life to the American civil rights movement.

Staff have also created an annotated bibliography highlighting specific notable and recent books. Bowers



The NOTL Library has selected a number of books for Black History Month this year, featuring books in multiple genres and for multiple age groups. SUPPLIED

said if she were to recommend two books from the shortlist, she would start with “Black in Blues: How a Color Tells the Story of My People” by Imani Perry. She is a professor in studies of women, gender and sexuality, and in African and African American studies at Harvard University.

Perry’s book, published last year, is what the International African-American Museum called an analysis of “art, history and personal narrative.” It looks at how deeply black history is intertwined with the colour blue, whether it’s traced

through West African indigo cloths or blues and jazz music. For instance, it makes reference to the song “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue?” first recorded by Louis Armstrong in 1929.

In essence, the book highlights how the colour blue has symbolized both melancholy and hope for Black people.

“It offers a powerful and accessible exploration of Black identity through culture, history, and emotion, connecting personal experience with broader social meaning, while be-

ing deeply thoughtful and poetic,” Bowers said.

For children, she would go with “Black Star” by Kwame Alexander, an American writer of poetry and children’s fiction.

Alexander’s 2024 book is the story of a young Black girl named Charlene Cuffey growing up in segregation-era Virginia. She’s inspired to become a baseball pitcher after watching a Negro Leagues game, despite her mother’s disapproval, and hopes to go all the way and become a professional baseball player.

“It stands out as an en-

gaging historical novel that introduces themes of ambition, resilience and family during segregation in a way that resonates with middle-grade readers,” Bowers said.

There are several other books on the shortlist: “Swing Time,” acclaimed English author Zadie Smith’s 2016 novel about two girls, both of whom are biracial, who meet in dance class and become best friends; “All the Sinners Bleed,” by S. A. Cosby, a thriller about an African American sheriff facing off against a serial killer in a rural Bible belt town; and “North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes” by Harvey Amani Whitfield, which uncovers the history of enslaved people in the Maritimes and how they fought for freedom.

There’s also “Black Writers Matter” by Whitney French, an anthology of African-Canadian writing, “(S)kin” by Ibi Zoboi, a contemporary fantasy book, “Flip” by Ngozi Ukazu, a graphic novel, and “Free At Last: The Story of Martin Luther King Jr.” by Angela Bull, a biography.

Library staff selected the

books based on their familiarity with the collection and reader interests across age groups, Bowers said. They considered factors like literary merit, relevance to Black history and culture, representation of Canadian and international perspectives, and suitability for children, teens and adults.

“The goal was to create a balanced, thoughtful list that supports discovery and meaningful engagement rather than a single narrative or genre,” she said. “Libraries help preserve history, amplify diverse voices, and provide space for learning and reflection.”

Bowers said she hopes the list helps place Black history within a broader context.

“Celebrating Black History Month gives libraries the opportunity to collectively honour the culture, art, contributions and history of Black individuals,” she said. “Black history is not separate from Canadian or global history — it is fundamental to it.”

To explore the catalogue, visit notl.niagaraevergreen.ca/eg/opac/home.

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Cookies raise thousands for Red Roof

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Every February, heart-shaped chocolate chip cookies start popping up across Niagara-on-the-Lake — and with them, a familiar show of community support for Red Roof Retreat.

Now in its fourth year, Jody Vermolen is turning Valentine's Day cookies into thousands of dollars for Red Roof, a registered NOTL charity that provides respite and recreational programs for children, youth and young adults with special needs and their families across Niagara.

The fundraiser usually raises just under \$4,000 each year. "Things are going really, really well," Vermolen said. "What we did two years ago — we've already surpassed that amount."

Asked about exact totals or targets, she laughed and said, "Oh, I don't need any bad mojo."

Feb. 9 is the last day to order cookies and funds will be presented to Red Roof on Feb. 11.

Residents can order cookies directly through Vermolen by calling or texting 905-327-3158, or by



Left: Official taste-tester Kerry Finn, Jody Vermolen's sister, gives her stamp of approval. The heart-shaped Valentine's cookies will be sold in half-dozen bundles and raise money for Red Roof Retreat. SUPPLIED



direct message on Facebook or Instagram under Jody Vermolen or @Grammies.she.shed.

"There's only 17 days left to get your orders in," Vermolen said.

She said the fundraiser is simple and accessible. Cookies are sold in half-dozen packages — \$10 for regular chocolate chip and \$12 for gluten-free, dairy-free and vegan. There are no limits to how many packages can be purchased per person.

Buyers choose their pick-up or delivery dates and Vermolen also delivers cookies to Red Roof locations.

"It's nice that it's a smaller kind of a fundraiser, because everybody can get around it," she said.

The heart shape ties into Valentine's Day, which Ver-

molen said fits Red Roof's "All You Need Is Love" message.

"It's definitely a community support thing," she said. "It's like a simple, giant bake sale."

"And what keeps me coming back? It's just a way for me to give back," said Vermolen.

"They have supported my sister for a little over 10 years," she said. "I just appreciate them greatly for all that they do, for all of the families."

Beyond fundraising, Vermolen said the sale helps spread awareness about Red Roof and the role it plays in the community.

"My sister, and all of everybody else that they support, basically — they keep the kids properly socialized," she said. "They make

sure that everyone is very visible in the community."

She mentioned the number of activities Red Roof's participants take part in, like going to the library, swimming, hanging out at the park and more.

"It just makes their lives so much better."

Vermolen said many people learn about Red Roof through the cookie sale and continue supporting the organization after learning more. "The community loves Red Roof," she said.

"It's just a way to get information out there about something that's really wonderful and supportive," she added.

She said there's a sense of momentum as the organization moves ahead with a new expansion. "It's total excitement."

Vermolen bakes so many cookies each year that she eventually stops counting. "But it is a lot," she said.

For her, it's a simple idea with a tangible impact.

"Red Roof has so much respect from their community, and to be able to be a part of that, and to be able to support that, why wouldn't you want to?" she said.

"I enjoy doing it — and it's easy."

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Young NOTL **rising star** shines at the Shaw Festival

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

At 11, Vivienne Atwood already has an impressive resumé as a stage actor. The St. Davids resident and St. Davids Public School student received recognition from the Town of NOTL earlier this month for her Shaw Festival debut in Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” this past holiday season. She played Susan Waverly, the granddaughter of the show’s main character, Gen. Waverly.

“She kind of symbolizes me,” she said. “Happy, joyful, exciting ... I felt like I played her the way I’d play myself as a character.”

