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# Royal George plan ignites passion

Crowd packs council chambers to voice opposition to size of new Shaw complex



The future of the Shaw Festival's Royal George Theatre is drawing lots of interest from NOTLers, many of whom aren't convinced it's the right idea. So many people showed up to council chambers on July 8 that they had to use the overflow room in the building. SOURCED

Dan Smeenk | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

The Shaw's plans to rebuild the Royal George Theatre were met with moans and groans from an unusually packed council chamber on Tuesday. Attendance was so high at the committee of the whole planning meeting on July 8 that committee chair Coun. Wendy Cheropita asked some attendees to move to an overflow room.

The meeting was intended to gather public input and information on the project, one part of a \$150-million renovation and expansion of the Shaw Festival.

While the tone remained mostly civil, the crowd — largely opposed to the proposal — expressed its emotions with groans and even a brief round of applause.

"I'm just going to ask that we be respectful to every speaker,"

said Cheropita, following a groan from the audience in response to a comment from Shaw Festival director Kimberly Rampersand about the theatre's proposed size. Rampersand attended the

Continued on Page 4

# No sign of safety: Online-only warnings at NOTL beach stir concern

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The days of bright yellow "no swimming" signs are gone — at least at beaches in the Niagara region.

Now, beachgoers are expected to check online or assess conditions themselves, a shift that has left Niagara-on-the-Lake Coun. Sandra O'Connor and some visitors to Queen's Royal Beach feeling uneasy.

"I have a bit of a problem with the change in procedures," said O'Connor, who plans to bring a motion to council. "I'd like to see something more proactive, by having signs say when it is not safe to swim."

She said a unified position from council would carry more weight.

From Victoria Day to Labour Day, Niagara Region Public Health monitors beach water for E. coli, algae and other hazards.


Test results are posted on the region's beach safety webpage twice a week.

Queen's Royal Beach is tested Tuesdays and Thursdays, with results posted Wednesdays and Fridays. As of Tuesday, it was posted

unsafe for swimming.



Niagara phased out static "unsafe" signs several years ago. Permanent signs now direct beachgoers to check the website and assess


Continued on Page 3



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The former Niagara-on-the-Lake hospital site at 176 Wellington St. is the subject of a wave of public feedback forums that has started this summer, ahead of a final report to council in December. PAIGE SEBURN

## 'There's going to be a lot of interest' Town reignites talks over former hospital

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The future of Niagara-on-the-Lake's former hospital site is back on the table — and the Town of NOTL is asking residents what should become of the old building.

The town purchased the property at 176 Wellington St., once home to a hospital, nurses' residence, hospice and medical office space, from Niagara Health in 2018 for about \$3.4 million, according to a June 27 news release.

Now, the town is starting a new round of public engagement, beginning next week, online and in person, to hear what the community wants to see happen next with the building.

Findings will be presented to council in December.

"The goal is to gather a wide range of perspectives," said Lauren Kruitbosch, associate director of the office of the CAO, in an email.

A November town release said \$85,000 from parking revenue was approved to support the engagement process, which follows council's 2022–2027 strategic plan.

Residents and stakeholders will be invited the week of July 7 to complete an online survey, submit ideas through the town's Join the Conversation platform and take part in interactive community mapping at the community centre, where participants will be able to mark physical display maps and answer questions. Exact dates are to be determined.

A second round of engagement will take place between July and September, including community walks around the site and small-group workshops for partner organizations and key stakeholders.

Kruitbosch said the work-

shops will not be open to the general public but will allow targeted discussion of specific ideas and needs.

Consultants will lead the community walks, asking questions and encouraging informal conversations about current uses, challenges and future opportunities for the site.

**"The hospital system, Niagara Health, is not interested in doing a hospital there. So, it's not going to be a hospital."**

LORD MAYOR GARY ZALEPA

In October, the town will host three public information centres, open to all residents. Consultants will update them on what they've heard so far during the process and gather more feedback.

Kruitbosch said these sessions are "to confirm themes, test ideas and gather additional input."

"A critical step in ensuring community voices are reflected in the final presentation to council."

Council members will determine what they see as the community's top needs when the final report of findings goes to council at the end of the year, said Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa.

Zalepa encouraged residents to participate however they can, online or in person, and said all feedback will help guide next steps in a way that best serves the community.

"So council can hear the whole picture, right?" he said.

Zalepa doesn't plan to share his ideas for the site's future at this point. When asked if he has any in mind,

he said he does, but doesn't want to "influence the process."

"I really want to hear what people think," he said. "I'm really certain some of the things that I have in my mind are going to come up forward."

One possibility, however, is already off the table: a hospital.

"The hospital system, Niagara Health, is not interested in doing a hospital there," he said. "So, it's not going to be a hospital."

For Ron Simkus, one of the directors of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association, the old hospital was once a major draw — but he acknowledges those days are likely over.

"When we moved here in 2009, it was a hospital," said Simkus. "(It) was a tremendous attraction."

But he believes the era of small-town hospitals has passed. Still, with medical and educational facilities disappearing, he said there are fewer reasons for people to live in NOTL full-time.

And if institutional use is ruled out for the site, that "will pretty well close the book on all the institutional properties left in the town of NOTL," he said, adding that preserving them is essential to the town's long-term future.

"Because otherwise, there's no place for people to converge," he said.

"Essentially, you're displacing the old-time residents with part-time visitors and the appearance of a heritage town."

Zalepa said the community has tried to start this process of figuring out what to do with the site before, but "there were a few stumbling blocks."

"I think, what we're going to try to do is learn from that," he said, adding the feedback will be key when the town seeks out partners

in redeveloping the site.

"We'll have a clear sense of what we want to accept or not," said Zalepa.

NOTL resident Robin Ridesic said ideas have been submitted to the town in previous years, including one from the Niagara Creative Cultural Community Hub for a shared space for charities and community groups, or a "creative and cultural hub."

Other submissions have included commercial and residential proposals from various developers, she said.

"It's critically important for us to preserve our very limited number of community-use properties," said Ridesic, adding doing so will help sustain the town's vibrancy.

But as of now, the site is partially rented to Royal Oak Community School, a massage therapist and a telecommunications tower, according to a November staff report. The property also has a working ambulance station used by Niagara Regional EMS.

According to the town's 2017 official plan, the site is zoned for public or institutional use and is intended for parks or community buildings. But council may consider changing that based on community feedback.

Simkus said the residents association hasn't reviewed the proposals in depth or landed on a position yet, since its priorities often shift from issue to issue.

"The one today is the Royal George."

But the association "absolutely" plans to participate in the consultation process, he said.

"It's really important to us what happens to that hospital site," he said. "I think there's going to be a lot of interest to provide input."

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# NOTL library collecting 225 reasons to celebrate 225 years

Debbie Krause  
Special to The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Public Library is celebrating 225 years of community service wants you to help mark the occasion.

To honour this incredible milestone, we are collecting “225 reasons we love our library” from patrons of all ages.

Whether it’s a favourite program, a childhood memory, or a kind interaction with staff, we’re inviting you to share what makes the library special to you.

Every contribution, no matter how small, helps tell the story of a community connected through books, programs and people, painting a picture of how the library has touched lives over more than two centuries.

“Your story matters,” says library CEO Laura Tait. “We’re proud of our history, but it’s the people who give the library its heart.”

Submissions can be emailed to [notllibrary@gmail.com](mailto:notllibrary@gmail.com) or jotted down in person at the library.

It’s an ambitious undertaking but we are hoping to publish all 225 as part of a special section this fall in The Lake Report marking the library’s 225th birthday.

Founded in 1800, the NOTL Public Library was the first circulating library in Upper Canada. Today, it continues to serve as a vital space for learning, creativity and social connection.

Whether you’re a long-time user or new to the community, we invite you to help celebrate this historic anniversary by sharing what the library means to you.

*Debbie Krause is the NOTL Public Library’s community engagement co-ordinator.*

# CCTV coming after fourth act of vandalism on speed cam

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Someone’s done it again.

The Virgil speed camera outside Crossroads Public School was chopped down sometime Monday night — the fourth time since late May.

“We can confirm that this is a further instance of vandalism to the automatic speed enforcement camera located at Crossroads,” said Scott Fraser, associate director of transportation planning for Niagara Region, which owns and operates the device through a vendor.

The Lake Report observed the camera intact Monday evening shortly after sunset. By early Tuesday morning, it had been cut down.

Now, the region says it’s going to go ahead with installing a security camera to watch over the speed camera.

“The region plans to move forward with the use of closed-circuit television,” said Jason Misner, senior communications specialist for Niagara Region. “But a timeline for implementation has not yet been determined.”

The region had reinstalled the speed on Monday after a previous act of vandalism — only for it to be destroyed again within hours.

Installed in May, the camera was scheduled to remain until August as part of a regional initiative to reduce speeding in targeted areas and make regional roads safer.

“The (regional police service) is committed to promoting road safety and

municipalities are considering more security measures, including closed-circuit television.

Misner said CCTV is already used across Niagara to protect infrastructure and improve public safety.

Officials are also evaluating different camera designs. Pole-mounted devices, like the one at Crossroads, may be more susceptible to tampering.

“Niagara Region utilizes both types of automated speed enforcement cameras,” Fraser said. “Some are installed using a fixed permanent housing on a pole and some use a roadside mobile unit.”

The Niagara Stone Road location uses a fixed unit installed in 2023 during the program’s first phase. Newer sites, starting in January, began using mobile sites.

Fraser said future deployments will consider vandalism rates when selecting camera types.

Despite repeated damage, the Region says the program will continue.

“Despite these acts of vandalism, Niagara Region’s automated speed enforcement program is an important component of Niagara Region’s Vision Zero initiative,” Fraser said. “The presence of ASE cameras has, overall, shown positive results in changing driver behaviour and reducing the number of speeding vehicles across the region.”

Const. Rich Hingley of Niagara Regional Police said there are no new updates on the Crossroads incidents.

To combat the problem,



The camera is down again.



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Portables sit outside St. Davids Public School, where enrolment continues to exceed the building's capacity. PAIGE SEBURN

## \$60K for St. Davids school in new board budget

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Some parents and a Niagara-on-the-Lake councillor say the funding earmarked in the local school board's new budget for classroom renovations at St. Davids Public School won't go far enough to address the school's overcrowding problem.

The school is set to receive about \$60,000 to renovate its classrooms, says Milica Petkovic, spokesperson for the District School Board of Niagara.

"\$60,000 doesn't go very far in today's construction and renovation costs, especially when dealing with a worsening overcrowding issue that requires much larger-scale planning," said Andrew Stewart, a parent with kids at St. Davids.

Although he welcomes any investment in their children's learning environment, Stewart said, "Any renovation does not solve the root problem."

And despite long-standing calls from some parents, there's still no high school planned for NOTL in the newly approved budget.

The board's latest budget, approved in late June, comes in at about \$666.8 million — a hike of almost \$34 million from last year.

Construction at St. Davids is expected to begin "shortly," said Petkovic in an email, though she did not confirm exactly when, or whether the school has already received the funding.

Petkovic said the capital budget includes renovations that are "focused on classroom space" at St. Davids, but not at Crossroads Public School, which she described as a newer building "with no renovations currently required."

Coun. Adriana Vizzari, who has had children at

St. Davids since 2021, says she's concerned the funding might not be new at all — and that it may not address the school's most urgent needs.

This fall, St. Davids Public School will begin another year with a student population larger than the school's capacity, according to the school board's 2023–2032 long-term accommodation plan.

**"I'll be pushing for clarity and advocating for investments that directly address the school's growing needs to help manage overcrowded classrooms."**

COUN. ADRIANA VIZZARI

"As a local councillor and advocate for St. David's School, I'm pleased to see \$60,000 allocated in the (District School Board of Niagara) budget," said Vizzari in a direct message.

"However, with enrolment rising and the school's library now being converted into a classroom for the upcoming year, I have concerns about whether this funding is truly new or simply already committed."

She added that if the money has been allocated to renovations when other classrooms in the area are sitting empty, "that's a disappointing use of resources."

"I'll be pushing for clarity and advocating for investments that directly address the school's growing needs to help manage overcrowded classrooms," Vizzari said.

Stewart called the planned funding to expand "an already overcapacity school" a "misallocation

of resources" that could've gone to upgrading the current classrooms instead.

"Additional washroom facilities, improved parking infrastructure, and better allocation of space are urgently needed," he said, adding that the current conditions "do not encourage a thriving learning environment."

