



Gaio brings music home | Page 12



Benny Marotta.

## Town asks OPP to investigate after developer gives councillor \$10,000

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council has asked the Ontario Provincial Police and the town's integrity commissioner to launch investigations after prominent developer Benny Marotta

gave \$10,000 in cash to Coun. Gary Burroughs.

The Lake Report learned late last week that Marotta handed Burroughs an envelope containing \$10,000 during a meeting at the developer's winery, Two Sisters Vineyards, on Saturday, March 11.

In interviews, Burroughs and Marotta independently confirmed the exchange happened, but both said it was not politically motivated.

Marotta said the money was not a bribe and he didn't ask Burroughs for anything in return.

It was a personal donation to Burroughs, mainly to help with re-election campaign expenditures, he said.

Burroughs said, "That isn't what happened. But I can't go further into it."



Gary Burroughs.

Continued on Page 2

### Special Report: Rental costs are high, supply is scarce in NOTL

Somer Slobodian  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

First in a series

Debbie Delesky couch surfed for more than a year before finally finding a place to live in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

A NOTL native, she has been living with a couple in Virgil since November, after spending about five months at a friend's house in St. Catharines.

Since about 2021 she's hopped among a half-dozen places — sometimes in different cities — seeking a place to call home while trying to make ends meet.

Delesky says she was paying her hosts rent but it was a temporary solution to her personal housing crisis.

She's not alone, though.

Across Niagara, throughout Ontario and nationwide, the inability to find

Continued on Page 11

## NOTL swimmer sets sights on Olympics



NOTL swimmer Peyton Leigh, 15, will compete in the Olympic qualifiers in the 200-metre butterfly and 400-metre freestyle. SOMER SLOBODIAN

Julia Sacco  
The Lake Report

Standing just five-foot-five, with a shoe size of eight and a half, Peyton Leigh says she is "short for a swimmer," but the 15-year-old has never let that slow her down.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake teen has just qualified to compete in the Canadian Olympic trials in two events — the 200-metre butterfly and the 400-metre freestyle.

A strong performance could mean a chance to represent Canada at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris.

Her mother Christi notes the journey toward the Olympics

began when Peyton was just four months old, with swimming lessons under coach Margaret Park.

Continued on Page 13



## Niagara wineries unite to pressure province for changes

Jill Troyer  
The Lake Report

Niagara wineries travelled to Queen's Park with an important message, as well as some delicious VQA wine in an effort to lobby

the government for changes to help the industry grow.

Leaders from more than a dozen wineries were on hand to underscore the economic importance of their industry and to pour some of their best wines at

a reception following the official presentations.

"We hosted a launch of the Vision 2030 document at Queen's Park, where we met with all levels of government, both political officials and bureaucrats,

to celebrate the launch of the vision and to share with government the role that they need to play to help us achieve our ambition," said Del Rollo, chair of Wine Growers Ontario.

Vision 2030 is a report

created by the wine industry. It outlines a forecast for ambitious growth with big benefits to the economy — and it calls for more support from the government,

Continued on Page 5

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# Marotta and Burroughs say **no political favours** asked

Continued from Front Page

Speaking in an interview Monday after town council held a special private meeting to discuss the matter, Burroughs said at first he wasn't directly told why he was given the money.

He was emphatic that he wasn't asked for anything in return.

Burroughs, a former lord mayor of NOTL who has been in politics for 25 years, said he was handed an envelope and just told to "read it later."

He said Marotta only told him afterward that it was intended as a campaign contribution. He said the developer also emailed him on Monday to reiterate that the money was for his election campaign.

"That's his story. But my campaign's been closed for a long time," Burroughs said.

"And in fact, this year, my campaign I have to pay money back to the town because I have excess left over. So it can't be about (the) campaign."

## Maximum donation is \$1,200

Any municipal council candidate could accept up to \$1,200 from a single party as a donation during the campaign period. Under Ontario law, any cash donation cannot exceed \$25.

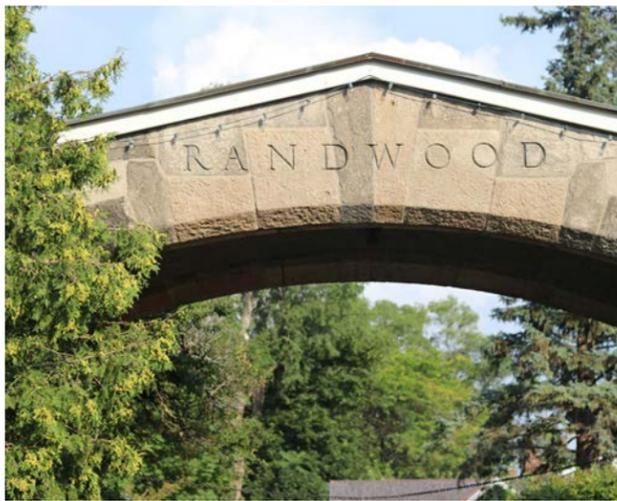
Election law limits meant NOTL council candidates could spend up to \$18,596.60 in last fall's municipal election, according to information from the town's website.

The deadline for closing most campaigns was Jan. 3, 2023, though exceptions can apply if there is a campaign deficit.

Burroughs said that the day after the envelope exchange, Sunday, March 12, he called Marotta to say he couldn't accept the money, at which point Marotta said to give to his church whatever he couldn't use for his campaign.

"He did say that. But I can't accept it for the church either," Burroughs said.

"If he had said, 'I'll go to the church and give (them) whatever,' then that would be different, but that's not what happened. And I can't



Benny Marotta's company owns the historic Rand Estate, where he plans to build a subdivision. FILE PHOTO

## Town issues statement but **no details** about case

On Wednesday afternoon, about 90 minutes after The Lake Report's website published an extensive story detailing the cash exchange between developer Benny Marotta and Coun. Gary Burroughs, the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake issued a brief statement about the affair.

The statement contains no details, names or specific information and is obliquely signed by "the corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake."

News advisories from the town are usually signed by a member of the communications department.

This is the text of the town's statement:

"On March 20, Niagara-on-the-Lake town council was informed of a matter involving a third party's interaction with a member of council that warranted investigation.

Town council directed the chief administrative officer (CAO) to bring the matter to the attention of the integrity commissioner and to notify police. Both steps were taken immediately.

The work of the integrity commissioner and the police are important investigative processes that need to be carried out in a professional and confidential manner.

The town will respect the investigative processes, assisting and supporting any reviews and investigations to the best of its ability."

really go into it because I don't know what the town has been told."

The following day, on Monday, March 13, Burroughs met with the town's chief administrator, Marnie Cluckie, and gave her the money.

"It was Monday at 12:30 p.m. two weeks ago. And I explained everything. And from there, I don't know what she's told council."

Marotta told The Lake Report he and Burroughs have been friends for years, since Burroughs was lord mayor of NOTL and that the money was a personal gift to a friend, whom he thought was in need.

Marotta said he received a call from Cluckie in which she asked him to come and retrieve the money. He said he sent a staff member to pick it up.

Marotta said he and Burroughs frequently spoke before Betty Disero was lord mayor, but said that communications stopped during her time leading the town.

He said after talking to Burroughs, he thought he was in a bad financial situation and Marotta wanted to "help."

Burroughs confirmed the two have been friends for years and corroborated that Marotta didn't ask him for anything in return when he

handed him the money.

But as an experienced politician for many years — having sat on regional council, been lord mayor and a town councillor — he knew something wasn't right.

Marotta said he wasn't aware of the campaign donation limitations and that's why he told Burroughs to give the remainder to his church if he couldn't accept it.

## Both deny favours were sought

Both of them said no political favours were requested.

Now Burroughs said he is waiting for answers on what the whole thing means for him and he wishes it never happened.

"My problem is I really like Benny, but this whole thing is a nightmare," Burroughs said.

"I don't know how long it takes for the integrity commissioner and/or the OPP to do their investigation, but hopefully, it won't be too long."

Asked multiple times if he got the sense Marotta was trying to bribe him, Burroughs was emphatic that he was not.

"I've met with Benny before and we never talk business. We've never had this issue happen either," Burroughs said.

"But we've both been married 50 years this summer, we both have two daughters, we both love chickens. I mean, it's non-business stuff. And I've always kept it that way."

"So he wouldn't have brought that up, because it just wasn't what we ever talked about," Burroughs said.

"I don't know in his mind what he was doing."

Marotta said he was trying to help out a friend.

Burroughs said he couldn't discuss all the details but that he'd be saying more to the OPP.

"I'm hoping they're gonna ask me some questions but I haven't done that either."

Council discussed the exchange Monday during a special council meeting, which wasn't available for the public to view.

Burroughs was not a part of the meeting, having de-

clared a conflict of interest on the matter.

But when he joined the public session later, he said, "It's like I had the plague afterward."

"When I walked in, nobody talked to me. Nothing."

He is eager to find out about his next steps, but right now he said he's treading carefully.

He wishes fellow councillors could tell him more — or talk to him.

**"I won't get into why I didn't open it. I was told to put it in my pocket and read it later. And so I did. And that's about all I've got."**

GARY BURROUGHS  
NOTL TOWN COUNCILLOR

"They never asked me a question," he said.

Burroughs said the whole situation is new territory for him after all his years as a politician.

Panicked when he opened the envelope, he said the first thing he did was check the definitions of donations and bribes.

"I went and looked up the definition of donations to politicians. And I don't know whether it has to include a request for something back or not. I don't know that. But that's where I started looking after it all fell apart," he said.

## Didn't open envelope until he got home

He said he was unaware of what was in the envelope until he got home on the Saturday when he received it.

"I won't get into why I didn't open it. I was told to put it in my pocket and read it later. And so I did. And that's about all I've got."

He said he is still unaware of what exactly constitutes a bribe.

"I actually don't know. And I've never wanted to know. I've never wanted it to happen either. So they'll decide, whatever they decide."

Burroughs said for the

time being, until the matter is resolved, he won't be attending or voting on any matters related to Marotta's companies.

While he wasn't asked for anything specific from the developer, he said the whole situation complicates his role as a councillor.

"For example, this week now, there's all sorts of heritage committee (meetings), which I'm on, which I won't go to. There's Randwood tours that I won't go to. You know, already it seems to be involved," Burroughs said.

"I don't know if I have a conflict — Well, I have a conflict because it had to do with Benny, but what my conflict is, I don't know. And until I know I'm not going anywhere."

He's hoping the issue is dealt with swiftly.

"I hope it happens fairly soon. It's driving my family crazy."

Marotta also said he wants it resolved sooner than later.

## Major landowner in NOTL

All told, Marotta's companies Solmar Niagara 2 Inc. (Solmar Development) and Two Sisters Resorts Corp. are the largest developers in NOTL and quite possibly the biggest landowners in town.

Over the past several years, his companies have built subdivisions in St. Davids and Old Town and have acquired land for many other projects.

Marotta owns the four remaining properties of the Rand Estate and has been in battles with the town about the property's future.

He has built the award-winning Two Sisters Winery and is in the early stages of building a new winery called Stone Eagle on Niagara Stone Road.

Marotta also has acquired businesses like the Old Winery and owns several buildings on Queen Street, including a newly built retail project near the post office.

He bought the former Parliament Oak school property last October and plans to build a hotel on the land.

As well, he owns the former Mori Gardens property in Virgil.



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Wil Neufeld stands with thousands of baby chicks at his farm. They eventually go to Maple Lodge Farms for processing. SUPPLIED

## NOTL chicken farmer staying positive amid rise of **avian flu** cases in southern Ontario

Somer Slobodian  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The owner of a large Niagara-on-the-Lake chicken farm is confident all the precautions he takes will prevent an avian flu outbreak at his operation.

Two farms in southern Ontario are under quarantine due to outbreaks and two dead waterfowl birds have tested positive in Brampton.

But NOTL chicken farmer Wil Neufeld isn't too concerned – yet.

“It's nothing new. This has been going on for a long time,” Neufeld told The Lake Report.

There are outbreaks at a small flock farm in Chatham-Kent County and at a commercial operation in West Lincoln.

Neufeld said he received an email saying the outbreak was in Smithville.

He runs two massive broiler farms in NOTL, one on Wall Road and one on Four Mile Creek Road.

This week he's getting a shipment of 80,000 chicks. He raises them for meat and has never had an outbreak.

He hopes to keep it that way.

“We have very strict protocols to keep it in check,” he said.

The avian influenza, also known as the bird flu, has many strains and is spread through wild birds. The

current strain spreading across the globe is known as H5N1 and is deadly to birds.

In 2022, about 6.7 million birds in Canada died due to the avian flu.

Neufeld houses the 80,000 chickens between his two barns for upward of five weeks, until the birds weigh 2.2 kilos then they get shipped off to Maple Lodge Farms in Brampton.

Maple Lodge supplies poultry to major grocery stores and to restaurants like Swiss Chalet.

Once his chickens are sent to Maple Lodge Farms, his barns are empty for about four weeks while they are disinfected and cleaned. Then a new batch arrives.

These precautions allow Neufeld to make sure no diseases spread between flocks of chickens.

“With broilers, it's five weeks in and out. Clean everything out. So, it's easily controlled,” he said.

