



Kimberley Rampersad, Shaw's assistant artistic director, speaks at the company's annual meeting.

Shaw sets record with \$39.5M revenue

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Despite a year filled with challenges such as cross-border travel, U.S. tariffs and economic stagnation, the Shaw Festival is touting its 2025 season as a success, with another year of record-breaking revenue.

During Friday's annual meeting, executive director Tim Jennings described the previous year as "challenging," but said the organization performed well.

Last year's operating revenue of \$39.5 million is \$500,000 higher than 2024's revenue, which was \$39 million, topping it as the Shaw's largest operating revenue to date.

2025, however, saw a dip in the Shaw's operating profits: the festival reported a surplus of \$172,000, compared to the 2024 surplus of \$768,000.

Attendance went down from 2024's numbers: last year saw a total of 222,169 attendees compared to 2024's 239,542. The festival made \$20.7 million in earned revenue such as ticket sales, compared to the previous year's \$22.5 million.

The Shaw has yet to make

Continued on Page 4

Town pitches parking

NOTL council looks at two-storey garage for former hospital site, Burton Foundation urges council to consider proposals for community use



Niagara-on-the-Lake is eyeing the possibility of turning the former hospital at 176 Wellington St. into a two-level parking garage with 150 spots, along with making some space available for community or municipal use. The project could cost up to \$18 million. SOURCED/TOWN OF NOTL

Paige Seburn | Local Journalism Initiative | The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake is betting on parking at the former hospital site on Wellington Street.

It's studying a project to add 150 parking spaces to the spot, which could bring in up to \$1.9 million a year, instead of opening the land to outside ideas — for now.

Staff are looking at the possibility of a two-storey building with parking and some flexible space for community or municipal use,

which could generate between \$1.1 million and \$1.9 million annually, but cost roughly \$9 million to \$18 million to build.

Councillors debated four options from staff for 176 Wellington St. Tuesday night, ultimately voting 6-3 to move forward with staff's recommendation — the first option out of four possibilities — to direct staff to continue developing the town-led concept and spend up to \$200,000 on

detailed design work.

Option 2 would have stopped the work and maintained the site as-is; option 3 would have shifted to exploring third-party options through a request for proposals; and option 4 would have done both — continuing staff work while also exploring outside proposals.

The James A. Burton & Family Foundation pushed council to choose the fourth option, arguing it would bring forward

more ideas and lead to a better-informed decision.

Coun. Maria Mavridis said that position was echoed in "dozens" of emails from residents that day "pressing for option 4."

"Regardless of it being an election year — decisions need to be made that may not be popular with some, but in the best interest of all," Mavridis said at the meeting.

Continued on Page 3

NOTL votes to reduce number of councillors from eight to six

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

Niagara-on-the-Lake council has voted to reduce its size from eight councillors to six, a move set to take effect in time for the

2026 municipal election.

Council approved the change at its March 24 meeting, framing it as part of a broader effort to streamline local governance and respond to concerns raised by the province about

municipal structures across Niagara.

The new composition would see one lord mayor and six councillors, down from the current one lord

Continued on Page 10



This year when a new council is inaugurated, there will only be seven people representing the residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake. FILE/RICHARD HARLEY

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Council expected to approve **final official plan** next month

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake is in the home stretch of finalizing its largest planning document, with the final draft of its new official plan out now and approval expected next month.

The official plan, which outlines policies expected to guide the community over the next 25 years, shapes where homes, businesses and farms go, how heritage areas are protected and how growth is managed.

The town said the draft, a 402-page document, includes updates following a public meeting in November, including “general edits and formatting changes, revisions to site-specific policies, employment areas, secondary plans, definitions, transportation policies, and other refinements.” The document also summarizes changes made since the previous draft.

Among the changes is the removal of the Glendale secondary plan “with the intent to incorporate once the appeal process is complete.”

Council approved the Glendale plan early last year, but it remains under appeal with the Ontario Land Tribunal.

A secondary plan is a detailed land-use plan for a specific area. The draft official plan states Glendale is expected to be the fastest-growing part of Niagara-on-the-Lake during the plan’s timeframe.

Steve Hardakar, a board member with the NOTL Residents Association who lives in Glendale, said he was “disappointed” that schedule 2b from the Glendale secondary plan remains. He said the section addresses “enhanced building heights,” allowing for taller buildings in certain locations.

“It gives false hope that developers are going to get higher buildings in Glendale,” said Hardakar.

