



Gale resigns after claims he paid \$6K for Hitler-signed Mein Kampf | Page 5

## NOTL rejects weighted voting vision

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council is pushing back against comments from resigned Niagara Region Chair Bob Gale.

The dispute comes amid ongoing discussions about regional governance and possible amalgamation.

In a now-deleted Facebook post on Thursday, Coun. Erwin Wiens said Gale misrepresented the town's position by suggesting Niagara-on-the-Lake would support a weighted voting model at regional council — a system that would give larger municipalities greater influence.

This comes after Gale's letter to the province, sent March 4, which puts forth the idea of reducing Niagara Region's council to 12 members, introducing weighted voting based on municipal population and cutting down some municipalities' number of councillors.

In contrast to his first letter to the province, sent Feb. 19, Gale's letter doesn't support merging Niagara's cities and towns, saying his latest proposal avoids the "disruption" of amalgamation.

In the letter, Gale says his recommendations are supported by seven of the region's mayors, including Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa — Wiens, however, said in his post that the letter wasn't "reviewed, discussed or approved by" Zalepa before it was sent.

"The suggestion that NOTL would support a

*Continued on Page 8*

## WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

# Life is good for Janice

Despite living with cancer, longtime NOTL leader Janice Thomson looks back at long list of women who helped shape our town's identity with a nod and smile to next generation



Paige Seburn | The Lake Report

“From women lending living room furniture to the fledgling Shaw Festival for set pieces, to women hosting parties for Shaw actors and opening nights at their properties, to organizing fundraisers to preserve community services ... The names behind these many efforts are legendary,”

JANICE THOMSON  
NOTL LEADER

Janice Thomson has spent decades in leadership roles in Niagara-on-the-Lake, serving 18 years as chair of the Chamber of Commerce, eight years as chair of the Niagara Parks Commission and nine years with the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission. At 30, she was working as national sales manager for BMW. She currently serves on the boards of Niagara Health System, CAA Niagara and CAA National.  
PHOTO BY DAVID HASKELL

“Women Who Shape NOTL” is a special section dedicated to recognizing the roles women play in our town and supporting women from a broad field of areas. From farming and agriculture, to shop owners, community volunteers, charity leaders and town officials, NOTL has no shortage of women who help run the show.

Read more stories on Pages 9-17.

Generations of women helped build and preserve the character of Niagara-on-the-Lake — a legacy Janice Thomson, the town's 2015 citizen of the year, former head of the Chamber of Commerce and the

leader of many more organizations across the region, says still shapes the town today.

As communities marked International Women's Day this week, she reflected on those women and the community that stood beside her during a difficult year.

Thomson has been battling cancer,

which resurfaced last summer following her initial diagnosis and treatment three years ago.

“Niagara-on-the-Lake has a bedrock of community strength — developed by many women dedicated to its natural beauty, heritage and culture,” said Thomson.

A longtime figure in the town's tourism and civic life, Thomson spent 18 years leading the NOTL Chamber of Commerce.

“Moving to Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1995 opened many opportunities to serve my new

*Continued on Page 10*



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# Resident disturbed by bright outdoor lights pushes NOTL to act

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A Queenston resident says bright outdoor lights from neighbouring homes are spilling into her yard and making it hard to enjoy her property at night.

Jane Calver, who wants Niagara-on-the-Lake to crack down on light pollution, raised the concern during a March 10 committee of the whole meeting. She urged councillors to consider stronger rules on outdoor lighting.

"I feel like I've lost the use of my property."

Calver told council she believes the town's current rules leave gaps when it comes to outdoor lighting.

"It's such that I don't enjoy being in my backyard," she said.

Today's bylaws, Calver said, fail to address light spilling from one property onto another — what she described as "light infiltration" — and do not require lights to be shielded or directed away from neighbouring homes.

Calver said the problem is residential lighting and



Jane Calver says current bylaws leave residents with little protection from light spilling onto neighbouring properties — and said bright lights from nearby homes have affected her ability to enjoy her backyard. PAIGE SEBURN

became apparent after a neighbouring property was redeveloped and split into several lots, with new homes using multiple exterior spotlights.

At the meeting, she referenced research on light-pollution bylaws across Ontario that she had done, as well as reviews of guidance from the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.

"At first, it was about me and my property," Calver said. But then she noticed "a lot of light infiltration on people's yards."

She spoke with other residents in the neighbourhood when she walked her dog during the daytime and "a

lot of people feel the same way," said Calver.

One Chautauqua resident told her the light spilling onto their property was so severe they had put up garbage bags to block it.

During discussion, when Coun. Tim Balasiuk asked whether she had spoken with the homeowner involved, Calver said she had spoken with a previous owner, who adjusted the lights, but the situation changed after the property was redeveloped.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita asked whether lighting could be redirected or shielded.

"They can be shielded," Calver said.

Cheropita also asked staff whether the town has the authority to force homeowners to turn off their lights.

Staff said that would be difficult.

"I don't believe we have the ability to tell people how they can keep their lights on," Fire Chief Jay Plato said, adding that regulating light intrusion can be challenging.

"The wording of the bylaw, right now, does speak to the light not intruding or creating, essentially not shining, into other people's houses," Plato said, "because that was a concern that we had brought forward to us."

He said controlling lighting is "very, very difficult."

"It was considered when the review for the bylaw came forward," said Plato.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said the issue has been raised before and pointed to previous work by the town's environmental advisory committee.

"The environmental advisory committee has dealt with this issue," O'Connor said, noting there had once been a draft nuisance-lighting bylaw.

"Somehow that got morphed into property standards."

O'Connor said staff should take another look at the issue in light of work previously done by the committee "to address some of these concerns" that Calver raised, "plus other people I know that have raised concerns — even me."

"I'm very sensitive to that issue," she said, before she brought forward a motion recommending staff review that earlier work and report back on what options may be available.

But staff cautioned against changing the town's bylaws before staff examine whether existing rules already address the problem.

"Our first step should be to investigate the existing concern that's been brought forward," said chief administrative officer Nick Ruller.

He said the town's bylaw enforcement manager has indicated this year's changes to the property standards bylaw "aim to ensure property owners minimize light intrusion and light trespass" through the use of light deflectors or by replacing fixtures.

"I appreciate her willingness to come and delegate," Ruller said of Calver, but "at this point, I think it would be more appropriate for us to have staff work with her, identify and evaluate the concerns."

He said his understanding was that "the staff had offered to investigate further the concerns that she brought forward."

Later in the meeting, while council discussed a report outlining bylaw enforcement activity in NOTL, Burroughs referenced Calver's concerns, during a discussion about the kinds of bylaws staff enforce and how the town handles them.

"Earlier this evening, we heard about lighting issues," Burroughs said. "Are our staff confident that they're dealing with them the best that we're able at this point?"

Staff said updates to the property standards bylaw added new provisions for noise and lighting and the town believes it can enforce them, but will continue monitoring how effective they are.

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Resident Nicholas Colaneri created and presented these renderings to Niagara-on-the-Lake councillors to illustrate the proposed Virgil development, prompting thanks from some members of council during the meeting. SUPPLIED

## Five-storey Virgil proposal raises concerns over land ownership, height

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A proposed five-storey development in Virgil is raising pointed questions from councillors and nearby residents, who warn the project could set a troubling precedent and say key land ownership issues remain unresolved.

The concerns surfaced last Tuesday during a public meeting before Niagara-on-the-Lake council on an official plan amendment application for 1544-1546 Four Mile Creek Rd., which seeks to redesignate the site to allow a mixed-use development with 241 surface and underground parking spaces, a two-storey commercial building and a five-storey residential building containing 31 units and rooftop amenity space.

Town planner Victoria Nikoltcheva told council the meeting dealt only with the official plan amendment because the zoning bylaw amendment tied to the project has already been appealed for non-decision and is now before the Ontario Land Tribunal.

Even so, councillors pressed staff on several aspects of the proposal, repeatedly returning to one central question: how and when the ownership of the Line 2 Road allowance tied to the property will be confirmed and resolved.

The proposal incorporates the road allowance into the development layout, including several proposed parking spaces, prompting councillors to question

whether the developer is relying on land the town believes it owns.

Residents who spoke at the meeting warned the proposal could reshape how planning policies are applied in the area.

The owner is Stephen Aghaei of Times Group Corp., who did not attend the meeting to present the proposal. Coun. Gary Burroughs noted he would have preferred the applicant be there to answer questions directly.

Nicholas Colaneri told council the application represents a “full re-frame-work.”

“Height is not cosmetic,” he said, adding planning decisions “do not exist in isolation” and that “policies are not decorative.”

Colaneri said planning policies in the official plan and zoning bylaws are meant to work together, warning that site-specific exceptions can weaken that framework.

Neighbour Lloyd Redekopp, who lives south of the proposed development, urged council to reject the application, arguing it raises unresolved land ownership and height concerns.

He said residents have long treated the Line 2 Road allowance as town-owned and warned the project could eliminate existing access points.

“There’s daily use of these conservation lands,” he said. “We ourselves have two driveways that we use on the north side of our property onto this road allowance — the proposed plan eliminates these access points.”

Redekopp also objected to the building height, saying the proposed 21.28-metre residential structure — “almost 70 feet” — is “twice the normal height limit.”

“Some cell towers are only 20 metres tall,” he said. “This sets a bad precedent for future developments in our town.”

The concerns were also reflected in questions from councillors.

Burroughs pressed staff on the Line 2 Road allowance issue, asking how the dispute will be settled before the process moves much further.

“How does that get resolved before we drag this thing on too far?” he said.

Town staff said it cannot pause the planning process while the ownership issue is examined.

“There’s no ability for us to pause the timing on any of these applications,” said Aimee Alderman, director of planning, building and development services.

“The clock does continue” under Planning Act timelines, she added.

Coun. Erwin Wiens also questioned how the application can proceed while the ownership question remains unsettled.

“We have a whole plan that’s subject on something that’s critical — the ownership of who owns the land,” he said. “How does that work, that we go through this process, not knowing who owns what?”

Wiens also raised concerns about irrigation infrastructure and access tied to the road allowance.

“We’re aware that there’s irrigation lines, you men-

tioned that,” he said. “We own it, so we want to make sure that we have access to it.”

“But what happens if we get further down the line and they want to put pavement over top of irrigation lines?”

Coun. Wendy Cheropita raised concerns about the proposed building height and its location beside nearby homes.

“Right next to a residential area?” she questioned. “Is that precedent-setting?”

Staff said the proposal will be assessed on its own merits, noting the five-storey building is taller than what is typically built in Virgil and will receive closer scrutiny.

“I don’t want to say that it’s a precedent-setting situation, but it’s definitely something that we’re looking at more closely,” Nikoltcheva said.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor questioned how the application could move forward if land ownership tied to the proposal remains unclear.

“Do we not have to ensure that the land that developers are proposing to develop are owned by that developer?” she asked.

Staff said the application was deemed complete under Planning Act requirements and the town is reviewing it within those parameters.

Coun. Adriana Vizari also raised questions about consultation with local school boards, asking whether the Catholic school board had been contacted. Staff said it would follow up.

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## Roadside art will celebrate Indigenous crops

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

A roadside art project dedicated to celebrating farmers is taking shape in Niagara-on-the-Lake, with organizers aiming for a late summer or early September installation after weather and logistics pushed the timeline beyond its original spring target.

The upcoming installation will be the first of three part of "Thanks for the Meal," an initiative to honour NOTL's agricultural roots and bring a little extra colour to the farmlands.

This first installation, titled "Three Sisters," is an homage to the trio of agricultural crops significant to Indigenous peoples: three separate works of art, by Raymond Skye and Shayde Sandy, will show women harvesting squash, corn and beans.

Those works will appear blown up and laminated on large wood displays and installed outside St. David's Hydroponics on Concession 7 Road.

A team involved with the project, including represen-



From left, Art Gallery of NOTL board members Debbie Whitehouse, Ron Clavier, and Ken I'Anson met with their team at Niagara College last Wednesday to discuss their Thanks for the Meal project. DAN SMEENK

tatives from the Art Gallery of Niagara-on-the-Lake, met last Wednesday to discuss the images for roadside murals that will be part of the project.

"We're sorted out that 15 feet will be the max height," said Ken I'Anson, one of the board members. He added that foliage and crops will appear at the base of the murals.

The group also discussed technical details, including materials and the structures that will support the installations.

Ron Clavier, founding president of the Art Gallery of NOTL, said he believes the team was able to accomplish everything it needed

during the meeting: figuring out the logistics and timeline of the project.

Clavier said the team hasn't determined what the exact cost of the upcoming installation will be, but estimated each image may cost around \$10,000.