To lower the chance of his chickens getting sick, Neufeld keeps them in a comfortable and stress-free, climate-controlled barn.

“It's just like humans. If you're stressed out, you're more likely to get sick,” he said.

Neufeld isn't a fan of free-range operations, since those chickens are more likely to mix with wild birds and could be exposed to the virus.

A wild bird can give it to

chickens and if they somehow spread it to a large commercial poultry operation, it becomes a “financial disaster,” he said.

However, in order to keep the chickens safe, large-scale poultry farms like Neufeld's need to follow a hefty set of protocols.

“(In) Ontario, we have a very strict biosecurity program to try to combat all kinds of diseases,” he said.

A biosecurity program is enforced to minimize the introduction and spread of infectious diseases.

Diseases can come in on anything — truck tires, clothing, hands and even footwear.

Farms have a “whole book worth of protocols we have to follow and paperwork procedures,” he said.

Farmers must follow standards such as properly disinfecting boots and equipment, limiting visitor access to the chickens, maintaining a visitors log and making sure proper signage is visible.

“Chickens get a lot of diseases,” he added.

If an outbreak occurs, farms are put under quarantine by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and an investigation is started.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is on top of it, said Neufeld.

However, if a farm is not infected but is within about 10 kilometres of a quarantine zone, safety precautions would be increased.

An outbreak on his farm could really affect his business – because if even one chicken gets the virus, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency requires the farm to humanely kill every bird that is infected or exposed.

All bodies, manure and eggs must be disposed of properly.

For an operation like Neufeld's, with 80,000 chickens, that would spell big trouble.

“There's no money in sick chickens,” he said.

Christine Nasrallah, a spokesperson for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, told The Lake Report that “owners whose animals are ordered destroyed by the CFIA may be eligible for compensation.”

The agency will trace the disease to any other potentially infected or exposed animals and decontaminate all infected areas.

Sometimes farms can be closed for upward of six months, said Neufeld.

Once farms have been cleaned and disinfected, the agency will evaluate the operation to determine when the quarantine can be lifted, Nasrallah said in an email.

According to the Chicken Farmers of Canada, the avian flu poses no food safety risk and does not usually spread to people.

“There's definitely no harm to the consumer,” said Neufeld.

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Right: Trucks like these were used for transporting ammunition and rations. IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

# THE MONUMENTS MEN

## Charles Joseph McCoy killed weeks before end of war

*It's been a century since Niagara-on-the-Lake's iconic clock tower cenotaph was erected. Then, in 1926, the Township of Niagara unveiled its own memorial in Queenston. In recognition of those who fought and died in two world wars and beyond, NOTL historian Ron Dale has been researching the stories of the people – all men – whose names are engraved on the two cenotaphs. This is one in a series of stories documenting and remembering the sacrifices of those commemorated on the municipal memorial in Queenston.*

Ron Dale  
Special to The Lake Report

Charles Joseph McCoy was born in Dublin, Ireland, on Aug. 23, 1892, son of Charles Joseph McCoy and Christina Day.

Charles senior was a solicitor's clerk who died early, leaving Christina to earn a living and support her six children.

In the 1901 census of Ireland the 35-year-old widow was listed as a dealer in fish. At the time, her son Charles was living at a boarding school.

Dublin was in turmoil in the first quarter of the 20th century, with sectarian violence common and rebellion threatening. Whether Charles decided to seek his

fortune and a better life in Canada or his mother felt he would be safer away from Dublin is unknown.

When he was 15, Charles left for Canada to work as a farm labourer in Niagara. Eventually his mother Christina and his younger brother William James emigrated to Toronto.

Charles left Niagara to temporarily live with his brother in Toronto and enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force to fight in the First World War. He signed on with the 34th Battery, 9th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, on Dec. 17, 1915.

Like many artillerymen, Charles was sent to England to undertake the bulk of his training after receiving some rudimentary instruction in foot drill and musketry (marksmanship) in Canada. He embarked from Halifax on Feb. 5, 1916, and landed in England nine days later.

McCoy trained as a driver for the 9th Brigade Ammunition Column, the men who kept the cannons supplied at the front.

At Witley Camp, the main Canadian artillery training facility in England, he was transferred to the 33rd Battery, Canadian Field Artillery. On July 13, 1916, he sailed from Southampton to France and his destiny.

McCoy served as a brakeman on the 2nd Division

ammunition train from July 20 to Aug. 15, 1916. He then returned to the brigade ammunition column, transporting shells to feed the cannons and food to feed the men operating them.

Each time he approached the front lines he was in danger of enemy artillery fire, which frequently bombarded roads and road junctions.

While McCoy was able to dodge enemy gun fire, he fell victim to some of the other hazards of being a soldier in the First World War, living through the dirt and filth that was a soldier's lot at the time.

On Dec. 30, 1916, he was admitted to #10 Field Ambulance Station suffering from scabies. Over the next several months he was hospitalized a few more times, with impetigo, furunculosis and influenza.

After August 1917 there were no more visits to the hospital and he carried on transporting ammunition.

The following year an end to the war was in sight. Beginning with the Battle of Amiens in August 1918, in which Canadian troops played a major role, the Germans were slowly being pushed back, suffering unsustainable casualties on their slow retreat, resisting the unstoppable Allied advance.

The Germans would be driven out of one line of

defences only to fiercely defend another line set farther back. Their most formidable defensive position, the Siegfriedstellung, (also known as the Hindenburg Line), was smashed in early October by Allied forces, spearheaded by the Canadian Corps.

The war ended when an armistice took effect on Nov. 11. However, many men were killed before the guns fell silent. McCoy was one of them, killed on Oct. 18, 1918, just over three weeks before the end of the war.

According to the official report on his death: "On the morning of Oct. 18, 1918, his brigade moved up to Hem-Lenglet in support of the infantry who had crossed the canal at this point. The enemy was harassing the village with 4.1-cm guns during the day and at evening shells were dropped in the vicinity of the headquarters, one of which detonated on the roof. (It) drove the shell fragments down through the ceiling and a piece struck Driver McCoy on top of the left shoulder, and although immediate attention was given he died on the way to the dressing station."

McCoy lies in the Sains-les-Marquion British Cemetery in France and is commemorated on the cenotaph in Queenston.

## Expert advice on how to **avoid** becoming the victim of a scam

Somer Slobodian  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

*Last in a two-part series*

With the number of text, phone, door-to-door and email scams targeting seniors and vulnerable people across the region, it's good to be prepared in case you're targeted.

These scams won't stop and there will always be a new one, says Mary Shkoury from Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario. "I want them to know how to fight back," she said.

With the seniors she works with, she emphasizes the four Rs — recognize, reject, report and reach out.

"If you don't recognize a caller, if you don't recognize an email if you don't recognize somebody at your door, reject," she said.

"So immediately reject, hang up, shut the door, delete the email, delete the text and reach out," she added.

She encourages seniors to reach out to family members or contact the Ontario Seniors Safety line at 1-866-299-1011.

Corp. Kim Chamberland of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police also urges people to always report to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre and their local police.

"Reporting is essential to combating fraud," she said in an email to The Lake Report.

There were only two reported victims of fraud in Niagara-on-the-Lake last year, with no money loss.

While that number may seem low, the real total likely much higher, says Shkoury.

According to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, only about 5 to 10 per cent of people report fraud.

There are also situations where companies, like Simply Green and Ontario Green Savings, offer people rebates for work or home services like hydro, air-conditioners or water heaters.

The salesperson will pressure people into a lengthy contract that is hard to get out of.

Many seniors and newcomers to Canada are targets of this scam, says MPP Wayne Gates.

Once people sign the contract, many are too embarrassed to tell family and friends about a deal they agreed to under pressure, he said.

Shkoury wants seniors to know that they should never "feel shamed or afraid, and that there are resources to support them."

Gates shared the story of a family friend who didn't find out about the contract his father signed until after his father's passing.

Among the ways government can help protect these vulnerable individuals is to stop permitting liens on people's homes, said Gates.

"These seniors have worked their entire lives to build up their equity in their home or their savings. And in some cases, they lose it all," he said.

If someone has an outstanding debt and if they don't pay, their home can be taken away.

"It is an unethical business practice," he added.

Something else that would help is if Consumer Protection Ontario extended the current 10-day cooling-off period when you sign a contract in your home, he said.

This allows someone to cancel a contract within 10 days of getting a written copy.

"So that if this does happen at the door, they can get out of a contract before they're stuck trying to fight for years and years to get out of the contract," Gates said.

When it comes to any scam, Chamberland encourages people to be suspicious, listen to their gut feeling and be careful — and always report.

The Ontario Seniors Safety Line can be reached at 1-866-299-1011. Contact the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre online or by phone at 1-888-495-8501.



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# Tax reductions, better access to markets among **concerns** cited by wine industry

Continued from Front Page

including better access to markets and lower taxes on domestic wines.

“We had almost half to two-thirds of the cabinet ministers in attendance and all the key staff, so we were really able to share the message that we’re trying to deliver, and compel the government to understand that they play an active role in helping us to succeed,” Rollo added.

Bill Redelmeier, proprietor of Southbrook Organic Vineyards said this was the first time in 15 or 20 years that all of the wineries were represented.

“We’ve been dealing since the mid-2000s with the split between what I’ll characterize as the big versus the small wineries and now, thank goodness, for the first time in quite a while, we are standing on our soapboxes and asking for the same thing,” he said.

“That’s possibly the most important part of the whole exercise, getting everybody together. It’s huge,” Redelmeier said.

Vision 2030 was the product of many months of work and is a collaboration of three industry groups representing wineries of all sizes. Wine Growers Ontario worked with Ontario Craft Wineries and the Wine Marketing Association of Ontario to produce the report.

“When we launched this, it was really a call to arms for the entire industry to work together, to get involved, to speak to their communities and to their stakeholders, to their local representatives, to all levels of government to talk about the needs that we have,” Rollo said.

“And I found a really good response. I have since had some conversations with government officials, where they took note of the fact that we are aligned with what we’re looking for,” said Rollo.

That sentiment was confirmed by provincial agriculture ministry spokesperson Jack Sullivan.

“It’s great when they



Del Rollo presents Vision 2030 at Queen’s Park. SUPPLIED

collaborate and come with a unified approach. When they’re working together it really benefits the entire wine industry,” he said.

“Working towards a common goal is helpful for them as an industry, but also for us as a government,” said Sullivan.

However, it’s too early for a response to the report, he added.

“We have received the report and recommendations and are reviewing them,” Sullivan said.

“And while we don’t have much to say at this point, we are taking their recommendations seriously and we’re still committed to working with the three organizations to grow Ontario’s wine industry.”

“It’s encouraging that they submitted it, and encouraging that they want to grow the industry together,” he added.

Vision 2030 describes a future for the wine industry with dramatic growth in consumer demand and sales, with a corresponding increase in market share; more tourist visits; a doubling of acres under vine by planting of another 20,000 acres; increased capital investment; and subsequently a boost in people employed directly and indirectly in the wine industry, to 40,000 from 22,000.

The report underlines the need for changes to current taxation and regulation policies, to enable the growth.

Carolyn Hurst, chair of Ontario Craft Wineries,

noted, “Growth is wholly dependent on the changes that we’re asking for.”

“In order for our industry to unleash sharp growth, we need a couple of things to change. We need better access to markets and we need a better tax structure,” she added.

“We are taxed like an import, so there’s no domestic advantage to us selling our wines in the only place that we’re allowed to sell them other than our own stores,” she said, referring to the LCBO.

“I think that consumers want what we’re producing, but the taxation makes us uncompetitive in our own market,” she added.

The industry argues that is why market share for Ontario wines is stagnant and points to other jurisdictions to demonstrate how lower taxation and better market access support greater success.

“The American wine industry has gone from nothing to being very successful, controlling about 70 per cent of their market. The B.C. wine industry has gone from zero to 25 per cent of their market. And the Ontario market is stuck at about 7 or 8 per cent,” said Redelmeier.

Wine industry advocates have long said the LCBO doesn’t adequately promote Ontario wines in its stores, while at the same time its markups and taxes are too high.

For example, according to Redelmeier, when a \$30 bottle of wine is sold at a

winery, the winery keeps roughly two-thirds. When that same \$30 bottle of wine is sold at the LCBO, the winery keeps one-third.

Another sore point is the 6.1 per cent provincial tax charged on wine sold at the cellar door, in addition to HST.

Wineries in “no other country are charged that 6.1 per cent extra levy,” Redelmeier pointed out.

“We would really like some signal from the provincial government that they’re supportive of our industry. There’s 140 of us in this province, trying to do a living, trying to do the right things in terms of how we operate, producing beautiful world-class wines that are celebrated everywhere else in the world,” said Hurst.

With a provincial budget coming up, Rollo hopes to see some action.

“But, you know, it’s a journey for us over the course of the next year to see if we can get what we need,” he said.

Sullivan said changes can be complex and require collaboration within government.

“These matters cross multiple ministries. Most of the alcohol legislation regulations fall within the Ministry of Finance. So any response, or anything we do around their vision is going to be a multi-ministry type of approach, not just one ministry,” said Sullivan.