He added that removing the secondary plan could create other challenges.

“If it’s not in the plan, then I can’t see the town approving any development applications for Glendale,” he said.

The town also released a document compiling public comments submitted during



Fiona Main, NOTL senior policy planner, is one of the main architects of the official plan. The final draft of the plan was released earlier this month. FILE

the planning process.

The process has drawn concern in the Chautauqua neighbourhood. The Chautauqua Residents Association has said it believes the town is backing away from a commitment in the 2019 official plan to create a secondary plan to protect the area’s distinct design and history.

This time, however, the group struck a more cautiously optimistic tone, citing productive discussions with town staff, including Fiona Main and Tanya Devlin, who toured the neigh-

bourhood in November.

“The Chautauqua Residents Association appreciates the recognition in the town’s draft official plan that Chautauqua warrants further area-specific planning attention through the preparation of a secondary plan or other appropriate study,” said association president Weston Miller in an email.

He added that “residents will be paying attention to how this commitment is implemented through future planning work and look forward to participating constructively in that process.”

The draft also allows country inns as a permissible “secondary use” on properties in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Other secondary uses include existing cottage rentals and rooming and boarding houses. The plan also updates definitions for bed and breakfast establishments, cottage rentals, vacation rentals and villas.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa called the upcoming committee of the whole meeting “an important step in finalizing the town’s official plan.”

He said it will allow council to review the final draft, hear from the public and consider adopting the plan.

Zalepa said the draft includes “policy updates in several key areas,” including growth management, housing, employment and the economy, agriculture, climate change, cultural heritage, transportation and infrastructure, urban design, and Indigenous engagement.

Coun. Andrew Niven praised the draft’s attention to tourism, agriculture, heritage and the “overall character of the town.”

“Like any major planning document of this scale, there will always be opportunities to refine certain details, and I look forward to continuing discussions with town staff as we move through the final stages of the process,” he said.

“However, the overall direction of the plan is very positive and provides a strong foundation to guide the community’s growth and decision-making in the years ahead.”

Coun. Adriana Vizzari said she was “happy with the process and the opportunity for residents to provide

input as the Town develops its new official plan.”

She said her input has “mainly focused on transportation safety, particularly recognizing schools as priority community safety zones.”

Coun. Sandra O’Connor said she has not yet reviewed the document.

“Councillors have until March 30 to discuss with staff, so my comments are not yet ready,” she said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita called the process “comprehensive, inclusive, and thorough.”

The town adopted an official plan in 2019, but Niagara Region delayed approval because it did not align with the regional official plan or reflect changes in provincial land-use policies. The new plan aims to address those issues.

Council is expected to consider the draft at a committee of the whole — planning meeting on April 14 at 6 p.m.

A PDF of the draft is available on the town’s Join the Conversation page: jointheconversationnotl.org/officialplan.

daniel@niagaranow.com

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NOTL continues to study 150-spot parking concept for former hospital

Continued from Front Page

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said the divide at council over the matter is largely about timing.

"I really believe we're all trying to get to the same place," he said.

On considering a request for proposals now, Zalepa said "I will — that's where I'm going. But I'm not ready to do it, for all the reasons mentioned so far."

Council also approved a separate report allowing Royal Oak Community School to stay at 176 Wellington St. until June 2027 under a lease extension, but the town can end the lease early with six months' notice as it decides the site's future.

Parking and revenue driving the plan

Mavridis called NOTL a town "in the parking business," arguing parking reserves have helped fund projects and avoid tax increases.

"Why are we continuing making decisions for just today instead of planning for the future?" she said.

Coun. Erwin Wiens said he frequently hears from residents about "the parking issues that we have" so he was confused by "some negativity" he's heard around parking at the site.

Although he said he wants clear and concise information before going to market, Wiens ultimately supported giving staff more time to explore the options and "nail it down."

"In the long run, it will be a quicker process that will be more effective and get the goals we want," he said.

The building, now home to Royal Oak, costs about \$181,000 a year to operate while bringing in about \$107,000 in rent and parking revenue.

"So we're upside down," said Wiens, raising concerns about the building's condition and what plans the school has after the lease is up.

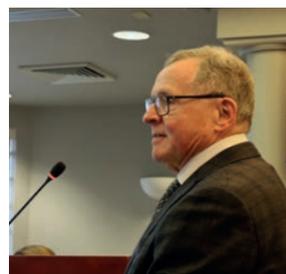
Staff said though most services work, the building "is not in great condition" and the school is exploring its other "opportunities," in recognition that their situation involves "a temporary kind of lease agreement."