But he said, dedicated teachers at the school still work through the challenges of overcrowding, "thankfully."

Real improvement, he said, won't happen until school boundaries — which determine where students go to school based on where they live — are adjusted, and a thorough review of how many students each school can handle, an enrolment audit, is completed.

Stacy Veld, treasurer for the District School Board of Niagara, told The Lake Report last month the board is aware of the overcrowding and is monitoring the situation, with recommendations expected to go to trustees this fall — though it's unclear if they'll directly address boundary changes.

As for a high school in NOTL, Petkovic said enrolment projections don't support one.

"Based on this data, there is no demonstrated need for an additional elementary school or a secondary school in Niagara-on-the-Lake," said Petkovic.

But the board will continue to monitor trends and projections, she said, adjusting plans as needed "so that schools are well-positioned to support students and families."

The continued lack of a high school is "a serious concern of many parents," Stewart said, adding the town is "in desperate need of one."

"We fear that the poor planning which resulted in the closure of the high school will be repeated by

the (District School Board of Niagara) in failing to move with any urgency to build a new one," he said.

He said he's heard about a long-term plan for a high school in Glendale being considered, but said he doesn't have much confidence about that.

"We also see how the (District School Board of Niagara) was fully aware of the overcapacity at St. Davids several years ago and yet has done nothing to remedy the problem other than add portables," he said.

"Unfortunately, privately funded builders can construct entire neighbourhoods quicker than a publicly funded school board can build a single school."

The board uses data from its long-term 2023–2032 accommodation plan to guide funding and space planning decisions.

"We rely on detailed enrolment projections," Petkovic said.

Along with enrolment, the board also considers student needs, residential development, school capacity, population trends, current offerings and resource allocation.

Petkovic said that data helps it decide things like where to add additional classrooms and where to assign staff, "ensuring staff are assigned where and when they are required."

The budget follows the board's strategic plan, complies with Ministry of Education requirements and was developed with "a strong focus on student success and well-being," she said.

"(The board) approaches the budget with both responsibility and intention."

The school's principal, Carl Glauser, did not respond by press time to questions about the new funding and how it will — and will not — be used

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# A hole lot of trouble: Sinkhole opens on Airport Road

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Crews repaired a sinkhole that opened on a closed stretch of Airport Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake Monday afternoon, after a vehicle drove over a heaved patch caused by a water main break.

The area was closed “for safety and traffic reasons” until around 6 p.m. Tuesday, said Jason Misner, spokesperson for Niagara Region, in an email.

The roadway is now open to traffic with a granular base at the repair site. The road will be repaved and fully restored by Thursday, said John Brunet, associate director of water operations and maintenance.

Excavators remained on site throughout the afternoon and into the evening on Monday to do a temporary repair, said Brunet.

Water service was re-



The region says it didn’t take a measurement of the sinkhole that opened up on Monday. It appeared to take up half of one lane of traffic. PAIGE SEBURN

stored overnight and then shut down again when crews returned Tuesday morning at 7 a.m. to complete a permanent repair.

At the time of Brunet’s response — just before 5 p.m. Tuesday — repairs and testing were completed and the water main was back to full service.

Through its online monitoring system, the region was alerted to a surge in water flow and dispatched

crews to the site around 8:30 a.m., he said.

After identifying that the water main between Queenston Road and Lincoln Avenue was leaking, the region closed the area to motorists.

The sinkhole formed after a driver attempted to drive over the raised section of road, rather than go around it, said Marion Boychuk, lead hand at Archer Traffic Control Inc., who was

called in to assist with traffic control. This caused the road to collapse.

“They stopped, turned around and looked — and by that time — they called somebody and said, hey, you got problems down here. It had sunk,” said Boychuk from the scene. Alfred Beam Excavating was on the scene as well.

While The Lake Report hasn’t determined the exact size of the sinkhole, it ap-

pears to take up approximately half of one lane of traffic and is around the size of a compact car.

Misner said the region didn’t take a measurement of the hole’s width and that the deepness of it “wasn’t significant in size.”

It’s unclear at this time how the vehicle accessed the road if it was closed to traffic shortly after 8:30 a.m., or whether the driver was a local resident given special access or a worker in the area.

The driver wasn’t at the scene when Boychuk arrived, she said, and she doesn’t know if their vehicle was damaged. She said she didn’t know how much the road repair would cost the region, but that the driver wouldn’t be held responsible for the damage.

Boychuk said about 30 minutes passed between the time her crew was dispatched and when they began responding.

“The region got out here and did the lane closure with the yield on-coming (signage) until I was able to get out here,” she said.

Incidents like this aren’t as rare as they might seem in NOTL, said Boychuk.

“In this heat? Absolutely,” said Boychuk from the scene, when asked if she’s seen this kind of thing happen in NOTL before.

“All these old farms — they’ve been here for generations.”

Boychuk said the area has seen its fair share of tractor-trailers barreling down the road and people treating it like a “speedway.”

And since the infrastructure is steel, Boychuk said the region and Alfred Beam Excavating would likely have to “rip the whole road open” to determine how to repair it.

“That’s the problem with this one,” she said. “It’s not a new one.”

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

## The Lake Report

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# Royal George Theatre proposal met with groans

*Continued from Front Page*

meeting with architects Bill Lett and Meika McCunn of Unity Design Studio. Shaw Festival executive director Tim Jennings participated virtually.

The Royal George Theatre, located at 85 Queen St., is a 335-seat venue originally built during the First World War.

The Shaw Festival's website notes it was meant to last about 25 years, but has now stood for more than a century in downtown Old Town. It is widely regarded as a staple of the festival and a beloved site in NOTL.

Jennings said the theatre requires significant upkeep and has reached the end of its lifespan.

"It is failing and must be rebuilt," he said.

Eight delegates addressed council about the rebuild — seven opposed to it, and one in support.

While few object to the idea of a new theatre, many are concerned about how the Shaw Festival plans to proceed.

The most prominent issue is the size. The proposed new building would be located just north of the current theatre, spanning addresses from 178–188 Victoria St. and 79–83 Queen St.

It would feature a significantly larger footprint, with three floors plus a basement, covering roughly half a block. The current theatre, by contrast, has a lobby that fits only 13 people.

To accommodate the new design, part of the site would need to be rezoned



The new Royal George Theatre would stand three storeys tall, covering roughly half a block. The current theatre, by contrast, has a lobby that fits up to 13 people. Left, council chambers will filled on Tuesday to discuss the plan. Right: Shaw director Kimberley Rampersad faces a skeptical reception from the audience at Tuesday's council meeting about the Royal George Theatre rebuild. DAN SMEENK



from residential to commercial.

Local resident Maria Vaneva, who operates a nearby bed and breakfast with her husband, Dimitar Minkov, said the rezoning could harm both her business and quality of life.

"We sent a letter about the heritage status, the massive scale of the modern building, the public disruption, the taking down of mature trees and parking issues," she said.

The Shaw Festival says the increased size is necessary to meet modern accessibility standards and provide space for performers, school groups, and non-profits — amenities standard in contemporary theatres.

They also argue that consolidating these functions will improve workflow.

But heritage concerns remain. Critics argue the design and location of the proposed building are out of step with the neighbourhood's historical character.

The Shaw Festival has stated that the new building will reflect the area's heritage. The plan would require a heritage permit.

Many residents, however, remain unconvinced.

"We're baffled by why the Shaw is not just restoring the Royal George, but extending and rezoning," said area resident Valmai Howe Elkins. "177 is heritage ... it's one of the oldest buildings in town."

Elkins warned the development could damage the town's appeal to tourists by changing the historical character of the area.

"Tourists slow down" when they reach the building, she said.

Some residents worry the project could set a precedent, potentially paving the way for more commercial developments in the heritage district.

"When we start allowing non-heritage buildings," Elkins said, "it's just a step before more hotels, more restaurants, coming to the neighbourhood."

Several alternatives were proposed, including relocating the theatre outside the Queen-Picton heritage dis-

trict. Vaneva, for instance, suggested the old municipal site.

Other concerns were more practical. Coun. Tim Balasiuk raised the issue of waste management related to theatre operations and construction.

"I'm a little bit concerned about the waste," he said. "For a 360-seat theatre offering food and drink and that sort of thing, I'd love to see some creative way that that waste won't end up on Queen Street."

Jennings said the current theatre, with 335 seats, hasn't posed a problem and that the new design includes hidden waste storage solutions.

These were only some

of the concerns raised by residents and councillors. Both sides made emotional and passionate cases.

Minkov said he chose not to speak because of how strongly he felt, leaving the remarks to his wife. Lett also acknowledged his emotional connection to the project and the community.

Jennings said no demolition permits have been submitted, as the Shaw Festival intends to proceed in good faith with council.

With no decisions made and the meeting focused on public input, the debate around the future of the Royal George Theatre is likely far from over.

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# Zalepa uses 'strong mayor powers' to give CAO back old powers

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The lord mayor has dipped his toes in the pool of the province's "strong mayor powers."

He used them for the first time on Monday to give newly appointed chief administrative officer Nick Ruller full authority over the town's organizational structure and staffing decisions.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said he is simply restoring authorization that the town's top administrator had before the province granted more decision-making power to mayors in 169 more municipalities earlier this year.

The powers granted to



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa says he acted, in part, to show immediate confidence in new CAO Nick Ruller. FILE

Ruller give him the final say over staffing decisions and how the town delivers ser-

vices through departments such as fire and emergency services, operations, plan-

ning and public works.

Before the province enacted the strong mayor powers, the role of hiring staff and overseeing the town's structure "was always the responsibility of the chief administrative officer," Zalepa told The Lake Report.

"When the province changed these rules," he said, "they actually gave authority to the mayor to influence those things."

Zalepa said he thought it was important to "bring clarity" to the town of NOTL and make it clear to the new CAO that he would like to hand these responsibilities back to him.

Monday marked Ruller's first day on the job. His appointment was

announced June 19, following a 17-month search to replace former CAO Marnie Cluckie.

Zalepa said he acted in part to show immediate confidence in Ruller, whose experience, he said, makes him well-suited to the role. Ruller was previously NOTL fire chief and a NOTL councillor.

Under Ontario's Bill 3, which came into effect in May, mayors in designated municipalities were granted strong mayor powers. Currently, 216 towns and cities across the province fall under this legislation — nearly half of Ontario's municipalities.

The law gives mayors the authority to hire and fire senior staff, propose bud-

gets, create committees and appoint a CAO. It also allows them to delegate those powers to the CAO.

Zalepa said he wants to maintain the previous structure of municipal governance in NOTL.

Despite evoking the strong mayor powers for the first time, Zalepa said he still values collaboration.

"While this new legislation provides mayors with enhanced decision-making authority, I remain committed to working in partnership with staff and council to serve our community effectively," he said.

Zalepa added he does not plan to use his strong mayor powers again in the near future.

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# At \$786 per household, NOTL pays too much for police: Kaiser

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Does Niagara-on-the-Lake pay too much for police compared to the other communities in Niagara? The town's regional councillor says so — and she wants to see the way the municipalities in the region pay into its police service change.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser criticized the cost of police services for her municipality during a regional council meeting, saying it is a long-standing concern among NOTL residents.

Kaiser said that right now, NOTL residents pay \$786 per household to support Niagara Regional Police, the highest rate in the region. They pay \$238 more than the next-highest municipality, Grimsby, which follows with \$458. Welland, at \$255, pays the least.

"In 10 years on municipal



Right now, Niagara-on-the-Lake pays the highest service levy per household to Niagara Regional Police, \$238 more than the next-highest municipality. Regional Coun. Robert Foster says it's because houses in NOTL are worth more, so market value assessment is higher. FILE

council, this was an ongoing issue," said Kaiser.

Regional council passed a motion that asks for a report to address the pay discrepancy and new funding models for the Niagara region.

Police funding in Niagara Region is funded through a combination of general levy

funds and user fees. Kaiser said the current model was instituted in 2015.

The proposal met mixed reactions from council. Kaiser acknowledged that not all members would support the motion.

"I know this is not a popular motion with a number of people at the

table who've expressed concerns," Kaiser said.

"Why would they put additional funds on their taxpayers and their municipality? I think it's our job to be fair and treat everyone in the municipality fairly."

She said that her staff already outlined specific recommendations in her statement, which included allowing the Ontario government to approve a non-standard tax model and allowing municipalities to levy specific charges for services like policing.