Atwood alternated the role with Celine Jung of Oakville, with each performing about half the shows. Atwood appeared in 26 performances from Nov. 7 to Dec. 21 at the Festival Theatre, following a month of rehearsals in October.

She began acting at age seven, when she joined Linus Hand Productions, a theatre company for performers aged five to 17. She



Vivienne Atwood made her Shaw Festival debut back in November, playing Susan Waverly in White Christmas. She was recognized by the town earlier this month. DAN SMEENK

has been with the company for four years.

Her first role was as an ensemble member in “The Descendants,” a show she later revisited as the character Jane. She initially performed in ensemble roles, then moved on to larger parts, including Michael in “Elf,” Flounder in “The Little Mermaid” and a chief ancestor in “Moana.”

Atwood said that progression motivated her to continue acting.

“I wanted to do it for more, I wanted to get better roles,” she said. “You start in ensemble and the more you do it you get better and better and better roles, if you keep trying. So, that’s kind of like a factor that makes me want to keep doing it.”

Her connection to the Shaw Festival came through her vocal coach, who told her about auditions for

White Christmas. A friend of Atwood’s, Payton Mills, had played Susan Waverly in the production three years earlier.

Atwood and her mother, Judith, credited vocal teacher Tenja Hagenberg with helping connect Vivienne to the wider theatre world, as her family is not connected in that world. They also credited Hagenberg with being a positive mentor since Atwood began working with her at age nine.

“She’s an amazing woman who’s a very gifted teacher,” Judith said.

At the audition, Atwood sang “Let Me Sing and I’m Happy” and read lines. “Maybe” 15 children auditioned, she said. A few days later, her vocal coach told them she had been cast.

“I was very, very happy and excited,” said Vivienne, who also noted the contrast with children’s theatre.

“It was such a big difference from my children’s theatre ... It’s professional, it’s all adults, so it’s a whole other level.”

Vivienne and Judith said the Shaw Festival was “super duper nice and encouraging” toward child actors, including paying Atwood as a professional performer. Vivienne said she appreciated having Jung in the cast, as it gave her another child to talk to while working primarily with adults.

Atwood has returned to Linus Hand Productions this year to perform in the musical “Camp Rock.” She is also active in sports and the arts, including travel soccer, piano and dance, and participates in school activities such as robotics, student council, basketball and chess.

Her mother praised her confidence and leadership skills and said she was more proud of her as a person than as an actor.

Vivienne said her nerves faded as the run went on. By the final performance, she had formed close bonds with cast and crew. She said the work was intense and she welcomed a break, but she hopes to stay in touch with the Shaw Festival team.

“I was happy that it was done, but I didn’t want it to end,” she said.

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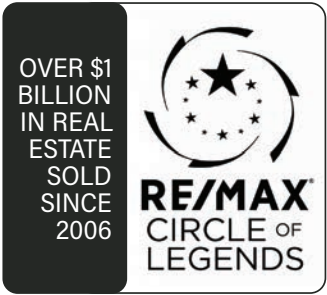
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BKind Grateful With Bradley Hamilton
#61: With a new year upon us, set up a purposeful piggy bank that you will put your coins in over the coming year. Next Christmas you will have a gift to give to your favourite charity.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock
“The truth is most of us don’t discover where we are headed until we arrive.”
- Bill Walterson

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Snow day at the park

Over at Brock’s Monument, detailed work is taking place to restore the historic war monument this winter. Behind the scaffolding erected at the site, staff from Clifford Restoration Limited are chipping out mortar joints to rake and repaint every single one of them in the monument. Parks Canada says the goal is to finish the rehabilitation work by this spring, depending on the weather.
SUPPLIED/PARKS CANADA

Opinion

The governor, the president and **your house**



THE TURNER REPORT
Garth Turner
Columnist



Local realtors say sales in Niagara have never been this thin. 2025 was the first year on record with fewer than 6,000 deals, and December was a bust. GARTH TURNER

What has Donald Trump got to do with selling a house in NOTL?
More than you think, now that we’re part of China.
See Trump’s post on Truth Social from last Sunday, shared at 1:05 p.m.: “China is successfully and completely taking over the once great country of Canada. So sad to see it happen. I only hope they leave ice hockey alone! President DJT.”
Last Saturday, the U.S. president called our prime minister “Governor Carney” and said if we started trading with China, there’d be a 100 per cent tariff slapped on Canadian goods heading into the States. On Sunday, he posted the message above, managing to avoid the subject of a U.S. citizen being murdered by ICE. Or Epstein. Or that weird Greenland speech at Davos (when he called it Iceland).
Well, picking on Canada has consequences. The impact on buyer confidence is as palpable as the silly ban in place against Americans buying houses here. Existing tariffs are bad enough

(just ask the guys working at Stellantis in Brampton, or Ford in Oakville) but hiking them to 100 per cent — and maybe ripping up the existing Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement this summer? That’s war.
Already people are turtling. Unsold houses are piling up. Offers are fading. Prices slowly retreating. Seller anxiety growing.
This past year, says a report from Bosley, “was one of the most, if not the most, challenging years in Niagara real estate history.”
In the whole of Niagara region, fewer than 6,000 properties changed hands in 2025. That was a first. A record. Worse than the credit crisis of 2007/8 when financial markets crashed and Wall Street megabanks failed.
People are worried about what’s going down across the river, where the

most powerful person in the world (with the tanks, drones plus a habit of kidnapping heads of state) is dissing us.
And worried people don’t buy houses. Especially here, it seems.
DOM means “days on market” and is a benchmark indicator of market vitality. Right now, ours is barely showing a pulse.
The local realtor cartel says the average time taken to sell a home in the region has been running at just over 60 days. But that’s for all of Niagara. St. Catharines, at 44 days, was the lowest and NOTL was the highest — a whopping 120 days.
When it comes to the pricier places in Old Town, you can double that. Some agents say tripling is more like it. And the extreme time on market has been hidden routinely by rel-

istings — when an agent sets the days clock back to zero, a fact not disclosed in statistics by indicting CDOM (cumulative days on market)
This pathetic column pointed that out recently. Local broker Patrick Burke agrees.
“I read your latest column regarding the absence of CDOM. You are absolutely correct that it’s desperately needed, especially in 2025 when cancelled and relisted properties are the majority,” he says. “Currently the gap between DOM and CDOM is at a minimum 30 days, but more likely in the 45-60 days. So yes, DOM is useless at the moment, which is why the board includes the disclaimer to at least give better context.
“It’s definitely on the agenda and we’re all pushing for the return of the reality of CDOM. This is out of NAR (Niagara Association of Realtors) or our control, so thank you for helping with my lobbying campaign.”
What next?
The realtors say they expect 2026 in this place to be “dynamic.”
But the hurdles are high. Rates are staying put. Trade is iffy. Trump is nuts. Inventory has been piling up and we’re waist high in snow. Maybe Beijing will save us.
Garth Turner is a NOTL resident, journalist, author, wealth manager and former federal MP and minister.
garth@garth.ca

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Joining Niagara's conservation authority with Toronto's would be a **big mistake**



Wayne Gates
Special to The Lake Report



MPP Wayne Gates says merging the region's conservation authority with the province's is a bad idea because the province doesn't know as much about and will not prioritize local environments, such as Four Mile Creek watershed, which the Niagara conservation authority is actively working to repair and preserve. FILE

I've never heard a single person suggest to me that handing more power over to Queen's Park, at the cost of increased taxes with fewer services, is a good idea.