Councillors acknowledged the school's long-term future at the site is uncertain, but stressed there are no immediate plans to displace it.

"We're not gonna kick



Above: These renderings offer a peek at what the former hospital could look like if converted into a parking garage, while keeping all or some of the existing building intact. SOURCED/TOWN OF NOTL Right: Jim Burton, whose foundation wants to turn the old hospital into a cultural and arts hub, says the town should consider outside proposals for the space. PAIGE SEBURN



kids out," Wiens said.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita said the school fills an important gap in the community.

Split over when to open the process

Not all councillors agreed.

Coun. Sandra O'Connor said although she appreciated the architecture, she had expected a request for proposals to come forward at this point.

"I think that there's too much focus on parking — particularly when 39 per cent of the responses said that parking should not occur there," she said. "That shouldn't be the main focus."

Coun. Gary Burroughs and Coun. Wendy Cheropita also pushed for that direction. Cheropita said the process should stay open to different ideas and opportunities since council may not yet have considered everything the site could become.

Before council approved staff's recommendation as presented, an amendment was moved to shift toward option 4 and failed in a 6-3 vote.

Chief administrative officer Nick Ruller said before staff can seek outside proposals, it needs more time and resources to gather additional information and provide clearer direction.

He said his "biggest apprehension" with requests for proposals right now, is "we still need the clarity as to what the deliverables are."

"There's a lot of moving parts here."

Ruller said those parts include how many parking spaces and how much building space the site could support, what revenue a gateway component might generate and whether partnerships could be secured for any community use.

Push to 'build on' staff work, open proposals now

The James A. Burton & Family Foundation — which has proposed a multi-use community hub focused on arts, culture and education, with space for performances, events, classes and local organizations, alongside parking — spoke in front of council to urge option 4.

To the foundation, the original purpose of the site — serving the community — remains.

"A most constructive next step is to build on this work by inviting alternative, feasible solutions," foundation chairman Jim Burton.

"What do we have to lose by welcoming other proposals?"

Burton said the foundation has "no commercial interests" and is "not seeking

ownership," instead offering to act as a "catalyst" for the project.

"An open process simply ensures that a decision is made with the best available information," Burton said, adding that it would help the town see "philanthropic, institutional and partnership models not currently reflected in the report."

The foundation released a video on its website at 176wellington.ca featuring 14 voices from across the community describing the site as an opportunity to reimagine a defining community landmark.

"This was a community initiative — a small, little, quiet, sleepy, agricultural town that put its collective forces together to build a state of the art hospital," said Laurie Harley, one of the founders and leaders of the NOTL Ambassadors.

"To me, it would be a perfect location to be able to have that focal point to welcome people. Not just to get the information, but to get a feel for the spirit of the town."

The video ends with a message casting the site as a "rare opportunity" and a "shared responsibility."

"Some buildings close. Their purpose does not," the video said. "The time to act is now."

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Attendance **still down** from pre-pandemic era

Continued from Front Page

a return to its pre-pandemic attendance numbers: in 2019, it hosted about 267,000 people.

The organization, however, did see an uptick in attendees to education and outreach events (which it hosted more of last year), with 118,460 attendees recorded. There was also a more-than \$2-million increase in fundraising revenue, with the festival earning \$16.6 million last year.

Expenses rose by \$1.1 million, a 2.8 per cent increase, said treasury director Greg Prince said, citing inflation.

“For those of you who actually watch the news and actually understand that we do have something called inflation all the time, we actually expect, all things being equal, our costs to go up every year,” he said.

Artistic and production expenses rose 3.6 per cent, while marketing, fundraising and facility costs also increased. Administrative expenses fell six per cent.

Alongside the Shaw Festival’s season productions and daily operations, Jennings called increased participation in the All.Together.Now



Shaw Festival artistic director Tim Carroll speaks during the organization’s annual general meeting last Friday. The All.Together.Now campaign has raised \$115 million thus far according to the organization. DAN SMEENK

program a “big win” and said the festival is off to a “very good start” in 2026.

The All.Together.Now campaign, launched last year, has raised \$115 million. Jennings said the organization aims to secure the remaining \$35 million this year, take full possession of the Artists’ Village and open the Burton Centre for Lifelong Creativity in July.