The team is working on fundraising for the project and Clavier said it'll be starting up another fundraising effort soon.

The meeting brought together several professionals who will help create the project, including a photographer, printer, engineer and lumber crew.

Niagara College staff and students will also be involved. Duane Bender,

dean of media, trades and technology, attended the meeting.

Cory Duncliffe and Mark Williams, owners of Niagara Sawmill, are donating all the lumber for the first installation. Clavier said they may offer a discounted rate on lumber for future installations.

"It's a remarkably generous offer," said Clavier.

Other contributors include Ryan Bath, an engineer with Canboro Designs, photographer Sonya Wilkinson and printer Reg Freer of the Print House.

Debbie Whitehouse, the third board member involved in the project, said the group also discussed using the internet and social media to promote the installations. They also reviewed project costs, which will be finalized once the artistic designs are complete.

Participants said the meeting was productive and that those involved support the project.

"There is a genuine sense of commonality and community," said Clavier. "Everyone immediately thinks this is a good idea."

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# March golf madness



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DAVE VAN DE LAAR

# Gale resigns as regional chair over ownership of Hitler's 'Mein Kampf'

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

Niagara Region Chair Bob Gale resigned late Wednesday night after two anti-racism groups questioned why he owns a rare, signed copy of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

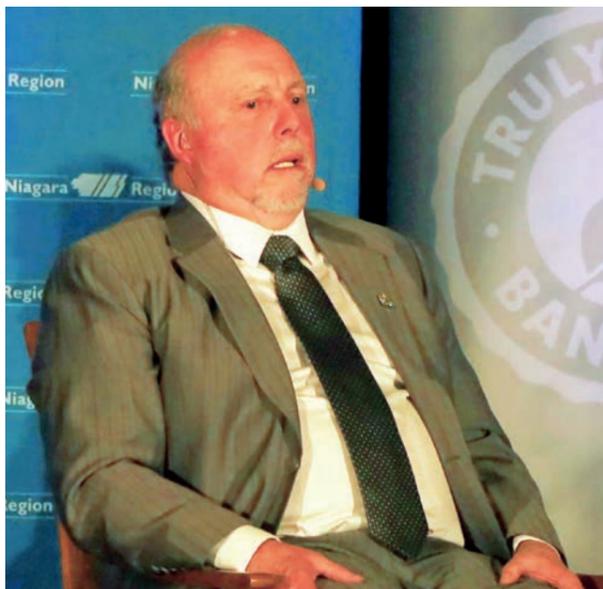
In a letter to Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack circulated to the media just after 9 p.m., Gale noted he is a "passionate historian with a broad collection of historical art and artifacts."

He said his collection includes an 1859 letter from anti-slavery advocate John Brown, plus letters from George Washington and Winston Churchill among other items.

He did not mention "Mein Kampf" by name but stated that "today, a member of the communist party circulated a dated document that listed my name as the owner of a historical book found in many libraries."

Earlier Wednesday, Saleh Waziruddin, an executive member of the Niagara Region Anti-Racism Association, issued a news release saying that Gale paid thousands of dollars for a rare, signed copy of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

He said the group received documentation from "someone concerned that Niagara's highest municipal elected official owns a



Niagara Region Chair Bob Gale resigned Wednesday. FILE

copy of such well-known, anti-Semitic literature" and demanded an explanation and apology from Gale.

Another group, Justice 4 Black Lives Niagara, made the same request.

In his letter to Flack, Gale did not directly address the concerns over "Mein Kampf," but said since he "undertook the necessary work to start fixing the issues at the Niagara Region, there was a strong vocal minority who decided they would stop at nothing in order to keep their fiefdoms and addiction to power and tax dollars."

"They wish to paint a picture that is untrue and hurtful to my family, my friends and those in Niagara that

believe in the hard work I have undertaken."

"This work is bigger than any one person, including me. This is about making the changes for the people of Niagara who desperately need and deserve change," he said.

Appointed by Premier Doug Ford in December, Gale had been leading the charge to consider amalgamating Niagara's 12 municipalities into one or four larger cities.

His proposal met strong opposition from some sectors, especially smaller towns like Niagara-on-the-Lake.

He later suggested re-vamping regional council and having it comprised

solely of mayors of the municipalities with weighted voting based on population. That idea also sparked major pushback from some people.

Purchases of "Mein Kampf" by collectors have sparked controversy over the years.

"Mein Kampf," German for "my struggle," is Hitler's autobiography and political manifesto, written in 1925.

It details his political philosophy, including anti-Semitic beliefs, and future plans for Germany and the world.

An invoice from National Book Auctions in New York, provided by Waziruddin's organization, showed that Gale purchased an "inscribed" copy of "Mein Kampf" for \$6,345 in 2010.

Waziruddin said both the book and the signature were authenticated in 2018 in a report issued by the Certified Appraisers Guild of America.

The group said an appraiser's report prepared by Jon K. Jouppien, a St. Catharines-based heritage consultant, valued the book at \$16,000.

The report says the signature was more difficult to authenticate but concludes it likely is genuine. It also identifies the book as a first edition, second volume of the text.

kevin@niagaranow.com



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## Change to St. Davids subdivision plan **rejected**

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Two Niagara-on-the-Lake residents warned council a proposed change to a St. Davids subdivision could open the door to more development — and most councillors agreed, rejecting the proposal.

The development at 46 Paxton Ln. would include 29 homes — 12 single-detached houses and 17 townhouses — as part of the Settlement at St. Davids (Extension). The debate centred on one block within the development, called block 18.

Under earlier conditions tied to the approval, the block was expected to eventually be transferred to the town after archeological work was completed. A new proposal before council would instead allow the developer to keep the land, while placing a “holding” zoning provision on it that would prevent development



Nicholas Colaneri addresses council.

until archeological requirements are addressed.

Right now, the developer still owns the land because the conditions tied to transferring it to the town have not yet been completed.

Residents Nicholas Colaneri and Tracy MacLeod spoke against the proposed change.

Colaneri said the plan removes permanent protection for the land and could open the door to more

development in the future, which he argued is not a minor change.

“Once this temporary symbol is removed, it then opens the door to additional development,” he said. “This is intensification beyond the (Ontario Municipal Board) approval.”

“I respectfully request that council refuse this staff recommendation report.”

MacLeod said the proposal raises concerns about open space that she described as “a significant part of the village’s history.”

“The sensitive nature of this site,” she said, should not be overlooked.

“The modification and the zoning amendments, in my opinion, are not minor,” MacLeod said. “The potential development of another acre of land without any more information is very concerning.”

Several councillors said they were uneasy about giving up the land.

Coun. Andrew Niven said he was “struggling” with

giving up land that “may or may not in the future be developed.”

To Coun. Erwin Wiens, the land has long been seen as open space in the community.

“It’s been that way since I was a kid,” he said. “Why did we not want to keep it?”

The conversation also touched on sidewalks and neighbourhood walkability.

“My concern is that, with this application, it almost gives us an opportunity to sort of get it right,” Coun. Adriana Vizzari said.

“What, then, would you consider a walkway? Like, what’s walkable if it’s without a sidewalk?”

Staff described this as a “chicken-and-egg situation,” suggesting pedestrian connections depend on other planning decisions that may come later.

“I understand what you’re saying — that it’s coming,” Vizzari said. “But we’re calling it walkable, but there’s no place to walk.”

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KADHAI LAMB BONELESS LAMB IN CINNAMON FLAVORED SPICY PREPARATION	GOAN FISH CURRY BASA FILLET COOKED IN A TAMARIND & COCONUT BASED SPICY PREPARATION

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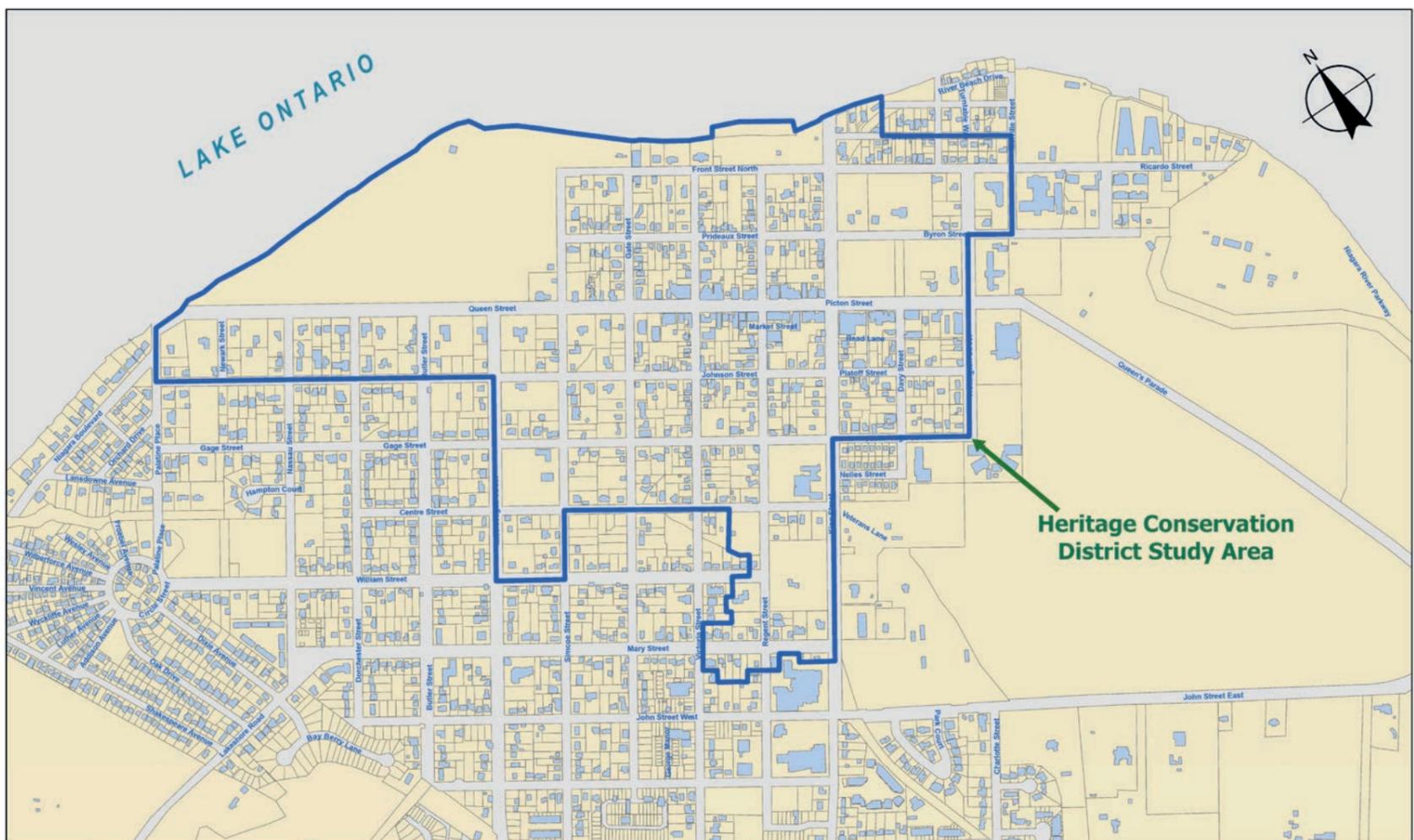




# NOTICE OF PASSING OF DESIGNATION BY-LAW AND PLAN FOR OLD TOWN HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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

The boundaries of the Old Town Heritage Conservation District are:



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

## Explanation of Purpose and Effect of By-law

The by-law designates all the properties within the boundaries of the Old Town Heritage Conservation District under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

## Notice of Objection

As per the Ontario Heritage Act, any person who objects to the by-law may appeal to the Ontario Land Tribunal within 30 days of March 12, 2026, by giving the Tribunal and the clerk of the municipality a notice of appeal setting out the objection to the by-law and the reasons in support of the objection, accompanied by the fee charged by the Tribunal, in accordance with Section 41 (4) of the Ontario Heritage Act.