However, she didn't share what these policies would be — the upcoming report will include those details, she told The Lake Report.

Kaiser also suggested using other funding models for different services in Niagara as a template for policing.

"Garbage was once based on assessment, so we made that change," she said. "We also made the change in terms of transit.

I don't understand why we don't do the same thing for policing."

Regional Couns. Tom Insinna of Fort Erie and Bob Gale of Niagara Falls, who's a former police officer, shared their support for Kaiser's motion.

Gale proposed expanding the list of potential solutions by adding the phrase "but not limited to" into the motion.

Not all members of council who spoke during the June 26 meeting were on board, however.

"This will help residents in Niagara-on-the-Lake but harm the rest of the region," said St. Catharines Regional Coun. Laura Ip. "The difference in cost allocation isn't inequitable at all. It reflects socioeconomic differences between municipalities."

Ip drew a comparison to regional road funding, noting that NOTL residents pay more per person than those in St. Catharines. She

argued that discrepancies in funding are not inherently problematic.

Regional Coun. Robert Foster of Lincoln said he was open to the report but questioned the potential outcomes. He said he doesn't view the cost discrepancy as unfair.

"When your house is worth more, market value assessment is higher," Foster said. "It's as simple as that."

Terry Ugolini, regional councillor and Thorold mayor, expressed reservations about changing the funding structure.

"Policing is part of the general levy," Ugolini said. "I'm not in favour of even looking at adjusting that. Right or wrong, that's where we're at."

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, also a regional councillor, said he hopes the motion will give the region viable options for changing the funding model.

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# Busy start to season for marine rescue

Doug Mephram  
Special to The Lake Report

Capsized kayaks, paddleboarders in peril and an assortment of on-the-water emergencies — the start of the boating season has been hectic for the volunteers of South Shore Search and Rescue.

Chances are, it will only get busier.

That's only an educated guess, of course, but just over a month into the Lake Ontario boating season, 2025 is already shaping up to be a busy one with 10 rescue missions completed before the end of June.

It's a sign, says unit leader Ben Upper, that we could be heading for a busy season.

"There are always predictions about how busy the coming year will be but we never really know until the season starts," Upper says. "Some years, the spring can be very slow. Not this year."

A number of factors can combine to make a busy



Crew members from South Shore Search And Rescue attend to "JJ," the rescue manikin as part of person-in-the-water recovery training. SUPPLIED

boating season, Upper says. Good weather, particularly on weekends, is a big factor. So is fuel price.

Other economic factors like unemployment and interest rates are considerations. Whether Canadians are vacationing at home or travelling afar also has an impact. But a good boating season also means more rescue calls.

"The more boats on the water, the more calls we get," Upper says. July and August are usually the busiest months, he says, but good weather in the fall can make September very busy, too.

The volunteer group, which draws members from communities from Niagara-on-the-Lake to Stoney Creek, was called

out 31 times during the 2024 season.

Demand for the volunteers' efforts has steadily grown over the past decade from a low of just eight calls in 2014. Over the past three years, South Shore Search And Rescue crews have been called to 108 rescue missions on Lake Ontario.

And 2025? "It's too early to say," Upper cautions, "but this could be a busy one."

More than 30 active South Shore Search and Rescue volunteers maintain a fully equipped rescue vessel and train year-round to hone the skills and readiness to be effective on the water.

The group responds to emergencies anywhere in western Lake Ontario from a base at Fifty Point.

For more than 25 years, Doug Mephram has been a marine rescue volunteer. He is one of three South Shore Search And Rescue members from Niagara-on-the-Lake.



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# Summer fun, easy as cherry pie

From left, clockwise: Volunteer Bev Lees readies for the cavalry of hungry festivalgoers, set to enjoy a slice of St. Mark's Anglican Church's beloved cherry pie. Over at the craft table, Allison Browne helps three-year-old Juniper Browne out with an art project. Cynthia Fuller buys a slice of cherry pie à la mode (with vanilla ice cream) from Cheryl Carmichael. DAVE VAN DE LAAR



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# Coach **David Mines** latest inductee to Sports Wall of Fame

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Sports Wall of Fame will welcome two new names this August: the late Mike Kappel and David Mines.

Mines is being recognized for more than 40 years of dedication to developing hockey and lacrosse in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He said the honour means a great deal, especially given his lifelong ties to the community.

"It's quite an honour ... for someone who's grown up in the area, born here, work here (and) raised a family here," he said.

Mines made his mark as a coach, trainer and general manager in both sports. Among his most notable accomplishments were back-to-back appearances in the All-Ontario midget hockey finals with the Niagara Wolves.

His team lost in 2016 but returned to win the championship on home ice in 2017.

"The crowds in those days, it was just great to see," said Mines. "It was nice to win it at home."

He also played a key role in the construction of the Meridian Credit Union



David Mines spent 40 years of his life involved in hockey and lacrosse in NOTL. His contributions will be honoured on Aug. 22 at the Meridian Credit Union Arena, which he played a key role in helping to get built. SUPPLIED

Arena, which opened in 2003. It is one of two hockey rinks in town, alongside Centennial Arena.

Born in NOTL, Mines grew up playing hockey as a defenceman and pitched in baseball. He credits his father as a major influence in his life and his development as an athlete.

"I'm nine years younger

than any of my siblings, so I think my dad had some time to spend with me a lot more," said Mines. "The reason I am who I am is because of my father for sure."

He began coaching hockey at age 16, when he and a friend led a local peewee house league team. After stepping away from travel hockey at 17, he coached

intermittently for about 10 years before starting a family.

"When (his kids) finally got a little older, it was right behind the benches," Mines said. "I was actually on a bench for Niagara Falls for a few years, coached a team in St. Catharines for a year, and ended up coming back to Niagara (on-the-Lake)."

Both of his sons played lacrosse, and Mines coached them as well, helping their teams win provincial championships in 2007 and 2008.

In 2007, he became president of Niagara-on-the-Lake Minor Hockey. A decade later, he joined the Junior B Thunderhawks lacrosse team and eventually

served as general manager until 2020.

Through his decades in sport, Mines said one quality stands out as essential for any coach: commitment.

"I was fortunate that whatever bench I was on, I was surrounded by a bunch of good people," he said. "It's full time jumping from the hockey bench to the lacrosse bench — you're not away from the arena too much."

He acknowledged the many people who helped him throughout his career, especially those in the community who made sacrifices so children could play sports.

"I grew up in a time where there were tremendous families," said Mines, noting many had six or seven children involved in sports. "There were real commitments from some people (regarding sports)."

Mines, along with Mike Kappel, will be inducted on Aug. 22 at the Meridian Credit Union Arena on Four Mile Creek Road — the facility he helped create. The social begins at 5 p.m., followed by the ceremony at 6 p.m. No registration is required.

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## Patrick Craig's **even-par 36** tops men's league

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

The luck of the Irish might have been with Patrick Craig as he scorched the course with some booming tee shots and a stellar even-par round of 36 in the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club's men's league last Thursday.

He also won closest to the pin on #9 with a great shot from the back tees.

Other winners: James Grigjanis-Meusel was second low gross by retrogression, with a 1-over 37, while Greg Fedoryn and Ken Willms were low net with 32.

Peter Chilibeck made the longest putt on #2, Quinton Spagnol outdrove everyone on #3 and Jim Rye was closest to the pin on #4.

Brock Sansom and Ted Wiens scored \$95 net skins on #1 and #7 respectively, while birdies by Grigjanis-Meusel on #1 and Rai Laugel on #4 earned \$55 gross skins.

No one won the weekly putting contest and the prize increases to \$300 this week.

In Tuesday's Woofs league, Ted Carmichael's 40



Patrick Craig, pictured after winning the senior men's title at last year's club championships, shot even-par 36 in men's league action last week. FILE

won low gross, by retrogression. Peter Chilibeck had low net with a remarkable 28 and Ted Baker won the hidden hole with a birdie on the par-5 third hole. Charles Swaenpoel was closest to the pin on #4.

In other league competition: This month, players in the nine-hole women's

league are counting putts and winners will be announced at the end of July.

This Tuesday's top gross scorers were Susan Horne (45), Suzanne Watson (48) and Maureen Dickson (49). Best net scores were by Julie Smethurst (28), Horne (33) and Caroline Cochrane (36).

Shelley Sansom had the longest drive on #2, Dickson had the longest tee shot on #6 and Vicci Interisano was closest to the pin on #4.

Next week the league hosts its biannual member-guest tournament with the theme 150 Shades of Summer, in keeping with the club's 150th anniversary celebrations this year.

Martha Cruikshank shot 86 to lead the 18-hole women's league on Tuesday. Yolanda Henry followed with 87, while Diana Dimmer had 91 and Susan Gagne and Val Chubey shot 96.

Low net winners were Cruikshank (70), Gagne and Henry (72), May Chang (73) and Judy Mantle, Jennifer Meszaros, Dimmer and Chubey had 75. Sharron Marlow was closest to the pin on #4.

In Monday's business ladies league, Claire Forbes was the top shooter, with 41. Other winners: Suzanne Watson (longest drive #1), Mickey Kerklaan (closest to 150 on #2), Sally Miller (longest putt on #7) and Diane Brooks (closest to the pin on #9 in two).

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With Bradley Hamilton  
**#35: Gen Z embraces the statement “got your back.” If one hurts, they all hurt. If someone is hurting, let them know you got their back and feel the hurt.**

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



**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

“The bad news is time flies.  
The good news is you’re the pilot.”  
Michael Altshuler

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New Queenston Heights courts in a pickle?

Pickleball is hugely popular in NOTL and around the world, and new courts have opened at Queenston Heights. But on a few visits to the park this week we found no one was using them. Yet. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Editorial

Bring back beach ‘warning’ signs

Kevin MacLean  
Editor Emeritus

Niagara Region’s public health department does a thorough job of testing 19 beaches around the region from Victoria Day to Labour Day.  
However, the region can do a better job of letting people know whether it’s safe to go for a swim or let their children frolic in the water.  
Checking those 19 beaches a couple of times a week is a lot of work. And to its credit, Niagara tests more beaches than any major municipality between here and Oshawa.  
Niagara also tests more often than most, every Tuesday and Thursday in NOTL’s case. Toronto checks water daily, York “usually” tests twice a week, but most municipalities rely on a single weekly test.  
Hamilton checks seven locations, Halton monitors eight, Peel just four, York does 14, Toronto checks 10 daily and Durham tests eight.  
For Niagara, having so many public beaches is the blessing/curse of being sandwiched between two Great Lakes, Ontario and

Erie. And the logistics of geography and staff availability make it challenging.  
But it is essential work. Here, once samples are taken at five spots at each beach, they are processed in Hamilton and analyzed so the next day the results are known and posted on public health’s website.  
That is all well and good, so far as it goes. What’s missing is actively and transparently updating signs at each beach so that those who don’t know to check online for test results can at a glance to learn whether E. coli, algae or other conditions make the water dangerous.  
As we have reported, Queen’s Royal was closed for about two weeks due to E. coli levels and was just declared safe again last Thursday. But on Tuesday it failed an E. coli test and is again unsafe for swimming.  
Interviews with beachgoers repeatedly showed almost none of them knew to check the public health department’s website for water quality updates. The lone sign didn’t catch their eye.  
Posting test results online is an excellent option

and it is one embraced by all municipalities in the Golden Horseshoe.  
But only Niagara and Hamilton have gone online-only and stopped the practice of erecting signs (or flags in Toronto’s case) that tell people when E. coli levels are too high.  
It wasn’t always this way. Previously, when Queen’s Royal, Niagara-on-the-Lake’s only monitored beach, failed a test, a single bright yellow “Warning” sign would go up on a post near the waterfront. No longer.  
The main reason is that beach conditions can change suddenly thanks to weather and numerous other factors. And the most up-to-date results can be readily found online. That’s all true.  
Niagara’s “This beach is monitored” signs are quite informative about what can make water unsafe and how to find the latest test results online.  
Unfortunately, people often ignore such subtleties and must be educated so they will take time to be informed — and maybe check the region’s website — before jumping in the water.  
While there is no guarantee a bright yellow “Warn-

ing” sign would be obeyed, at least the region would be going the extra mile to draw attention to water problems.  
If that ship has sailed and online-only remains Niagara’s policy, then at least prominently erect more than one sign at the beach. We’d suggest at least three at Queen’s Royal.  
We asked the region what other jurisdictions do and were told to contact those other regions ourselves; so, we did.  
We discovered that Niagara is an outlier, as, in addition to posting results online, all the other Golden Horseshoe municipalities (except Hamilton) use some form of active signage or flags to inform the public of dangerous E. coli levels.  
After all, no one wants to unknowingly be exposed to E. coli or other nasty waterborne dangers.  
In our view, doing away with on-site warnings in favour of passive signs leaves a lot to be desired.  
We urge Niagara Region to revisit this policy. And if restoring warning signs when beaches fail a test is not in the cards, then at the very least add several more of the advisory signs to each monitored public beach.  
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# We need a culture of safety on our roads

Dear editor:

Everyone hates getting a traffic ticket. But let's be honest — we all speed.