He said the festival is also seeking a federal grant for the Royal George Theatre to complement the \$35 million it received from the province last year.

The Royal George Theatre — a 110-year-old building the Shaw has owned since 1980 — closed at the end of last year and is slated for demolition and rebuilding, a decision that has drawn controversy from some critical of the new

theatre’s planned size.

Nicholas Colaneri of Centurion Building Corp. took the Shaw Festival, and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, to court over whether heritage and other rules were followed in approving the teardown of the theatre. A decision from the Divisional Court is expected this week.

During the question-and-answer period, Jennings provided a general update on the Royal George Theatre, including the demolition of 178-188 Victoria St. and the installation of geothermal units.

He declined to comment further and would not address the financial impact of the litigation or construction when asked by The Lake Report, citing the ongoing court case.

The 2025 season also

marked the end of performances at the Royal George Theatre and the Spiegel Tent, and the introduction of shows at the Fleck at Toronto’s Harbourfront Centre for the next three years.

Jennings said the move will help accommodate productions during the rebuild and introduce new audiences to the festival.

He said he hopes Toronto audiences who attend performances there will later travel to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

“You just get on the subway or the light-rail transit to go to the Harbourfront, you can see something there, and if you like it then maybe you think to yourself ‘hey, I’d love to go down to see something in Niagara,’” he said.

Board chair Ian Joseph announced changes to the board of governors. Samiha Sachedina is stepping down after four years. Sandra Aversa, Lorne and Rosemary Barclay, Dr. Roe Green and Mary Mizen will join the board.

Dr. Bonnie Rose will join the U.S. Shaw Festival Foundation Board. Joseph also acknowledged the death of former board member William Saunderson.

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Wastewater infrastructure at **critical point**: town staff

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Wastewater costs are surging in Niagara-on-the-Lake — and staff warn parts of the system are nearing a “critical state of almost failure.”

The concern came during discussion of the town’s 2026 water and wastewater budget and rates report, where councillors pressed staff on why wastewater rates are climbing faster than water and where the money is going — before ultimately approving staff’s recommendations.

The report recommends a three per cent increase to water rates and a 10 per cent increase to wastewater rates to fund operations and infrastructure. It also includes a \$3.78-million capital budget for 2026 — up from \$2.5 million last year.

New rates will take effect April 1.

“What is this deficit that we’re seeing?” Coun. Erwin Wiens asked, questioning the need for continued increases.

Staff say the answer lies largely outside the town’s control.

In Niagara, water and wastewater services are split between two levels of government, with the region handling treatment and local municipalities managing distribution, collection and billing.

Staff said regional wastewater charges are expected to jump by 21 per cent or \$1 million primarily because of “necessary inflationary pressures and capital costs required to ensure the health, safety and reliability of the systems.”

Staff recommended rate increases to keep the system running, pay for repairs and start closing the long-standing infrastructure gap.

According to the report, staff have historically turned to rate-mitigation strategies such as “temporarily reducing transfers to capital reserves,” to moderate rate increases for wastewater and water.

Coun. Wendy Cheropita questioned the spike and said inflation doesn’t explain it.

“Inflation is only 2.3 per cent,” Cheropita said. “So, 21 per cent — can you explain that?”

Staff pointed to years of deferred investment.



Jordan Frost says NOTL is feeling the strain of aging infrastructure and rising wastewater costs. PAIGE SEBURN

“Catching up,” staff said, citing a lack of past capital spending and increasing infrastructure demands.

“Increases are in our forecasted rates for quite a while.”

Councillors also raised concerns about whether the town is allocating funds properly between water and wastewater systems.

“Are we splitting the water — wastewater — to the best possible use for infrastructure needs?” asked Coun. Gary Burroughs.

Staff said the town’s rates are based on a five-year study completed in 2024 and are “appropriately allocated.”

Other questions focused on system performance and

long-term risks.

Coun. Erwin Wiens asked about water loss along transmission lines and whether the issue had improved.

“We were working towards trying to close that gap to find the reasons why that was happening,” he said. “Is that still an ongoing issue?”

Staff said water is lost through leaks, unmetered connections and aging meters that don’t accurately record use. The town addresses the issue over time as pipes are replaced and unauthorized connections are identified and removed.

The town’s director of public works and infrastructure, Jordan Frost, said NOTL has “a pretty good water main distribution system.”

“I think about 75 per cent of it is PVC or plastic, which is very good,” he said.