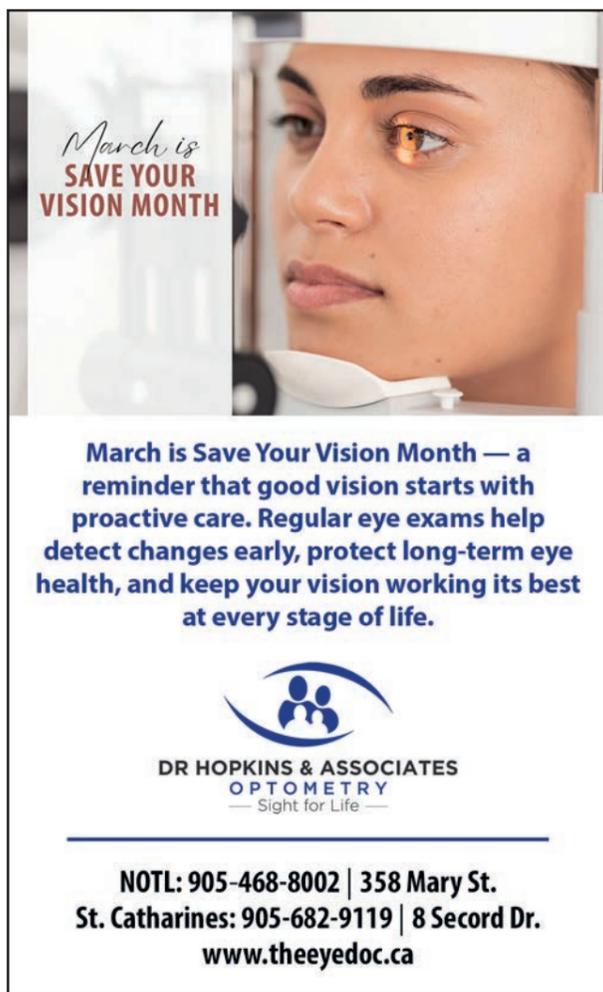
Please be aware, in accordance with subsection 41 (8) of the Ontario Heritage Act, the Tribunal may dismiss all of part of the appeal without holding a hearing on the appeal if the appellant has not participated in the public process for the adoption of the Plan by making oral representations under subsection 41.1(9) or written submissions under subsection 41.1(11).

Grant Bivol, Town Clerk

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

Dated this the 12th day of March, 2026

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



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## Councillor **fires back** at Gale after letter

*Continued from Front Page*

weighted voting model at regional council is deeply concerning,” Wiens said, adding it “undermines the principle that every community deserves a meaningful voice in discussions that affect their residents.”

In an email to The Lake Report, Zalepa said he is “not prepared” to “treat any single piece of correspondence as the definitive blueprint for how reform should unfold” and that “the right place” for ideas like weighted voting is Niagara Region’s governance and service delivery review, launched on Feb. 26.

The town touched on the matter on Tuesday, when the town’s governance working group gave its second update to council during a general committee of the whole meeting.

The group, formed after Gale sent his first letter to the province, is responsible for monitoring any developments related to the regional



Coun. Erwin Wiens.

governance review situation now happening in Niagara.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller said it continues to meet frequently and is still waiting for a response from the province to a letter the town sent last Wednesday outlining its opposition to amalgamation.

The letter was sent to Minister of Municipal Affairs Rob Flack and Premier Doug Ford.

The town is also awaiting a response to a March 4 joint letter Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa co-signed with the mayors of seven other municipalities in Niagara.

In the letter, the mayors outline a plan for “modernizing” regional governance, including lowering the number of politicians and shifting regional services down to the municipal level.

Zalepa said in his email that this letter “is where my commitments are clearly stated.”

“I feel like we’re in the bottom of the first inning,” Ruller said at Tuesday’s meeting. “But I think we have a long way to go still.”

Ruller said the town remains open to options that could improve efficiency at Niagara Region, such as new public service boards or municipally controlled corporations, while remaining “clearly” opposed to amalgamation.

He pointed to examples such as library boards and conservation authorities.

Ruller added the town is also preparing in case the province decides to move forward with amalgamation.

The NOTL Residents Association also weighed in with a letter submitted March 7. The group supported the town’s position but raised concerns about a lack of transparency from the provincial government, noting it is concerned that a regional government review conducted in 2019 was never released publicly.

“Without access to the original findings, municipalities and residents are being asked to evaluate structural change without access to the only comprehensive provincial review ever completed.”

Wiens said he was pleased Gale took amalgamation off the table for now, but added the town should remain vigilant while staying open to reforms.

“It might be off the table, but it’s not out of the room,” he said.

*daniel@niagaranow.com*



# Summer Company

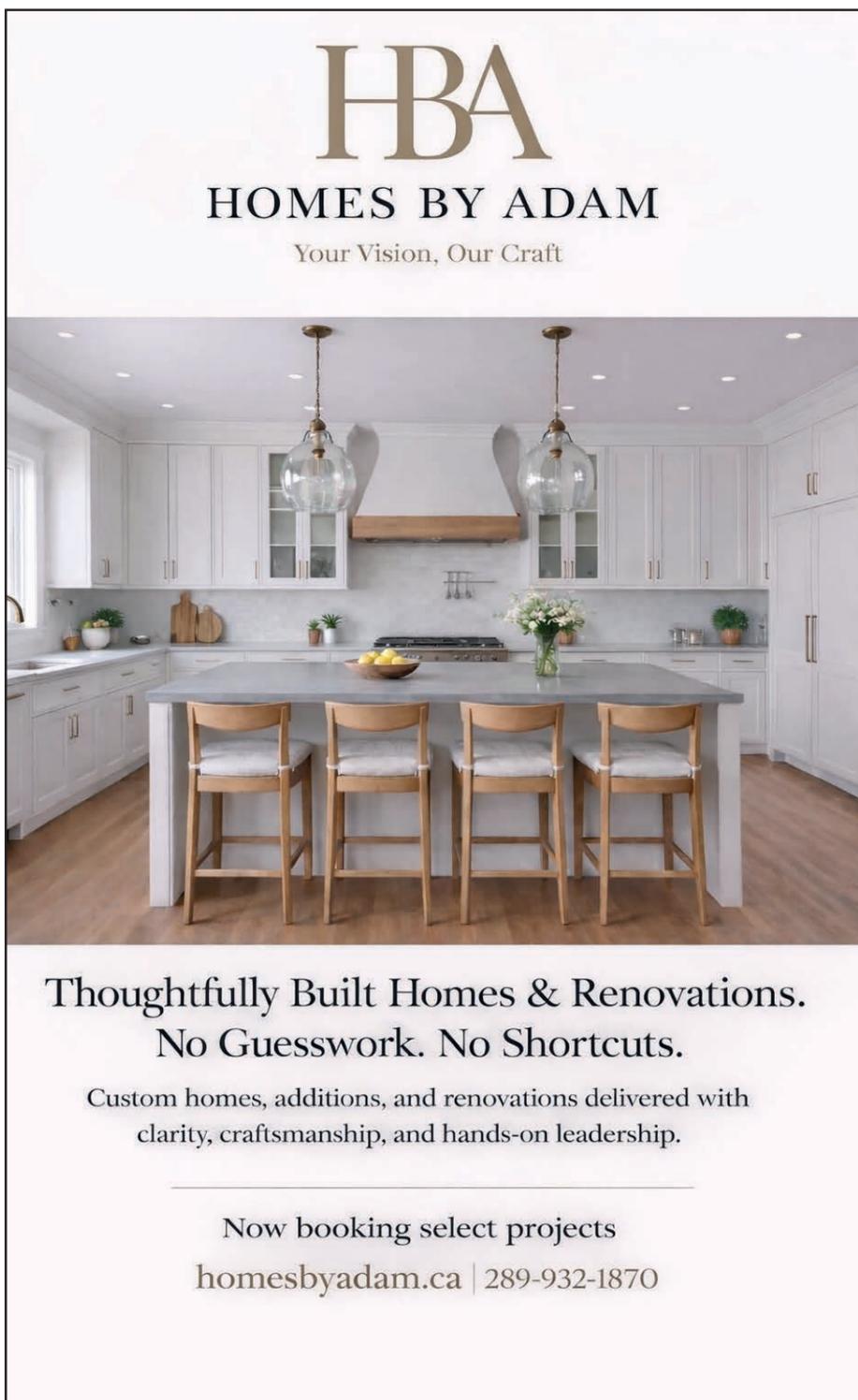
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# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## NOTL's enforcement supervisor, Erin Montanaro, **reflects on role**

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

For Erin Montanaro, the qualities that shape her leadership in Niagara-on-the-Lake begin at home.

"As a woman and a mom of three, I believe I have a natural ability to nurture, support and encourage others," said Montanaro, the supervisor of enforcement for the town.

"These qualities have helped shape my career, the relationships I've built both internally and externally and my ability to lead an incredible and dedicated team."

As communities marked International Women's Day on March 8, Montanaro reflected on the philosophy that guides how she supports the town, which she joined in 2017.

"I've had the opportunity to work in all aspects of bylaw enforcement," Montanaro said.

Today, she oversees the



Erin Montanaro says being a mom of three has helped shape the supportive leadership style she brings to Niagara-on-the-Lake's bylaw enforcement team. PAIGE SEBURN

day-to-day operations of the bylaw division and supervises a team responsible for handling investigations and enforcement across the community.

"My role is very much a support role for staff," she said. "They know I am always there to provide guidance and support."

Montanaro's team includes two general bylaw officers, one hybrid parking and bylaw officer, one short-

term rental coordinator, one urban forestry officer, five parking officers and two crossing guards who all report directly to her.

She said her team sees her as a leader "who empowers and encourages them to do what they feel is right."

"I wear a uniform daily, not because I am required to, but because it is significant to me as a leader to show solidarity."

Montanaro said a typical

day could involve required participation in a meeting, reviewing service requests submitted through the town's online portal, assigning investigations to officers and meeting with staff to discuss files. She also provides input into revisions and creations of new bylaws and policies in the bylaw division.

"Any inquiries or concerns that are sent my way, I try and respond promptly,"

she said. "Whether by email, phone call or a person who visits town hall."

Montanaro said when she meets with staff to discuss investigations, it's a chance to offer guidance and support while staying briefed on new developments.

"Or, an opportunity to just bounce ideas off each other," she said.

When complex investigations arise, she said she "typically will" assign the case to herself or "be heavily involved" with assisting officers to support the investigation.

Montanaro works closely "with various departments and external agencies," she said, including planning — such as heritage planning involving heritage properties — and the building department on property standards concerns.

"Along with other departments on occasion," she said.

Montanaro said the "most meaningful and gratifying" part of her role is being able

to "help enhance the quality of life for residents" through protecting public health and safety and maintaining community standards.

"I couldn't be more grateful to work in such a unique and beautiful place," she said.

Also serving as a management member of the town's joint health and safety committee and having post-secondary education in occupational health and safety, Montanaro said she has "a passion for it," adding health and safety "is of the utmost importance" to her "as a supervisor, a colleague and a public servant."

Montanaro, who served six years as an auxiliary constable with the Ontario Provincial Police from 2016 to 2022, said that when she's not working, she channels her creativity into interior design and decorating.

"Where I always find a project to fulfil my artistic side," she said.

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# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## No two days look the same in the life of Kim McQuhae

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Whether it's working on her farm, waitressing, setting up cable network connections, or making her award-winning jams and jellies, the Niagara-on-the-Lake resident says she's always done things on her own terms and is rarely bored.

"I got a lot of things going (at) the same time," she said, adding that she's "probably forgetting a bunch of stuff" she is doing at the moment.

For two decades, she has also won numerous awards for her jams and jellies, including five first-place prizes for the 23 jams she entered at the most recent Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto — earning her the moniker "the Jam Queen" around town.

Born in North Vancouver, McQuhae spent the first year of her life partly in Winnipeg before her family moved to Oakville. She lived there until she was 13, when her family moved to NOTL.

She described herself as somewhat of a latchkey kid who got good grades.



Kim McQuhae, owner of Gryphon Ridge Highlands, has had an eclectic career as a farmer, network cable specialist and server, among other things, and makes award-winning jams in her "spare" time. DAN SMEENK

As a teenager, she worked to save money for her first horse — even though she had nowhere to keep it. At first, she put the horse in her parents' garage.

"I heard her leave the house, go out to the garage, open the garage door, come back down, she walked back into the house, and she sort of yelled at me," said McQuhae.

"She goes, 'Kim, what's that in the garage? And I'm like ... 'Oh, it's just something I picked up while shopping last night.'"

She later moved the horse

to the tool shed. McQuhae joked that her father reacted so calmly that putting the horse in the living room might have caused more of a stir.

When she was 17, her father took a job in France. McQuhae decided to stay in NOTL because she already had her horse.

When she later asked her mother why she was allowed to stay behind, her mother told her she knew McQuhae had made up her mind.

She has supported herself ever since.

To keep her farm running, she has relied on multiple streams of income, working jobs that have included restaurant serving and construction.

"You always have to have plan A, B, probably C and D as well, right?" she said.

While working in construction, McQuhae often woke up around 4:30 a.m. to feed the animals at her NOTL farm, Gryphon Ridge Highlands. She would then head to a job site by 6:30 a.m. and work until about 3:30 or 4 p.m.