Rollo sums it up this way. “I’m cautiously optimistic. The government has got a lot of priorities, but having a united vision, with the industry speaking with one voice, is something that they haven’t seen in the last little while, because we’ve had multiple people going in asking for multiple different things,” he said.

“But we’re very aligned as an industry now. And they also recognize that, COVID and, whether this is a recession or whether it’s just the downturn of the economy, it is challenging, and a healthy wine industry is very important to the economy.”

“So, I think they’re listening.”



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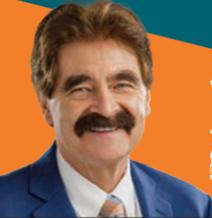
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**Canada** The Local Journalism Initiative is funded by the Government of Canada.

## COVID Tracker

**NOTL active cases (last 28 days): 25**  
**Region active cases: 365**  
**Region deaths: 724**  
**Region total cases: 52,019**

*\*March 22 data per Niagara Region Public Health. Public health warns that "Due to the surge in COVID-19 cases, limited availability of testing, and changes to case and contact management practices, case counts shown (above) are an underestimate of the true number of individuals in Niagara with COVID-19. Data should be interpreted with caution." Case data for municipalities is also now being interpreted in 28-day cycles.*



**Contributed by Patty Garriock**  
 "Rules for Happiness: something to do, someone to love, something to hope for."  
 - Immanuel Kant

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## It's spring time, deer



A group of deer hangs out on East and West Line on Sunday.  
 DAVE VAN DE LAAR

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## Editorial

## Good sports, all around

Kevin MacLean  
 Managing Editor

It's spring – finally, thankfully – and that means warmer weather.

It also means that winter sports seasons are coming to an end – and this year, as often in years past, there is plenty to celebrate on the Niagara-on-the-Lake sporting front. Here are just a few of the accomplishments of note.

Swimming is a year-round sport, of course, and as our front-page feature on 15-year-old Peyton Leigh tells you, her years of hard work and early mornings are paying off.

The elite-level competitor now has a shot at competing in the 2024 Paris Olympics in two events. She'll swim in the Canadian team qualifiers. Whether she makes it or not, she's already done herself and her community proud with her performance.

So, too, have figure skaters Ashleen Hale, Samantha Frydryk and Ophelia Xie. The trio, members of the NOTL Skating Club, will compete this weekend in the provincial championships in Stratford.

Hale qualified in two events while Frydryk and Xie will skate in one each.



Judi Boyle-Krzeczkowski, the NOTL Skating Club's director of programs, and skaters Ophelia Xie, Samantha Frydryk and Ashleen Hale, with club official Darlene Dortono, celebrate on Wednesday before heading to the provincial competition in Stratford. EVAN LOREE

Best of luck to them all.

Wrestler Zubin Gatta, as we reported last week, won gold at the Ontario high school championships and two days later, competing at the national level, severely dislocated his elbow in his first match. As he's already proven, at the Canada Summer Games and throughout his high school career, he's one tough kid.

We're confident he'll bounce back as he prepares to join Brock University's team next year.

It's been a stellar year on the ice for NOTL minor hockey teams, says association president Peter Flynn. Of course, it's about more than winning, but that

said, several of NOTL's teams have made great strides this year.

In the association's recent March Break tourney, the U13s coached by Matthew Unruh and Steve Lidstone's U15 team both won their divisions.

At the local league level, the U11 team is in the B division championship, U13 is playing for the A title and the U18 team will contest the C division championship.

The U11 rep Wolves were a force all season and then knocked off the top-seeded Thorold Blackhawks, earning a trip to the provincial championships being contested in Barrie. They're also competing in the Niagara District league

finals, where they'll likely see Thorold again.

As well, NOTL's U18 rep team, celebrated in our sports pages this week, is playing this week in the Niagara District finals but also qualified for the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championships. They'll be travelling to Barrie also, but in the case of these 16- and 17-year-olds, for a dozen of them it will be their minor hockey swan song.

They're ending their careers – but they picked a heckuva way to do it, by playing their way to the championship tourney.

Congratulations to all NOTL's young athletes and best of luck in the future

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# Many problems with plan for Rand Estate

Dear editor:

Like a recurring nightmare, the Benny Marotta-Solmar subdivision development proposal debacle continues at full throttle with the latest de-facto salvo from the proponent.

I lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake, adjacent to the Rand Estate, for most of the 1990s so I am very familiar with the property.

The revised planning documents filed by Mr. Marotta and his ever-expanding planning team make for a painful read, but nevertheless are worthy of every town resident's attention as the eventual outcome will influence future planning decisions.

Any person with a background in applied heritage conservation can readily identify the proposal's failures.

A few immediately come to mind:

The proposal at 172 housing units is far too dense for the Rand Estate site and is disrespectful of adjacent neighbourhoods and existing heritage designations.

Additionally, the propo-



Solmar's plans for the 172-home subdivision. FILE

nent's Disneyland-esque approach to heritage conservation and commemoration is superficial and defies in-situ heritage conservation principles.

The proposal calls for a walkway from the subdivision to Two Sisters Vineyards – further insulting concerned residents.

Also, it will be a challenge for emergency vehicles to navigate the tight turning radius of many interior roads – especially in the winter.

The proposed stormwater pond facing Weatherstone Court (conveniently far away from Two Sisters

Vineyards) will attract mosquitoes and is a potential safety hazard.

The proposed emergency access road from Charlotte Street is problematic on many fronts.

Children and adults (many with physical challenges) are regular users of the Upper Canada Heritage Trail.

With the emergency access road running parallel to the heritage trail at Charlotte Street, just envision the chaos for trail users when emergency vehicles arrive.

A fitting penance for Mr. Marotta's desecration of a large swath of trees and flora on the Rand Estate

property in November 2018 would be for him to reinstate the landscape.

Future generations will no longer be able to admire the hawks and eagles that once perched on the majestic trees that stood on the Rand Estate.

Instead, local residents and visitors must be content with gazing at the two menacing-looking concrete eagles that adorn the entrance to the winery.

Mr. Marotta has missed an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy for his family and business interests in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

There is still time for Mr. Marotta to modify the development proposal to embrace the site's intrinsic built and cultural heritage attributes.

Dismantling and reassembling parts of existing buildings that are designated under the Heritage Act is akin to façadism – something the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake should not embrace.

Mr. Marotta can do better.

*Alan Wojcik  
Jordan*

# Developer's trees a welcome addition to St. Davids

Dear editor:

Seventeen beautiful new good-size trees have been planted on the perimeter of the shiny brand new St. Davids Square commercial plaza built by Solmar at Four Mile Creek Road and Line 9 Road.

This should be recognized as a positive benefit to the area and an inviting feature of the northern gateway into St. Davids.

My wife and I have been truly fascinated about the evolution and eclectic mix of new development activ-

ity in this very interesting little village of St. Davids.

The village is steadily becoming enriched with architectural diversity, by combining the natural environment, the heritage characteristics of the older housing stock, and the new modern thinking such as the townhouse development behind the Avondale store.

Who would have guessed that St. Davids would one day have underground parking. Genius.

It all seems to work somehow and we are look-

ing forward to how the balance of the residential infill opportunities will evolve in the near future. Hopefully something different to keep things interesting.

St. Davids is an excellent example of how the new can blend together with the old to make something even more valuable than the sum of the parts, including being able to walk to almost everything you need.

It's fascinating to watch all this unfold and I hope

that all the other developers planning on building new homes and commercial properties in the area follow this example and plant some more trees to help preserve the natural beauty of the area.

So far, we have counted about 70-plus sizeable trees planted by Solmar along stretches of major roads in NOTL over the past few months. Credit where credit is due. St. Davids just got 17 trees better.

*Peter Rusin  
St. Davids*

# NOTL Bahai's celebrate Naw-Rúz spring equinox

Dear editor:

The spring equinox on March 21 is celebrated by Bahá'ís here in Niagara-on-the-Lake and around the world. It is called Naw-Rúz, literally "New Day," but actually "New Year."

Naw-Rúz is one of the oldest celebrations in the world, originating with

the Assyrians and adopted more than 3,500 years ago by the Zoroastrian religion, which was the state religion of the Persian Empire.

Today Bahá'ís celebrate Naw-Rúz for two reasons: it marks the end of an annual 19-day sunrise to sunset fast and it begins a

new calendar year.

Naw-Rúz is celebrated by Muslims and Zoroastrians but Christians will recognize in it many similarities with Easter.

Although no particular Bahá'í customs are associated with Naw-Rúz in the West, most Bahá'ís here have Iranian friends, some

of whom have borrowed Naw-Rúz customs from their co-religionists who also celebrate this first day of spring.

Your Bahá'í friends and neighbours wish everyone a very happy and joyous Naw Rúz.

*Hugh Church  
NOTL*

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# Slow architecture and from whence it came



Brian Marshall  
Columnist

Last week in this column we opened a window onto the slow movement and the architecture that has been enfolded under its banner.

That article closed with the suggestion that the core tenets of slow architecture were something that truly great architects had always encompassed within their practice.

I'd like us to explore that further by considering two of those "great" architects: the first played on a world stage, while the second chose to practise his craft in this region.

Frank Lloyd Wright believed common buildings were boxes that placed limits on what the occupants could do and see, a reinforcement of social conventions that curtailed both dreams and aspirations.

He suggested self-actualization begins in designed spaces that are not a series of boxes packaged in a box, but rather holistically integrated (both interior and exterior) to produce experiential opportunities

for creative and contemplative thought.

That he, during his career, was committed to "breaking the box" can be seen through his address to the Junior Chapter of American Institute of Architects (New York City) in 1952 in which he stated: "I think I first consciously began to try to beat the box in the Larking Building – 1904... Unity Temple is where I thought I had it, this idea that the reality of a building no longer consisted in the walls and roof."

From his "In the Cause of Architecture" essays (VIII - 1928) we can see how important a place this "breaking the box" consideration held in his design ethos when he writes: "The walls themselves cease to exist as either weight or thickness. Windows become in this fabrication a matter of a unit in the screen fabric, opening singly or in groups at the will of the occupant."

In other words, a building design of spaces should provide for unbroken support, in and of the moment, of the occupant's thought and/or creative processes. Walls, ceilings and floors should not limit, but rather free, self-actualization.

Further, Wright was a proponent of architecture that learned from and followed nature. He wanted to build with the land, not on it.

So, to be very clear, he was not a proponent of



Don Chapman's River Zen home on the Niagara Parkway is an example of slow architecture. BRIAN MARSHALL

copying the forms of nature or subsuming his designs into the landscape. His position was that you take inspiration from the natural site and govern your design accordingly.

In Wright's "In Cause of Architecture" essays in 1908, he wrote: "A building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings if nature is manifest there and, if not, try to make it as quiet, substantial and organic as 'she' would have been were the opportunity 'hers.'"

In these two (selected from others) criteria, Wright exemplified, or perhaps first articulated on a global stage, the core parameters of the 21st century slow architecture school.

Throughout his career he sought to create spaces that would free the mind

or, as he put it in "Modern Architecture" (The Kahn Lectures, 1931), "Architecture must now unfold on inner content – express 'life' from the 'within.'"

Now, let us move on to another architect, a western boy who settled in Niagara and never left.

That Don Chapman believed in the same central tenets to which slow architecture ascribes can be best illustrated by his personal home on Niagara River Parkway. Here, unconstrained by any client limitations, he was allowed to fully express a design founded in those beliefs.

From the river, the house sits slightly below the brow of the river bank while from the street, it settles into the landscape, echoing the topography to extend its natural elements into the built form.

In my mind's eye, I can

see the architect on the vacant lot, carefully plotting perspectives and lines of sight before commencing his work on the design, for this would be a house of seamless transitions from the interior to exterior, with every space devoted to giving people that mind-freeing experience.

Constructed of locally sourced, largely natural materials, the oak timber framing softens and contrasts against the white structural brick walls, while earthy tones of the polished brick floors ground the spaces.

Ceiling-to-floor glass windowed colonnades connect four distinct pavilions organized around accessible exterior courtyards, with each pavilion designed to augment a measured, thoughtful lifestyle. And every space presents its own incredible views

onto the river and into the Carolinian forest of the riverbank.

The completed design creates a gestalt that results in a sense of Zen that has rarely been produced by North American architecture. Moreover, in the five decades since it was built in 1970, the building has aged beautifully in the context of its setting.

In short, it is a tour de force, a masterwork of organic design that exemplified the principles of slow architecture 40 years before that movement came to be.

That in no way diminishes slow architecture but, rather, lends it the weight of a tradition explored by great architects of the past.

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

## Old Town really needs a hospital and a school

Dear editor:

I am writing further to your March 16 editorial, "The future of old NOTL hospital," about proposals for the former property.

The old hospital should be a new hospital and the old school where Parliament Oak was should be a new school.

Get it done.

*Brian Emes  
NOTL*

## Black burial ground should be commemorated

Dear editor:

Given the historical significance and the recent renaming of the former Negro Burial Ground to the Niagara Baptist Church Burial Ground, plus the attention being given to the number of grave locations, I propose taking an important next step.

We should formalize the boundary and location of the cemetery by erecting a wrought iron (or similar) boundary fence complete with an arched entrance,

complemented with the burial ground name and street address prominently displayed over the arch.