“One of the tops, I’ll say, in the province — in terms of that type of system.”

Wiens also raised concerns about lead pipes, but Frost said the town has largely phased them out.

“We do have one of the most plastic systems, I’ll say.”

Over the past couple decades, the town has spent a “considerable amount of time and resources to remove ductile iron, cast iron and lead water mains,” Frost said.

“I don’t think any lead — but we have a little bit, maybe one per cent, two per cent, of the other types,” he added.

Still, it’s the wastewater system that drew the most concern.

Coun. Sandra O’Connor asked why wastewater increases continue to outpace water.

Staff said the region’s treatment plants are under strain.

“What we’ve seen from Niagara region is a lot of the water treatment plants and wastewater treatment plants have come to a critical

state of almost failure, if not failure,” said Frost.

He said regional projects were deferred in the past due to high costs and reserve management, but have now reached a point “where they must be replaced now” to meet legislative requirements.

So because of the region’s costs for “major, major projects at the treatment plants,” the town is “seeing that directly translate into our wastewater rate,” Frost said.

O’Connor asked staff to include updates on the status of recommendations from the 2021 operational audit in future water reports, a request chief administrative officer Nick Ruller agreed to.

Despite the concerns, staff said the town is making progress in closing the infrastructure gap.

“I think that our asset management plan will speak to what the deficit is (and) the upcoming financial strategy will indicate what that will look like on top of the water rates,” said Frost.

“But from my understanding, we’re doing a pretty good job trying to close that (gap).”

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DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Niagara Parks, telecom company look to install **three towers** in NOTL

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A plan to install 11 cell towers along a 56-kilometre stretch of Niagara Parks Commission land between Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie includes three sites in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Niagara Parks is partnering with Shared Tower Inc. on the project. The proposal calls for a 35-metre monopole at the McFarland North parking lot near the Niagara River Parkway and East-West Line intersection, a 35-metre monopole near Brown's Point, and a 30-metre monopole at Queenston Heights Park.

Niagara Parks Commission chief operating officer Marcelo Gruosso said the tower at Queenston Heights Park is "not visible at all" because it's "back into the work yard" and not in the middle of the park.

The project has been in development since 2023. At that time, Niagara Parks said Shared Tower Inc. would install and own the infrastructure, while Niagara Parks would "develop, manage and maintain policies around the standards and aesthetics of the towers to ensure they are minimally intrusive." Gruosso confirmed that arrangement remains in place.

He said construction in NOTL is not expected to begin until 2027 and possibly 2028.

Niagara Parks and Shared



A rendering of what the McFarland House parking site would look like with a monopole installed. SUBMITTED

Tower Inc. say the towers aim to address spotty cell service in the area.

"Lack of Canadian wireless infrastructure has caused poor cellular service issues in the surrounding areas. The current existing structures do not provide adequate coverage for the areas, specifically for Canadian users," Niagara Parks said in its communications.

Gruosso said improving coverage for emergency services is also a concern.

The nearest towers to the McFarland North parking lot are 2.72 kilometres northwest and 1.72 kilometres southwest, Niagara Parks said.

Gruosso said regulations require carriers to sign on before construction to avoid building unused infrastructure. He said he does not yet know which carriers will participate.

In an information booklet about the McFarland North proposal, Niagara Parks and Shared Tower Inc. said the design could reduce the need for additional infrastructure.

"To address this major gap in coverage, the proposed tower is engineered to accommodate initial and future loading for three cellular service providers and additional fixed wireless equipment as required, thereby limiting the need for additional infrastructure to service the area."

Some residents have raised concerns about the proposal.

Catherine Cornell and Don Dinnin, NOTL residents who live near Nelson Park, said they do not oppose the towers but question placing them on park land. They also opposed a now-withdrawn cellphone tower proposal for Nelson Park last year.

"That fact that they're on park lands raises in my mind the question of: why would the Niagara Parks Commission want that type of infrastructure on park land? And more importantly, what alternatives did they seek? Because I think preserving the park land as parks, is important," said Dinnin.

Cornell said existing towers near park land in NOTL are far enough away that they do not affect park users.

"You don't even see them," she said.

Dinnin said telecommunications towers "weren't the end of the world if they were on park land," but added Niagara Parks has a mandate to preserve park land and should consider alternatives.

"That's not in any of the material that's certainly available to the public," he said.