But let's be clear: that is what municipal amalgamation would mean for Niagara.

We have seen a clear pattern of disrespect for local voices at Queen's Park, as the Ford government is set to force amalgamation of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority with communities in Toronto.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a proud, unique community. I know that seems obvious, but it's worth repeating what makes our town so special, and why it's such a distinct honour to represent this community as your member of provincial parliament.

This town's identity has been built by local families, businesses, volunteers, and elected leaders who understand and care deeply

about our community's history and heritage. And that's why I am concerned today, because I believe that local uniqueness is under threat when you concentrate decision-making outside of our community.

Nobody sitting in an office in Toronto knows our creeks, our farmers, our floodplains, our tourism and our history, as well as the people who live here.

Doug Ford is forcing through the amalgamation of our local conservation authority — the conservation authority that protects so much of what we hold dear in Niagara.

Ford is silencing local voices and ending

local control. And his government's new agency will merge Niagara with Toronto-centered communities that can charge new fees back to conservation authorities, meaning local taxpayers will take on even more costs.

As we have seen at attempts to meddle in municipal affairs in places like Barrie, where despite their local townships, their councils and residents opposing forced amalgamation, Ford and his Conservative politicians pushed it through anyway.

Research on municipal amalgamations have shown that the promise of cost savings is never realized, and

outlying, rural and smaller municipalities like Niagara-on-the-Lake get sidelined.

We also know that amalgamation is not necessary for municipalities reform their governance structures. For example, several years ago, Niagara Falls moved to reduce the size of their council, and they did it without amalgamation. We can reform local governments and save costs for the taxpayer without forced, top-down amalgamation.

With Doug Ford at the helm in the Ontario legislature, I remain seriously concerned amalgamating Niagara's conservation authority is the first step, and they plan to ram through more unwanted, unnecessary municipal amalgamation in Niagara. We've seen him do it to communities like Barrie and Peel.

Let's be honest: what is happening at the conservation authority in Niagara is happening to municipalities and conservation authorities right across Ontario.

I will always stand by the belief that the best solutions to governance reform are local solutions that respect our local communities, their unique characters and their local decision-making authority.

Wayne Gates is the member of provincial parliament for the Niagara Falls riding.

A lot of **positive things** are happening, too

Dear editor:

I would like to counter Garth Turner's ever negative reporting, the most recent being his worst possible view of the rebuild of Shaw's Royal George Theatre.

I see that Niagara-on-the-Lake is extremely fortunate to have the Shaw Festival, and it should be supported as best we can.

I think the George Theatre should be a prominent presence on Queen Street, as is the Courthouse, and that prominence is more important and interesting than ever more retail. The retail will inevitably benefit by the Shaw presence.

During the George's building we can celebrate and be thankful it is being

done. To pass negative judgement of the hoarding around the site, and its design, 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.

These are just examples of the kind of tenor and largely negative reporting I regret to see week after week. There are positive views-cum-interpretations to be reported.

*Peter Rand
NOTL*

We welcome your letters

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



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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

Last issue category: Not to be confused

Clue: Both delicious, but don't confuse these two cookies with similar names..

Answer: What are macaroons and macarons?

Answered first by: Susan Hamilton

Also answered correctly (in order) by:
Sue Rautenberg, Lynda Collet, Bob Wheatley, Jeff Lake, Jim Dandy, Katie Reimer, Claudia Grimwood, Kimberly Amaral, Howard Jones, Sheila Meloche, Marla Percy, Margie Enns

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Two situations facing the heritage committee this year



Brian Marshall
Columnist

Last week, this columnist observed that “several municipal processes related to proposed and undertaken alterations of this important heritage property,” referring to the Chrysler-Burroughs House at 187 Queen St., “have been fundamentally flawed.”

Further, it was suggested that council should “delay any decisions pursuant to applications on this property” until, at a minimum, correct heritage permit application(s) for the attached garage and driveway off of Queen Street are presented to the municipal heritage committee (“Arch-i-text: Questions about proceedings on the Chrysler-Burroughs House”).

This week, after reading that column, one of our Niagara-on-the-Lake neighbours reached out to me with pertinent and relevant

information relative to these issues.

As it happens, that reader had raised concerns regarding the specific issues of the driveway and attached garage with the former director of community and development services, Kirsten McCauley.

The first communication was last April, wherein Ms. McCauley stated, “The owner/applicant is aware that a heritage permit is required for the garage addition and the driveway” and that “the heritage permit for the garage is a condition of consent and is included in the development agreement that is registered on title.”

Then, in September, McCauley declared, “Staff have been advised that only a temporary gravel driveway is proposed at this time.” Continuing with, “In the future, any proposal to formalize the driveway and any addition to the house for a garage will require a heritage permit.”

Based on these statements, it is very clear that senior town staff and certain downline staff members were fully cognizant of the actual “state of affairs.” However — and to err on the side of giving “benefit of the doubt” — it seems that they failed to communicate these requirements to their heritage planners.



The Shaw Festival promises us tombstones and plaques to commemorate the loss of our heritage streetscapes.

As a result, the proceedings of the Jan. 14 municipal heritage committee deliberations and recommendations associated with this property were based on the false premise that the driveway and garage addition did not require their review and recommendation.

And, if not challenged, could lead to the assumption of a de facto approval.

Based on the incontestable evidence, I would submit that council must immediately direct town staff to contact the owner(s) of 187 Queen St. to request they file heritage permit applications for the “proposed” driveway off Queen Street and the attached garage — which, upon receipt, shall be presented to the municipal heritage committee for their review and subsequent recommendation(s).