The truth is, automated speed cameras are one of the fairest tools we have. They don't care if you're rich or poor, who you know, or how good you are at talking your way out of a ticket. They just enforce the law — consistently and impartially.

People think they're unfair not because they are,

but because they work. A police officer might let you off with a warning. A camera doesn't. That's the point.

Calls to turn them off during the summer, or make the signs bigger, miss the mark. The goal isn't to help drivers avoid getting caught — it's to help people slow down, all the time. You can't build a culture of safety if enforcement only kicks in when it's convenient.

Of course, cities need to

own their role, too. We've spent decades designing roads that prioritize speed over safety — wide lanes, big turning radii, fast-moving arterials. It's no surprise people treat them like highways.

If we want real change, it's not just about cameras or tickets. It's about reshaping the expectations we've built into our streets — and the habits we carry behind the wheel.

As for speed bumps, unfortunately, they are not practical in winter months when it comes to snow removal. The speed bumps and the snow blades are both damaged easily during snow removal.

As a further comment, if someone sees adherence to the laws as boot-licking, then the issue at play here may be more fundamental.

Frank Hayes  
NOTL

# The NOTL dream died. So they left



**THE TURNER REPORT**

Garth Turner  
Columnist

For over half a century, the old building on Queen was the town hospital. In the early '50s, a spanking new one was built down the street. That one lasted 60 years. It closed in 2016 and now we have none. Isn't progress great?

Today the closest hospital is in scary St. Catharines and is named after a developer. The emergency room wait time is four hours on a good day. Eight on a busy one. Or longer.

The fate of the 1950s building is currently in limbo (the town bought it seven years ago), but the old Cottage Hospital has since morphed into a swishy condo. It's for sale these days. And there's another story behind it worth telling you about.

The folks who own it are gone. They couldn't take NOTL any more.

"I have just finished reading your column in The Lake Report. Many times I have wanted to reach out to thank you and the time has finally come," says Sonja Schindeler. "But your efforts are too late for us."

They bought here a dozen years ago, identifying this horse-infused, artistic small town with its majes-



The Cottage Hospital in Old Town (now a condo) was replaced by a new health centre in the 1950s. GARTH TURNER

tic trees, tight community, great services (including a functioning hospital and a public school) and cautious, anti-development politicians as the ideal place to retire.

"But over the years we felt that our dream was slipping away as the town and council seemed to become more and more focused on tourists, and less so on the residents that chose to call NOTL home," she says.

So, they listed the house, then up and left.

"We have now relocated to Portugal, and finally found the 'village' that ticks all of the boxes. With two grocery stores, two pharmacies, the doctor's office, the dentist, padel tennis, numerous cafes, restaurants and bars, multiple exercise facilities and, of course, the ocean — all within easy walking distance."

"We have found what we had hoped NOTL would offer. YES — there are tour-

ists here — and PLENTY of them in July and August, but the village still rings with the voices of the youngsters and the elderly gather in the local coffee shops for their coffees and sweets for less than 3 euro (no Starbucks here!)."

She reads this paper weekly, "but it saddens me as I am reminded of the lost opportunity."

So, what have we become? Disney-on-the-Lake, or has this progress that drove her away been reasonable? Unavoidable?

The school is a hole in the ground. Politicians and the guy the hospital is now named after have agreed to build a honking big hotel there — in the middle of a residential 'hood. There's a glass-and-concrete hotel going up in the Village area. It looks like a departure terminal at Pearson.

NOTL is one of the few places in Canada allow-

ing its housing stock to be turned into Airbnbs where hosts don't live. So there are fewer families and virtually no rentals. Our real estate's been financialized.

The two most recent Old Town listings (one sold in two days), came on at \$3.3 million and \$3.5 million. Now the beloved Shaw Festival is ready to tear up a residential block and erect a hulking new industrial theatre multiplex on the main drag, igniting years of heavy construction.

All this, and more, for the love of business.

Among so many others in the past few days, prompted by the Fat George proposal, Hamish and Leslie Kerr have decided to speak out and to stand for something. For two decades, they operated a business in Old Town.

"An important comment heard from many customers was that they come to Niagara-on-the-Lake BECAUSE IT'S DIFFERENT FROM EVERYWHERE ELSE!" they tell me (yes, in capital letters). "Once the Old Town is gone ... it's gone! Please stop the slide where it just looks like everywhere else."

The folks we elected can do that. Will they?

"Thank you for caring and thank you for being a voice of reason," says Sonja, kindly. "Know that from far away I am rooting for you, and hope your efforts will play some part in restoring NOTL to what my dream (and I'm sure yours) had been."

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

garth@garth.ca



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

**A starter containing lactic acid bacteria is used to induce fermentation when making this tangy bread.**

Last issue: WE STAND ON GUARD

Clue: The motto of this service branch is Semper Paratus, "Always Ready."

Answer: What is the U.S. Coast Guard?

Answered first by: Jesse Agnew

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Claudia Grimwood, Bob Wheatley, Lynda Collet, Ken Dewar, Sue Rautenberg, Mike Gander, Jeff Lake, Esther VanGorder, Jim Dandy, Rob Hutchison, Nancy Rocca, Tuija Johansson, Katie Reimer, Wade Durling, Marla Percy, Catherine Clarke, Margie Enns

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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On behalf of the Friends of Fort George, we would like to thank everyone that contributed to making Canada Day festivities in Niagara-on-the-Lake such a big success!

In particular, we would like to thank

**the Department of Canadian Heritage,**  
**the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission,**  
**the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake,**  
**BCM Insurance Company,**  
**Willow Cakes and Pastries, Parks Canada,**  
**The Niagara-on-the-Lake Rotary Club,**  
**Greaves Jams and Marmalades,**  
**Hendrik's Independent,**  
**our Board of Directors, and countless volunteers that made the day possible.**

All proceeds raised throughout the day will help to support student employment opportunities at Brock's Monument and Fort George.



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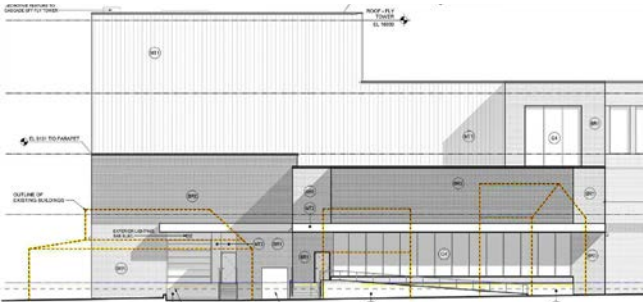
# Other points of concern about Royal George plans



Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Back in 1964, a small group of modernist architects gathered in Venice and drafted what became known as the Venice Charter. It is because of this document — considered flawed by several of its authors and marred by translation errors in the English version — that new architectural designs associated with historic buildings are expected to bear a “contemporary stamp.” Interestingly, Raymond Lemaire, widely credited with writing Article 9 (which introduced this idea), almost immediately repudiated it during his decade-long restoration of Leuven in Belgium — long seen as a gold standard for projects of this type. Lemaire and other Charter framers later became advocates for revising the document, seeing first-hand

the damage that followed its widespread adoption. Over the last five decades, many architects and professional groups — including the International Network for Traditional Building, Architecture & Urbanism (INTBAU) — have continued to call for reform and modernization of the Charter’s principles. I discussed the Charter’s background in this column on May 15, 2024 (“Arch-i-text: Flawed protocol for heritage architecture needs new vision,” The Lake Report), so I won’t repeat myself, except to say this defective document is responsible for many architectural insults inflicted on historic buildings and streetscapes — especially across North America. Which brings us to the Royal George Theatre’s proposed redesign, which its proponents describe as a contemporary reinterpretation of the historic building’s character. In short, they are slavishly following the Charter’s flawed protocols to produce a design which, in the view of several architects I know, is utterly inappropriate in the context of the Queen-Picton historic district. Last week, we examined the potential impacts of



The incompatible architecture of the proposed Royal George rebuild will completely disrupt the heritage district while dwarfing every other building on Victoria as the red dotted line showing “existing buildings” illustrates, writes architecture columnist Brian Marshall.

the proposed facade and fly tower on Queen Street’s historic streetscape. Unbeknownst to me, a colleague took the initiative of uploading the applicant’s measurements and elevations into AutoCAD software for closer analysis. He found that the new facade facing Queen Street would be about 1.6 times longer than the existing theatre and nearly double its visible surface area — not including the fly tower or Queen Street face of the Victoria Street wing. Based on his scaling of the architectural drawings, the cornice height would be approximately 10.2 metres, with the pediment cresting at around 14.25 metres, or 46.75 feet — significantly taller than the current structure. To put this in perspective, the proposed pediment would sit a mere 15 inches lower than the Old Courthouse pediment — and the facade viewed from the street would actually be larger than that of the Courthouse.. Besides its contemporary styling — better suited to a commercial district — the proposed height, scale and massing would disrupt the streetscape rhythm along Queen Street and distort the district’s architectural continuity. Now, let’s turn onto Victoria Street, where we currently find two 19th-century houses and a detached garage (188 and 178 Victoria). The character of the street immediately shifts from traditional commercial to traditional residential. Historic buildings here are

mostly modest clapboard or stucco-clad one-and-a-half- and two-storey homes, typical of the heritage district. The applicant proposes to demolish these two houses and the garage to insert a utilitarian, commercial-institutional styled facade with a loading dock — overtopped by the looming dark wall of the fly tower, set slightly back from the street. There is no attempt to relate the new structure to the historic streetscape or heritage character. Rather, it appears the decision has been made to inject an entirely foreign building form and style into this preserved neighbourhood, with no regard for its impact on the district or streetscape. Little consideration seems to have been given to the fact that the fly tower will be visible from several points along Queen Street — or to the negative effect this may have on the tourists who flock to Niagara-on-the-Lake to enjoy its historic charm. And what of the impact on Victoria Street businesses? Finally, allow me to raise two items that remain undressed. First, in an attempt to reduce the visual impact from Queen Street, the applicant proposes to relocate the enlarged fly tower to the rear of the property. What appears to be overlooked is the effect this will have on neighbouring properties along Prideaux Street (particularly Nos. 86 to 94) and 164 Victoria. What will a looming, 62-foot-tall dark wall do to their property values — or their enjoyment of their homes and gardens? That wall will be clearly visible, in all seasons, to pedestrians on Prideaux, altering the character of that quiet stretch of town. Lastly, the well-intentioned idea of installing rooftop planters and cascading greenery to soften the fly tower’s harsh lines has been described by a nationally respected landscape architect as “simply horticultural nonsense.” Because of the deep shade cast by the fly tower’s walls “for much of the day,” the conditions will be “not ideal for healthy growth.” Maintaining the planters “will prove to be quite challenging” — read: very expensive — and likely unsustainable for an institution such as the Shaw. I say again, a fundamental rethink of the Royal George proposal is in order. Brian Marshall is a NOTL realtor, author and expert consultant on architectural design, restoration and heritage.



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# Setting the record straight on patios

Dear editor:

I ran my campaign on transparency, fairness, and preserving the past while planning for the future.

Lately, there's been a great deal of conversation — much of it filled with misinformation — on social media regarding the temporary patio program in Niagara-on-the-Lake, particularly on Queen Street.

To clarify: this program began during COVID-19 when indoor dining was prohibited. The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario introduced a temporary measure to allow licensed food and beverage establishments to expand their operations onto outdoor municipal lands.

Fast forward to 2025 — COVID is behind us, the AGCO has ended its temporary patio program, yet some businesses are now advocating to keep these patios permanently.

Understandably, additional seating increases revenue. And when there's no requirement to pay for permits, planning or property taxes on that space, it's an appealing proposition for any business.