Cornell and Dinnin said the towers could affect tourism in NOTL, noting the proposed sites are in "highly used" areas valued for being "so beautiful, and it is so peaceful."

"To me, preserving that is important," Dinnin said.

Gruosso said Niagara Parks has spent several years assessing locations to ensure the towers are unobtrusive while addressing coverage gaps along the Niagara River Parkway.

"I think we've done the best we could with the situation," he said.

Public consultations began this year. A public open house for all three towers is scheduled for April 1 at Queenston Chapel from 6 to 7 p.m.

Last year, residents opposed a proposed cellphone tower at Nelson Park by Signum Wireless. The project was later abandoned.

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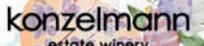
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The best \$20 you'll ever spend: Spring market supports animals

Andrew Hawlitzky
The Lake Report

A spring vendor market at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre drew 44 sellers on Sunday, including a volunteer animal rescue whose table of donated goods funds veterinary care for a growing number of cats abandoned across Niagara as costs of living rise.

The spring market circuit across Niagara has expanded over the past two years, giving independent sellers from across southern Ontario a place to find buyers without a storefront or advertising budget.

But for Raina's Rescue, a volunteer-run cat rescue with no central facility, the market is primary way it pays veterinary bills for animals surrendered by owners who say they can no longer afford them.

Every item at its market table, from catnip toys to pet beds to baby blankets, was made and donated by volun-

teers, with proceeds going directly to veterinary care.

Colleen Paige, a member of the rescue's fundraising committee, said the scale of the crisis has accelerated.

"People are dumping their pets because of the cost of everything. It's really sad, and the rescues are left to clean up the mess," said Paige.

The rescue recently trapped 13 of 17 stray and feral cats from a colony in Jordan, Ont., only to identify a second colony of roughly 30 cats in a nearby field days later.

Mild winters have extended breeding season, and the rescue is already pulling in pregnant cats well ahead of what would normally be kitten season.

The rescue places animals in foster homes and covers all costs, including spaying, neutering, vaccinations, deworming and emergency surgeries.

Their veterinarian at Niagara Falls Animal Hospital on Morrison Street some-



Sonja Nastopoulos and her sister Niki at their knit and crochet booth at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Community Centre on Sunday. ANDREW HAWLITZKY

times takes critically ill cats home on weekends to ensure they receive proper care. The organization recently received a Platinum Award at the Niagara Readers' Choice.

The market, which began roughly two years ago, has built a core of returning vendors and customers. Sunday's rain slowed foot traffic but did not stop it.

Several vendors described

a shift in what buyers want. Michelle Armstrong, who has made embroidery and knitwear in Stoney Creek for 15 years, said the market for cheap goods has largely dissolved.

"People don't want cheap anymore. They want quality and something unique that lasts," said Armstrong.

"People want something that speaks to them, not the same thing everyone else has."

Sonja Nastopoulos, co-owner of Nickles & Knots, sells knit and crochet goods from Niagara Falls alongside her sister Niki, said the gap between how people spend at large retailers versus local markets still surprises her.

"People don't think twice about spending thirty or forty dollars at a big-box store, but when they come here, suddenly handmade items are questioned," said Nastopoulos.

Nubia Bahl came from Brampton to sell crochet goods made by her mother,

Bharti Bahl, who has crocheted for decades without ever selling publicly.

"My mom has always done this, so now we're trying to support her and push her into something she's been doing for years," said Nubia Bahl.

She sees the interest in handmade goods as generational.

"I think everyone is starting to come back to their roots. Even young people are picking up hobbies like their grandparents," she said.

Vendors Market Canada has additional spring markets scheduled for Niagara-on-the-Lake in May and June, with the same organizer, Uzo Kanu, running the circuit.

For Raina's Rescue, the next priority is getting pregnant cats trapped before colonies expand further. The group is currently fundraising for two incubators for newborn and critically ill cats.

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Court orders Colaneri to pay \$25K costs

Paige Seburn
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A Divisional Court panel has dismissed a legal challenge against Niagara-on-the-Lake's handling of the Royal George Theatre project, finding the town's process was thorough and justified.

The decision, released March 24, rejects a judicial review application filed by Centurion Building Corporation related to the proposed demolition and redevelopment at 79-83 Queen St.

In its ruling, the court said the town undertook months of consultation, reviewed expert reports and addressed key heritage concerns before making its decision. It concluded council acted in the broader public interest and in accordance with legislative requirements.