Anything less could expose the town (and taxpayers) to a losing proposition, should the matter be brought before a court of law or from any form of provincial oversight.

Moving on to another matter considered by the municipal heritage committee during their Jan. 14 meeting, the demolition permit for the old Royal George and Tranter’s House buildings at 83-85 Queen and 79 Queen, respectively.

As many of you may be aware, demolition permits were granted for 188 and 178 Victoria last year — the first two historic buildings slated as casualties in the Shaw Festival’s obscene

attack on the integrity of the Queen-Picton heritage district’s streetscapes.

It is certainly no secret that this columnist considers the architectural design of the proposed theatre, as presented to date, to be distinctly inferior in terms of contextual integration. Moreover, the “ghost façade” proposed as a keystone element in the Shaw’s commemoration plan will be a singularly awkward isolated island tombstone divorced from both the streetscape and the proposed building itself.

While the municipal heritage committee did vote in favour of accepting heritage staff’s recommendation on the demolition permits, it should be noted that contained therein were several conditions, including having a site plan agreement in place with the town prior to issuance of the permits, and several relatively minor revisions to the commemoration plan.

Thus, the Shaw’s agenda is, one bite at a time, moving forward.

But here’s what I find somewhat puzzling:

At some point, the Shaw Festival must file a heritage permit application for the proposed building — its design subject to municipal heritage committee review and evaluation vis-à-vis its impact on the Queen-Picton historic district as designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

This moves me to wonder if successfully fulfilling the heritage permit requirement is a part of the site plan agreement.

If not, it is possible that demolition could proceed on Queen and Victoria streets — irretrievably altering the streetscapes — with no agreement on the permissibility of the proposed design for the new building.

Such a scenario would only add additional leverage to the Shaw’s current take-it-or-leave-it positioning (“Shaw warns delays could derail Royal George rebuild,” Niagara Now, Nov. 17, 2025) associated with the proposed building.

Perhaps this little wrinkle should be sorted out sooner rather than later?

Particularly since, if the members of the municipal heritage committee stand firm in their overriding mandate to protect our historic designated properties and places, a redesign of the building would definitely be in order.

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



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Polar vortex tests toughness of local Scots on Burns Night



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

For a few occasions each year, a good number of proud Scots and wannabe Scots in NOTL don kilts and other tartan regalia for events planned by our local St. Andrew's Society.

Last weekend, we were challenged. It was cold, very cold, and a brisk wind was blowing off the Niagara River down by Navy Hall. It was only a short walk after parking the car, but let me repeat, "It was cold," even wearing long johns or tights.

This year's Burns Night was a total triumph. Eighty-six people enjoyed a perfectly planned evening, in a unique venue, filled to capacity. How lucky are we, to be able to immerse ourselves in the history of

the settlement of this area? The wall hangings are an easy to read textbook.

I will provide details later, but in the meantime, let us think back a century or two. In the days not so long ago, before email and texting and Paypal, and even before telephones, how did people plan events? And think about cooking without gas or electric appliances. Refrigeration? Forget about it.

And let's remember that indoor plumbing is a relatively recent invention. The mind boggles. How about washing the dishes and pots and pans? Indeed, our ancestors were hardy. Washing and drying their clothes. Heating and cooling their houses.

Rambling back to Burns Night, hats off to the Dicksons at Catering Niagara and Pig Out Barbeque. They served up the traditional haggis and oatcakes. Merlot braised beef and coho salmon, topped off with Scottish shortbread and fruit crumble. Served with class, professionalism and alacrity, on elegantly decorated tables.



Another test of bravery was the haggis, one for each table to share and try along with their meals. SUPPLIED

By the way, I really think we are coddled now, with a choice of entrees at banquets and other functions. Just saying.

The Burns Night program had more "R's" being rolled than a Glasgow pub at closing time.

Piper Graham Edwards started off the evening, followed by Lorna Penman's "Address to a Haggis," and Trish Spagnol performing "Poosie Nancy." Happily for many of us with hearing challenges, the sound system was more

than adequate.

Ian Adams delivered the Selkirk Grace, and Vir-r-gil's own Diana Carroll read "Willie Wastle." Next up, the Niagara Highland Dance Academy were enthusiastic and sartorially resplendent. One of their members received the Geoff Martin Trophy and scholarship.

Then, "The Immortal Memory" read by Alan Dickson, and the very direct and mostly correct "Toasts to the Lads and Lassies." Brian Carberry, a very authentic Scot, presented a "A Red, Red Rose" to each lady.

Eloquently and sincerely, Ben Higgins formally thanked the many Burns Night organizers and volunteers.

With great enthusiasm, Burns Night came to a close with everyone singing "Auld Lang Syne." "Times Long Past" are remembered with this famous song. The third, last verse says, "And there's a hand my trusty friend, And give me a hand o' thine! And we'll take a right good-will draught, for auld lang syne."

Happily, Heather and

Martin Quick's dulcet and mellifluous singing at a neighbouring table encouraged us to sing loudly and proudly. What fun!

This week's Ramblings has described the annual Burns Night, because that is the affinity group I was with last weekend on an extremely cold Friday evening. Countless Niagara-on-the-Lake residents are members of friendship groups, and getting together helps us through the long, cold and dark season.

Every little bit helps, so let us resolve to help each other. Take the step, and join a group.

And think about how tough life was for our ancestors. We cannot even imagine. How did they survive and prosper without all the things we take for granted? Pure and running water, available by simply turning a tap. Cold or hot, even.

Medications, almost always easily available.

And oh yes, the internet and computers.

Think about a polar vortex way back then — without central heating..

rossrocket9@gmail.com

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Joy Miele
REALTOR
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*McGarr Group Sales Volume

MEET NICOLE MARSH-BURKE

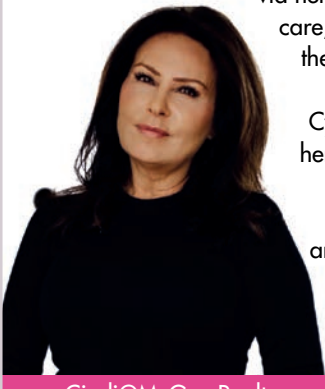
Exceptionally experienced in selling vacant land, residential property, condominiums and multi-residential property. She has re-located buyers from the GTA, helped families 'downsize' as well as 'upsized' and guided many first-time buyers through the real estate process.