But these patios come at a cost to the broader community. Each business has occupied two municipal parking spaces over the last five years. Each of these spots brings in approxi-

mately \$12,250 annually to the town.

With three businesses participating, that's a loss of \$73,500 per year in parking revenues — or \$367,500 over five years. And that is a dollar amount on just the spots that presently have temporary patios on parking spots. That figure alone equates to a three per cent tax increase over that period.

And the issue isn't just financial. Other Queen Street businesses pay commercial taxes on every inch of space they operate. They pay significant rent, averaging \$3,000–\$4,000 per month, and contribute to municipal revenue fairly. Continuing with temporary patios would mean a business receives an additional \$5,000 a month value without the same level of contribution.

We've heard different responses: some are open to paying, but only during peak months. Others are willing to pay year-round but don't want the program expanded to all businesses. And many residents have said it changes the character of our historic downtown.

Let's remember: this was a temporary solution for a temporary crisis.

If there's now a desire to make patios permanent, then we must follow a proper planning process, which is

why council passed a motion to begin a Queen Street secondary plan — something every other village in NOTL already has.

Without a vision, we can't piecemeal permanent changes into our most historically significant street.

Our heritage district matters. There are 38 businesses that could potentially qualify for patios. If fairness is our guiding principle, we must include them all — or none. And if food establishments are granted expansion, why not retail?

Some have suggested my opposition is personal because my family owns a restaurant. Sunset Grill has reported me to the integrity commissioner twice.

Sunset Grill operates from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and serves a breakfast and lunch clientele. Corks, for example, opens later and serves a different market entirely.

This isn't about competition — it's about community integrity.

My participation in the patio discussion has been reviewed by two independent integrity commissioners, both of whom found no conflict and confirmed my actions were in the public interest.

While their findings are currently being challenged in court, the town's legal coun-

sel is confident and expects the matter will be addressed in September in the courts.

Seven councillors voted to end the temporary program and begin proper planning for Queen Street. Why? Because the infrastructure is outdated. Crumbling clay pipes are causing flooding. Sidewalks are too narrow.

We need a long-term solution — not short-term band-aids.

Additionally, some businesses using patios on private property are violating their approved site plans by taking up parking spots meant for second-floor short-term rental guests, who are now being redirected to municipal spaces. This, too, undermines planning fairness.

There is far more to this conversation than a few patio tables. I encourage residents to reach out to councillors, ask questions, and get the full picture rather than take to Facebook and post false information.

And for those who love patios, good news: there are over 23 permanent patios already operating in the heritage district.

Let's preserve what makes Queen Street special while planning for a future that's fair, inclusive, and thoughtfully designed.

**Coun. Maria Mavridis  
NOTL**



## First-time buyers can realize their dreams



### BOTTOM LINE

Steve McGuinness  
Columnist

In our last column, we explored the dramatic recent shifts in Ontario's housing market (The Lake Report, "Bottom Line: Home prices dip, but ownership still elusive for many," June 12). This column will focus on how younger buyers can realize their home ownership dreams.

The average age of a first-time homeowner has increased from 36 to 40 over the last decade, but some basics never change.

First homes are usually purchased with a combination of a saved down payment and mortgage financing from a lender. Aspiring homeowners need to set a plan to accumulate a down payment, leaving manageable mortgage payments.

Lenders will require the homeowner to put down 20 per cent of the home's cost. Otherwise, they may accept less, but that will make mortgage payments higher and will entail incurring a high ratio mortgage insurance fee.

Lenders will require all home ownership costs to remain under 40 per cent of gross income.

Extending the amortization period for a loan from 25 years to a longer period, will lower the mortgage payments.

Alarmingly, if you buy at 40 and amortize the balance over a period longer than 25 years, you will extend the mortgage life beyond normal retirement age.

There are two strategies to help new homeowners accumulate a down payment faster.

The first is to borrow from "the bank of mom and dad." Generally, no part of a down payment can come from borrowed funds, but the lender will consider contributions from parents

as gifts (whether the parent requires repayment or not).

Parents can borrow their contribution against their own home using a home equity line of credit. These lines of credit usually only require interest payments. So, if the parent expects the child to make the payments, the amounts could be lower than on a traditional mortgage.

The second way to accumulate a down payment faster is by taking advantage of government incentive programs. There are two: the RRSP Home Buyers' Plan and the First Home Savings Account.

The Home Buyers' Plan lets first-time homebuyers withdraw up to \$60,000 toward a down payment from their RRSP, without tax. To qualify, you must not have owned a home (or lived in a spouse or partner's home) within the last four years.

You must also live in the new home as your primary residence, and the RRSP funds must have been deposited 90 days before the purchase. The withdrawn funds must be repaid over a period of 15 years with at least 1/15 of the amount being recontributed every year.

The First Home Savings Account plan allows tax-deductible contributions plus tax-free withdrawals if used for a qualifying home purchase. Unlike the Home Buyers' Plan, you don't have to repay the funds you withdraw. You can contribute up to \$8,000 per year, with unused room carried forward and a lifetime limit of \$40,000 (although couples can each open a First Home Savings Account, doubling total savings to \$80,000).

To withdraw funds, you must have signed an agreement to purchase a home. If you never purchase your home, savings can be transferred to an RRSP without penalty. The account can remain open for up to 15 years.

Steve McGuinness was a senior adviser to major financial institutions during his Bay Street career and is now retired in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Send your personal finance questions to him at [smcgfinplan@gmail.com](mailto:smcgfinplan@gmail.com).

## New theatre part of town's 'visual destruction'

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

It is with utter disappointment that we have become aware of the magnitude of the proposed destruction and redevelopment of the Royal George Theatre.

The "Trump-hotel-esque" façade and fly tower of expansion loom over the heritage district. The zoning change on a residential street and the loss of three unique homes on Victoria Street accommodate parking and access to the mechanicals at the back of the theatre. This contributes to the creeping visual destruction of our town.

It would seem that the cancer which is destroying the uniqueness and small-town feel of Niagara-on-the-Lake is now coming from within. It is the misguided vision of those who fail to embrace the overall preservation of our town.

Through local newspaper

editorials and letters regarding the proposal, it would seem that money buys decisions to fulfill the wishes and visions of a few.

It allows them to adopt the Trump-bullying posture to direct staff and supporters to express their agreement with this plan.

Thirty-five million dollars can (and should) result in architectural design that complements and enhances the existing streetscape. It should also be subordinate to the already-present heritage features.

This outrageous proposal by a community facility does not speak to whether or not residents support the theatre industry. The community does support and appreciate theatre.

While the Shaw Festival has been a part of our community for some 50-plus years, it could have chosen to situate in any area in the Niagara region.

In our opinion, the theatre and early founders such as Brian Doherty chose the town of Niagara-on-the-

Lake because of its unique charm, its ambience, its magic and a main street that had maintained its functioning commercial use within the restored, rehabilitated and preserved village atmosphere. The theatre was welcomed by the community to house their "business" in NOTL.

Now the theatre is considering the destruction of our heritage district to accommodate their misguided vision. And that it is even being considered by our elected officials!

There is no need for the proposed accessory cafés, restaurant or community areas within the proposed development. We already have many excellent facilities that, for many years, have been the tourism draw, creating what has been a beneficial symbiotic relationship among existing businesses.

The concept to replace or repair the theatre's deficient structural problems and provide accessibility does not require the expansion as proposed.

We respectfully request this council's review of the proposal and to work with the theatre and not issue a heritage demolition permit for the development as proposed.

It is also easy to imagine, if approved, that such an oversized "factory" will lead to requests for special permission for additional bus drop-offs at the front door for patrons. It will bring increased commercial traffic to service its needs. It will require increased parking for the additional staff required to operate.

All of this will come at the expense of the historic ambience and lack of stewardship responsibility to maintain one of Canada's most unique communities.

It will endanger its significant early history and show a lack of respect for those who have fought for its continued preservation.

Thank you in advance for your deliberations and considerations.

**Jim and Erika Alexander  
Old Town**

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# Young artists win Pumphouse scholarship

Staff  
The Lake Report

Two of Niagara-on-the-Lake’s young artists are getting a boost from the local arts community this summer, as they ready to take their creative work to the next level at university this upcoming semester. Molly Cummings and Lia Contino are this year’s recipients of the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Scholarship for Art Education, which supports graduating high school students from NOTL pursuing post-secondary studies in the visual arts.

The scholarship was established in memory of Ian Butler, a founding member of the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre. At a presentation held this summer, Natalie Early, board secretary of the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre, awarded each student a \$200 cheque and a complimentary membership to the centre. “It is our honour to support and encourage the next generation of creatives,” said Early. “Both Lia and Molly have demonstrated excellence in



From left, the winning artists Lia Contino and Molly Cummings receive their \$200 scholarship awards at the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre from Natalie Early. SUPPLIED

arts, and a commitment to pursue a post-secondary art education. We are excited to see how they will shape the future of visual and theatrical design.” Cummings, a graduate of Laura Secord Secondary School, is a multidisciplinary artist working in both visual and theatrical arts. Her piece “Detached” was recently featured in Brock University’s Drawn 2025 showcase. She will begin studies this August at the National Theatre School of Canada in the production design and technical arts program, focusing on themes of femininity and mental health. Contino graduated from Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School and has pursued art from a young age through a range of in-school and extracurricular programs. This fall, she will begin the Bachelor of Arts game design program at Brock University, aiming to apply her creativity and design skills to the gaming industry. The Niagara Pumphouse Arts Scholarship was created in 2010 following Butler’s death. In 2018, the fund was formalized to award \$200 annually to a student from one of three local high schools: A.N. Myer Secondary School, Laura Secord Secondary School and Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School. Recipients are selected from applications submitted by school staff.

**SHAW**  
Niagara-on-the-Lake

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU**

Please join us to learn more and share your feedback about plans for the new Royal George Theatre

The new Royal George will be Canada’s first fully accessible, carbon neutral theatre and will serve patrons and community members for generations to come while still preserving elements of the theatre we know and love.

On July 16 we are hosting a Community Consultation Open House to share our plans and hear your comments and questions. We are committed to community conversations and engagement and we invite you to join us.

We hope to see you there!

Sincerely

Tim Carroll  
Artistic Director

Tim Jennings  
Executive Director




Royal George Theatre Community Consultation Open House

Wednesday July 16 at 7-9pm

Royal George Theatre,  
85 Queen Street

Capacity is limited,  
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alltogethernow](https://shawfest.com/alltogethernow)  
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# Yellow Door brings ‘Lion King’ to life

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Theatre director Christoph Ibrahim hopes audiences will embrace a little “hakuna matata” when his cast of young performers takes the stage in “The Lion King” later this month.

Presented by Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Yellow Door Theatre Project, the musical will be performed for one night only on July 19 at Partridge Hall in the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre.

This adaptation of the Broadway show — originally based on the 1994 Disney film — will feature a performing cast of 50 children aged eight to 17. First staged in 1997, the musical is known for its elaborate sets, colourful costumes and choreography. But Ibrahim said this scaled-down version will focus more on storytelling and the emotional journey



“The Lion King” cast and crew hope to put on a roaring performance at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre on July 19. SUPPLIED/DAVID HASKELL PHOTOGRAPHY

of finding one’s place in the circle of life. “I’m excited to dive into (the show) and be able to storytell,” he said. “What better and more interesting people to tell that story than kids who are in the process of finding their own place in the world?” Ibrahim has worked in theatre for more than a decade in various roles, including stage and musical direction. He became involved in this production through his connection with Yellow Door Theatre Project, founded by Andorlie Hillstrom, who previously directed “The Lion King” for the company. When Hillstrom stepped down, Ibrahim was invited to take over.