The court also ordered costs of \$25,000 to the town and \$30,000 to the Shaw Festival.



The Royal George Theatre on Queen Street in Niagara-on-the-Lake is at the centre of an ongoing legal dispute after a Divisional Court dismissed a challenge to the town's approval process. An appeal and request to halt demolition are now before the Court of Appeal. FILE

But the dispute is continuing.

On March 25, Centurion filed two motions with the Court of Appeal for Ontario: one seeking leave to appeal the Divisional Court decision — to be heard in writing at a date to be set by the court — and another seeking a stay to halt any demolition at the Queen Street

site pending the outcome of the appeal. The stay motion is scheduled to be heard March 26. No decisions have been made on either motion.

Centurion president Nicholas Colaneri said the company received an "instant response" from Shaw to negotiate the stay.

"Things are in the works still," Colaneri told The

Lake Report. "Nothing is finalized."

In its filing, Centurion argues the Divisional Court made several legal errors, including misapplying the law on standing, the Ontario Heritage Act and legal non-conforming uses. The company also alleges the court relied on case law not presented during the hearing and reached conclusions without evidence.

Centurion is also asking that costs for the motion be reserved to the panel that would hear any future appeal.

The case names Centurion as the appellant, with the Shaw Festival and the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake listed as respondents.

Town staff say they will continue working through the required planning, heritage and building processes as the file moves forward, adding the municipality remains committed to following all legislative and legal requirements.

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NOTL joins other Niagara municipalities in **reducing number** of council members

Continued from Front Page

mayor and eight councillors.

Lord Mayor Gary Zalepa said the decision reflects the fact that NOTL is a small, rural community and that the town's governance structure should mirror that.

"A smaller council is not a weaker council; it is a more focused, more accountable and more effective one that can better serve our residents," he said.

With a population of about 19,000, Niagara-on-the-Lake currently has one of the higher ratios of councillors per resident in the region.

The move comes amid a wider regional conversation about council sizes and governance, sparked by former regional chair Bob Gale's letter to Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack in late February, which put the prospect of amalgamation on the table.

He followed up a few weeks later with another letter to the minister with the idea of reducing the size of several municipal coun-



Whoever takes the helm of NOTL after this year's municipal election will be part of a team of six, instead of eight, after NOTL council voted Tuesday to reduce its size. FILE

cils in Niagara, including NOTL, instead of merging Niagara's cities and town.

Several Niagara municipalities — including Thorold, Port Colborne and Grimsby — have also passed resolutions to reduce the number of elected officials on their councils.

There was discussion of the matter on Tuesday among NOTL council, with Coun. Erwin Wiens saying the town has no

choice but to move to this new council size.

A few councillors, however, questioned aspects of the decision, including Coun. Sandra O'Connor, who called this "a political issue," not based on the "rationalization of costs."

Across Niagara's 12 lower-tier municipalities, more than 100 elected officials currently serve, with council sizes ranging from four to 12 councillors.

Town staff will now begin the administrative and legislative steps required to implement the change, including seeking provincial approval and updating election procedures.

The town is asking the province to put the necessary legislative framework in place by May to ensure the smaller council can be in effect for the 2026 election.

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NOTL featured in photographer's **seven-continent book**

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

Some of Niagara-on-the-Lake's most recognizable landmarks will be featured alongside people and places from all around the globe in a Niagara-based photographer's upcoming book that showcases his travels across all seven continents.

Self-taught photographer Lorne Demoe, who has travelled to 117 countries, is preparing to release a 15-chapter book, "The Canadian Globetrotters: Lens on the Loose," featuring 1,050 of the 700,000 photos he has taken over the past 20 years of travel.

The book offers an eclectic selection of images from a photographer who sees beauty in every corner of the world, with the first chapter featuring several photographs taken in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"Travel photography has many genres," he said. "My love is for people, animals, architecture, landscapes and cityscapes. It's an all-encompassing style of photography, but it speaks to where we've been."

While Demoe currently lives in St. Catharines, he worked for 30 years in Niagara-on-the-Lake — 15 years as a tennis pro and another 15 as a massage therapist — and knows the community well.