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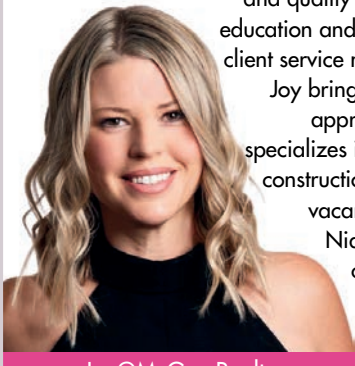
She has established a reputation within the community via her work involving community care, outstanding knowledge of the new construction business in Niagara and Toronto. Cynthia's success stems from her comprehensive marketing and advertising strategies, exclusive contact network, and insight into communities of Niagara-on-the-Lake.



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NOTL needs to be at the table of our future

Dear editor:

Is Niagara-on-the-Lake at the table — or on the menu?

Reading recent articles in The Lake Report about developments being approved because of provincial pressure, I've had a growing sense of déjà vu. We are being told, again and again, that housing targets, infrastructure costs and "fairness" between municipalities leave us with little choice. That this is simply the reality of the moment.

We have heard this story before.

In the mid-20th century, many towns and villages around Toronto were given the same message. Regional authorities argued that small, distinctive communities could no longer stand apart from system-wide solutions. Housing was urgent. Infrastructure was expensive. Planning had to be efficient. The result was amalgamation and, over time, homogenization. Those places didn't disappear — but much of



Letter writer Bruce Gitelman says NOTL needs leaders who will stand up to provincial pressure in the name of preserving the town's special character.

what made them special quietly did.

The parallels to what Niagara-on-the-Lake is facing today are hard to ignore.

It's important to be clear about what this is not. This is not a "build nothing" argument, nor a reflexive rejection of change.

Labeling concerns about scale, location, and long-term impact as NIMBYism

— or worse — misses the point. The real issue is not whether growth happens, but how, where, and at what cost.

There is a meaningful difference between opposing all development and insisting that development respect the very qualities that make a place worth living in.

History suggests that relying on compromise alone is risky. Once growth pressures are framed as inevitable, mitigation replaces protection, exceptions become precedents and erosion happens one approval at a time. Each decision may seem reasonable on its own. The outcome, years later, rarely is.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is not just another municipality. It is a place of national historical importance and a living community whose economy and identity depend on authenticity, not scale.

Once that authenticity is diluted, it cannot be rebuilt with design guidelines or funding programs.

As Mark Carney recently observed in another context, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu. That insight feels increasingly relevant here.

When decisions are driven by stronger powers and historic towns respond individually, compromise tends to be one-sided.

That is why this moment calls for leadership. We need our council and civic leaders to step up and work with other historic towns and villages facing the same pressures — to make a clear, collective case for why these places matter, why they need different rules and why protecting them is in the public interest.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is worth standing up for. And if we want to be at the table rather than on the menu, now is the time for communities like ours to speak together, clearly and firmly, about what must not be lost.

Bruce Gitelman
NOTL



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Many thanks for our neighbours' generosity during the snowstorm

Dear editor:
I've lived in the village of Queenston for nearly two decades, and I never cease to be amazed at the kindness and generosity of my neighbours. Queenston has few services, so it's necessary to drive everywhere.
During the snowstorm over the past few days, several people have come and ploughed my driveway and front walk. They weren't asked to do it. They simply arrived.
I'm grateful because

my husband, who usually handles this, is having some health issues and couldn't do it himself.
In fact, thanks to the cleared driveway, he was all set to go to a doctor's appointment on Monday. Unfortunately, the doctor couldn't get out of his own driveway and had to postpone the meeting.
Thank you David, Adrian, Jeff, Paul and all the others who help make life in a small village a pleasure.
Linda Fritz
Queenston

Actually, let's keep talking about immigration

Dear editor:
Please, let's keep talking about immigration ("Ross's Ramblings: Can we please stop talking about immigration?" Jan. 22, The Lake Report).
If we don't, I fear that negative views towards immigration — people who are talking about it — will further take hold in Canada.
And, while I applaud Mr. Robinson's sentiment, if we do not advocate for a principled and moral approach to immigration, our pro-immigration proclamations will fall on deaf ears.
For example, if my pro-immigration views were not grounded in principle, I might have read Mr. Robinson's column and thought, are we only pro-immigration because we have abundant resources? Would that then make immigration immoral if we did not?
Are we only pro-immigration because people are fleeing persecution or hunger? Would immigration be immoral if they were not?



Letter writer Alexander Evans says every person on the planet should have the right to migrate unimpeded, unless they're a threat to other individuals. MIDJOURNEY
Are we only pro-immigration because of our love of diverse cultures? Would immigration be immoral if we did not?
And while I could passionately exclaim, "I love immigrants!" — and I do, literally: my wife and daughter are immigrants — this would not be a moral argument for immigration.
Rather than argue principle, people on both sides of the political spectrum try to quantify their arguments for and against immigration.
Oh please, do tell me how I should or should not have been allowed to meet my soulmate because GDP increased or because GDP-per-capita might fall again.
Now, you might be think-

ing, what would make for a principled and moral argument for immigration?
One that identifies and safeguards the individual rights of people living in Canada and abroad.
An open immigration system is the only moral government policy. Every individual on the planet has the right to travel unfringed by governments, so long as they are not a threat to other individuals.
Now, what qualifies as a threat?
People who have been convicted of violent crimes.
People with contagious life-threatening diseases.
People from countries with which we are at war.
Barring people who qualify under the above categories, everyone should be able to live and work in Canada.
So, let's please talk about immigration because the happiness of the individual depends upon it.
Alexander Evans
NOTL



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FOOD MENU

NOTLer’s autobiography offers reflections on life and cycling

Continued from Front Page

write the book as a way of closing that chapter.

“It was a way of me severing the umbilical to that chapter of work,” he said.

Hayes is also battling prostate cancer, which he said was caught early and is treatable. He hopes to raise money for cancer causes through proceeds from the book.

Originally, Hayes intended the project as a work guide for his LinkedIn audience, but it evolved into something more personal.

“There’s a little bit of something in it for everyone,” he said.

Part memoir and part reflection, the book traces Hayes’ upbringing in Ireland, where his father worked as a police officer. His father once guarded former U.S. president John F. Kennedy during a visit to Ireland, and Hayes writes about meeting Jackie Kennedy on that trip when he was four years old.