“I was very excited to say yes,” he said. He noted the enduring appeal of “The Lion King.” Despite the original film’s 1994 release, more than a decade before any of the cast members were born, the story remains familiar, in part due to Disney’s 2019 photorealistically animated remake of the same name. “Most of these kids have heard a version of ‘The Lion King,’” said Ibrahim. He added that the production will be a unique moment for the cast. With such a large group of children involved, they’re unlikely to work together again, making the performance all the more special. “The Niagara region is so rich in arts,” he said, reflecting on the significance of staging the show locally. The performance begins at 7 p.m. on July 19. Tickets are \$15 and available at firstontariopac.ca. [daniel@niagaranow.com](mailto:daniel@niagaranow.com)




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**ANNO DOMINI 2025**

# Airport runway expansion brings environmental concerns

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

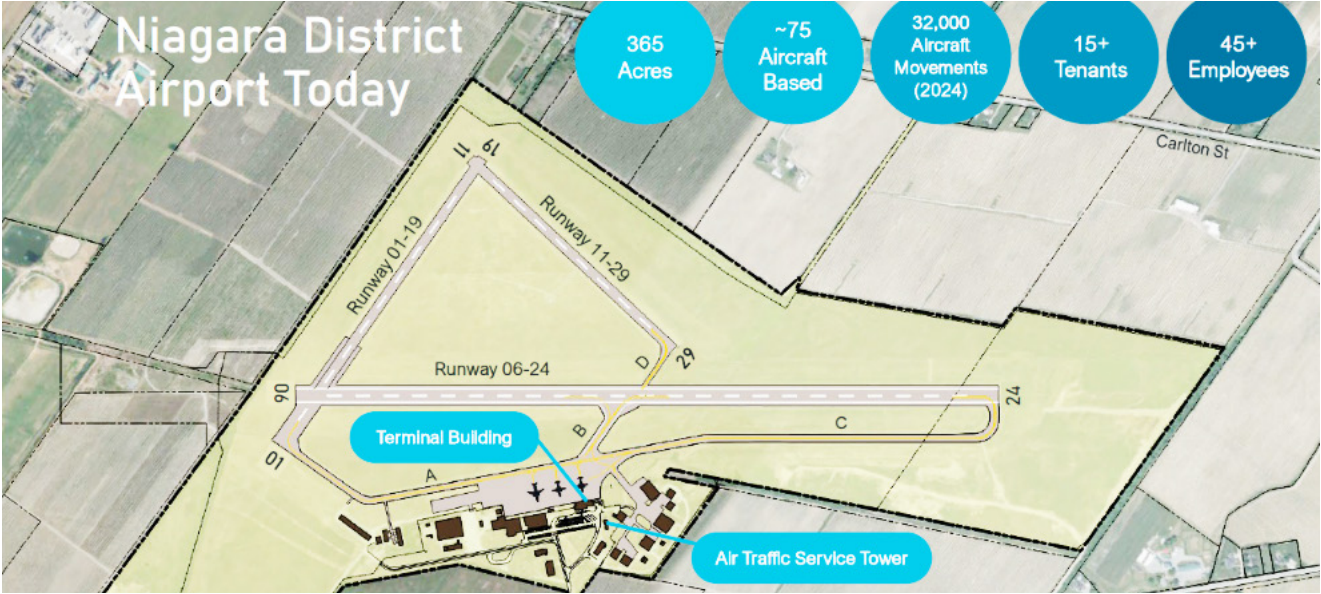
Some Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors have concerns about plans to extend the Niagara District Airport's runway by 2,500 feet in the coming years, as it would take up more space in the protected Greenbelt.

During a discussion about the airport's draft master plan at its last meeting in June, council heard from town staff about the proposed project to extend the airport runway from 5,000 to 7,500 feet.

"The airport lands are within the Greenbelt," said Kristen McCauley, the town's director of community and development services. "Any airport expansion would be within the Greenbelt."

Some councillors, including Coun. Sandra O'Connor, raised concerns about the runway encroaching further into protected land.

"I'm not supportive of them increasing their



The Niagara District Airport plans to expand its runway by about 2,500 feet, but it would need Greenbelt land.

footprint to include runway expansion," O'Connor said. "If they can expand within their current footprint, great."

The Greenbelt was established by the provincial government in 2005 to protect environmentally sensitive lands in Ontario.

The runway extension was one of several issues raised as the Niagara District Airport works on

its draft master plan, which outlines goals to grow the airport and up its services, from 2025 to 2045.

Council reviewed a town staff report and debated which comments to submit to airport staff and the airport commission for consideration in the plan.

Another major topic was the future of the airport's crosswind runway.

Coun. Gary Burroughs

said the runway "has not been in good shape for years." Town staff mentioned the potential for decommissioning it, although no decision has been made.

Crosswind runways are designed so that wind blows across the tarmac, requiring pilots to use specific landing techniques.

Burroughs questioned whether removing the runway could impact nearby

development on Glendale Avenue and Taylor Road, for four highrise buildings, at 17, 18, 21 and 25 storeys.

He referred to an ongoing dispute between the airport, the town and a developer over building height and proximity. The airport has said the proposed buildings violate federal zoning regulations.

Niagara District Airport also voiced concern this

June about hotel plans slated for York Road, which would be an extension of the current Staybridge Suites and Holiday Inn hotels, and the planned height of 10 storeys for that building.

McCauley said if the crosswind runway were closed, zoning rules would be reassessed.

"If there was a potential closure of that runway," she said, "the airport zoning regulations would be reviewed to reflect the operation of the airport, which would then potentially change the restrictions within the Glendale area."

O'Connor questioned whether the runway should be closed at all.

"I don't approve of endorsing in any way of a comment saying we should get rid of that crosswind runway," she said.

McCauley said the airport's draft master plan will be released "in the next short while."

Council voted to receive the staff report as information.

[daniel@niagaranews.com](mailto:daniel@niagaranews.com)

## Notice of Proposed Transition

QEW Garden City Skyway Bridge Twinning Project, Niagara Region, City of St. Catharines, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

### THE PROJECT

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) retained Stantec to carry out a 30-day consultation process in advance of the QEW Garden City Skyway Bridge Twinning Project located in the Region of Niagara, connecting the City of St. Catharines and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The project will address and improve the structural and traffic safety needs of the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW) crossing of the Welland Canal. The purpose of this notice is to inform you that the project intends to transition to the *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities and Municipal Expressways, 2024* (2024 Class EA). A Transition Memo was prepared for this project and can be found at [www.qewgcs.ca](http://www.qewgcs.ca).

### THE PROCESS

The project was approved through the planning process for a Group 'B' project in accordance with the *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities, 2000* (2000 Class EA).

### PROPOSED TRANSITION

This notice is being issued to inform interested stakeholders, members of the public, and Indigenous communities of the intent to transition this project to the 2024 Class EA. Transitioning will not result in any changes to the project's design, potential for impacts, or potential environmental effects. Any commitments made during the completed Class EA planning process such as the necessary environmental investigations and federal or provincial approvals will continue to be fulfilled. The rationale for transitioning to the 2024 Class EA, is to improve the efficiency of the process, and reduce duplication, while maintaining strong environmental oversight and protection. Any commitments made during the 2000 Class EA process will be considered and/or addressed or fulfilled under the 2024 Class EA process.

Information on the project, including the process under the 2024 Class EA can be found at [www.qewgcs.ca](http://www.qewgcs.ca).

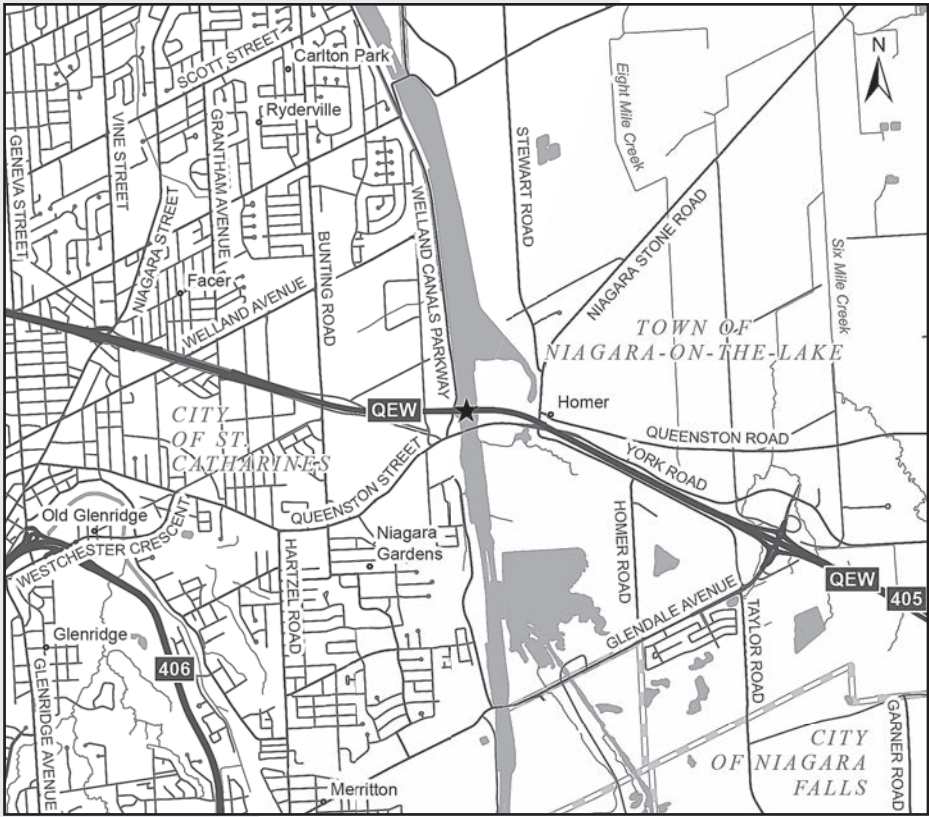
### COMMENTS

This notice will be available for a 30-day comment period between **July 10, 2025 and August 9, 2025** at the project website: [www.qewgcs.ca](http://www.qewgcs.ca).

If you have any comments or questions about this notice, or have questions about the project, please contact one of the following Project Team members:

**Deven Bhatla, P.Eng.**  
Project Manager  
Stantec  
300-1331 Clyde Avenue, Ottawa  
e-mail: [Deven.Bhatla@stantec.com](mailto:Deven.Bhatla@stantec.com)

**Osarumen Aigbogun, P.Eng.**  
Project Engineer  
Ministry of Transportation  
159 Sir William Hearst Ave, Toronto  
e-mail: [Osarumen.Aigbogun@ontario.ca](mailto:Osarumen.Aigbogun@ontario.ca)



You are encouraged to visit the project website at [www.qewgcs.ca](http://www.qewgcs.ca), where project information including study notices, background information, etc. is available. You can also submit comments or questions to the project team on the project website.

If you have any accessibility requirements in order to participate in this project, please contact one of the project team members listed above. Comments and information are being collected to assist the MTO in meeting the requirements of the *Ontario Environmental Assessment Act*. Information will be collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. All comments will be maintained on file for use during the study and, with the exception of personal information, may be included in study documentation and become part of the public record.

THIS NOTICE WAS ISSUED ON JULY 10, 2025

# Grist gives back with Project Share fundraiser

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

It's an addiction, but the good kind: that's how customers Dennis and Deborah Sunstrum describe their relationship with the Grist Craft Kitchen and Brewery.

The restaurant had an invite-only customer appreciation gathering Tuesday evening — its way of giving back to regulars, says owner Mamdouh Abdelmaksoud, who took over about a month ago.

"We're addicted," Deborah said with a laugh. "We go through Grist withdrawal."

Attendees were asked to bring donations and non-perishables for Project Share — a non-profit, important to the restaurant, giving in-need Niagara Falls residents emergency food and support.

Abdelmaksoud said the Grist has a great staff and loyal customers, some of whom visit two to three times a week. "We just



Guests help themselves to the complimentary food offerings at Grist on Tuesday. PAIGE SEBURN

thought it was time to show some appreciation," he said.

And who better to judge than those who keep coming back for more?

The evening doubled as a free tasting of some new menu ideas: Four different flatbreads, watermelon peach salad, key lime pie, carrot cheesecake and a Dubai chocolate bar. Guests voted on a ballot using a "like it" to "love it" scale.

"It doesn't mean we're putting them all on the menu, but we're just presenting them and seeing what people think," said

Abdelmaksoud.

Dennis said the exceptional staff is what keeps him coming back.

"We'll get the car and we'll go, 'Where are we going to go?' We'll go to (the) Grist, because, you know, the people," he said.

Regular Terri Scordino said she, too, comes for the staff — and for "great food."

Over the past month, Abdelmaksoud has been warmly welcomed by an overwhelming number of locals and regulars, he said. "It's been wonderful."

Deborah said he's "fitting in nicely."

"He's been great — right from day one."

Nothing has changed at the restaurant, said bartender Andy Savage, adding Abdelmaksoud is a "great guy."

"He's keeping everything the same: Same staff, same food," she said.

A "great owner," as customer Cheryl Rienzo-Meger would put it.