Some jobs took her as far as Burlington or Oakville.

After returning home to check on her animals and shower, she would start her night shift as a server at Zees Wine Bar and Grill around 4:30 or 5 p.m., working until closing time.

She would then complete her night chores before getting about four to five hours of sleep.

Over the years, she has worked on cabling projects at sites including Joseph Brant Hospital, Jackson Square and the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Stage in Niagara Falls.

As she approaches her

63rd birthday next month, she said she has started slowing down that work.

Without construction jobs at the moment, she now starts her day at a comparatively relaxed 6 a.m.

Much of her time goes to caring for the cattle, horses and chickens on her farm, where she also produces and sells her jams.

"Farm work is never done," said McQuhae.

She still works afternoon and night shifts at Zees Wine Bar and Grill and also helps a neighbour across the street who had a stroke.

Despite the recognition her preserves have received, McQuhae said making jam is simply something she enjoys.

"It's every year. It's a different year, right?" she said. "And I like to create new things. I don't like to duplicate anything ... It's just fun to compete."

That fun now includes making about 200 different jam flavours.

McQuhae said she has sometimes had to prove herself in male-dominated workplaces, but she has remained fiercely independent. In fields such

as construction, she said, women should not feel intimidated.

"I'm not easily intimidated," she said. "If you're good at your job, they're going to respect you."

She added that both boys and girls often showed interest in the work she was doing, and she realized she could inspire them.

"I think especially when I was in the schools, it was kind of cool," she said.

She recalled a story from a visit to Dennis Morris Catholic High School in St. Catharines, in which she proved to be a hero to the students — simply by installing the school's much-needed Wi-Fi.

"I was walking down the hallway with my ladder, and one of the three or four boys ran by me, and then they turned around. They said, 'All hail the Wi-Fi queen.'"

"I said to my boss, 'I need a T-shirt that says that.'"

She said young girls would sometimes watch her work on similar jobs, giving her the chance to offer encouragement.

"I said, 'You can do this,'" she said.

daniel@niagaranow.com

## Dedicated women have always helped guide NOTL: Thomson

Continued from Front Page

community," she said.

Thomson has held numerous leadership roles in the Niagara region, including nine years with the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, two of them as chair, and nine years as a commissioner with the Niagara Parks Commission, including eight years as chair.

She currently serves on the boards of Niagara Health System, CAA Niagara and CAA National.

She said those roles allowed her to help shape Niagara's international bridge crossings, help steward the 56 kilometres of natural beauty maintained by the parks commission, support regional healthcare and contribute to the work of CAA.

"I cannot imagine a higher honour than serving in these roles," she said.

In 2023, Thomson received some life-changing news.

She was diagnosed with uterine cancer and underwent a hysterectomy followed by eight weeks of radiation.

Then, the cancer resurfaced last June as a tumour near her left ureter that

affected her kidney.

"My instinct was to close myself off and handle the battle on my own," she said.

Since last July, she has undergone six surgeries to place a kidney drain and six rounds of chemotherapy, and has been receiving immunotherapy treatments every six weeks since December.

She said she's optimistic about her recovery.

"Following the oncologist's directions of improving rest, reducing stress and making recovery my number one priority has not been easy — but I feel it is working," she said.

Although her instinct when the cancer returned last June was to face it alone, the community she has spent years championing had something else in mind.

"The generosity of business colleagues, friends and family was remarkable," she said.

"Doctor's orders were to eliminate stress, rest and follow good nourishment and exercise protocols, but the community had other ideas. Surely, I needed more homemade soup, more muffins, more companionship."

She said she is grateful for



Janice Thomson says there's a long list of women who have changed the course of NOTL's history. PAIGSE SEBURN

the support she received and that when she needed time alone to focus on medical appointments and treatments, those around her, including her stepmother Elena Thompson and friend Nora McLellan, respected that.

NOTL's character and history, Thomson said, have been shaped by generations of women — from historic leaders to educators, winemakers and community volunteers — supporting efforts from the early days of the Shaw Festival to grassroots campaigns to protect local services and the environment.

"From women lending living room furniture to the fledgling Shaw Festival for set pieces, to women

hosting parties for Shaw actors and opening nights at their properties, to organizing fundraisers to preserve community services," she said, such as "to save the local hospital."

"The names behind these many efforts are legendary," she added, mentioning NOTL Museum founder Janet Carnochan and community volunteers Margherita Howe and Laura Dodson.

She also shouted out women in the world of winemaking, such as Madame Bosc, Norma Jean Lowrey Harber, Debi Pratt, Sandra Marynissen, Donna Lailey, Suzanne Jahnke, Sherri Lockwood, Connie Pillitteri and Andrea Kaiser.

Thomson also pointed to historic Niagara figure Laura Secord and community figure Si Wai Lai, along with Bluma Appel and Angie Strauss, as well as educators such as Pam Voth and Julia Murray, and women she said represented NOTL's strengths in agriculture and preservation through work with government: Blanche Quinn, Austin Kirkby and Gracia Janes.

She highlighted "the ladies of all the local churches" who established seasonal fruit celebrations and shared "treasured family recipes and traditions," noting their legacy includes families such as "the Hunters, the Dineleys, the Lepps, the Epps, the Moris, the Kurtzs, the Andres, the Dyck and Dick families, (the) Van deLaars," as well as "the founders of the annual Candlelight Stroll — Trish Romance and the Newville Candle factory and Neudorp family."

Thomson said her journey began earlier in the automotive industry, where she said male mentors shared their knowledge of the business and trusted her abilities, including Jaguar Canada president John Mackie, Jaguar vice-president of sales

John Webb, Jaguar vice-president of service Brian Green and BMW Canada president Vic Doolan.

At age 30, Thomson became national sales manager for BMW Canada.

"I had the unflagging support of my parents," she said, adding they encouraged independence and reminded her she was "made of sterner stuff" and could accomplish whatever she set her mind to.

Moving to NOTL in her mid-40s, she said, made her appreciate the lifelong ties many local families share and the way those relationships shape the town's sense of community.

"Their understanding of what makes our community strong and their willingness to share with all newcomers inspires me," she said.

Asked what advice she would give younger women hoping to lead or make a difference, Thomson pointed to the example set by generations before them. "Above all, be humble," she said. "Follow and learn from the outstanding women — and their families — who have set phenomenal examples of loving where you live."

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# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## For Lindsey Bridgeman, the grocery business is about community

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Lindsey Bridgeman didn't set out to build a career in the world of groceries.

But more than 20 years after taking a job decorating cakes at a Sobeys store, she now owns Niagara-on-the-Lake's newest grocery store — a milestone that reflects both her own journey and a changing industry where more women are stepping into leadership roles, she says.

At the end of January, Foodland opened its doors to the public in Garrison Village. Foodland is a grocery store chain under the umbrella of Sobeys.

"Getting offered this store was one of the greatest honours I've had," Bridgeman said.

She said the industry has seen a clear shift in the role of women during her career.

When she first began working in grocery stores, she said management and leadership roles were largely held by men. Over time, however, more women have stepped into those positions.

"Now, I would say, it could almost be turning ... there's a lot of really great females in these roles," she said, pointing to women in management at Sobeys such as vice-president opera-



Lindsey Bridgeman's Foodland grocery store opened in late January this year. She says anyone can achieve their dreams if they put in the effort. DAN SMEENK

tions Krista Payne, senior vice-president Jana Sobey and district operator Nikki Unrau.

"Women are really getting ahead now."

Bridgeman grew up in Waterford, Ont., which she described as a small town similar to NOTL in feel, though with a "much smaller population than NOTL is now."

She grew up with her parents and a sister seven years younger than her. Her mother also worked in the grocery industry, starting as a cashier before moving into the meat department and eventually becoming a seafood manager before

retiring.

Bridgeman said her mother provided a model for her and has always supported her.

"My mom has always been a really great supporter," she said.

She described her childhood as a positive one.

"I had a really nice upbringing," said Bridgeman, who added she also had "a lot of great teachers."

Despite that family connection, Bridgeman did not initially plan to follow her mother into the grocery business. She studied graphic design at Niagara College but decided not to pursue the career.

ager training program.

"I kind of excelled really well at the career and I wanted more challenges," she said.

Bridgeman has remained with Sobeys and Foodland ever since.

She first became a department manager, then an assistant store manager in Grimsby and later a store manager in Niagara Falls before being offered the NOTL location she now owns.

She said the key to success in the industry is showing up consistently and being willing to learn.

"Realistically, we're selling groceries. It's not a hard job," she said. "You just have to be able to come in and want to learn."

Bridgeman said women may sometimes approach the work differently, noting that attention to detail and different perspectives can shape management styles.

"The way I do things is a little boutique-y," she said. "A lot of the times, men in the business are more like 'This is the plan.'"

For Bridgeman, people are the most important part of the job.

She said store ownership is people-focused, and she chose to stay in small towns because they are places where people know one another. Her favourite part of the day is spending time on

the store floor, talking with staff and customers.

"If I could spend my whole day on the floor and not have to do anything up here (in the office), that would be I'd do all day," she said.

She said she greatly values her employees.

"The people make this run."

Bridgeman and her husband, Ryan, have three children — a daughter and two sons — and live in St. Catharines. Ryan also owns a grocery store in Niagara Falls.

She said the job works well for her family life. It allows her to attend her children's activities, such as watching her son play in a single-A hockey playoff game or seeing her daughter perform in dance.

She also spends time with extended family.

Although she no longer has much time for art, Bridgeman said she still enjoys painting.

She said she tries to raise her children, including her daughter, to be confident and to be their own people.

Bridgeman believes society has made significant progress in breaking down barriers faced by women.

"As a society, women have really come a long way," she said.

daniel@niagaranow.com

## Women celebrated, 100+ Women Who Care NOTL gains momentum

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

International Women's Day shines a spotlight on women making change in their communities — and a growing group in Niagara-on-the-Lake is proving what that can look like locally.

The town's 100+ Women Who Care NOTL held its first meeting last October and has raised \$33,900 in its first two meetings. A third meeting is planned for next month.

Under the giving-circle model, members meet quarterly, each donating \$100 to a charity chosen by the group and pooling the funds into a single large donation.

"Shows that women get



Julia Buxton-Cox, left, and Audrey (Pellett) Webber, right, of 100+ Women Who Care NOTL celebrate with Ann Mantini Celima of Wellspring Niagara after the group presented an \$18,800 donation Jan. 19. SUPPLIED

stuff done," said co-founder Audrey (Pellett) Webber.

The group donated \$15,100 to Hospice Niagara at its Oct. 22 meeting and \$18,800 to Wellspring Niagara on Jan. 19.

Webber, Julia Buxton-

Cox and Penny Milligan launched the group to bring women together to support local charities in NOTL.

"Penny Milligan was a founding member in Saint John, N.B., and my sister had been a member in Wa-

terloo region," Webber said.

"We thought that this was a great way to get women together to make a difference in our community."

The idea quickly caught on.

"I'm so happy with the support of our community," Buxton-Cox said. "We have surpassed 200 members."

The group has since added a plus symbol and changed its name to 100+ Women Who Care NOTL.

For Webber, the most powerful part of the group has been seeing women show up for their community — even when the weather doesn't cooperate.

She said the turnout at the group's Jan. 19 meeting — a day she described as having "a pretty big snowstorm"

— still saw women "come out strong," something that overwhelmed the organizers.

"I just love that over 100 women can get together for an hour and make such an impactful difference."

Buxton-Cox said the strong support from members has been encouraging as the group prepares for more donations.

"We're excited for our third meeting," she said.

The group launched a new website, 100womennotl.ca/, built and sponsored by NOTL resident John Gallant.

"We're so grateful for his amazing talent and sponsorship," Buxton-Cox said of Gallant.

She said the group is also

"thrilled to have Vintage Hotels sponsoring our meeting space each quarter," adding that Ferox and Konzelmann wineries donated wine and a gift basket as door prizes for members at the January meeting.

For women who want to give back but may not know where to begin, Webber said getting involved can be the first step.

"Join us," she said. "You may find a cause that is near to your heart that compels you to want to do something more."

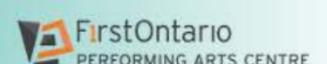
As Buxton-Cox put it, the formula behind the group's growing momentum is simple: "Great women plus good vibes equals big impact."

paigeseburn@niagaranow.com



# Jill Barber Trio

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# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## NOTL's Trisha Romance talks art, ambition and motherhood

Dan Smeenk  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Most artists, male or female, do not get the Order of Ontario and their own gallery dedicated to their work. But Trisha Romance is no ordinary artist.

Romance, acclaimed for Christmas and family life paintings, among others, and a longtime former resident of the historical McArthur Estate in Niagara-on-the-Lake, said she views herself as a woman artist, rather than an artist who happens to be a woman.