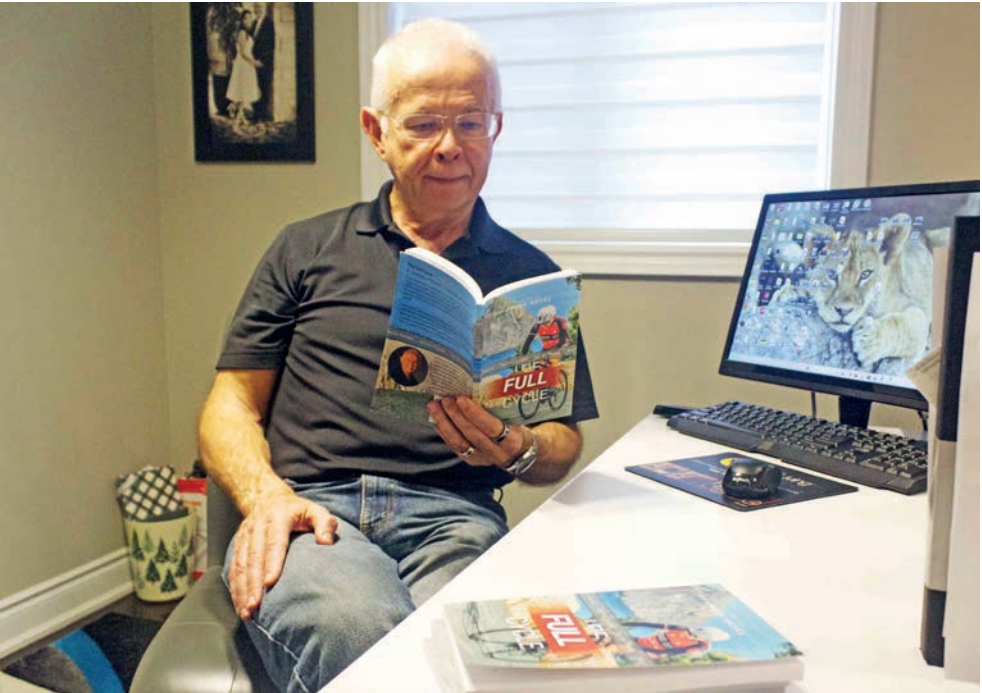
Although his family encouraged him to become a police officer, Hayes chose a different path, entering digital security sales while still in Ireland. He later moved to Canada to continue his career, drawn by what he described as a modest, English-speaking country without the level of “petty crime” he experienced back home.

He arrived in Canada at age 28 with \$5,000 and a high school education.

Hayes went on to work for several digital security companies based in Canada, Israel and Finland. He said he ended his career on a high note at the Finnish firm iLOQ, which he described as having a work culture that valued expertise and trust over authority.

Now retired, Hayes reflects in the book on lessons learned throughout his career, particularly around ethics in the workplace.

He said the values he grew up with led him to reject behaviours he later



Frank Hayes has changed countries, had a career in digital security sales and now is a published author — and an avid cyclist. With the sales of his new autobiography, “The Full Cycle,” he hopes to raise funds for cancer research. DAN SMEENK

observed in positions of authority and tried not to repeat as a manager.

He recalls hearing a senior executive say, “I never make a mistake,” a comment Hayes said undermined that person’s cred-

ibility and respect within the company.

He also objected to being asked to lie, an experience that prompted him to “quiet quit.”

He hopes such stories serve as cautionary tales

for people working in toxic environments.

Hayes also wrote the book as a way to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder following a workplace accident. He was riding on a golf cart when a colleague

fell off and suffered a fatal head injury.

The experience left a lasting impact.

“What did it teach me? Life is fragile,” he said.

Hayes said it took two years to recover. As part of his therapy, he said a therapist recommended writing a book and then filing it away as a way to compartmentalize the trauma and prevent it from shaping the rest of his life.

Though not a professional writer, Hayes said the project allowed him to reflect, offer guidance to others and complete something many people consider but never finish.

“Everyone has one book in them,” he said. “Because it’s their life story.”

“The Full Cycle” is available in paperback and as an e-book on Amazon.

Hayes will also be doing a promotional event for the book at the Junction Coffee Bar in St. Davids on Feb. 3 from 7 to 9 p.m.

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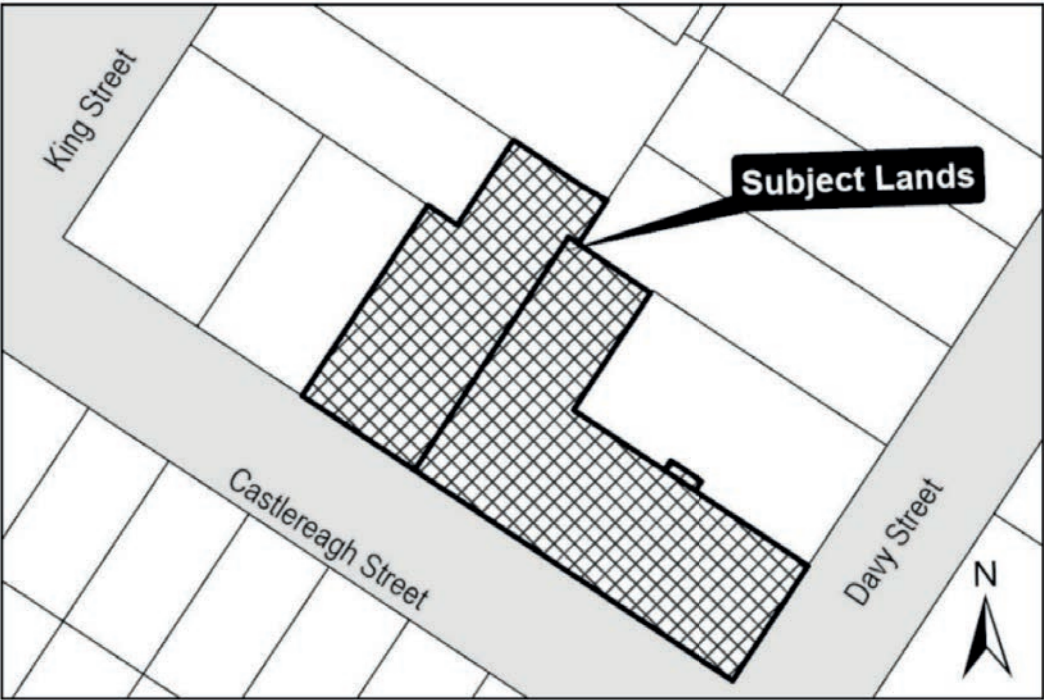
NOTICE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION, OPEN HOUSE AND PUBLIC MEETING

- What:** Notice of **Complete Application, Open House and Public Meeting** for a **Zoning By-law Amendment** (under Section 34 of the *Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13*, as amended)
- When:** Open House: **Monday, February 23, 2026, at 5:00 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. ZBA-28-2025 | 25-43 Castlereagh Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake

What is this?