Rather than tourists and locals stumbling by accident on its location, by raising the profile of this location, the historical society and tourism board will further be promoting the history of the Underground Railroad and the attendant contribution of the Black community to NOTL.

*Samuel Young  
NOTL*

## We already have a long list of private health care providers

Dear editor:

I am writing regarding Richard Wright's letter, "Liberals, NDP need to act to stop privatized health care," in the March 16 edition of The Lake Report.

Many NOTL residents' health care needs are obtained from: Niagara North Family Health Team, a private corporation (not-for-profit); doctors set up as private companies; LifeLabs for

prescribed tests; Simpson's Pharmacy and Shoppers Drug for vaccinations and prescriptions; dermatologists; physical therapists; and, optometrists.

All of these are private companies. These "private" services are paid by OHIP and are part of Ontario's health care system.

Is the writer suggesting that these private companies are providing inferior services and/or that the

Liberals and NDP should nationalize them if they get elected?

New Democrat Wayne Gates, our riding's MPP, should be asked the same questions based on his opposition to privatization.

As an ex-premier of B.C. (a Liberal) stated: Health care decisions should be made based on what works, not political ideology.

*Brian Crow  
NOTL*

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# Happy to share, but developers must **respect** NOTL

Dear editor:

I am writing in response to the letter from Blair Cowan, (“Let’s share NOTL with others who want to be here,” March 9), in which he asks: “How come people are against sharing our beautiful town ...”

No one is against sharing.

Issues around development have never been about that and it’s time to shut down such an erroneous and divisive narrative.

Productive discussion is not served by Manichean thinking or such disingenuous claims. Opposition to an inappropriate project hardly means people don’t want to share.

Niagara-on-the-Lake enjoys a unique status and wonderful features – lots of golden eggs. Future development is about ensuring responsible, contextual projects that don’t kill the goose.

NOTL is rich in non-renewable history and heritage and remarkable geography, plus so much more.

So far we’ve seen a number of lazy proposals that disrespect and erode the very features that allow this area to thrive.

It’s also apparent that the attempt to waste valuable resources through disrespectful action is on the table. And it doesn’t matter what the developer’s name is.

In this information age, there is no excuse for poor design or the failure to recognize larger implications. Long after a developer walks away with their profit, the town is left with the aftermath of their work, both good and bad.

Peller’s proposal for Riverbend is a beautifully conceived project in a great location that makes sense. The attempt to put a hotel



Environmental conservation lands were paved over by Vrancor Inc. in 2018. FILE

of mediocre design on a site targeted for a community facility does not.

High-priced condos are more likely to end up as short-term rentals than a home for a full-time

resident. The height, mass and density of the proposed building disrespects existing bylaws and flies in the face of all that makes NOTL so attractive in the first place.

If someone truly loves this town, do something that won’t be an infrastructure and tax burden for citizens. Make it beautiful to look at, with the kind of openness and landscaping NOTL is known for.

The Shaw needs affordable accommodation for actors and staff, as does the hospitality industry; citizens need a clinic and wellness facilities. There are many possibilities.

At the very least, recognize and respect the beauty and deep history and heritage of Ontario’s first seat of government. Propose better.

My hope is that as a new member of the town’s urban design committee I can work with others to help the community gain clarity of NOTL’s official plan and vision for the future while steering growth and development in a manner that continues to respect this important historic region.

Contrary to what Mr. Cowan claims, this resident is happy to share. Just please don’t make a mess.

**Chrys Kaloudis**  
NOTL

# \$75 is **small price** to pay for superior, private health care

Dear editor:

When I opened up the March 16 edition of The Lake Report to see my letter (“Let people buy better health care if they can afford to and want

to,” juxtaposed with another letter, allegedly critical of privatizing health care, I read Richard Wright’s piece, “Liberals, NDP need to act to stop privatized health care,”

with great interest.

I was expecting to read a privatized health care horror story but to my surprise it was exactly the opposite.

Let me get this straight,

the public health care system would have left Mr. Wright’s brother-in-law to suffer for several months, but for a “whopping” \$75 he was treated in a manner far superior?

But sure, let’s not forget the doctor made a greedy profit from the procedure.

I’m sure the doctor enjoyed a nice Big Mac with the likely \$7.50 pre-tax profit he

made from that \$75. If this is an example of a privatized health care “horror” story, please keep them coming.

**Alexander Evans**  
NOTL

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# Property taxes to rise average of **\$105** with new budget

Evan Loree  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake expects to spend about \$4 million more in 2023 than it did last year to cover its daily operations.

The budget review committee, made up of all councillors and senior staff, is projecting a budget of more than \$44 million this year, up from about \$40 million in 2022.

A fourth discussion of the operational budget is set for Thursday morning.

Barring any other budget changes, finance director Kyle Freeborn said the town portion of property taxes on a home assessed at \$541,000 will rise by about \$105.

“For properties within the urban boundary, there will be a further impact of



Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa, left, and the deputy mayor Erwin Wiens. EVAN LOREE

\$11.68,” he told The Lake Report in an email.

This year’s spending will bring the average annual property tax bill to about \$1,300.

Freeborn said a few key items are driving up costs.

These include a 6.3 per

cent increase in inflation, an \$89,000 hike in the town’s insurance, and compensation increases to volunteer firefighters and town staff.

Last year, the town had to top up the operational budget multiple times to mitigate budget increases

during the election.

The top-ups, totalling \$672,000, were taken from the town’s various financial reserves.

The province has also made changes to the Ontario Municipal Employee Retirement System and

Freeborn previously told council that will cost the town up to \$150,000.

The operational budget covers several ongoing expenses to the town, including staff salaries, maintenance of town properties, administrative costs, storm-

water management systems, community partnerships and town vehicles.

The biggest revenue stream for the town is service fees and fines, accounting for 39.12 per cent or about \$17 million of the operational budget, Freeborn said.

Another 38.6 per cent, or about \$15 million, is funded through property taxes.

Grants, licences, permit applications, town reserves and other smaller revenue sources make up the remaining \$12 million of the town’s operational revenue, or 22.28 per cent.

This year’s increase to property tax hike also is driven by a storm pond maintenance program estimated to cost the town \$90,696 in 2023, according to a report Freeborn presented to council March 9.

# Town of NOTL proposing to hire **16 new staffers** for 2023

Evan Loree  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is proposing to spend almost \$900,000 on 16 new staff members in 2023.

Discussion over which positions make the cut have been held at several meetings over the past few weeks.

The town has ranked the positions in order of priority from first to 16th: a communications co-ordinator, legislative committee co-ordinator, health and safety co-ordinator, asset management co-ordinator, economic development officer, heritage planner, town planner, mayoral assistant,

a second mechanic, climate change co-ordinator, building inspector, fire inspector, bylaw and building administrative assistant, programming specialist for parks and recreation, digital records co-ordinator and a landscape worker to service Victoria Street.

Three of these are contracted positions, including the mayoral assistant, the digital record co-ordinator and the landscaper.

Staff and council agree that additional planning staff are top priorities.

“Our number one complaint is about planning,” Coun. Erwin Wiens said.

Wiens told council that new legislative rules implemented by the province’s

omnibus legislative bill, the More Homes Built Faster Act, are coming into effect July 1.

The town’s director of development, Kirsten McCauley, said staff are expecting a swell of development applications as a result of those changes.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said she was “surprised” staff was only asking to hire one planner.

McCauley said the town’s planning application numbers “have increased significantly over the years.”

“We are strapped,” she added. “We need more staff.”

The communications co-ordinator is currently a contract position and is

funded through grants, said chief administrator Marnie Cluckie.

The role is not new to the town and has been evolving into a full-time position for a few years, she said.

The communications job salary is budgeted at about \$90,000.

The legislative committee co-ordinator, with a salary of about \$52,000, would record all the committees of council.

“This would allow for some consistency between the minutes,” said Victoria Steele, the town’s government relations officer.

It would also allow committees to start meeting in person again, she said.

Health and safety is cur-

rently handled by a town’s human resources worker, Cluckie said.

The position is valued at nearly \$63,000 in the budget.

Staff and council also considered the importance of an economic development officer to help diversify the town’s economy and direct economic projects like the tourism plan.

“We do have a bit of service – and we’re grateful for it – from Niagara Region,” Cluckie said.

Wainfleet, Pelham, West Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake share that service, but it is “quite a challenge” because “we are larger in terms of tourism,” Cluckie said.

“If it’s something we’re gonna do anyways, then let’s

do it as opposed to delaying it,” said Wiens.

He argued that the town was not out trying to attract businesses to NOTL whereas neighbouring cities are.

“Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, they’re eating our lunch because they’re out there getting it,” he said.

The position would cost the town about \$42,000 if approved.

The town also listed a mayoral assistant in the budget at a cost of almost \$36,000.

Staff recommended both an additional mechanic (\$59,000) and a program co-ordinator for the parks and recreation department (\$50,000) in their budget proposal.

# Region seeks **100 new volunteers** for emergency response team

Somer Slobodian  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Niagara Region is looking for 100 new volunteers for its Community Emergency Response Team, known as CERT.

Volunteers are trained to assist the community in times of disaster or crisis.

They learn to provide first aid and rescue, help with disaster relief efforts, handing out emergency supplies and other duties.

The region is accepting applications on its website until March 24.

“It doesn’t matter what your occupation is. We want people from all trades



Carmen Lampman is a team leader for Niagara’s Community Emergency Response Team. She also works as a paramedic in Haldimand County. SOMER SLOBODIAN

because everyone brings something different to the table,” NOTL resident Carmen Lampman told The Lake Report.

Lampman is a paramedic in Haldimand County and was one of the first 50

volunteers on the response team in 2022.

She was promoted to team lead this year.

She’s lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake for about eight years and moved here from Germany, where she

belonged to the German Red Cross.

Since her move to Niagara, she’s wanted to join something similar.

“I just like this kind of work. I like to give back to my community,” she said.

When she heard of the response team, she just knew she had to be a part of it, she said.

However, Lampman wants people to know that they are not alone — it is a team effort.

“You have your team lead, you have your other volunteers and they’re there to support you,” she said.

As a team lead, Lampman assists with training and first aid.

If the CERT teams is deployed to deal with an emergency, she’ll be responsible for four to eight volunteers.

Once trained, volunteers will download an app to their phones that will notify them via email or text message of any emergencies that require their assistance.

The team was deployed last December during the major Christmas blizzard. They provided assistance from Dec. 25 to 27.

The alert went out Christmas morning, said Lampman.

The team did a total of 120 hours of coverage over the span of three days and

helped many families who could not go back home.

“Basically you check in with people, you help set up the cots, the chairs, asking if they need anything, asking if they need any extra care or if (they) need food,” she said.

“Just comforting them, because they are away from their house, they can’t go back,” she added.

The latest batch of volunteers will be recruited in two groups of 50 and will need to complete eight weeks of in-person and online training.

The first training session starts in April and the second session will begin in September. Both will run Thursday evenings.

# Farmworker Hub opens doors to **new social space**

Julia Sacco  
The Lake Report

Sunday afternoon the Niagara-on-the-Lake Farmworker Hub's social space opened for the first time and welcomed workers to a place for rest and relaxation.

Director Julia Buxton-Cox was excited about what the new space will provide.

"It's a place that they can come that's away from the farm, where they can feel like they can relax a bit after work. We've got free wifi up here, they can just relax and have a little bit of fun," she said.

"They can play pool, we'll have sports, there are snacks for them and then at the back there's some dominos and games."

Volunteers said the space was already bustling within the first hour of opening.

"We probably had close to 80 people stop by within the first hour and a half today," said Buxton-Cox.

The upstairs space was donated by Cornerstone Community Church and features multiple small rooms in addition to the



Jamie Knight of the Rotary Club presents a cheque to Julia Buxton-Cox to help assist the Farmworker Hub, which is now equipped with a pool table and a lounge space for workers to relax in. SUPPLIED/JULIA SACCO

large, communal space.

One of the rooms will be dedicated to religious and spiritual affairs.

"Many of the workers are people of faith and so they're looking for prayer and pastoral counselling,"

said Buxton-Cox.

"So starting in April we have four different pastors from different churches and different denominations who will be coming to volunteer their time."

Two Sundays of the



month Spanish-speaking pastors will visit.

The NOTL Rotary Club presented a cheque to the Farmworker Hub to help with its rent payments.

Buxton-Cox said the cheque is greatly appreci-

ated and that her next goal is to find more volunteers.

"We could use some drivers to help bring workers who aren't within a biking distance here," she said.

"There's two of us leading this and 2,000 work-

ers, so any extra hands are appreciated."

The Farmworker Hub is operating with about 34 volunteers, including Chrystal Haverstock, a new resident who chose to volunteer as a way to get involved.

"I'm new-ish in town and NOTL is unique so I'm looking for my place to fit in," she said.

"I really decided after talking to Julia when I came to donate some stuff and I thought, 'I like how this woman thinks.'"

With the opening of the social space, Buxton-Cox expects more workers to visit.

"Last year we had just under 3,100 visits, this year we're expecting close to 5,000," she said.

The social space will be open every Sunday from 2 to 6 p.m. and the hub will also operate Tuesdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. for drop-offs and donation sorting.