Regulars were offered a complimentary beer, cider or sour, along with wine samples from Reif Estate Winery and Konzelmann Estate Winery "to support local," he said. He's eyeing Cake Cafe on Niagara Stone Road for the next local collaboration.

The restaurant collected \$80 cash and \$823 in non-perishables. It's all going to the non-profit.

"A great way to appreciate our customers and give back to the community. They feel good giving back," said Abdelmaksoud.

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com

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# 15th annual Chardonnay celebration July 17

Jill Troyer  
The Lake Report

Staff and volunteers are in high gear this week, as preparations for i4C, the International Cool Climate Chardonnay Celebration, enter the home stretch.

The four-day event runs over the weekend, starting next Thursday, July 17. Organizers are particularly pleased that the very popular "Friday Night Flights" tasting event is back at the Niagara District Airport in Niagara-on-the-Lake this year, for the first time since COVID-19.

i4C is a big draw for tourists, promotes local wineries, and engages a small army of volunteers.

A contingent of more than 100 volunteers will clock over 500 hours of work, doing everything from setting up tables, linens and décor, to pouring wine and creating floral displays, said event director Trisha Molokach.

She says the volunteers are like a family, with many returning year after year.

"It's hard work, but also a lot of fun," she adds.

Molokach points out there will be more than 1,100 people attending i4C this year. She says 31 per cent are local, from less than 40 kilometres away.

Another 41 per cent come from farther away in Ontario, and the rest are from across Canada and various international countries, including France, Chile and South Africa.

Last year, she says, the event generated 556 room night stays, to the benefit of local hotels and short-term rentals.

Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake sponsors the event, which Brianne Hawley, director of tourism services, says brings in affluent wine country tourists who love food and wine.

"They stay longer and spend more. They're here for the four-day weekend, and they have time outside the i4C events to explore more of NOTL, from parks to theatre to restaurants and breweries," she says, adding, "That helps to encourage repeat visits."

This year, 43 wineries will participate in i4C. Some will be part of the events for the first time, while others are long-time alumni.

Winemaker Ann Sperling hasn't missed a year. In fact, she was part of the group that hatched the idea of celebrating Chardonnay.

"We wanted to have a positive way to let the world know that we make great Chardonnay, putting it on an equal footing with

international producers in a celebratory way," she explains.

"I would say it has been successful. When you go anywhere internationally, anyone who's into wine — whether sommeliers, critics or buyers — they know that Niagara Chardonnay is excellent. That's pretty cool, and ultimately, that was our goal."

Niagara has ideal conditions to grow excellent Chardonnay grapes. Sperling says, "The cool climate and the soil composition with limestone and calcium really works in our favour."

Sperling has made fine wines at a variety of Niagara wineries. This year she'll be pouring 2020 Chardonnay and Blanc de Blanc from Dobbin Estate, a new winery on the Bench that produces carefully crafted small-batch wines.

She's confident the Dobbin wines will compare to some of the finest wines poured over the weekend: "2020 is being hailed as one of the most important vintages this century for Niagara and I think people will be very impressed with this wine."

At the opposite end of the spectrum is NOTL winemaker Jeff Moote, owner and winemaker at Divergence Wines.

He's attended the event

before, but this year is the first time he'll be pouring his own Chardonnay at the various events. Divergence is part of Collab Wine & Beverage, a collection of producers who share resources.

"For me, it's great exposure for my brand, but it's also just a great celebration of Chardonnay," he says.

"Chardonnay grows everywhere in the world, but it's particularly suited, in my opinion, to our climate, and we do a really wonderful, cool climate expression of Chardonnay."

The other benefit for Moote, as well as others, comes with having so many winemakers in one place.

"We don't all spend a ton of time together, so it's great to catch up and swap stories and information about our wines and just learn from each other," he says.

There are many ways to participate in i4C. There are three marquee events, starting with School of Cool on Thursday, Friday Night Flights on Friday, and a tasting and dinner event at Riverbend Inn on Saturday.

All weekend, more than a dozen individual wineries are hosting special tastings or culinary experiences. The website has details: coolchardonnay.org

## The Lake Report

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- 2. Pledge** an endowment to the paper so your dedication continues to have a positive impact on the community after you are gone.

### What your pledge supports:

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- Preserving NOTL's history
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Pledge your annual donation at [www.lakereport.ca/donate-today](http://www.lakereport.ca/donate-today)

Contact us at [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com) to let us know of endowment plans

## Classifieds

**GARAGE SALE**  
Saturday, July 12 | 8 a.m. | 38 Colonel Butler Cr.  
Furniture, golf pull-cart, bedding, power-washer, blower, air fryer and more.

## Have an opinion you want heard?

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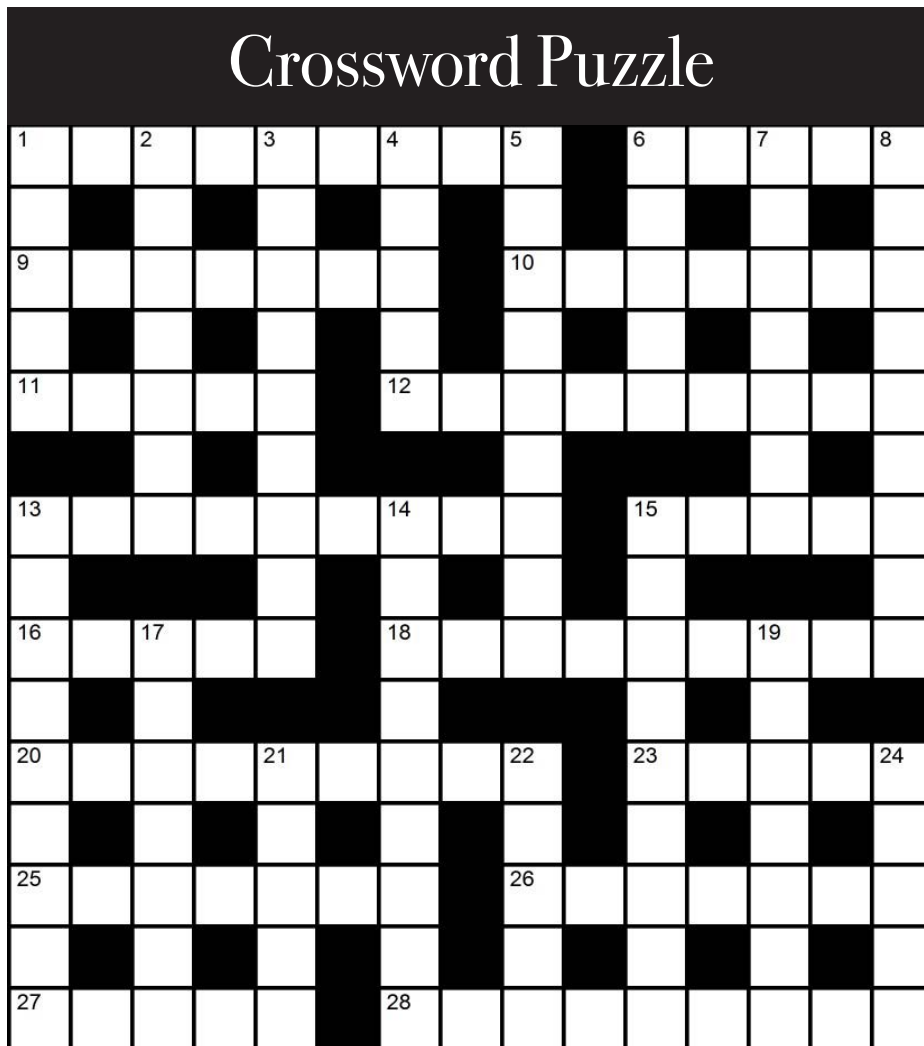


Have some fun

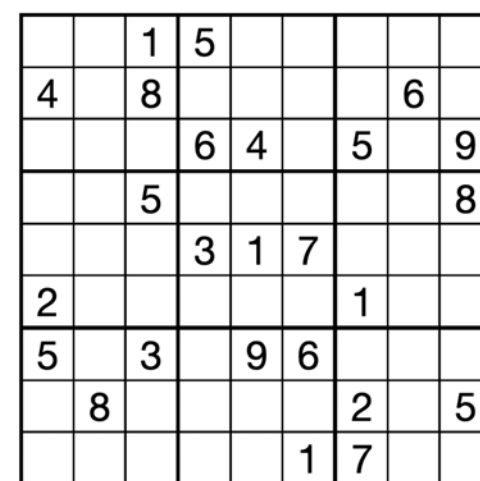
1. E.g. a ketch (3-6)
6. Copper and zinc alloy (5)
9. Item (7)
10. Not friendly (7)
11. Nail-like fastener (5)
12. Carry (9)
13. Bony structures (9)
15. Burning gas (5)
16. Forbiddingly (5)
18. Environmental fouling agent (9)
20. Deadlock (9)
23. Lukewarm (5)
25. Arabian Nights hero (3,4)
26. Mythical creature (7)
27. Expel (5)
28. Northern Canadian island (9)

1. Melts (5)
2. Exterior (7)
3. Satan (9)
4. Larceny (5)
5. Practice session (9)
6. Defeats (5)
7. Grand Canyon state (7)
8. Confection (9)
13. In good order (9)
14. Home for abandoned children (9)
15. Ornamental water jets (9)
17. Conceive (7)
19. Sanction (7)
21. Make law (5)
22. Peer (5)
24. Move rhythmically (5)

# Crossword Puzzle

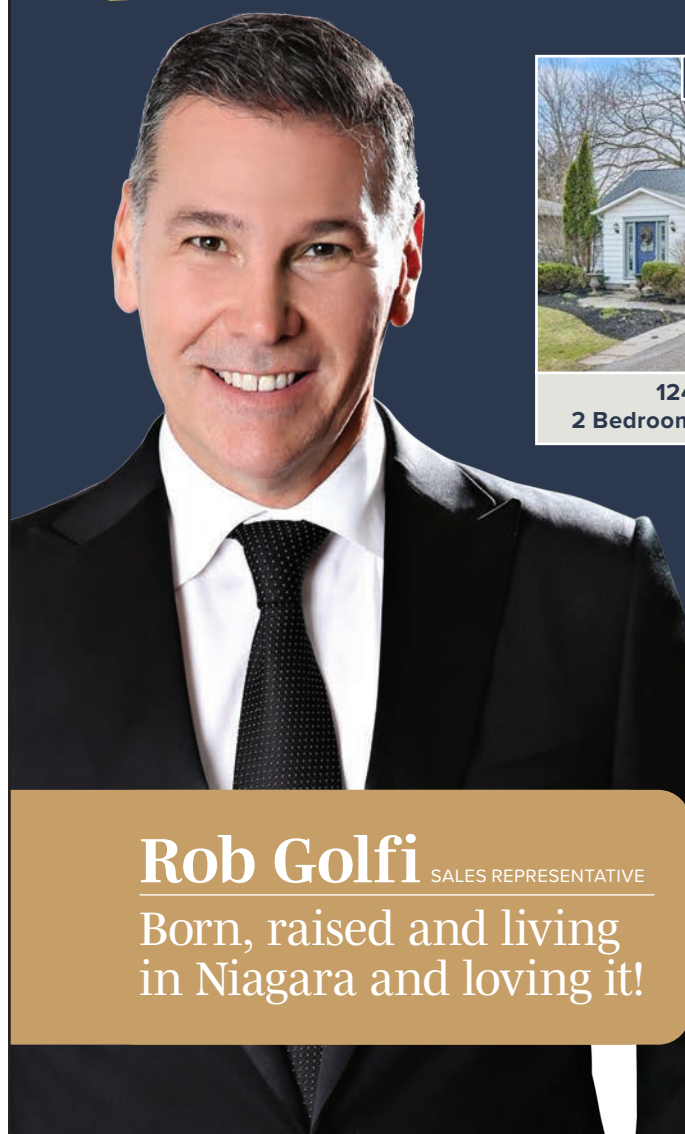


## Last issue's answers



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**EXPLORING HISTORY**  
WITH NOTL MUSEUM



**A view of Niagara taken from the Heights near Navy Hall**

This is a watercolour by Mrs. J.R. Simpson that was copied from an original by James Peachy, circa 1783. It is a very interesting view of the Niagara River from the heights near today's Fort George. Peachy was a surveyor, draughtsman, army officer and artist. He depicted a few of the settlement farms that were first established here in Niagara-on-the-Lake. This area is also where the King's Point Condominiums are today. An archeological dig held in 1998 discovered that the site appears to have been frequented by hunter-gatherers more than 6,000 years ago! Small groups of Indigenous people were likely using the site for summer fishing in the nearby marsh and river. For residents looking to learn more about this dig and to see the objects found there up close, make sure you sign up to attend our lecture on the topic on July 17.