An application has been received for a Zoning By-law Amendment on the subject lands (see location map). The Application is proposed to facilitate an expansion of the Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) Museum property at 43 Castlereagh Street onto the abutting lands at 25 Castlereagh Street, which contains an existing single-detached dwelling. Additions are proposed to the existing museum and single-detached dwelling to accommodate spaces such as a lobby, reception, multi-purpose room, several storage spaces, and exhibit space. The proposed additions would connect the two existing structures, being the NOTL Museum building and single-detached dwelling.

The Zoning By-law Amendment proposes to rezone the lands from “Established Residential (ER) Zone” and “Institutional (I-54) Site-Specific Zone” to a new site-specific “Institutional (I) Zone” to facilitate the expansion and incorporate site-specific provisions for front, interior side yard, exterior side yard, and rear yard setbacks, lot coverage, building height, permitted encroachments, buffers, loading space requirements, and parking space requirements.



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.

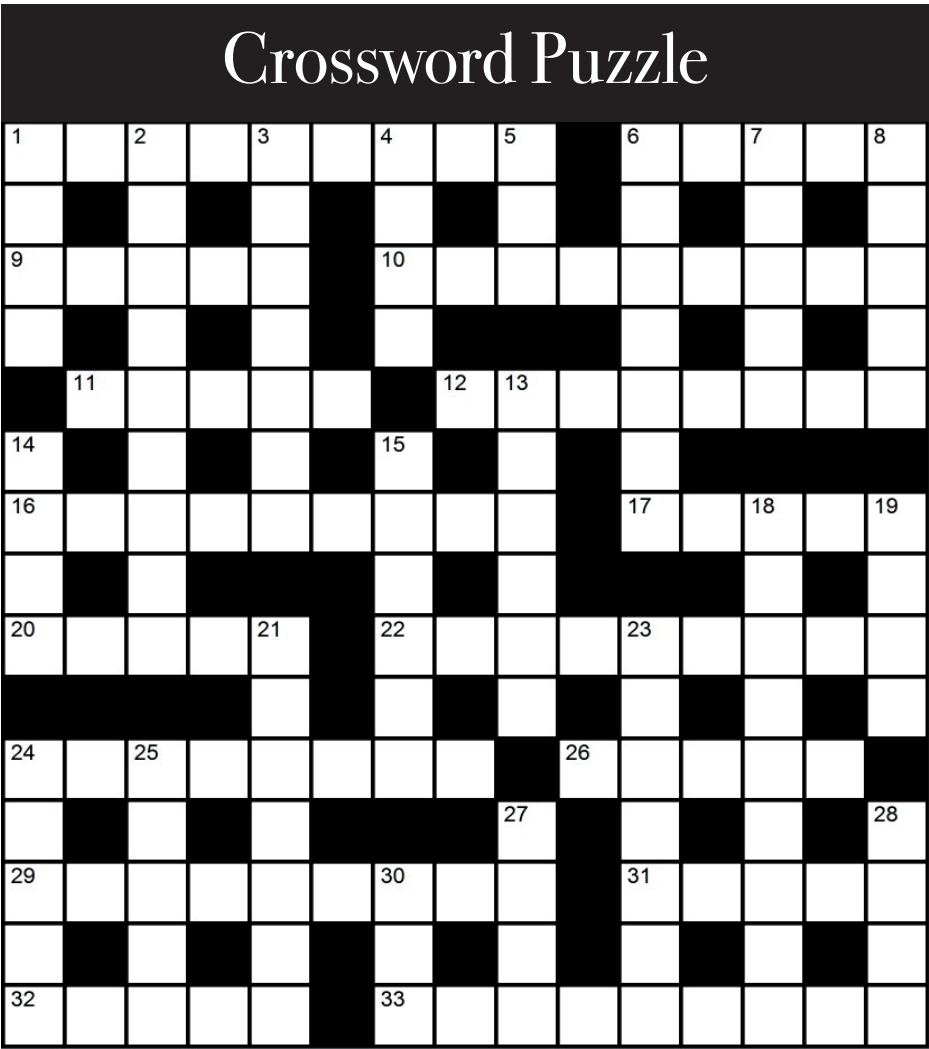
If a person or public body does not make oral submissions at a public meeting, or make written submissions to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake before the by-law is passed, the person or public body may not be added as a party to the hearing of an appeal before the Ontario Land Tribunal unless, in the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

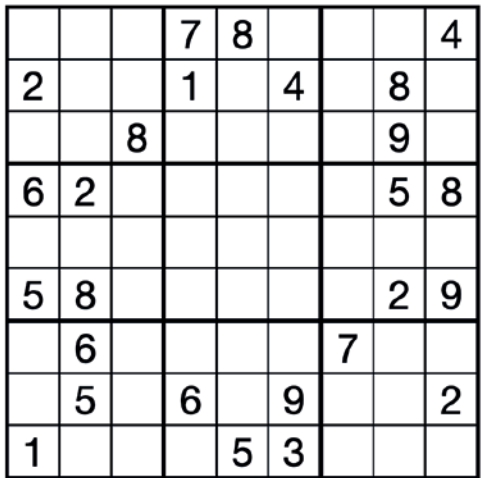
Dated at the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, January 29, 2026
Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

- Across**
- 1. Masked (9)
 - 6. Mexican money (5)
 - 9. Diving bird (5)
 - 10. Life story (9)
 - 11. Yorkshire town on the Wharfe (5)
 - 12. Commonplace (8)
 - 16. Hard-shelled pupa (9)
 - 17. Pilsner (5)
 - 20. Swellings (5)
 - 22. Fit for publication (9)
 - 24. Fashion industry (3,5)
 - 26. Effluent carrier (5)
 - 29. Apiarist (9)
 - 31. Strong thread (5)
 - 32. Trials (5)
 - 33. Necessary to get to Mars (9)
- Down**
- 1. Stalks (4)
 - 2. Protected from the weather (9)
 - 3. No good (7)
 - 4. Weeps (4)
 - 5. Pair (3)
 - 6. Incomplete (7)
 - 7. Above (5)
 - 8. Cunningly (5)
 - 13. Rural (6)
 - 14. Scrutinize (4)
 - 15. Inclined (6)
 - 18. Nonsense (9)
 - 19. Regretted (4)
 - 21. Wave riders (7)
 - 23. Stage (7)
 - 24. Capital of Morocco (5)
 - 25. Valleys (5)
 - 27. Extent of space (4)
 - 28. Quick sharp bark (4)
 - 30. Step in ballet (3)

Have some fun



Last issue's answers





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WITH NOTL MUSEUM



A look back at the Royal George

Built around 1915 as the Kitchener Theatre, it originally hosted vaudeville performances for soldiers stationed at Niagara Camp. After the war, it continued presenting vaudeville acts and touring performances until the rise of the “talkies” and economic challenges led to its decline. In the late 1930s, it became a cinema and was renamed the Brock Theatre. It was especially popular on Halloween, when children enjoyed free movies and costume contests. In the 1970s, as the home of the Canadian Mime Theatre, the building received the front façade that is familiar to us today. Since 1980, the theatre has hosted numerous Shaw Festival productions. This week, the Shaw Festival invites the public to bid a final farewell to the Royal George Theatre before redevelopment of the site begins.