"We come from a place of abundance, this is our way of neighbours helping neighbours," Buxton-Cox said.

# If you're single, finding an affordable rental is **huge challenge**

Continued from Front Page

an affordable place to live is a common refrain for thousands.

In NOTL, rent for a two-bedroom home can easily exceed \$3,000 a month. You might have better luck winning the lottery than finding an affordable one-bedroom in town.

In January, Delesky's hosts gave her until the end of March to find a new place, but her move hit a snag because it seemed impossible to find an affordable apartment for one person.

Despite her predicament, Delesky actually might be considered one of the lucky ones.

There was light at the end of the seemingly dark tunnel thanks to a social media post on Facebook.

"I could not believe the outpouring of support," Delesky told The Lake Report.

She posted on the NOTL 4 ALL Facebook group page in January, but didn't receive many comments.

It wasn't until she reached out again in February that her fortunes turned – with more than 40 comments from kind members of the community.

And, eventually, a place to stay. Thanks to the tips and leads she received, she found a studio apartment above a couple's garage in NOTL.

Delesky said she felt like she "could finally sleep."

"(I) couldn't be more grateful," she said in a text message to The Lake Report.

Delesky is 48, works in Virgil and wanted to find a place to rent in her hometown.

"I would like to stay in town. This is where I grew up," she told The Lake Report.

However, finding affordable renting options in Niagara-on-the-Lake is "almost impossible," she said.

For more than 12 months, she's bounced among different living situations.

When she was told she had until the end of March at her current place, she began to panic.

Her budget was about \$1,000 a month since she's living on her own.

"I'm working as much as I can and I know that I will have another part-time job in the spring, just (to) make more money. But it's not easy for one single person," said Delesky.



Struggling to find a place to live, Debbie Delesky has rented studio space above a garage in NOTL. SOMER SLOBODIAN

The options, especially in Niagara-on-the-Lake, are few. Rents are high – and supply is scarce.

When you look at the housing costs in Niagara-on-the-Lake compared to the rest of the region, NOTL is "a little bit of an anomaly," said regional Coun. Andrea Kaiser.

And it is making it more difficult for residents to stay in town, she added.

As of early March, about

56 rentals in Niagara-on-the-Lake had been listed with the Niagara Real Estate Board in the previous 365 days.

The average listing was a three-bedroom, two-bathroom unit averaging \$3,032 a month, said Cheryl Munce, a realtor with Engel & Volkers Niagara.

Of the 56 rentals, 23 were townhouses, 30 were houses and only three were apartments.

A search this month on Rentals.ca showed just five rental options in NOTL and the lowest price for a basement apartment was \$1,545 a month.

A flyer on the kiosk outside the post office on Queen Street promoted a listing for a fully furnished, shared home for rent.

The price for the shared space was \$1,250 to \$1,350. And only one apartment in Virgil was listed on

Facebook Marketplace at \$1,500 per month for a one bedroom.

**Next week:** Debbie Delesky's situation raises some bigger questions – what options are there in Niagara-on-the-Lake for people looking to rent a studio or one-bedroom apartment at an affordable price? And what does the future hold for renters who want to live in NOTL. We'll explore those issues in part 2 of this series.

# Ryan Gaio hopes to bring the **music back**

Richard Harley  
The Lake Report

Ryan Gaio remembers a time when Niagara-on-the-Lake had a vibrant, independent music scene.

It was back when NOTL still had a high school — Niagara District Secondary School, which had a strong focus on the arts.

Though he didn't attend the school, he remembers how bands, many formed by students from the school, would play shows around town venues like the Legion and at music festivals like Peace in the Park.

Now he's on a "personal mission" to try to bring a piece of that back to town.

On April 1, Gaio, 30, will bring his own live music to the NOTL Legion in celebration of his first album release.

He says most of his inspirations came from those younger days watching home-grown bands take the stage.

He credits those musicians as the reason he started taking guitar lessons and playing music in the first place.

His journey into music began as a kid in about Grade 8, when he took guitar lessons from NOTL teacher Bruce Jones on Green Street.

"And I've been playing ever since," Gaio said in an interview with The Lake Report.

Now he lives for it — but not off of it.

"I'm not doing music as a living — like I'm not looking to be a professional musician. But I get so much joy out of doing this."

"It sounds so cheesy," he says. "But I feel this call in-



NOTL musician Ryan Gaio plays with special guest Matt Meagher at the NOTL Legion on April 1, to celebrate his album launch. SOMER SLOBODIAN

side to pick up a guitar and sing songs that are catchy and that other people can rock along to. Doing that gives me purpose," he said.

"I don't really know why. But it just really fuels me inside. And so I'm doing it because I can't not do it. I'm sad when I don't and everything feels boring when I don't."

Gaio, whose family will be remembered by many NOTLers for their stint on "Family Feud Canada" in 2020, now lives in Toronto, but he wanted to stage his album launch show back home.

His songs are written in and inspired by Niagara-on-the-Lake and small-town living.

"I'd love to classify it as NOTL rock, if there is such a thing, and I'm hoping to help define what that is with these songs, but basically it's just rock music. It's guitar-based, classic sounding, four-piece rock music."

He released the 10-song rock album, "The Best Ain't Happened Yet," on March 16.

Musically it's influenced by his favourite artists, he said.

"Well, always since I was a little kid, I said when I grow up I want to be Tom Petty. And I still have that same philosophy. So I would say Tom Petty is definitely a key influence."

"And I've spent many nights at the Sam Roberts shows at Jackson-Triggs.

So I think Sam Roberts is sprinkled in there as well."

"And any kind of classic guitar-based rock music — CCR, Bruce Springsteen, Joel Plaskett."

The album was recorded in home studios with the help of friends, but he thinks "it's as close to professional as people can do on their own, which nowadays is not far off from the real deal."

And though he's proud of the album, he insists his larger focus is really about bringing back local music and maybe inspiring others like he was inspired.

"Even more important I think is the kind of guiding philosophy behind doing it in Niagara-on-the-Lake,

which is that mission to celebrate local homegrown rock music, you know?" Gaio said.

"I know that you can go on the weekend to the Angel Inn and the Irish Harp and whatever and hear people sing 'Bobcaygeon' and 'Sweet Caroline' — and that is well and good. I have a great time doing that as well. But I don't know where people can go to hear people singing their own songs."

Thinking back to the bands that influenced him, he wants to see that scene bloom in town again.

When he started playing guitar and writing his own songs, "I was so influenced by going to see Matinee

Slim and (C for Cat) and As Above, So Below and Starlit Lounge and the Amazing Flying Hammer Brothers — all these acts — when I went to Peace in the Park and saw (them) all playing at Simcoe Park on the bandshell, to me, that was like Woodstock," he said.

"It was just like the most epic, amazing, cool thing and to see someone doing that in our little town was like, 'I can do that too.' And I don't know where that is anymore. And I want to give it a stage."

Tickets for the April 1 show are \$10 in advance, \$15 at the door and can be purchased at RyanGaio.Eventbrite.ca. Doors open at 7 p.m.

  
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By age five, Peyton Leigh was swimming at the Garden City Aquatic Club. She starting competitive swimming when she was seven. Now 15, she's setting her sights on swimming for Canada in the 2024 Paris Olympics. SOMER SLOBODIAN

# Peyton Leigh, 15, to compete for shot at making it to **Paris Games** in 2024

*Continued from Front Page*

By age five she had joined the Garden City Aquatic Club and at seven she was swimming competitively.

"My family definitely inspired me. My mom swam a bit, too," Leigh said in an interview.

She long has been working toward qualifying for the 200-metre butterfly and achieved that goal during the Eastern Canadian Championships in Windsor last weekend.

Earlier in March, when she qualified for the Olympic trials in the 400-metre freestyle at the Ontario Winter Swimming Championships in Scarborough, it was a bit of a surprise.

"Making the (400 freestyle) was kind of a shock to

me. I didn't go into it expecting to make it."

Success comes with many hours of hard work.

She trains 20 hours a week, waking up at 4:40 a.m. most days. She's in the pool by 5:30, which makes for some long, intense days.

She swims eight times a week: Monday morning and afternoon, Tuesday morning, Wednesday afternoon, Thursday morning, Friday morning and afternoon, and Saturday morning.

Sunday is her day off. Her secret fuel for the gruelling training process? "Pasta and lots of sleep."

"It's all worth it and it's all super fun."

That being said, Leigh expects if she makes it to the Olympics, her training schedule won't change too

much aside from more time dedicated to training and focusing.

She joined the Brock University swim team about a year ago.

"I had a new coach this year, Dave Ling and he's definitely helped me a lot. I couldn't have done it if he hadn't become a coach here," she said.

Aside from Olympic prospects, she has other big journeys ahead – she started Grade 9 at Holy Cross Catholic Secondary School last September.

Balancing high school and swimming makes life a bit more difficult, but she has it under control.

"It's hard sometimes but it's manageable," she said.

"My practices are at a good time and I have enough

time to do my homework, though I don't have much homework right now because I'm only in Grade 9."

Right now, her main focus is continuing to get faster and through it all, she is grateful for everyone around her who is supporting and guiding – including her younger sister Georgia, who also is a swimmer.

Canadian Olympians Penny Oleksiak and Summer McIntosh are two accomplished swimmers who inspire her. But so are her "amazing" teammates.

"My teammates help push and motivate me to be a better and faster swimmer," she said in a message to The Lake Report.

"It's just so great to be able to train with so many amazing people."



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style.  
Category: 30-SOMETHING

**Sir John Buchan wrote this spy novel that Hitchcock made into a big screen thriller.**

Last issue:

Category: COMPOUND WORDS

Clue: This "Wizard of Oz" character says the only thing he's afraid of is "a lighted match."

Answer: What is the Scarecrow?

Answered first by: Bob Stevens

Also answered correctly (in order) by: Bill Hamilton, Lisa Traficante, Jane Morris, Bob Wheatley, Jim Dandy, Margaret Garaughty, Gail Martin, Margie Enns, Sheila Mead, Nancy Rocca, Wade Durling, Daniel Smith, KC King, Pam Dowling, Sheila Meloche, Hedy Wiebe, Howard Jones, Gordon Yanow, Claudia Grimwood

\*REMEMBER TO PUT "WHAT IS" FOR JEOPARDY QUESTIONS!

Email answers to [editor@niagaranow.com](mailto:editor@niagaranow.com), with your name, for a chance to win a \$20 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

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# Breathtaking Machu Picchu offers lifetime of memories

Milena Veljkovic  
Special to The Lake Report

Everyone has a list of places they want to see or things they want to do – a “bucket list.”

Like most people I have a list, too, but there’s particular order for the places I want to visit.

I’m just happy to see anything that comes my way.

Not having any preference on where to go next, last November my husband Dragan and I took the opportunity to join friends on their journey to South America.

Our itinerary included Peru, Chile, Argentina, the Falkland Islands, Uruguay and Brazil.

Each country is unique and beautiful, with much to explore and experience.

From the breath-taking Machu Picchu and Sacred Valley in Peru, Chile’s famous wine region in the Maipo Valley (stretching from Santiago all the way



Milena and Dragan Veljkovic found the trek to Machu Picchu well worth the effort. SUPPLIED

to the Andes), glacial fjords and Patagonia encompassing the vast southernmost tip of South America (shared by Argentina and Chile) and passing through notoriously famous Cape Horn.

We walked alongside penguins on the Falklands, where we also had the pleasure of meeting maritime archeologist Mensun Bound, who last year discovered explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton’s long-lost ship,

the Endurance, beneath the Antarctic ice.

Among the other sights was the spectacular Iguazu Falls in a subtropical rainforest in Argentina, picturesque cosmopolitan Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, and last but not least Brazil, with its world famous Art Deco-style sculpture Christ The Redeemer, situated atop the Corcovado mountain, which makes it visible from

anywhere in Rio.

All these places have left us with so many amazing memories and incredible experiences that makes it hard to pick a favourite.

However, one definitely stands out above the others.

Machu Picchu, the Incan citadel set high in the Andes Mountains of Peru, above the Urubamba River valley, is often referred to as “The Lost City of the Incas.”

it is not the easiest place to get to, but once you make your way to the top it’s worth every breath taken to climb it.

You can’t help but to be in awe with the sight laid out before you while watching early-morning clouds slowly fade away, unveiling this beautiful once-forgotten place.

It’s almost surreal walking within the walls of more than 200 structures built 7,000 feet above sea level some nine centuries ago – without any use of metal tools or the wheel.

Machu Picchu’s Incan ruins are beautiful and disconcerting at the same time, without any clues written in the city or sculptures to suggest a purpose.

So many unanswered questions: Among them, who built the city and why did they abandon it?

Whether we ever find out the answers, one thing will remain. Building a place

like this surrounded by such natural beauty will always be admired.

And if anyone is still asking themselves whether a visit Machu Picchu is worthwhile, I would strongly recommend doing it.

It will leave you breathless in every sense of the word. The stunning mountain peaks with the city within mean the site will forever be etched in your mind.

The surreal images lingering in your head will leave you wondering if it was just a dream that felt so real.

I have been to many places in my lifetime and hope to see many more.

However, Machu Picchu will forever hold a special place that I had a privilege to visit and I hope someday you will, too.