By this, she means her femininity gives her an important perspective on her work.

"I am very much a female artist," she said. "I am proud about that, about especially since my work is so family-oriented as a mother, so my greatest inspirations are from motherhood, and I don't think that that can be replaced by a man."

Her contribution to being a woman in the visual arts were recognized last Friday when Women in Niagara and the Greater Niagara



Famed NOTL artist Trisha Romance will accept an award for International Women's Day on Friday. She says she believes all women deserve the award. SUPPLIED

Chamber of Commerce honoured Romance at their International Women's Day conference in Niagara Falls.

She received their International Women's Day award and also speak at the sold-out event.

Romance said she was "humbled" by the recognition.

"I was at first taken aback

and said, 'Oh my goodness, why me?'" she said. "I look at so many different other women ... that could be in this place."

Born in 1951 in Hamburg, N.Y., Romance moved to Canada to attend Sheridan College of Art and Design. She grew up during what she described as the "Pol-lyanna" period of postwar

Canadian life.

Her parents encouraged her to "stay in your lane," meaning to follow the path that made her happy and commit to it, regardless of sex, she said.

"I was very, very, very fortunate growing up with the parents that I had," she said. "There were four girls in our family. I never had a brother. So, I didn't even know what it was like growing up in a true man's world."

Outside her home, however, she said artistic ambition, especially for women, was often dismissed with the stereotype of the "starving artist." She said it was seen as more of a hobby than a career for women.

She recalled reluctantly participating in a high school beauty pageant where students selected a king and queen. During the event, she was asked, "If you were a man, what career would you choose?"

"I thought it was a trick question," said Romance. "I had grown up with 'You could be anything.'"

She responded that she wanted to be an artist

and did not see a division between men's and women's careers, a comment that drew cheers from the audience.

Romance said a supportive woman art teacher encouraged them to support their daughter's artistic ambitions. That support helped lead her to Sheridan College of Art and Design, which she described as a springboard for her career.

Despite the attitudes of the time, Romance said she did not view obstacles as struggles. A student of history, she drew inspiration from women artists and writers whose work was rejected because of their sex and who wrote under male names to be taken seriously.

She said she feels fortunate her experience was not as harsh.

"I am just so blessed that I did have the life that I had," said Romance. "And that journey has been made ... better and more simple because of the inspiration that they've given."

Motherhood has also been a major source of inspiration, she said, adding that

raising children and pursuing a career are not mutually exclusive.

"There's a place for every woman in every career," she said.

Romance said she has passed along her parents' advice to "stay in their lane" to her son and two daughters.

One daughter, Tanya Peterson, now runs the Niagara Image Gallery with her husband, Jordan Morrison, which keeps a lot of Romance's work.

Her other daughter, Whitney Fowler, owns the Carolinian Café in Cayuga with her husband, Jordan Fowler, as well as a second Carolinian Café location in Hagersville.

Romance said she feels blessed to receive recognition for her work as a female artist and is proud of what women accomplish.

"I'm going to be looking out on that audience and thinking 'every single one of you deserves this,'" she said.

"Women could run the world. I'm convinced of that."

daniel@niagaranow.com

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Thank you to the new Foodland, owner Lindsey Bridgeman and staff for supplying fresh tulips to the first 100 women who attended our International Women's Day celebration in Simcoe Park on Sunday – a thoughtful touch that made the morning even more special.

- The Lake Report team

**The Lake Report**

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**Strong women make headlines**

**The Lake Report**

# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## Women at the NOTL council table say representation matters

Paige Seburn  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

For the first time, women make up half of Niagara-on-the-Lake's council table — a milestone the town's four female councillors say is helping bring broader perspectives to decision-making at town hall.

"This is the first council term where women make up half of the table — and that representation matters," said Coun. Maria Mavridis. "It brings different perspectives and experiences to the decision-making process."

Mavridis, who called serving as a NOTL councillor "both an honour and a responsibility," said women bring different experiences and viewpoints to town conversations.

"What stands out to me most is the dedication of the women working across our town — from council to staff," she said.

Day to day, Mavridis said there are "incredibly capable



Four women now hold half the councillor seats at the Niagara-on-the-Lake council table. Couns. Sandra O'Connor, front left, Adriana Vizzari, front right, Wendy Cheropita, back left, and Maria Mavridis, back right, say women's voices help shape community priorities as the town marks International Women's Day. PAIGE SEBURN

women behind the scenes" who plan projects, support residents and keep the town "running smoothly."

"Their professionalism and commitment are a big

part of what makes our community so strong," she said.

Coun. Adriana Vizzari said women contribute across the town in many

ways and that they "play a vital role in keeping Niagara-on-the-Lake running every day."

"I'm proud to serve as one of four women on council,"

said Vizzari. "Representation matters."

She said from front-line staff to leadership, women help support the "strong, vibrant community residents enjoy" and should have a voice in shaping the town's future.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said women help bring attention to community priorities such as health care, youth programs and child care, pointing to her work helping bring a nurse practitioner to town for residents without a family doctor.

"It's a very important role to have women on council," said O'Connor. "The more diversity in perspectives, the better decisions that we can make."

She said she appreciates having "so many women in leadership roles" at the town and highlighted women working on front lines.

"That is important as well," O'Connor said, "to have women involved in keeping our town running."

For Coun. Wendy

Cheropita, International Women's Day is a moment to recognize the progress women have made — and the confidence of younger generations coming up behind them.

"I've seen the earlier days, where, you know, women didn't quite have the same level of freedom," she said.

"So it's wonderful to see the newest generation and the absolute confidence — and their attitude that they can accomplish anything," said Cheropita.

"I think that's really, really beautiful."

Cheropita said that in her eight years on council she has seen a collaborative and inclusive environment at town hall, adding that she does not see women being held back.

"It's always been a very inclusive environment, as long as I've been working in the town," she said.

"There's really a wonderful level of collaboration and respect."

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It does take a Village .... Thanks to so many people in the community who provided transportation, yard work and weekly garbage sorting, meals at home, physical support as I attended chair yoga, church at St. Andrew's and shopped at Avondale, Hendricks, Phil's since cancer resurfaced in June 2025. Professionals at the Stone Road Pharmacy, Virgil medical clinic, Marotta Hospital and Walker family cancer Centre are providing amazing care on the road to recovery. Thanks to everyone — no one can do this on their own!

- Janice Thomson

# WOMEN WHO



# SHAPE NOTL



The Lake Report hosted an International Women's Day celebration on Sunday at Simcoe Park. About 150 women showed up to enjoy some coffee, tea and baked goods while mingling and sharing stories, before getting together for a group photo. As a special addition, the NOTL Foodland handed out fresh tulips to the first 100 women who arrived. A big thank you to everyone who showed up for this year's celebration. We look forward to seeing even more women out for next year's photo get together. PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VAN DE LAAR

The Lake Report has made a tradition of celebrating women in our community. This is the fourth year we have hosted a gathering and created a special souvenir edition of the paper, donating proceeds from the section to a charity that supports women. This year we raised \$750 for the Farmworkers Hub, with the funds being earmarked to support women workers.

# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## Sisters behind **Liebling Wines** continue family legacy

Zahraa Hmood  
The Lake Report

It's easy to take the life you were given for granted. For Alison and Jessica Oppenlaender, who spent their childhoods on a small vineyard in Queenston, they figured the lives they had were ordinary.

"We've always known grape-growing," Alison says. "In your backyard, you see these cool harvesters, you're just like, 'This is normal, every kid experiences this.'"

However, going away for university made them realize the world, and the knowledge, they had access to was far from typical.

"You realize, 'Oh no, people don't actually know where wine comes from or where the local food that's on their table comes from,'" she says.

"It was just a privilege for us," Jessica says.

Now, as the sisters continue a way of life for their family that started four decades ago, they hope to encourage a new generation of winemakers and grape-growers, especially fellow women, to forge their own paths.



Alison Oppenlaender, left, and Jessica Oppenlaender, say they're among many wonderful women in the world of grape-growing and winemaking, but hope to see women's contributions to the industry celebrated and highlighted more. SUPPLIED

They're the owners of Liebling Wines in Niagara-on-the-Lake, which opened almost three years ago — a longtime dream for the Oppenlaender family, which has been growing grapes in NOTL for decades.

The second-generation growers are the daughters of Matthias Oppenlaender, who co-founded Huebel Grapes Estates in 1984.

For years, the family planted and sold grapes to winery operators in the region. However, it was their dream to cement their own status in the winemaking world by producing and releasing their own vintages.

It was through Jessica

that their dream became a reality.

The younger sister says she's always loved science and technology. Going to university and taking a course on the biology of plants, however, branched a connection between that passion and her love of the outdoors.

"I realized they were a lot of cooler than human biology," she says. "I was hooked."

That led her to discover more about the science, study and technical art of grape-growing and winemaking and realizing she could have the best of both worlds.

"I can do all the tech, nerdy stuff, all this fun that I like, but I can also be outside," she says. "I really haven't looked back."

In 2021, Jessica earned a bachelor of science in oenology and viticulture. A year later, she told her father it was time to make their winemaking wish come true.

Then, in May 2023, Liebling Wines was born.

In their day-to-day work, Jessica and Alison say they split their time between being in the office and outdoors.

Right now, they're preparing for the start of the growing season: taking

part in planning meetings, purchasing equipment and preparing to welcome the temporary foreign workers who will arrive next week to begin their work on the vineyards.

Come summertime, and then harvest, they'll be outdoors a lot more, they said.

"There's no typical day," Alison says.

When it comes to the representation of their gender in the industry, Jessica says on the one hand, women are well-represented on the winery and winemaking side — on the grape-growing side, not so much, though it's getting there.

"I see a lot of young female grape-growers that have a brother or their dad's doing it and they recently decided to come back to the farm — very much my story — and they're trying to find their place in that," she says.

"I've talked to a few of them and I'm like, 'You're going to do something on this farm that you don't even know. You have so much value,'" she says.

Alison says it's important to highlight the presence of women in the world of agriculture, as the misconception that it's always a

man who's in charge hasn't gone away.

She mentioned, for example, being at a farming event with her husband where people assume that he, not she, is the farmer.

"The older generation all just went to my husband and said, 'What do you grow? What crop do you grow?' and he was like, 'Uh, I fix things. I'm an engineer. I'm not the farmer,'" she says. "But everyone just gravitated towards him and not me."

The sisters hope to see more women enter the agricultural space and noted that it's a large industry with a variety of roles one can find a home in.

"It can be as hands-on as growing in the field and in front of the computer doing accounting," she says. "What is needed in agriculture is so vast."

In the same way these women have supported and encouraged them in their careers, Alison says they have to nurture the next generation in winemaking and grape growing.

"If we want this industry to be sustained, not just producing good crop, we have to produce good people."

zahraa@niagaranow.com

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# WOMEN WHO SHAPE NOTL

## NOTL women celebrate International Women's Day

Andrew Hawlitzky  
The Lake Report

Across generations, the stories sounded familiar: mothers who held families together, daughters breaking new ground and friends who lifted each other up.

In Simcoe Park last Sunday, more than 100 women gathered for Niagara-on-the-Lake's annual International Women's Day photograph — and to celebrate the women who shaped them.

Elaine Sonoda from St. Davids, responded without hesitation to the question of who her role model is — her mother.

"At that age, you didn't respect what they did for you, but as you age, you think, 'Holy! Mom did all that for us.'"

The community tradition that brings together residents across NOTL to connect and celebrate women's achievements.

Across the park, women spoke about the people who shaped them, often naming mothers, daughters, mentors and colleagues while reflecting on how expectations for women have shifted across generations.



A group of about 150 women gathered in Simcoe Park Sunday to celebrate International Women's Day.

Several residents reunited with longtime friends, while others attended for the first time after seeing last year's photograph and deciding to take part in the tradition themselves.

Tanya Peterson, a boxing coach with the St. Catharines Boxing Club, attended the event with her five-year-old daughter Sasha — also a boxer. Peterson has coached women's boxing programs for more than two decades and created women-only classes at the boxing club.

"International Women's Day to me is about a community of women at all ages coming together and building that self-confidence, especially in male-dominated sports like boxing," she said.

Peterson's long involvement in the sport will soon receive formal recognition. On March 27, she will receive a Niagara boxing legend honour for her work expanding opportunities for women in boxing.

She described the group photo as a simple but meaningful way to represent women across the community.

"Without women, we would be nothing. We would be nowhere," said Peterson.

Several participants spoke about generational progress and the hope that younger women will continue advancing opportunities.