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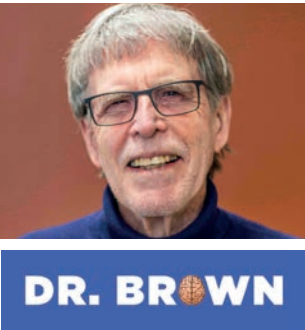


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Why does belief in an **afterlife** persist throughout history?



Dr. William Brown
Columnist

In the last year of my late wife Jan's life at Pleasant Manor, we often talked about her father, Bob, and Aunt Bahts, both long dead but who were among her favourite, most cherished remaining memories, the very mention of whose names lit up her face and but a short step to “Wouldn't it be wonderful to see them again?” followed by another cheerful grin, and affirmative nod.

And, in a flash, we were in the world of the afterlife.

Jan and I were comfortable with the whole notion of an afterlife — a place where we could renew relationships with familiar, much loved family and friends. In those moments, for us, the afterlife was one of those “of courses” in life — “Why wouldn't it be so?”

We didn't waste time speculating, surveying the evidence pro and con: Put

simply, it was our shared hope that we would be together beyond the grave in some meaningful fashion — whatever and whenever happened to each of us in this life.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam, other mainline religions and a wide variety of aboriginal traditions embody a belief in an afterlife and for some, reunion with their creator in the afterlife. For some traditions, there's also strong sense of continuity with and reverence for their ancestors.

Much has been written about near-death experiences, commonly described as a luminous, bright light accompanied by a deep sense of peace, interpreted by some as foretaste of heaven, and feelings so powerful and comforting that some so affected, were reluctant to return to life.

Related to beliefs in the afterlife are experiences of living encounters with God. For example, the Abrahamic religions include vivid life-changing encounters with God in the Hebrew Bible of, for example, Jacob, who wrestles with God, and descriptions of prophets such as Ezekiel, David and Jeramiah and in the Christian tradition, Jesus' encounter with the Devil, and in the Quran, the



Perhaps one of the ancient societies most well-known for its belief in the afterlife, the ancient Egyptians saw mummification as a crucial step in preparing the soul of the deceased for their next life. WIKIMEDIA

prophet Mohammed who communicated with Allah directly or through the angel Gabriel — all experiences that tested, molded and shaped them for their life's vocations.

Throughout history there are many accounts of similar sometimes traumatic life-changing encounters with God in the Christian tradition, such as Thomas Aquinas' revelation near the end of his life, or Thomas Traherne, who one evening alone in a field, desolate and despairing, was suddenly transformed by an implosion of light — an encounter with God — that changed the completely changed the trajectory of his life.

The foregoing and other experiences of the supernatural in life and the belief

understandings into images and probably music.

The cave art created by modern humans in Europe and Indonesia suggests that modern humans reached the threshold for a rich spiritual life as early as 50,000 years ago in Western Europe and ten-thousand years earlier in Indonesia and even earlier, though less well-developed, for neanderthals in Europe.

Answering the second question — why did rich spiritual lives develop — is, perhaps, easier. Life was high-risk, dangerous and short for most of human history and given our well-developed search for meaning in our lives, it's not hard to understand why our ancient ancestors might have created stories to explain and cope with the natural world that surrounded them.

Those stories, triumphs and tragedies would have been passed on from generation to generation linking the wisdom of generations past with the present and shared between groups.

Civilization as we understand it required nomadic peoples to settle down and eventually domesticate animals and plants — the beginning of settlements that would eventually lead to city states, nations and records. Through it all to the present, humans were and

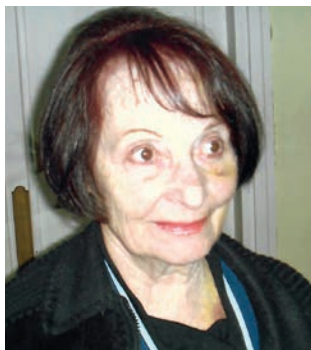
remain story-tellers and that requires good memories and lots of imagination.

What about the sense for the afterlife? Suggestive evidence are burial sites in which the dead were prepared and buried in a respectful manner as early as 800,000 years ago — long before diverging evolutionary lines led to neanderthals, denisovans and modern humans.

It's well to remember that for a long time, there probably weren't more than a few hundred thousand humans — total — and what few they were, lived in small, often widely scattered groups, leaving few traces of how they lived and how they might have viewed life.

Respectful burial suggests a belief — perhaps a hope — that the body or spirit of the dead might live on in some fashion. My imagination, of course, but not so different than the hope that some of us have that beyond the grave, connections with those we loved and treasured in this life, will be renewed in the next.

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.



A professional headshot of Evan McCaughey, a man with short dark hair and a light beard, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a grey blazer over a black button-down shirt. The background is a solid light blue. To the left of his head, the text "Buying OR SELLING?" is written in a large, red, serif font, with "OR" in smaller capital letters between "Buying" and "SELLING?". Below this text is a RE/MAX logo featuring a stylized hot air balloon with red, white, and blue segments and the text "RE/MAX" in blue. At the bottom left, there is a logo for "THE SYKES real estate TEAM". "THE" is in small blue capital letters above "SYKES", which is in large, bold, blue capital letters. "real estate" is in small blue lowercase letters to the right of "SYKES", and "TEAM" is in blue capital letters below it. A horizontal band with a blue-to-red gradient runs across the middle of the image. On the right side of this band, the text "NOTL & NIAGARA REGION" is written in white, sans-serif capital letters. Below this band, on a solid red background, the name "Evan McCaughey" is written in a large, white, serif font. Directly beneath the name, the phone number "289 · 968 · 8128" is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font.



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