*Hometown Traveller features stories by Niagara-on-the-Lake residents about their adventures abroad. Send yours to editor@niagaranow.com.*



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## NOTLers can help plant two billion trees

Julia Sacco  
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake residents could have the opportunity to add more greenery to the community with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority’s Trees For All planting partnership.

The partnership invites landowners across the Niagara Peninsula to plant a tree on their property to help contribute to Canada’s goal of planting two billion trees.

Geoff Verkade, senior manager of integrated

watershed strategies and climate change, said the conservation authority is looking to determine the level of interest NOTLers have in the program.

“Niagara-on-the-Lake has absolutely been at the table,” he said.

“We’ve got good engagement from the town right now,” Verkade said.

NOTLers’ interest in tree planting comes as no surprise to the town’s director of operations, Rome D’Angelo.

“The residents absolutely do love their trees,” he said.

“The Niagara region has a reputation for being a natural wonder with many environmental assets,” he said.

“It’s important for the birds, the biodiversity and the migration hotspots in this area, Niagara-on-the-Lake is situated between two Great Lakes. I think it’s just a really good fit to be part of this.”

Those wishing to express interest and register their property in the Trees For All program can go to the conservation authority’s website at [getinvolved.npca.ca/trees-for-all](https://getinvolved.npca.ca/trees-for-all).

# NOTL Youth Collective looking ahead to **spring session**

Somer Slobodian  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

With the NOTL Youth Collective's winter session wrapped up, volunteers are looking back and reflecting on the innovative centre's first eight weeks of operation.

About 110 NOTL young people registered at the collective since its inception, a number founder Caroline Polgrabia is more than happy with.

"We said we want 200 youth of Niagara to pass through our doors in the first year," she said.

"So we're almost 50 per cent in our first eight weeks. So that's good," she added.

Over the next few weeks volunteers will get together and discuss what the next steps are for the spring. Since the weather will be nice, there's a good chance some of it will be outdoors.

Lots went well over the first two months.

The collective had a huge



The NOTL Youth Collective held a pizza party for the last day of its winter session. More than 20 kids came to play basketball, chess and hang out. SOMER SLOBODIAN

turn out for its certification classes — 20 young people are now first aid certified, 36 babysitting certified and 34 are "home alone" certified.

Many activities were a hit, especially chess, Polgrabia said.

On a recent Wednesday night, Owen Nzouankeu

and Liam Cadeau were going head-to-head in an intense game of chess on the far right side of the room.

If they noticed the other kids yelling, playing basketball or competing in a rock paper scissors competition, it didn't show.

While some come to participate in activities, others

come to relax with friends and lounge around after a long day of school.

Sophie Cadeau, a Grade 9 student from Governor Simcoe Secondary School in St. Catharines, visits the collective about once a week.

"I like the comfy couches (and) the piano is pretty cool," Cadeau said as she ate food on one of the large couches.

Polgrabia discovered that certain cohorts tend to stick together. As a result, she intends to do more activities and programs geared toward specific grade levels in the spring.

Also, anything that youth had to register for was a hit, said volunteer Brenda Ferguson.

"Which I also think helped with planning because we knew what was coming," she said.

Some programs didn't work as planned, like the NOTL Museum's heritage moments program.

A member of the NOTL Museum came and pre-

sented an artifact from the museum and it was up to the young folks to spend a few weeks researching the object. They were then required to present their findings at the end of February.

"Conceptually, people didn't understand what it was until they saw the end result," Polgrabia said.

That being said, it will run again now that it's clear how it works.

Ferguson also thinks that announcing what is coming earlier would be beneficial to not only the volunteers, but to the parents.

If people know "what's happening a little bit sooner, it'll make people be able to put this into their schedule," she said.

Throughout its first eight weeks, the collective offered many programs, including chess night, book club and cooking.

For Valentine's Day, 88 cards were made and sent to seniors in the community.

"I think we're only going up," Ferguson said.

Polgrabia is happy with how much the community has been involved from the start and hopes that continues.

Not once has she had to reach out and ask people to get involved. Even before it launched, the group received a lot of support.

People have always reached out to her, Polgrabia said.

"People were donating to an idea and now I think people are seeing what is coming out of it," Ferguson said.

The spring session is set to launch in mid-April, but it may look a bit different.

Polgrabia isn't sure if it will still be five days a week, or if they'll explore other options, but that will be decided over the next few weeks.

One thing she does know is that they'll need more volunteers by the summer.

It is a lengthy process, so if anybody is interested in volunteering they're encouraged to reach out to Polgrabia at [info@notlyouth.com](mailto:info@notlyouth.com).

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# With 12 players 'retiring,' NOTL U18s qualify for **two** finals

Kevin MacLean  
The Lake Report

A dozen core members of the NOTL Wolves U18 rep hockey team are wrapping up their minor hockey careers in the next two weeks – but first they have some unfinished business.

The team starts a best-of-three series Thursday night in Fort Erie, taking on the Meteors in the Niagara District Hockey League finals.

But no matter what happens there, this Wolves team will be in Barrie from March 31 to April 2 to compete against 11 other top teams for the big prize – the Ontario Minor Hockey Association championship.

They're among two Niagara-on-the-Lake teams headed to Barrie to play for provincial titles – the U11 rep Wolves also qualified.

As well, three of the NOTL association's local league squads are competing in Niagara District finals.

The U11 team is in the B division championship, U13 is contesting the A title and the U18 team will play in the C division for its age group.

"It's been a very good year for Niagara-on-the-Lake minor hockey teams," association president Peter Flynn said.



This is the last hurrah for most of the members of the NOTL Wolves U18 rep team as 12 of the team's 18 players are "retiring." Pictured from left: Reese Gordon, Cole Holmes, Ethan Peters, Sam Walker, Jack Marotta, Griffin Dyck, Theo VanderKaay, Will Denham, Alex Reile and Blair Burland. Two players were absent: Noah Ostromecki and Mateo Gruosso, who was in Italy attending an elite-level soccer camp. Below, the coaching staff also is retiring: trainer Jeff Dyck, head coach Tim Marotta and assistant Jim Denham. KEVIN MACLEAN

The Barrie-bound U18 team had to knock off Fort Erie in NOTL's final round-robin playoff game to earn a berth in the championships.

The boys knew, "Win and we're in," said head coach Tim Marotta.

Despite finishing the regular season well behind the Meteors in the standings, NOTL pulled together and beat them 3-1 to secure a trip to Barrie. As the top seed out of the round-robin, Fort Erie also qualified.

It was an immensely satisfying way to wrap up the playoffs, said Marotta, especially since 12 of his 18 players effectively will be ending their NOTL minor



hockey careers once the season wraps up.

"We'd set a goal of having a shot at getting to the OMHA finals and now we've made it."

Most players likely will go on to recreational

leagues, though some could play U21 hockey in other centres, like St. Catharines, he said.

But as of now, there's no older team in NOTL for them to play on.

In that final March 8

game against Fort Erie, the Wolves "were really focused. They knew what was at stake," said Marotta, crediting the team's goaltending tandem of Theo VanderKaay and Mateo Gruosso for being difference-makers in every game.

For now at least, this also is the last hurrah for Marotta, assistant coach Jim Denham (a veteran of more than 60 years of coaching hockey) and trainer Jeff Dyck.

They all have boys in their final year on the U18 team.

"I'm graduating, too. I didn't put my name forward to coach next year," Marotta

said, adding he's known most of the boys for years and will miss coaching them.

One of the best parts of his time on the bench has been "watching the boys grow up. When we started, they were very young. Now they're grown up, young adults. It's been fun to be a part of that."

Meanwhile, the players are looking forward to playing Fort Erie again. At practice on Monday night, they were all loose but focused – and proud of what they have accomplished. So far.

As one player said, "We beat them last time, we can do it again."

The series opens in Fort Erie on Thursday, returns to NOTL on Saturday at 6 p.m. and then back to Fort Erie for game 3, if necessary.

The dozen "retiring" players are: #9 Sam Walker, #19 Blair Burland, #21 Jack Marotta, #27 Reese Gordon, #35 Theo VanderKaay, #39 Mateo Gruosso, #61 Ethan Peters, #71 Will Denham, #91 Griffin Dyck, #93 Cole Holmes, #94 Alex Reile and #97 Noah Ostromecki.

Those eligible to play U18 again next season are: #25 Kieran Necakov-Waller, #65 Nick Munera, #66 Tyler Jarrett, #87 Marco Gruosso, #88 Lucas Roberts-Ramos and #89 Logan Smythe.

# Volleyball playoff embodies all that is **positive** about sport



## Ross's Ramblings

Ross Robinson  
Columnist

There is so much wrong with sports these days.

The captain of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Wayne Gretzky on television promoting gambling. "Get in the game. Gamble now. Here's how to gamble more."

Hockey Canada mired in sexual assault scandals, and minor sports coaches accused of bullying and harassing. Teams going on strike.

Happily, I drove up to Brock University to watch the Quigley Cup, with the Brock Women's volleyball team hosting Queen's for the Ontario women's

championship. I arrived at the Bob Davis gym 30 minutes before game time, to be confronted by organized pandemonium.

So good to see my former old timer hockey teammate Bob Davis enjoying the games.

Health Science student Emily in the box office had enthusiastically sold me the third-last seat, and I joined students, parents, fans, cheerleaders, Queen's fans, and a kitchen band with frying pans, drums and banners.

Usher Gigi, a third-year recreation student (they wear name tags) found me a seat three rows behind the band and a bunch of wild and crazy males who were "really into the spirit." It was loud and crazy, and reassuring to see that students still act like students.

Way back in 1972, I fell in love with women's volleyball while working at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. A week or two before the Games started, I stumbled upon the Pol-

ish and Japanese teams practising in the Volleyball Halle.

I appreciated their athleticism, good attitude, positivity, sportsmanship and genuine love of their sport.

For the next month, I watched a bit of rowing and a bit of track and field, and a whole lot of volleyball. That was 51 years ago and volleyball still rocks my sports spectating world.

Back at Brock it was sport at its best. The two teams were on the floor, going through their efficient, choreographed warm-up routines.

Unlike hockey and basketball, where the athletes often seem to be making up their warm-ups as they go along, the two teams were on a schedule, sharing the court and retrieving errant serves and smashes for each other. Volunteer spectators, mostly young men in cool Brock gear, were helping out.

The host and visiting teams were evenly matched, both having won

20 matchups. The players were from all over Ontario, with three from out west. So athletic, with vertical leaps up to 38 inches. Diving, digging, blocking, killing, flying serves – even the pre-game is so awesome.

The teams, the referee and the on-court officials were introduced, and the first game started on time, at 6:01 p.m.

The noise! The enthusiasm! After every point, quick encouragement among teammates. Never a pout or a frown. Never a negative word or look toward the referee. Do that and you get yellow carded. Once more, a red card and you are gone.

No tantrums or clipboard throwing by the coaches. It's all so disgustingly positive.

After the first game, which Brock lost 26-24, I turned to talk to the student next to me. I was crying and convulsing, unable to speak, emotionally overcome. This was everything I love about

sports. She asked if I was going to be OK.

About ten minutes later, I had composed myself and went to buy popcorn. Only two bucks. Give me three bags, so I could share with the students.

At the concession stand, I chatted with the Queen's bus driver, from McCoy Coach Lines in Kingston. He loves driving volleyball teams.

"They are such great kids. Dedicated, polite, no prima donnas, no jerks. Classy kids. The worst are hockey teams. Generally speaking, hockey people are angry people."

Rambling back now to the bleachers (the stands, not the students) on that Saturday evening. So many exciting points and the lead changed hands often.

It came down to the fifth, tie-breaking game. With the score tied at 8, it seems the referee made a bad call at the net. The chap next to me, a "travel team volleyball coach from Kitchener," started to boo the ref.

I told him he was sound-

ing like a hockey parent. He chuckled and concluded his protestation.

Brock came back to win the deciding game, 15-13. I was caught short, not realizing the last game was only up to 15. Please tell me again why this is the rule. Just to confuse us?

Both teams were classy, half of the players really happy and half really sad.

But after a few minutes, an abundance of sports-womanship. Applauding each other, loving their gold and silver medals. Shaking hands and thanking the refs.

Chins up, ready for the next challenge.

For the Brock team, a trip to Vancouver last weekend for the nationals (where they competed but lost both their matches). For Queen's, a long bus ride around Lake Ontario to more studying, more fun, and soon, more volleyball games.

Each and every player a winner, knowing they had tried their best.

I love watching volleyball.