Tracey Tallman, who attended with friends dressed as Mrs. Roper

from "Three's Company" — orange wigs and all — said her role model is her daughter. She reflected on watching younger women move beyond the barriers previous generations faced.

"My daughter is a better version of me in so many ways," said Tallman. "She's aware of all my stuff that I carry forward as an adult, and she's just broken all sorts of barriers."

Sonoda also spoke about how views on women's roles have shifted during her lifetime.

"As women we should respect each other and allow every generation to become stronger and better than the last."

For others, the day centred on the everyday contributions by women that often go unnoticed.

Carrie Corfield, bakery manager at the new Foodland store, attended after decorating Women's Day displays at the store earlier in the day.

"Women sometimes rule the world in the background, even if it doesn't always look like it from the front."

Corfield handed out flowers for the women to hold during the

photo and described the celebration as a reminder to acknowledge women's work and leadership.

"A simple flower puts a smile on a woman's face because she feels appreciated and seen for the day."

Many women answered the same way when asked who they looked up to. They named their mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and women they had worked beside for years.

Tracy Frena attended with her daughter Rachel Frena and spoke about raising the next generation in Niagara.

"It's a great day to celebrate what women have achieved over centuries and to keep supporting young women so they grow up to be strong members of the community," she said.

Lois Chapman attended the event for the first time this year after returning early from a winter stay in Palm Springs, where she volunteers during the off-season.

"It's wonderful to recognize women because it's been a long time coming."

Chapman volunteers locally with organizations including the Shaw Festival, Music Niagara, the Niagara

Historical Museum and the Niagara Pumphouse Arts Centre.

Ruth Hunter, a longtime resident, attended with several friends who have also volunteered in Niagara-on-the-Lake for years.

"It's an important day because there are too many women who are still oppressed and treated as second-class citizens in many countries, so it matters that we come out, unite and show support for all women."

Hunter spoke with longtime friends Caroline Kindness, Margaret Walker and Tara Korkmaz who described the day as an opportunity to reconnect and recognize women who make the community a better place.

Participants began gathering at 1 p.m., greeting friends and meeting new residents before the photo was taken shortly after 1:30.

With the turnout for the photo growing each year, The Lake Report thanks all who attended and hopes more will come out in 2027 to celebrate the women who make Niagara-on-the-Lake a great place to live.

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**Canada** The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.



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**#66: Rather than a gift this year, buy a memory. Gifts come and go but memories are forever. Whether it be attending a concert together, going to the go-carts with your nephews or spending time doing something you both like, time is invaluable.**

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



**Contributed by Patty Garriock**

“Good friends, good books and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life.”

- Mark Twain

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## Warm weather a March relief

Lucas Javier, 7, catches some air at the Simcoe Park playground with a helping hand from his father, Dom. With temperatures rising well above the seasonal average, the pair enjoyed the rare treat of having the entire park to themselves.  
 DAVE VAN DE LAAR

## Opinion

# Mr. Trump's war comes to NOTL



**THE TURNER REPORT**

Garth Turner  
 Columnist



The surge in oil prices has already swelled the pump price here. War means more inflation, maybe higher loan rates and tough news for people selling pricey NOTL homes.

Our friends across the river decided to start a war. At least their boss did. Now we must live with it.

“Crazy times we’re all enduring,” says Kymberley McKee. She, her NOTL realtor colleagues and all the locals buying or selling houses — and trying to lead affordable lives — now have one more fly swimming in the economic soup. It’s a biggie.

Two weeks ago, a barrel of oil fetched \$63 (U.S.) on world markets. Sunday night, it rocketed past \$100, taking gas prices and inflation with it. If this lasts, forget about any Bank of Canada rate cuts. The next move could be higher, not lower.

Groceries, transportation costs and all the stuff on Amazon — everything’s under pressure, thanks to the American/Israeli assault on Iran, Lebanon and whatever comes next.

We won’t debate the legitimacy of the attack here. Above my pay grade. Let’s just talk about consequences.

The future’s hard to predict, but not the present. In the first week of the conflict,

gasoline jumped about 15 cents a litre. Blueberries and bananas may be next. Airline tickets will pop.

And eventually, everything made with oil — which is pretty much everything, like the plastic on the berries, plus the diesel and jetfuel that got them to the store — will become dearer.

The mental toll came with the first bombs. There was already enough stress flying around — like losing your job to AI, watching the Shaw tear down heritage houses or having Trump rip up our trade deal this summer — without a war. Sheesh. Enough already.

As detailed here over the past year, NOTL real estate is in a tough spot as consumer confidence wavers.

“I doubt there will be a spring housing market (again) this year,” says McKee, of Sotheby’s. “We may see a small bump in sales with better weather, but nothing substantial.”

“The foremost limitation on buyer demand is not just affordability but weak consumer confidence,” she adds. “On average, ongoing

Trump trade tensions continue to cause employment uncertainty and increased recession fears. Significant purchases (such as housing) are delayed if not deemed a necessity. Depending on the length of the war between the U.S. and Iran, rising oil prices may eventually trigger inflation causing the banks to increase rates which may weaken housing demands even further.”

Local realtors agree on one thing: pandemic-era prices are not coming back. Given current buyer heebie-jeebies, sellers must be realistic.

“We’ve had continued unrest in our lives for the last six years, so to some extent, the market churn is people moving on with their lives,” says Patrick Burke, of Bosley. “Seniors still move to seniors’ homes. Divorce, job changes, downsize, marriage, restless feet ... those moves still happen. What remains to be seen is the loosening of the overall market that results in a return of the out-of-town buyer. We shall see as we get into spring.”

Re/Max agent Greg Sykes calls the market “cautious, but stable” in which buyers rule.

“Markets always pay attention to uncertainty,” he says, “but real estate decisions here are usually driven more by local fundamentals like interest rates, employment and inventory levels. For sellers, the key advice right now is realistic pricing and strong presentation.”

Adds McKee: “In general, sellers can expect longer days on market, conditional offers and negotiation.”

And when it comes to those days-on-market, seems a lot of NOTLers with properties to sell don’t get it. Particularly with a war nation across the river.

“Statistically, we’re seeing a definite polarity in the market,” says Burke. “Either properties are priced and presented accurately and are selling within a month or, they’re priced too high and are languishing on the market.”

Indeed, fully half of the last 100 sales in NOTL took an average of 190 days to sell (a huge number) and ended up suffering a 20 per cent haircut on price. “That means their initial strategy was well off the market,” according to Burke. “Buyers saw those listings but kept shopping until the price was at a number that made sense.”

And that number just went down.

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

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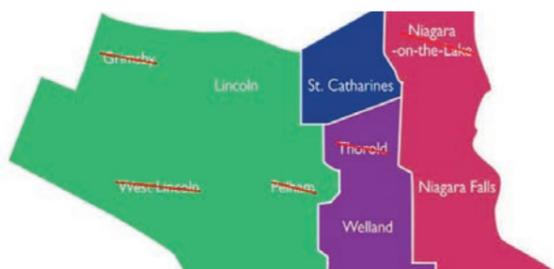
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# The realities of amalgamation



Ken Bosveld  
Special to The Lake Report



Retired reporter Ken Bosveld says Hamilton residents are still waiting to see cost savings from amalgamation.

Who doesn't want "better, more efficient government at less cost to the taxpayer?"

Or what about "lower taxes, improving services, reducing bureaucracy and achieving clear lines of responsibility and accountability?"

It sounds like a no-brainer. Where do we sign up?

Those were the exact promises made 25 years ago when the Mike Harris government imposed amalgamation in Hamilton despite widespread citizen opposition and outrage. Our local Conservative MPP felt so betrayed by his own party that he resigned and walked away from politics.

And those same promises of lower costs and better services were made in the early 70s when the Bill Davis government forced urban Hamilton and the surrounding towns and townships into the two-tier Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth.

Now you may be tempted to think that amalgamation would only occur if there is widespread support among the taxpaying residents. But think again.

Municipalities do not meet the democratic standard of existing at the consent of the governed. Rather, municipalities are created and rearranged by

the province.

Municipal elections may perpetuate the optic of municipalities existing to serve their constituents, but when push comes to shove, it is only Queen's Park that can do the pushing and shoving. No Canadian courts have had the courage to bring 1867 law into the 21st century.

The argument in support of amalgamation is rooted in a belief that bigger is not only better, but it is also more efficient and effective. If that were the case the most efficient government in Canada would be federal, followed by provincial and finally municipal.

But it ain't so.

Municipalities are responsible for parks and recreation, fire protection and policing, local road maintenance and snow removal, waste collection, social services, building permits, water and sanitation and a host of other functions.

There is no denying that municipalities administer the facilities and services that have the most direct, daily impact on the lives of their residents.

In addition, many of the services that municipalities provide are provincially mandated. So, while Queen's Park can boast that there have been no provin-

cial tax increases under the current regime, that is only made possible by dumping additional costs onto municipalities.

So, what has amalgamation brought to Hamilton, and particularly the suburban and rural communities?

It has led to a disconnect between citizens and their elected decision-makers.

Purely local issues that were once discussed, debated and decided in the local council chamber are now too insignificant to warrant anything more than a recommendation in a report, a show of hands by those who are usually quite unfamiliar with the issue, or simply being delegated to the bureaucracy.

Because political representation is based on population, not geography, it has resulted in rural and agriculture-related issues being decided by politicians who are unfamiliar with the communities and the uniqueness of agriculture industries.

In addition to the gulf between constituents and their elected representatives, amalgamation has contributed to a loss of community cohesion and identity.

From the Santa Claus parade to the festival in the park, activities that were once driven by passionate

local volunteers must now navigate their way through an onerous and frustrating bureaucratic process.

If amalgamation is right for Niagara, then it must be the people of Niagara who make that decision with eyes wide open, based on honest evaluation, measurable objectives and a clear and logical plan for achieving those goals.

When Hamilton's first round of amalgamation was heading off the rails, the province appointed the Stewart Commission, which concluded that the problem was not so much structural as it was rooted in "animosity" between urban and rural politicians.

In other words, it wasn't working because it was imposed, not chosen.

That's why it is essential that any recommendation to amalgamate be put to the citizens of Niagara in the form of a referendum, and that there be broad support among urban, suburban and rural communities, because only the taxpayers can truly determine value vs. cost.

Amalgamation was intended to deliver "better, more efficient government at less cost to the taxpayer." But, 25 years later, Hamilton residents are still waiting.

*Ken Bosveld is a retired journalist living in Flam- borough in the City of Hamilton. He was involved in a citizen-led referendum prior to amalgamation, and played a leading role in exposing the discrepancies and flaws in the Harris government's rationale for imposing amalgamation in Hamilton.*

## A 50 per cent solution to buying Canadian

Dear editor:

I was most interested by Dan Smeenk's article: "One year later, 'buy Canadian' sentiment remains strong" (The Lake Report, March 5 issue).

A year ago, when we all began to concentrate on "buying Canadian," I contacted President's Choice, asking them where the fruit for their orange juice came

from, hoping they might say Mexico or Spain.

In their reply, they carefully avoided answering my question. They said, "The juice is all processed in Canada."

That was not what I asked; I'd asked where it came from.

By their evasive answer, they did, of course, tell me the truth: it must be from

California or Florida.

Now, I can't bring myself to cease a lifelong habit of orange juice at breakfast time.

But, I did have a solution: I now have half a glass instead of a full one.

I have cut my consumption by 50 per cent.

Surely, every bit helps.

**Andrew Henwood**  
Old Town



## RIDDLE ME THIS

This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style  
Category: EAT LIKE A BRIT

**It's the super awesome name for sausages, especially when they're paired with mash.**

**Last issue category: NOTABLE NAMES**

**Clue: In 2023 this Nobel Peace Prize laureate called for a global movement to end gender apartheid by the Taliban.**

**Answer: Who is Malala Yousafzai?**

**Answered first by: Margie Enns**

**Also answered correctly (in order) by: Bob Wheatley, Catherine Clarke, Sylvia Wiens, Katie Reimer, Donna Pearce, KC King**

**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)**

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# Navigating the new heritage conservation district plan, pt. 1



**ARCHITEXT**

Brian Marshall  
Columnist

After nearly two years of study, research and work by the consultancy firm Cultural Spaces (along with many volunteers and town staff), in February, Niagara-on-the-Lake's town council voted to approve a new expanded heritage district in Old Town.

Bluntly, this action should have been taken 30 years ago and failure to do so by many previous council has resulted in the gradual erosion of Old Town's historic fabric.

But, better late than never — I applaud the current council for its action to protect NOTL's irreplaceable heritage assets.