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**Registration is limited**

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**What events hosted by  
the NOTL Chamber contribute significantly  
to the local economic impact?**

The NOTL Chamber not only supports its members through Business and networking events but also hosts Signature Events — the next is the Peach Festival Weekend — that culminates in our Shades of Summer Dinner happening in the heart of town!

Limited tables remain! Queen Street turns pink with our vibrant block party in front of the Historic Courthouse in Niagara-on-the-Lake on Sunday, August 10 at 5 p.m. Don your finest rosy or pink attire and enjoy live entertainment, Niagara-on-the-Lake wines, outdoor dining under the stars, all in the heart of the Heritage District.

Visit [www.niagaraonthelake.com/shades-of-summer-2025](http://www.niagaraonthelake.com/shades-of-summer-2025) for more information.

**Have a fabulous productive week!**

For more information regarding membership, please reach out to Stacey Mulholland, Membership Officer at [stacey@niagaraonthelake.com](mailto:stacey@niagaraonthelake.com) or call 289-547-7556.

**CHAMBER of COMMERCE  
VISITOR AND CONVENTION BUREAU  
NIAGARA - ON - THE - LAKE**

# Yellow plants give your garden an **extra zing**



**GROWING TOGETHER** 

Joanne Young  
Columnist

Well, summer has definitely arrived and our gardens take on a different look with all the mid-season bloomers like beebalm, coneflowers, black-eyed Susans and many varieties of hydrangeas and many more. When I design a garden, especially a summer garden, I always make sure to add some yellow-leaf plants in the mix along with other bold colours of summer. Whether it is a yellow-leaf tree, shrub, perennial or groundcover, the addition of this colour will make your garden pop. They can be used as a focal point, border accent or ground cover, and can help break the monotony of

green, especially in areas with dense vegetation. Adding yellow (or lime) coloured plants into a garden enhances the landscape in different ways. Firstly, it can dramatically enhance its visual appeal by introducing vibrant contrast, warmth and texture. The colour green is the most common colour in foliage (I consider it a neutral). Yellow-leaved plants stand out beautifully, offering an eye-catching variation which will always capture your eye's attention. Secondly, adding some yellow colour in a shady area brightens darker corners and complements other colours in your landscape. One of the best yellow plants for a shaded garden is any gold hosta such as 'Sum & Substance,' 'August Moon' or 'Designer Genes.' Yellow-leaved plants have a way of making other colours become more vibrant. The purples will be brighter, the pinks even pinker. Just imagine the large bright pink balls of hydrangea flowers, the multi-colours of coneflowers or the light purple lavender flowers with a stunning yellow companion. Everything will look more alive.



Looking for larger shrubs with a lemony-yellow colour? Consider the vibrant "Golden Spirit" smokebush.

Do you have a focal point in your garden, such as a fountain or bird bath or a special plant like a Japanese maple, that is not grabbing your attention like you hoped it would? By adding some yellow plants around it, you will definitely catch people's attention and make their eyes rest and take in all the details surrounding it. Yellow foliage also has seasonal versatility. In spring and summer, it radiates freshness and vitality. In autumn, it can blend seamlessly with seasonal changes, amplifying the garden's warm and cozy ambiance. One caution when adding yellow foliage to your garden is to avoid overusing it, as too much can overwhelm the eye. Instead, balance yellow foliage with neutral greens or soft blues to create a cohesive palette. For layered designs, place taller yellow-leaved plants at the back of borders and smaller ones in front to lead the eye through the landscape. If you are looking for some larger shrubs that can provide that lemony-yellow colour, you may want to consider shrubs like 'Golden Spirit' smoke-

bush, 'Lemony Lace' elder or 'Eye-Catcher' beauty bush. Some smaller-growing shrubs to use as accents in your garden are: 'Sunsation' barberry, 'Sunshine Blue' bluebeard, and 'Chardonnay Pearls' deutzia. When it comes to perennials with yellow foliage, there are many for you to choose from. For a part-shade location consider 'Sun King' aralia, lime coralbells, gold hostas and golden hakonechloa grass. Some choices for sunnier areas include golden oregano, lemon ball sedum, Dickson's Gold campanula and variegated irises. Adding plants with yellow leaves to your garden is a simple yet effective way to enhance its brightness, contrast and year-round appeal. These golden beauties not only bring aesthetic value but also evoke feelings of warmth and optimism. With careful selection and thoughtful placement, yellow foliage can transform your garden into a vibrant and welcoming outdoor space. Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at joanneyoung.ca.

## Obituary

### Willard Miller



MILLER, Willard A. – Willard A. Miller, 86, passed away peacefully, July 1, 2025, in St. Catharines, surrounded by love, leaving behind a life well-lived and deeply cherished. Beloved husband of Anita for 65 years, devoted father of Pamela Neumann (Ronald) and Kimberly Cantin (late David), adoring grandfather to Daniel Neumann, Caterina Neumann, Lauren Cantin, and the late John "Jack" Cantin, dear brother of Ralph Miller (Nella), and fondly remembered by many loved nephews, nieces, and cousins. He is predeceased by his parents, Russell Miller and Mary Miller, and his grandson, Jack.

A service to celebrate the life of Willard will be held at St. Mark's Church, 41 Byron St., Niagara-on-the-Lake, on Saturday, July 12, 2025, at 11 a.m. As an expression of sympathy, those who wish may make a memorial donation to either the Alzheimer Society or to the Shriners Hospital for Children. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com).



Let us help you share memories of your loved ones. Email [megan@niagaranow.com](mailto:megan@niagaranow.com) for package options.

# Memorial a reminder to **'think twice'** about drinking and driving

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Daughters lose their mothers. Parents bury their children. Siblings grow up with a hole that never heals. Every time someone grabs their keys after a drink, it's not just a crash — it's a lifetime of heartbreak left behind. "I sadly lost my mother because of drunk driving," said Solora Vaillancourt, who was 10 years old at the time of her mother's fatal crash. Ashley Marie Vaillancourt was killed in a single-vehicle rollover crash on July 9, 2022, when the car she was riding in left York Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake after a wedding, struck a culvert and landed on its roof, says a Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada July 9 news release. She was trapped in the passenger seat and pronounced dead at the scene. Her spouse, Brandon Joseph Rioux, was charged on July 15, 2022, with impaired driving causing death and having a blood-alcohol level



From left, two of Ashley Marie Vaillancourt's family members, her mother, Darlene Jones, and her daughter, 12-year-old Solora Vaillancourt, have been mourning Ashley Marie's loss for three years. "She was so full of life," says Jones. PAIGE SEBURN

above the legal limit. Today, on the anniversary of the crash, Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada — a non-profit organization that works to prevent impaired driving and support crash victims — unveiled a roadside memorial sign on York Road in honour of 34-year-old Ashley Marie. Family, friends, Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa and Niagara Regional Police Chief Bill Fordy gathered at the crash site, across from 1870 York Rd., to remember her and raise awareness. "She was so full of life,"

said Ashley Marie's mother, Darlene Jones. "When you lose a spirit like that over stupidity, it's just wasteful. It's just nonsense." Jones said if Ashley Marie were here today, she'd want her to know that her story is helping raise awareness and possibly save lives. "Ashley was totally against drunk driving," she said. Solora said losing her mother changed her outlook completely. "My life is a lot different," she said. Now, Solora speaks up when others have been drinking and are planning to drive, even if it's a friend's parent, she said. She refuses rides from anyone who has had alcohol and has become passionate about the message behind the non-profit. "I'm really now invested," she said. When Solora was asked what she thought her mom would think of the new memorial sign, she said, "I think she would be very grateful for all the appreciation she's getting and how we're honouring her life."

"I'm 100 per cent sure she's smiling down at us." The sign also sends a powerful message about the consequences of impaired driving, Solora said. "I'm overjoyed and sad at the same time." In a region known for wine tourism, it's all the more important to be mindful, says Dawn Regan, chief operating officer of the non-profit. "To us, separating the acts of drinking from driving, or using drugs and driving, is the best plan," she said. Regan called the sign a "true tribute to the family" that delivers a strong message. "You see that sign — maybe that makes you think twice," she said. The memorial was requested by the family, Regan said. "What a beautiful way to memorialize their loved one." Jones urged others to reconsider getting behind the wheel impaired: Call a cab. Get a room. Walk home. Sober up. "But don't drive. Please," she said. "It's not worth it." [paigeseburn@niagaranow.com](mailto:paigeseburn@niagaranow.com)

# Building a brain — is it **science-fiction** or reality?



**DR. BROWN**

Dr. William Brown  
Columnist

Molecular biology — biology at the level of its constituent DNA, RNA, proteins, lipids and sugars — beginning with Watson and Crick's catalytic discovery of how DNA codes genetic information in the arrangement of its four bases, has been one of science's greatest achievements in the last almost 75 years.

One astounding part of this story is that just as cells differentiate from a single fertilized egg into hundreds of different mature cell types each with highly specific jobs to do, so can mature highly differentiated cells such as adult human fibroblasts, be coaxed to return to a much earlier stage in development, from

which they can be redirected to develop into cells capable, for example with the right molecular prompts, of developing into version of layered foetal neocortex.

These miniature versions of fetal neocortex tissue form organoids, clumps a few millimetres at their widest, which faithfully reproduce the genetic script governing early cell differentiation, migration and the formation of the neocortex, including some budding connections between neurons.

But that's as far as they go, because without a blood supply, and dependent on diffusion in tissue culture for oxygen, they're doomed to go only so far, but no further.

Neat as these organoids may be, why would we be interested in creating something that lasts only for a matter of days? Because many genetically transmitted diseases of the nervous system influence the earliest stages of cell differentiation, migration and connections.

Beyond those diseases, the study of brain organoids provides a detailed map of



It won't be long when AI will possess general intelligence equivalent to and probably well beyond humans, says Dr. Brown.

differentiation at the genetic and molecular level, otherwise impossible for humans. That in itself is valuable but has its curious side interests. For example, it turns out that a difference in one amino acid in one protein, created by one gene, can make a huge difference in how the organoid neocortex develops.

A neanderthal version of this one gene leads to a simpler version of the neocortex — fewer neurons and fewer connections — compared to a human version of the same gene. Who would have guessed that a single

gene, indeed a difference in one amino acid, in one protein, could make such a big difference in the development of the brain? Not me until I read the article.

Recently, similar tactics have been used to create organoids of a complete system. One example, one study created a motor system from cells in the motor cortex and their connections with motor nerve cells in the brainstem and spinal cord. Another system created a sensory version including sensory cells in the spinal cord, thalamus and sensory cortex.

Readers can see where this might be going. If sub-systems in the nervous system can be created and connected with each other in meaningful ways, could a brain be created from its constituent systems?

Certainly not any time soon, for without a proper vascular system to nourish the nervous system, development would be as stunted as it is in current versions of nervous system organoids. However, incorporating a vascular system with an artificial pump to begin with,

might do the trick or perhaps a more natural heart could be developed later.

There's another problem. For any nervous system to work properly, different regions have to talk to one another and just as important, to the body's systems and the outside world through some version of vision, hearing and other sensory inputs. Who would want to do all that, and is it even possible, or desirable, or even unethical to try?

Some readers will recall the Star Trek series in the later twentieth century. It was science fiction at its best sometimes and never better than one show in which Data, a very clever robot serving on the Star Ship Enterprise was challenged by a scientist who claimed that as Data was a robot, he wasn't sentient and if not sentient, could be taken apart to understand how he was created.

A court was summoned to hear arguments pro and con, and eventually, the final judgement was made that Data was indeed sentient and therefore entitled to all the rights and privileges of

humans.

The same issue is often posed these days with artificial intelligence. Could future generations of AI be considered sentient and as with the case of Data and the Star Trek court, might AI be entitled to all the privileges and respect of humans?

Certainly, it won't be long, if we're not there already, when AI will possess general intelligence equivalent to and probably well beyond humans. Some versions of AI already show evidence of social and emotional intelligence beyond some national leaders these days.

And then there's the case of hybrids of AI and humans. Such combinations already exist for those who have lost their speech or, in some instances, their ability to walk, and at least one paper claimed recently that a similar device could read human thoughts.

*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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