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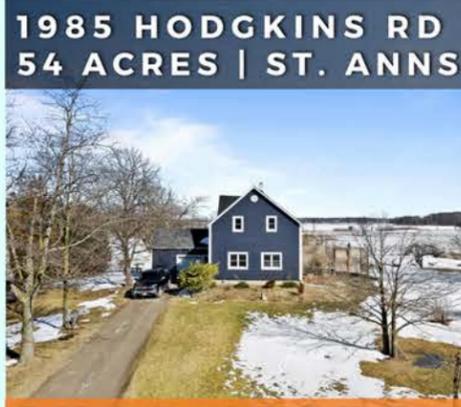
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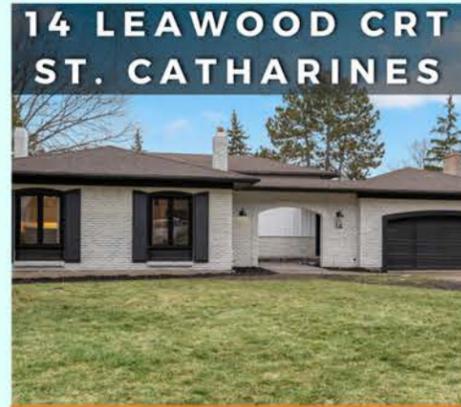
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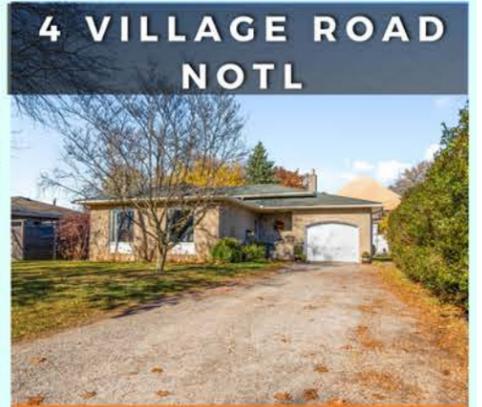
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The bottom section features a dark background with a decorative banner. On the left and right sides, there are illustrations of a white Easter bunny holding a colorful egg. The text in the center announces an event at Niagara Nursery School's Bunny Trail & Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 8 at 9 AM.



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# Spring is finally here. It's time to start your **seeds indoors**



## **GROWING TOGETHER**

Joanne Young  
Columnist

It is now time to start planting some vegetable seeds indoors.

No matter how many times I plant seeds, it never ceases to amaze me how everything a plant needs to grow and flourish is inside of the tough seed coat.

When you consider the size of a tomato seed (which is larger than most seeds) and think about what that tiny seed is capable of producing, it just is quite amazing.

The Hindi word for seed is *bija*, which translates literally to "containment of life." I love that definition. Seeing seeds start to germinate in spring has a way of bringing us hope after a long winter.

Here are some questions that I get asked about sowing vegetable seeds.

**Q:** Do you have to start all vegetable seeds indoors or can you plant them directly outside when the time comes?

**A:** Crops that are best started indoors include warm season vegetables such as broccoli, brussels sprouts, eggplant, cabbage and tomatoes.

Those with a slower root development, like cauliflower, celery, eggplant and peppers, should also be started indoors.

Some vegetables take more days to harvest than others and you can give them a head start by starting them indoors as well and get more produce from them. Starting seeds inside allows you to gain a few precious weeks of growing time, which can really make a difference.

Seeds for summer vegetables like beans, corn, squash, pumpkins, cucumbers, watermelons and zucchini can be directly planted into the ground around May 23.

**Q:** When is the best time to start sowing seeds?

**A:** The best time to be sowing most vegetable



Brussel sprouts are a crop you want to start early indoors, says Joanne Young.

seed indoors is about six weeks prior to the last frost. According to the Farmer's Almanac for Niagara region, the last frost date for 2023 is predicted for May 7. Therefore, most seeds should be started in the next week or so.

**Q:** What soil is best for planting seeds in?

**A:** Trick question. The answer is a mix that actually contains no soil at all. Most seed mixes contain a blend of mainly vermiculite, perlite and peat moss – and no soil.

This makes the medium light and airy for easy root growth. It also aids in moisture retention while still allowing for good

drainage. So when you are looking for the right "soil" in the store, look for a seed starter mix or a potting mix – not a potting soil.

Make sure you moisten the potting mix before planting the seeds.

**Q:** What kind of container is best to start the seeds in?

**A:** The easiest way to get started is to purchase a seed starting tray that holds water, some pots or cells packs and a clear plastic dome.

The clear dome placed over the pots in the tray helps to hold the moisture in until the seeds begin to germinate. If you like to recycle or use less plastic, you can always make your

own containers to plant the seeds in.

There are endless ideas online on what can be used – egg cartons, eggshells, newspaper, even toilet paper rolls. Just make sure that it has good drainage.

**Q:** How deep do I plant the seeds?

**A:** Always check your seed packages for depth, but in general fill your pots or cell pack with moistened potting mix so the soil level is just a little below the top.

Very lightly compress the soil mix with your fingers. Disperse seeds on the surface of the soil. Then lightly cover the seeds with a thin topping of more soil.

Most seeds do not need to be very deep at all, so make sure you are not putting too much on top of them. Lightly and gently water the soil, allowing the water to soak in.

It is OK if some water remains sitting in the tray below. Once watered, place the dome over top of the tray. You will notice condensation forming on the dome. The seeds will not need watering again until they have germinated.

Place trays near a bright sunny window. When the seedlings become visible, remove the dome permanently and start watering as required. Do not let the soil to dry out completely.

To help strengthen the seedlings, you might want to have an oscillating fan running nearby. This helps strengthen the stems of the plants and improve air circulation so that there will be fewer fungus problems such as damping off.

As seedlings start to grow, rotate the trays every couple of days to keep the plants growing straighter.

Let the seeding begin.  
*Joanne Young is a Niagara-on-the-Lake garden expert and coach. See her website at joanneyoung.ca.*



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## Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, 'The Roses of Heliogabalus'

Penny-Lynn Cookson  
Special to The Lake Report

Are you ready to party?

As we hesitantly crawl out from the constraints of our restricted social lives of the past three years, one example of an over-the-top banquet may serve to astonish. It's all about roses.

Beautiful, historic, symbolic, coveted, admired – roses have power. We gift them as expressions of love, friendship, celebration or sorrow.

They have also been symbolic of political battles for supremacy, such as the 15th century English War of the Roses. Intrigue, controversy and veiled meanings have been a part of the aesthetic world story of the rose since its first wild fossil was identified as 35 million years old.

In "The Roses of Heliogabalus," Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema has taken the ancient Roman sensuous obsession with roses to its

extreme in a painting that met the late 19th-century prudish Victorian desire for "wicked" paintings that combined academic historical accuracy with salacious scenes.

In the banquet of all banquets, the young Emperor Elagabalus, wearing a gold silk robe, lies on a fine tapestry, delicately holding his glass of wine as he dispassionately observes floral carnage as his guests are smothered to death by a cascade of pink rose petals released from a false ceiling over their heads.

Being inebriated and spent from an excess of food, wine and sex, they seem not to mind their fate. A maenad musician, cult follower of the god of wine Dionysus, whose sculpture is behind Elagabalus, plays the double pipes, inciting the guests to greater ecstasy.

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, known as Elagabalus, is considered one of the worst Roman emperors by the



Alma-Tadema, Lawrence, "The Roses of Heliogabalus," 1888, oil on canvas, private collection.

Historia Augusta and Gibbons "Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire."

He ruled a mere four years, 218-222 AD, as his wild, depraved, oversexed, vicious behaviour of executing anyone who censured him, his five marriages and four divorces including to a Vestal virgin, and delight in wearing makeup and women's clothing, became too much even for his

grandmother who arranged for his assassination by his Praetorian Guard.

He was 18 when he was killed. Elagabalus has been relegated to "damnatio memoriae," erasure from public record as a disgraced person of note.

When "The Roses of Heliogabalus" was commissioned by Sir John Aird in 1888, roses were out of season so Alma-Tadema

imported them weekly for the four months it took to complete the painting.

It was exhibited to great acclaim but interest in his work declined dramatically with his death in 1912 and has now been re-evaluated in recent years for its importance within 19th-century British art.

As we enter spring with plans to prune our rose bushes and entertain,

perhaps not with peacocks tongue, camels hoof and fried dormice, we can smother our guests with kindness and regale them with further stories of the power of roses.

*Penny-Lynn Cookson is an art historian and writer. See her live lecture on the "Power of the Rose" on Saturday, March 25 at 3:30 p.m. at RiverBrink Art Museum in Queenston.*

## Music festival competition returns to NOTL with 300 participants

Julia Sacco  
The Lake Report

This year's Niagara Festival of the Performing Arts is returning to St. Davids-Queenston United Church and the Yellow Door Theatre in Virgil with the introduction of strings and speech arts as part of the competition.

"It's for musicians of all ages and adult classes as well," said festival director and founder Lisa Cosens Brillon.

The competition, from March 27 to 31, includes classical voice, musical theatre, popular voice, classical piano, popular piano, strings and speech arts.

Nearly 300 participants are signed up and ready to play as the competition returns to fully in-person festivities for the first time since 2019.

"We offered virtual for two years and then last year I did a hybrid of virtual and live because people were still a bit hesitant to come back into a live situation," said Cosens Brillon.

"Now we're fully live and I'm excited for the festival to begin and to hear all the



Niagara's Festival of the Performing Arts is back in-person for the first time since the start of COVID. SUPPLIED

great performances."

Admission to all performances is free.

From Monday to Wednesday voice, classical piano and strings will be hosted in St. Davids while on Thursday and Friday the highly anticipated musical theatre competition will be at the Yellow Door Theatre on Line 2 Road.

"(Musical theatre) is our biggest competition, with the most entries," said Cosens Brillon.

Winners at the Niagara festival can be recommended to compete in the provincial festival, which runs from June 5 to 10 this year.

Locations in Niagara-on-the-Lake include Bethany Mennonite Brethren

Church, Cornerstone Community Church, Yellow Door Theatre and St. Davids-Queenston United Church.

"I'm very proud to say that our smaller festival has had many winners at the provincial music festival and they're competing with instrumentalists from across the province, from big centres like Toronto or Ottawa, Windsor and London," said Cosens Brillon.

"I'd say on average we have three provincial winners from our festival every year, which is pretty exciting."

She noted the festival is supported by the Rotary Club of Niagara Falls, Stamford Kiwanis Club and many businesses in NOTL.



Juliet Dunn, co-creator of the TD Jazz Festival, is excited about the win. FILE

## TD Niagara Jazz Fest wins top 100 award

Julia Sacco  
The Lake Report

The TD Niagara Jazz Festival has been in a staple in Niagara-on-the-Lake for a decade and it is no stranger to accolades.

After winning Festivals and Events Ontario awards in 2017, 2019 and 2020 for best new festival and top 100 festivals respectively, it has made into the top 100 yet again.

It's one of six festivals across Niagara that were honoured.

Juliet Dunn, co-creator of the TD Niagara Jazz Festival, said that among all the festivals across Ontario, it is always an honour to be

recognized.

"I mean there's the Peach Festival, the Garlic Festival. Of course, there's Boots and Hearts, which is a country festival. There's a festival for everything and that's really cool and fun."

Dunn said passion has always been the main driving force behind the event.

"My late husband Peter (Shea) and I are both musicians. Our festival was built from the ground up."

"I wasn't hired to work for the festival or anything. We actually created it from thin air, so it's really a passion project."

"We do a lot of events during the year, which keeps the art form of jazz

alive here in Niagara," she said.

There are jazz events each month around the region, primarily in NOTL or St. Catharines, leading up to the pivotal summer festival, including the upcoming spring fundraiser on May 6 at Hare Wine Co. in NOTL. "And every year, of course, we do something to celebrate International Jazz Day, which is on April 30," said Dunn.

This year, the jazz day celebration is also at Hare Wine Co.

The summer festival, which runs from July 15 to 23, will feature a double-bill at Jackson-Triggs winery.