However, as outlined in Debra Rowe's letter to the editor published in the Feb. 26 edition of The Lake Report ("Letter: We need clarity around heritage designations"), for those who

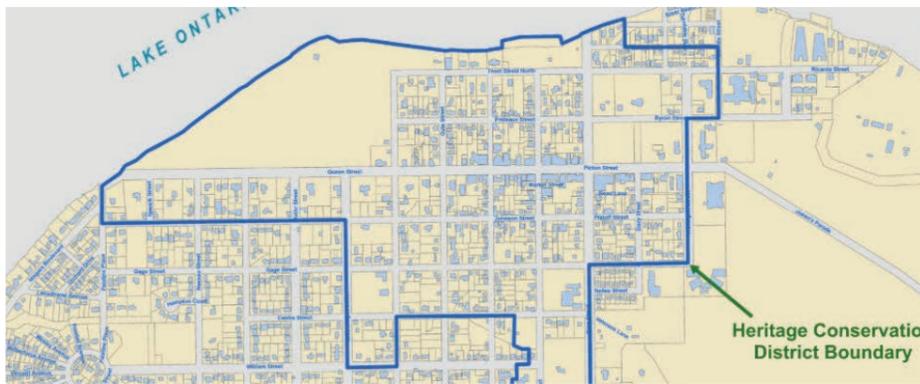
live in and/or own property within the boundaries of the new district, confusion abounds vis-à-vis how this will impact them in the go-forward.

As a broad general statement, if you own a Part IV individually designated property, I'm sure you already understand the rules of engagement regarding the stewardship of your heritage asset, however, the new heritage conservation district boundaries have introduced a whole new cadre of owners into a new and unknown paradigm ...

So, let's see if we can navigate the new heritage conservation district plan (and guidelines) in usable terms.

Off the top, you can find the heritage conservation district plan by going to the Town of NOTL's website, notl.com, searching "Old Town Heritage Conservation District Plan" in the search bar and clicking the link "Phase 2: Plan Report."

Now, if your property is within the new boundaries, it may be either "contributing" or "non-contributing" — there are different policies for each, with the latter being notably more flexible — and the simplest way to identify your classification is by going to appendix E



Of the 533 properties located within the boundaries of Niagara-on-the-Lake's newly expanded heritage conservation district, 255 were found to add to the heritage value of the district and possess architectural merit. TOWN OF NOTL

in the plan and looking up your address.

If your property is included on this list, you own a "contributing" property and, if not, it is "non-contributing."

Of the 533 properties located within the boundaries of the district, 255 were found to be "contributing," which the authors of the study defined as a property that "add(s) to the overall cultural heritage values, character, and integrity of the district, and also possess(es) architectural merit and design value in themselves."

But, for simplicity purposes, as a rule of thumb, the study suggests that if your property was constructed prior to 1915, illustrates an architectural style of the period and has maintained its historic integrity or is one of a group of historic build-

ings, chances are that it will likely be "contributing."

Contributing or not, if you are in the new district and want to do work on the property, you will need to contact one of the town's heritage planners in order to review your proposed plans with them and apply for the necessary permission to proceed.

Just as a point of reference, there have not been (to date) any fees associated with this process — it's free — and has been conducted on a pretty efficient timeline.

Still, I can hear the question now: "If I own a non-contributing property, why is it necessary to add this extra step into the permitting system?"

There are a number of reasons explained in section

7, "Policies and Guidelines for Non-contributing Properties," of the plan, but these really boil down to ensuring that any changes to a given property do not adversely impact the established character of the streetscapes or adjacent contributing properties.

We have seen this occur far too many times, when alterations to an existing building or, often more egregiously, when the design of new infill construction disrupts a historic streetscape and is a detriment to neighbouring characterful properties.

Yep, sigh of relief: if the plan is followed and enforced, there should be no fear of having an inappropriately designed monster McMansion squeezed into the lot next door.

Introducing this extra step into the permitting system for non-contributing properties is well worth the preservation of Old Town's historic streetscapes and character — your property values will thank you for it.

In section 6 of the plan, one can find the policies and guidelines that apply to contributing properties, which are sharply more defined and restrictive than those addressing non-contributing properties.

For example, whereas demolition of all, a part of and/or accessory buildings is permitted on non-contributing properties; after the "plans for the replacement building(s) or structure(s) have been approved, and requisite permits issued by the town"; demolition on a contributing property "should only be considered as a last resort, when the property or element is proven to be beyond repair and all conservation alternatives have been exhausted."

The policies and guidelines contained in section 6 deserve to be examined more closely. Stay tuned and we'll do that in next week's column.

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

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# Confused, curious and learning about **the Mennonites**



## ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

For a long time, immigration has been a large part of the Canadian story. Different waves, different reasons and different results.

It has been what it has been, it is what it is, and it will continue to be what it continues to be. How is that for an all-encompassing, general conversation starting and ending statement?

Let me attempt to summarize the discussion at our table last Thursday at the weekly Royal Canadian Legion fish fry. On King Street, next to Veteran's Memorial Park.

We had been discussing the current immigration situations around the

world. Deep stuff, and a break after I caught myself actually feeling sorry for Toronto Maple Leaf fans. Just for a moment or two.

Six of the people I was dining with had attended Niagara District Secondary School together back in the day, and each week I absorb so much about the history of Niagara-on-the-Lake just by being with them. I listen and learn, and each week we seem to veer off into other lanes.

Really, I hesitate to ramble about recent immigration, although so much has been "not that long ago." With caution, I am going to speak about Mennonites, after several discussions at the Legion and on the telephone with my new pal, George Dyck. Not Dueck or Dick, and yes, it is easy to get confused.

It is shocking how little I know about such an important group of people here in NOTL. I have lived here for some 40 years, and have driven or run past Mennonite churches hundreds of times, with little thought about their history. Shame on me? Not really, it's just the way it has been.



Mennonite immigrants who settled in Niagara-on-the-Lake made valuable contributions to the community, such as Peter Wall, who established the former Niagara Canning Company in 1940. SUPPLIED

So many pals from the old Hot Tub Hockey League, Chautauqua, and around town.

The Mennonites are an Anabaptist Christian group originating from the 16th century's Protestant reformation, named after their leader, Menno Simons.

Full disclosure: until last Thursday I had not realized that the Protestants were the people who were protesting against the Catholic church. Maybe most people knew this, but I didn't.

The Mennonites have historically been known as the "peace church."

As a rambling aside, that may be true, but they had some mean and tough football players on the Trojans while I played for the Sir Winston Churchill Bulldogs.

Back deftly to George

Dyck. He is a retired high school teacher, math and auto mechanics, and is now a very serious and knowledgeable history buff.

He splits his time between here and Birtle, Man., for family reasons. Classic Canadian prairie land, right near the border with Saskatchewan. And he does much charitable work helping out the good and brave people in Ukraine.

Almost all that I know about the Mennonite story is because of George. Not surprisingly, he is a patient and interesting teacher. Never condescending, he answers my questions, often subtly adding a little bit of extra information.

Let me offer a very brief sampling and, while confused, I hope I am accurate.

(With apologies to my pal

and teacher George. Any mistakes are my fault.)

Late in the 15th century, many Mennonites moved to Poland. Late in the 18th century, Catherine the Great and later the Russian Revolution. In 1919, after the First World War, many of the Dutch moved to Prussia, and started speaking German. Some were sent to Siberia, and in 1948, many came to Canada. George was born here in 1950.

Confused? I was too. I hope this brief rambling leads to further historic research by someone who can clearly explain the not-that-long-ago history of the Mennonite immigration waves to Niagara and Canada.

From what I understand, hopefully accurately, for some years the Conservative

government didn't allow Mennonites to immigrate to Canada. I am obviously rambling without any real direction, which may be as it should be. Occasionally.

Perhaps a professional journalist will take up the challenge of explaining the Mennonite immigration story as it relates to the Niagara region.

Such an influential group of Niagara citizens, who have had such an impact.

A very partial list of family names: Reimer, Neufeld, Wiens, Bergen, Klassen, Janzen, Enns, Derksen, Epp, Lepp and more. And more.

And they have all arrived in Niagara, not that long ago.

Now this has been an unusual Ross's Ramblings, wouldn't you say?

Stay tuned.

[rossrocket9@gmail.com](mailto:rossrocket9@gmail.com)

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# If NOTL doesn't want amalgamation, **what do we want?**



David Israelson  
Special to The Lake Report

If you have the feeling that Premier Doug Ford's government is aiming to saddle Niagara-on-the-Lake with amalgamation whether we like it or not, you're not alone.

The clumsy attempt by appointed Niagara Regional Chair Bob Gale to force a quick debate about amalgamation may have set back the dubious cause, but did it?

Gale's own regional councillors ordered him to stop bugging us about amalgamation, but here we are talking about it — NOTL's ratepayers, our lord mayor, town council and ordinary residents like me.

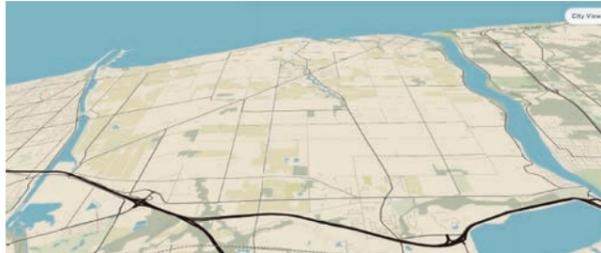
There seems to be a consensus emerging that we don't want amalgamation. But what do we want? It's time for our local leaders to speak up.

For many years, and through many local councils (though not always), Niagara-on-the-Lake has said no to change, with only vague alternatives. Our successive councils have been less good at getting 110 per cent behind visionary moves, though.

Why isn't there more support for the amazing work the Niagara Foundation is doing at the Wilderness, for example? Councillors should be posing in front of it every day.

Which brings us back to amalgamation: was Gale's ham-handed effort a scheme to allow Ford to put Niagara-wide mega-government on the province's agenda quickly?

Ford claims no, but he has shown no hesitation about disemboweling other municipalities. He cut Toronto's



Writer David Israelson says NOTL needs to find out what it does want, if it doesn't want forced amalgamation.

city council in half, gave mayors unwanted bossy new "strong mayor" powers, scrapped and rewrote planning laws to favour developers and sprawl regardless of whether it's good for cities and towns.

To its credit, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association quickly came up with a position paper opposing amalgamation, based on research into whether it would save NOTL taxpayers money.

Hint: it won't.

And Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa has also come out firmly against amalgamation. We'll see if all this works, or if the province simply goes

ahead and ignores the wishes of local people and their representatives.

The residents association has gathered data and the town has more data at its disposal showing that NOTL taxpayers would be worse off if amalgamation takes place.

There was also a regional report looking at amalgamation done in 2019, which the region so far has refused to make public. Why?

The bigger question is: Why mash up Canada's most beautiful town?

The answer is simple. Ford has a vision of building the Niagara region into a Las Vegas-style tourist

magnet that would attract exponentially more visitors than we already welcome.

NOTL likely doesn't have to worry about becoming casino-ville, but forcing our town to add more poorly planned development could easily be a part of this vision.

For those who would pave more of Niagara, the logic of amalgamation is that it leads to bold and quick decision-making. It's harder to commit provincially taxpayer funds and attract private investment when there are 12 pesky local mayors and governments that want a say.

We should have a say though. We live here.

Enhancing region-wide tourism could actually be a great idea if done right. But can the Ford government be counted on this?

We need only to gaze at the hellscape Ford has made of Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre to see what can happen when the public is ignored.

It's commendable that anti-amalgamation voices among ratepayers, NOTL's council and regional councillors are marshalling their facts to oppose any unwanted moves to turn Niagara into a political mosh pit.

But as we have seen so many times in this era of so-called populism, that facts won't necessarily matter to politicians who have already made up their minds.

That's why it's so crucial for NOTL's council to try something it has seldom done before, over many years — show some vision.

What exactly do we want for NOTL? What should it look like in 10 years? Maybe almost the same as now, only better. How?

Our local leaders should think boldly and speak clearly. It's time to dream — otherwise, someone else will be dreaming for us.

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



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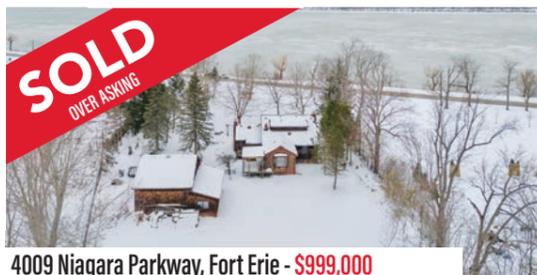
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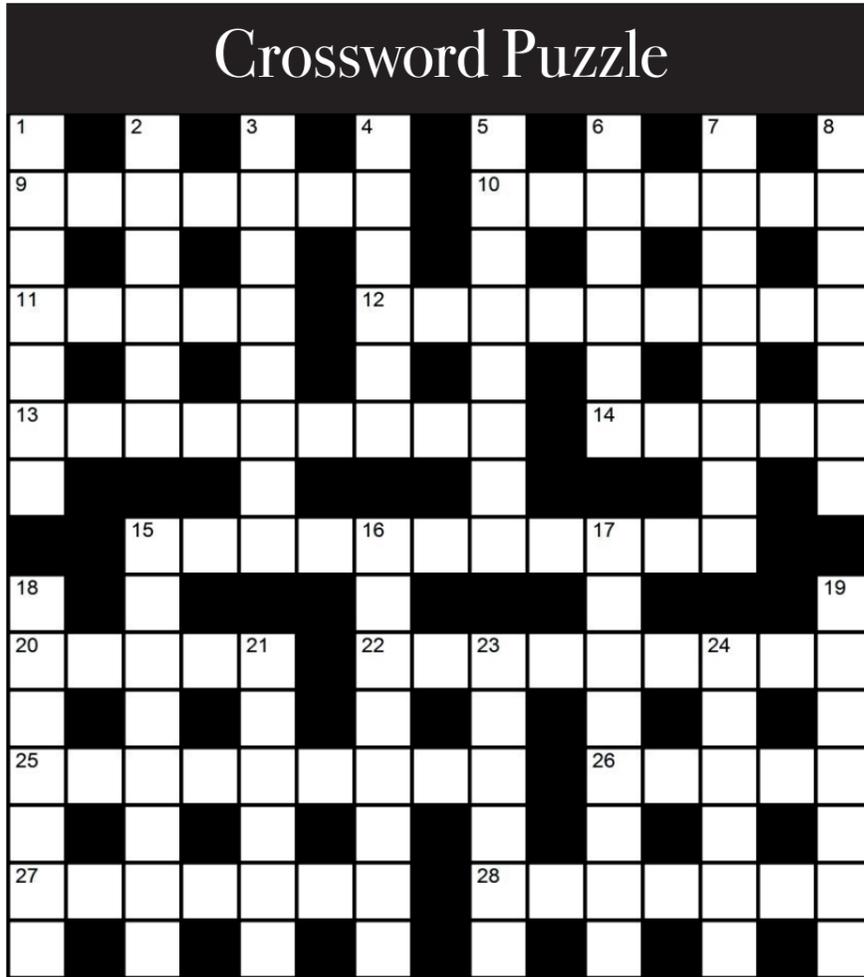


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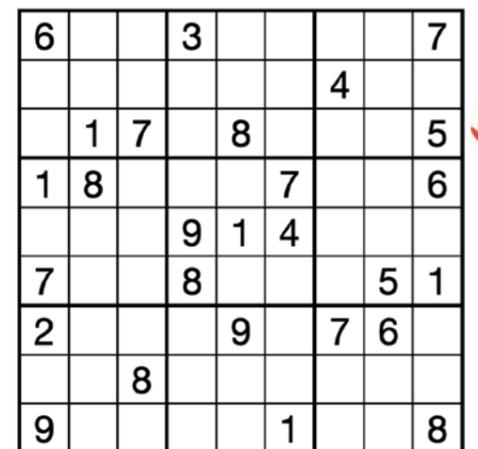
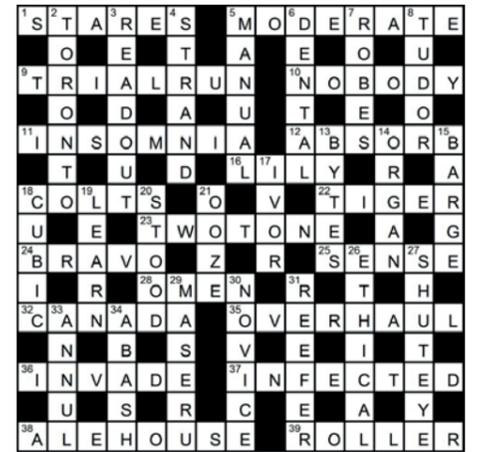
- 9. Roman sea-god (7)
- 10. Exhausted (3,4)
- 11. Mature (5)
- 12. Cheap book edition (9)
- 13. Inflammation of the lungs (9)
- 14. Snares (5)
- 15. Witches (11)
- 20. Have a cow (5)
- 22. Peculiar (9)
- 25. Lack of knowledge (9)
- 26. Greeting (5)
- 27. Fragment (7)
- 28. Loss of memory (7)

**Down**

- 1. Sad (7)
- 2. Natty (6)
- 3. Patron (8)
- 4. Make more intense (6)
- 5. Military aircraft (8)
- 6. Red Bordeaux (6)
- 7. Today (8)
- 8. Most feeble (7)
- 15. Magnificent (8)
- 16. Infinite time (8)
- 17. Fine weather (8)
- 18. Make dim by comparison (7)
- 19. Performer of gymnastic feats (7)
- 21. 2nd smallest continent (6)
- 23. Roman general (6)
- 24. Condiment (6)



Last issue's answers



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**EXPLORING HISTORY**  
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## Lighthouse and waterworks

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Niagara-on-the-Lake invested in infrastructure designed to improve both public health and navigation safety. The “Pumphouse,” built along the Niagara River in 1891, used steam-powered pumps to provide filtered drinking water to residents for more than 90 years. Nearby, the federal government addressed hazards at the river’s narrow entrance by constructing front and rear range lights and a foghorn house in 1904. When aligned, the range lights guided vessels safely into the Niagara River, particularly at night or in fog. Together, these systems reflect the community’s efforts to protect people both on land and on the water.

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## Artificial intelligence vs. the experts: **Who wins the future?**



**DR. BROWN**

Dr. William Brown  
Columnist

It wasn’t so long ago that artificial intelligence first beat world champions in chess, then masters of GO and later Jeopardy. Those highly published stunts certainly got the attention of the public.

What wasn’t so obvious at the time was that early versions of AI were being developed for the defence industry bent on developing powerful computer systems for identifying, analyzing and devising countermeasures to potential threats such as incoming missiles.

In 2022, ChatGPT introduced an AI system that harnessed large-language models to provide natural spoken or written language links between users and computers, and hence easy access to information and

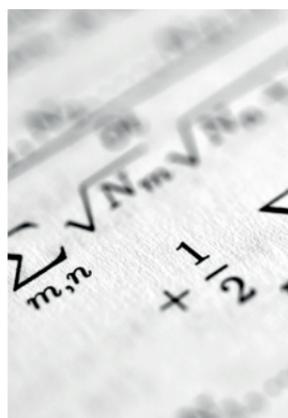
analyses enabled by huge databases.

Almost overnight, users began to use AI as their preferred site for looking up information, writing essays, creating grant proposals and, lately, designing, supervising and analyzing research data — even creating music, visual art and poetry.

On the more practical side, AI is commonly used to analyze imaging studies such as X-rays, CT scans and MRIs and more recently has proven as capable as most medicine specialists in making diagnoses, prompting and analyzing laboratory studies and even suggesting treatment options.

One article from Feb. 9 written by Gina Kolata for the New York Times was provocatively titled, “AI Is Making Doctors Answer a Question: What Are They Really Good For?” — A good question for even the most seasoned and experienced physicians now and more so in the near future.

Just a few years ago, most physicians saw AI, at best, as an aid, then a partner, and now many feel threatened by AI’s growing clinical



skills at eliciting and making sense of the history and laboratory findings — but as yet unable to carry out a physical examination — so far.

And if that’s what’s happening to physicians, the same is surely in store for lawyers, financial consultants and even mathematicians. For example, many promising students looking at a career in mathematics are put off these days because of AI’s mastery of all but the most challenging mathematics.

A month ago, the New York Times highlighted the latter issue in an article written by Siobhan Roberts titled, “These Mathematicians Are Putting AI to the Test.”

A group of four highly regarded, award-winning mathematicians set about devising very challenging mathematical questions for AI to solve.

The result? AI failed each challenge.

Even so, it had taken four brilliant mathematicians to come up with challenges tough enough — all for AI to fail.

However, my guess is that had AI been trained on similar challenging math problems, it wouldn’t have taken long before AI mastered other questions posed by top-notch mathematicians; and with the advent of quantum computing linked to AI, the combination will best even Fields Medal winners, one of the top prizes in mathematics.

But as with the challenges from mathematicians, so too will AI eventually win out in response to questions posed by human experts, whoever they might be, provided it is trained on similar, but not the same, questions.

There’s a related issue here. The more physicians come to depend on AI, the more their clinical skills may wither.

Learning to assess clinical cases can be very challenging; good examples are the weekly clinical pathological conferences cases discussed in the New England Journal of Medicine, in which physicians unfamiliar with the cases are challenged by complicated, sometimes esoteric cases.

Most of the time, invited guest discussants get the answer right, but not always. So far, AI does remarkably well on similar case material.

The future problem for physicians learning critical analytical skills will be how to acquire those skills in the age of AI.

That’s the thing with AI: it learns from its mistakes. The more AI is exposed to different challenges, such as cases in medicine and dentistry, the better it gets. Properly trained, it learns from far more cases than any one physician or dentist will in a lifetime.

Looking back at physics in that Camelot period from 1900 to 1930, a period that ushered in quantum physics and general relativity, it’s hard for me to see how AI would have come up with Einstein’s general

relativity — it was such a mind-blowing creation of his imagination. Perhaps the same might be said for Schrodinger’s and Heisenberg’s solutions for the subatomic world.

Paul Dirac, one of the most brilliant theoretical physicists and mathematicians of the 20th century by wide agreement among his colleagues, once spoke of Einstein’s general relativity as a creation so novel that no one else would have come up with for 100 years or more, whereas many advances, and it might be added Nobel prizes here, are for work, that given a few more years, others would have come to the same conclusion and result — not Einstein’s masterpiece.

Einstein was one of a kind, according to Dirac, like some of the greatest artists, including some of whom created the magnificent cave art in Europe in the period between 10-30,000 years ago.

*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.*

 **FEATURED**



## Ice cream weather teases us

Niagara-on-the-Lake got a bit of reprieve from the big chill we've been experiencing this winter — in fact, the weather outside was almost delightful. In celebration of the good weather, Aniket and Neha Bankar took their kids, two-year-old Aadya and eight-year-old Eira, out for ice cream on Tuesday. DAVE VAN DE LAAR

## Obituary

### Barry Hill



HILL, Barry Winston- It is with deep sadness that we announce the passing of Barry, at his home, on March 5, 2026 at the age of 84. Devoted and loving husband of Joan for 61 years. Dear brother of Ian (Elizabeth) and Karen Shewan (Mel). Survived by his nieces Stacey and Hayley, and by his nephew Michael. Predeceased by his sister-in-law Joy Lowe (Jack).

Barry was born April 23, 1941(St. George's Day) in Cadishead, Lancashire, England. He was a keen soccer player and fan over the course of his life. His father took him as a boy to Old Trafford to support Manchester United Football Club.

Barry had a varied career. After an electrical apprenticeship, he spent several years in the Merchant Navy and also Cunard Lines. Barry and Joan married in 1964 and emigrated to Canada in 1965. Barry's years in the Manchester and Toronto police forces and his interest in criminal law led him to a career as a Provincial Prosecutor in Windsor, Ontario and later as a Crown Attorney in Toronto and St. Catharines. Barry enjoyed sailing, travel and golf and after retirement, daily walks with Joan in and around their home in Niagara on the Lake.

Always remembered. Never forgotten.

As per Barry's wishes, cremation has taken place and a celebration of his life will be held at a later date. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to a charity of your choice.

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

## The Lake Report

# Pledge It

### Pledge your support for The Lake Report

The Lake Report's **Pledge It** campaign has two main components:

1. **Pledge** a recurring annual donation to support journalism in NOTL.
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## Thank you!



## Funding Available for Local Community & Youth Projects

Have a project, event, or youth initiative that benefits our community?

The Town is accepting applications for its 2026 Community and Youth Initiatives Grant Program until March 27, 2026. Total funding available for 2026 is \$167,443.

### Funding Priorities Include:

- ✓ Programs and events led by community members
- ✓ Opportunities that enhance youth development, engagement, and leadership
- ✓ Projects that encourage cooperation among local non-profits, schools, and service groups

Applications will be reviewed by the Grant Working Group in April, with final funding recommendations brought forward to Council for approval in May 2026.

Scan the QR code or visit [www.notl.com/community-youth-initiatives-grant](http://www.notl.com/community-youth-initiatives-grant) to apply.



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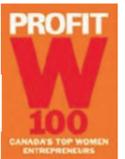


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