# Have some fun



**Across**

- 3. Crisp, lustrous fabric (7)
- 8. Loose Japanese robe (6)
- 9. Cynical and pessimistic film genre (4)
- 10. An island, according to John Donne (2,3)
- 11. Hypersensitive (8)
- 12. Musician --- Clapton (4)
- 16. Pirouetted (7)
- 20. Forsake (7)
- 21. "Honour and ---, fore-damned they sit ..." (Kipling) (3)
- 22. Amalgamate (5)
- 23. Chemical Ali was one (5)
- 24. Apollo moonshot vehicle (1,1,1)
- 25. Willingly obedient (7)
- 26. Symbol of sovereignty (7)
- 30. 1920s art style (4)
- 34. Not expressly stated (8)
- 36. Bring to fruition (5)
- 37. In (4)
- 38. Essential (6)
- 39. Attribute sounds like a writer (7)

**Down**

- 1. Stuff with stuff (4)
- 2. "Not likely!" (2,4)
- 3. Ego nut goes bananas for a mouthful (6)
- 4. Seed-eating bird variety (5)
- 5. "The moan of doves in immemorial ---" (Tennyson) (4)
- 6. The last Stuart monarch (4)
- 7. "Hot spot" IT service (2-2)
- 11. Greatly surprised (9)
- 13. Shining (7)
- 14. Big bit of crust? (9)
- 15. Literary ridicule (6)
- 17. Featherbrained (7)
- 18. "Cut it out!" (3,3)
- 19. Reside (5)
- 20. Components of molecules (5)
- 27. Mobster caught for tax evasion (6)
- 28. Values highly (6)
- 29. "Ten Commandments" mountain (5)
- 31. "Little Sir ---, how do you do?" (4)
- 32. Black and white marine predator (4)
- 33. Grand-scale (4)
- 35. Separate article (4)

### Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
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### Last issue's answers

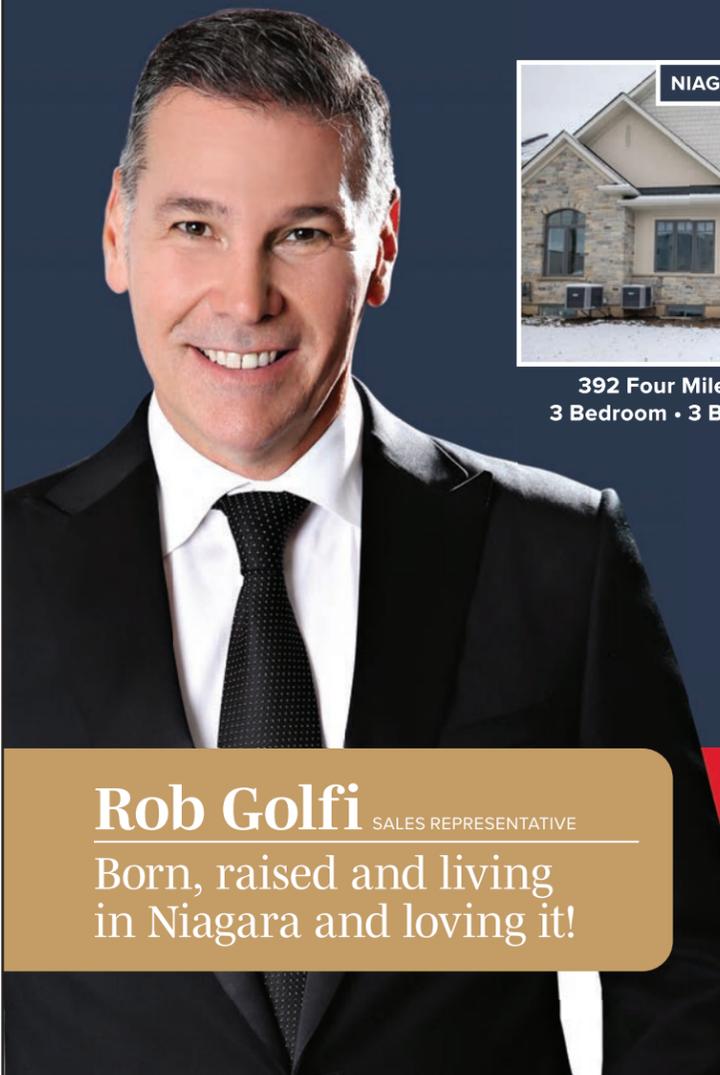
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	H	U		G		W	P	N	
16	E	A	S	E	S	P	E	T	R
	E	T	C		L	N	T	E	
21	P	R	O	S	H	O	P	C	E
	S	R	O	U		I	P	A	
24	K	I	M	J	O	N	G	I	L
	I	I	L		N		S	W	
29	N	O	N	E	S	C	R	E	V
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# Insights into complexities of the human brain



**DR. BROWN**

Dr. William Brown  
Special to The Lake Report

The nature of the consciousness and awareness remain what Winston Churchill so aptly described in a very different context, a “riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.”

But as mysterious as both may be in the minds of philosophers, neuroscientists such as Francis Crick and Oliver Sachs and the odd physicist, including Erwin Schrodinger and the 2020 Nobel Prize winner in physics, Roger Penrose – a more profitable way for me to tackle their nature is to begin with what I’m aware of now as I write this and some illustrative clinical cases.

Fortunately, we’re aware of the tiniest fraction of what’s going on within and around us at any given moment.

For example, as I write this, I’m aware of little more than my left hand steadying the pad of paper before me, while the black ballpoint pen in my right hand creates strings of words across the page, a vague sense of reading what I’ve just written and sometimes periodic pauses to think before moving on.

But for the rest – the familiar humdrum background sounds from the fireplace, the workings of my innards as they go about their business of keeping me and my brain alive – I’m mercifully unaware.

Except of course for the occasional shenanigans of squirrels that sometimes catch my attention. It’s an example of selective attention and just how capable the brain is at focusing on the interest at hand, while ignoring the rest.

Sometimes, we’re unaware for other reasons. My father was unaware of his left face, arm and leg following an ischemic stroke, which involved his right (non-dominant) hemisphere in the parietal region.

There was no weakness or trouble walking except



The human brain is still a complex mystery to unravel, but we’re starting to learn more, says Dr. William Brown.

when he was faced one day with the need to climb over a low rail fence on a country walk. There was no trouble lifting his unaffected right leg over the fence first, but unaware of his left leg, and thus the need to lift it over the fence to move on, he was stuck, unable to go on and frustrated.

It was only when I pointed out that his left leg needed to be lifted over the fence that he was able to do so and move on.

When his attention was

drawn to his left arm and leg, sensation was normal. But touched on both sides simultaneously, he always ignored the stimulus on the left side.

The same was true for his visual fields. Stimulated on both sides with my wiggling fingers, he ignored the fingers on the left side, but stimulated only on the left side, readily picked up the stimulus.

That’s an example of sensory extinction, to touch and sight, to simultaneous stimulation on both sides and an example of how lesions in the brain may distort our awareness.

Then there’s the matter of patients who survive severe brain injuries due to trauma, a major stroke or severe hypoxic brain injury. Some waken from their initial coma but fail to show any response to stimulation of any kind – a state aptly called “wakefulness without awareness.”

Or so it seemed despite many attempts to connect with these patients in some meaningful manner. Then teams at the universities of Cambridge and Liege

assessed groups of these patients using functional MRI, a technique that measures cerebral blood in real-time.

The results were stunning. In response to instructions such as, imagine walking through familiar rooms in your home or swinging a tennis racquet at a ball or navigating your way through a familiar city, the brains of several patients, otherwise “unreachable” using conventional methods, lit up in the appropriate regions of their brains in a similar fashion to healthy controls.

The findings clearly showed that in some fashion, some of those patients were aware.

That was amazing and a startling example of how standard assessment techniques used in intensive care units and recovery rooms may miss awareness in patients.

In the United States similar observations were made using artificial intelligence to analyze the surface-recorded electrical activity of the brain in patients in response to similar types of stimulation.

These few examples high-

light why the brain is such a challenging frontier for science. The brain contains roughly 100 billion nerve cells, many of which connect with many thousands of other local, regional and distant nerve cells, all of which makes the brain a formidable organ to study and understand.

The sheer complexity of the brain explains why, despite much effort by some very clever scientists, the physiological and anatomical basis of consciousness remains mysterious and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Some scientists, such as Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate in physics, even suggest that understanding the brain may be beyond the cognitive reach of humanity. By the way, he felt the same way about some of the most challenging and intractable problems in physics.

He was probably right on both accounts.

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

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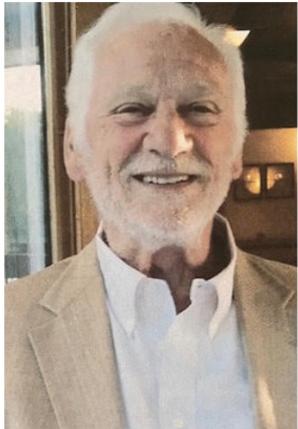


## Jerman's Service Station, St. Davids

This image is of St. Davids from around the 1930s. It features the Jerman's Service Station and refreshment stand that operated at the corner of Four Mile Creek Road and York Road. Former resident George Jerman was likely the owner. He was involved in a number of community groups, including the local firefighters and the township council administration. Note the tall fuel pumps out front and the Dominion Tire station in the background. In the 1960s, St. Davids boasted four gas stations. Today, St. Davids Dental occupies this corner!

## Obituary

### Ray Guy



GUY, Ray (Henry William) - Beloved father and grandfather, passed away peacefully on March 11, 2023 at Niagara Falls Hospital. Born on July 9, 1939 in Wishaw, Scotland to Jenny and Willy, brother to Moira (1944), Ray and his parents immigrated to Hamilton, Ontario where he was raised.

At the outset of his career with the Canadian diplomatic corps, Ray met his future wife, Valerie, and they moved to Pakistan, the first of numerous international postings that included San Francisco, Budapest, Atlanta, Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong and Detroit. Ray was a distinguished member of the Foreign Service for 31 years, retiring in 1999 as a Senior Trade Commissioner. Upon retirement, he and Valerie moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario where they welcomed guests at their historic Bed and Breakfast, the Wilson-Guy House, for 15 years.

Ray and Valerie were well connected to the local community in NOTL. Ray held leadership positions with the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club International, St. Andrews Society, and NOTL Lawn Bowling Club. Through his teaching appointment at Niagara College as coordinator of the International Business Management Program, Ray

dedicated himself to developing the next generation of students and business leaders.

Throughout his life, Ray was a voracious reader, traveler, lover of fine scotch, cigars, opera, and the English Premier League (go Hotspurs!). He also had an illustrious career as an oarsman, first organizing a high school team that won the Canadian Schoolboy Championship, being awarded the Calder-Cleland Memorial Trophy. He continued on with the Leander Boat Club, winning his first Canadian Championship and was named Oarsmen of the year (on two separate occasions). He was a member of the McMaster University Varsity Rowing Team from 1964 to 1968, serving as captain in his final three years, twice leading his team to an OQAA Championship title.

Ray demonstrated his incredible resilience after returning to anchor McMaster's lightweight team to a first-place finish after a life-threatening car accident in 1966. He also was a member of Canada's National Rowing Team from 1966 to 1967, winning a Canadian Henley Regatta. Ray's final race was in the 1967 Pan-American Games. Over his career, Ray won 11 Canadian Championships, two U.S. Championships, and was inducted into the McMaster Athletics Hall of Fame in 1999.

Ray was a loving husband to Valerie, who passed in 2008, and devoted father to their four children, Belinda, Laura, Andrew, and Olivia. He was incredibly proud of his four grandchildren, Liam, Morgan, Alex, and Elyse. Ray was an inspiration to all that knew him and will be missed deeply by his family and friends. He will be remembered and celebrated for his generous nature, gregariousness, passion for life, and for always spinning a good yarn.

Per Ray's wishes, cremation has taken place. A celebration of life has been planned for Monday, April 10 at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club (2-4pm). Those who wish may make a memorial donation to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada or Rotary Foundation international Canada. Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at [www.morganfuneral.com](http://www.morganfuneral.com)

## Spring fundraiser for NOTL Cat Rescue will sell planters

Somer Slobodian  
Local Journalism Initiative  
The Lake Report

Spring is here and the third annual spring planter fundraiser and food drive for NOTL Cat Rescue is just around the corner.

"One hundred per cent of the proceeds go to NOTL Cat Rescue," said Tanya Rice, the fundraiser's organizer and longtime volunteer.

NOTL Cat Rescue is a volunteer-based organization in Niagara-on-the-Lake that rescues stray cats and kittens.

Kauzlaric Family Farm will be sponsoring the fundraiser this year, which helps with the startup costs, Rice said.

The sale is April 1 from 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., behind Crossroads Secondary School at 456 Line 2 Rd. in Virgil.

Rice, her mom Joyce and a friend will be making 70 to 80 large and small planters to sell for \$25 to \$40.

Some planters will be filled with tulips, while others will be contain geraniums. Fresh pussy willow will be used in each planter, along with a large bright bow and butterfly or dragon decorations.

"We always do it the weekend before Easter," Rice said. "A lot of people buy them as a hostess gift."

Rice's Christmas fundraiser for the rescue raised about \$4,500 and sold 64 plants, she said.

"We're always striving to improve ourselves," Rice said.

A food drive will also take place and Rice is asking for dry food, wet food and cat litter donations.

Brands like Fancy Feast, Natural Balance and Performatrin for kittens and adults are always needed.

There will also be a raffle table.

Customers will have a chance to win prizes from businesses like Caroline Cellars Family Estate Winery, Pet Valu in Virgil,

the Shaw Festival and Soko Bakery.

There is also a Kate Spade bracelet and a Stella and Dot clutch to be won.

The proceeds from the fundraiser and raffle will help the rescue cover the medical costs for cats coming into its care.

This winter more than 20 cats were rescued.

The spay and neutering costs alone come to \$210 and \$260 per animal.

"But we never get away with that minimal cost because then there's the microchipping (and) the vaccination," Rice said.

There are also unexpected medical costs, like surgery, which can cost thousands of dollars.

Rice also wants to use the fundraiser as a chance to educate the public on why it's so important to spay and neuter cats.

"We just took a six-month-old kitten off the streets," she said.

"Not spayed, not microchipped, she had frostbite all over her little face. Her tail had sustained an injury," she added.

The kitten, named Ginny, is an example of what the rescue often sees. Her vet bills came to more than \$700.

"As a result of cats not being spayed or neutered, we have a huge increase in kittens in the spring," she said.

The rescue is also looking for new volunteers and fosters to help with the influx of cats and kittens.

"We lost four foster homes between the end of February and the beginning of March," Rice said.

Foster families will be provided with everything they need to foster a cat, Rice said.

"You just need the love in your heart and an empty room in your home," she said.

Cash and debit will be accepted at the sale.

Anyone looking to volunteer, become a foster or donate to the raffle can email Rice at [brownspoint4@hotmail.com](mailto:brownspoint4@hotmail.com).

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