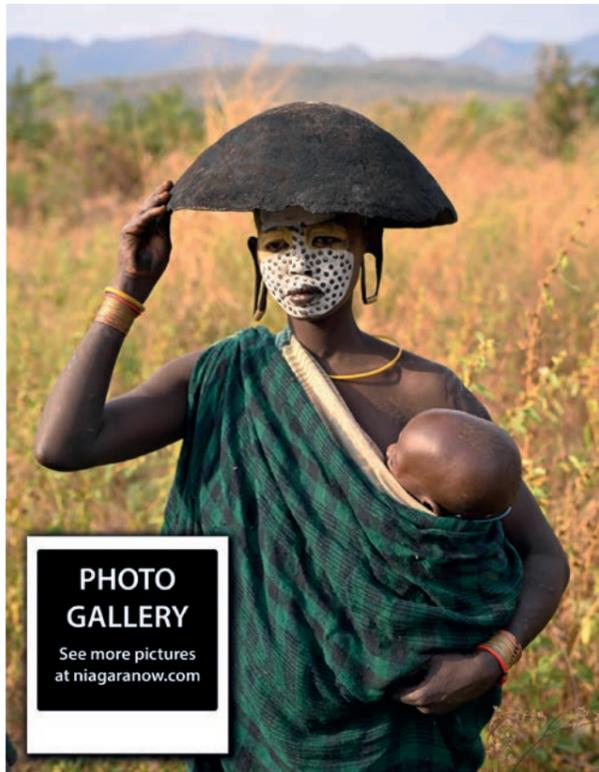
He works seven days a week to save money for his travels, spending three to four months each year abroad to capture his photos.

The first chapter of his book, "Home Sweet Home," focuses on the Niagara region and includes 30 to 40 pictures, including Niagara-on-the-Lake at locations such as Butler's Barracks, the gazebo in Queen's Royal Park, the Prince of Wales Hotel, the Niagara Apothecary, and more.

"These are actually the hardest photos for me to take, given my work schedule when I'm home," he said.

He said Butler's Barracks in particular is a place he enjoys "all the time." He said he likes the tree formations and the "symmetry" of the photo he took featuring it.

Demoe's favourite individual photos of NOTL



The last country Lorne Demoe visited was Ethiopia, where he took portrait shots of the local people. He has travelled to 117 countries and is publishing a book full of his photos, which includes many of NOTL. SUBMITTED

were both of Lake Ontario. One day, when he was looking out from the NOTL golf course, where he used to chip and putt on his breaks, he saw the lake take a photo-worthy turn.

"One day, the Lake

Ontario kinda looked like the Caribbean Sea," he said. "It had a green tint to it." So, he picked up his camera and captured the scene in front of him.

He also likes a winter photo of Lake Ontario that

he took near a sign about Marilyn Bell, a long-distance swimmer who became the first person to swim across the lake.

"You are never really disappointed if you walk through the town of NOTL," he said.

Demoe's travel journey began later in life. He first left Canada in 1996, at age 36, and travelled to England without a camera. That trip grew into visits to 14 countries.

About nine years into his travels, his accountant suggested he should make something more out of his adventures, which led Demoe to photography.

Since then, he has seen — and captured — a lot.

"In Antarctica, you'll find icebergs a mile long, whales, and penguins," Demoe said. "In Africa, you'll find everything from the pyramids of Egypt to Ethiopia. I do a lot of portrait photography, too."

By the time he met his partner, Susan Gillette, Demoe had visited 50 countries. Gillette, who has travelled with him for the last 13 years and wrote much of the book's text, has

accompanied Demoe to 84 countries.

She also contributed extensive journal entries, documenting their 240 flights, cities, national parks, road trips and more.

"She's been a big part of this journey."

One of his most memorable experiences while travelling was when he took part in a cleansing ritual with a shaman in Peru.

"We hiked for five hours, and he performed blessings and talked about people. He said that North Americans are often caught up in material things, trying to keep up with the Joneses, but that doesn't bring happiness. He emphasized living for experiences instead."

That moment has a profound effect on him, he said.

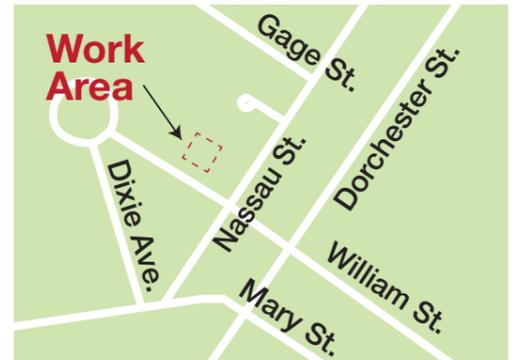
"I've really tried to live that way ever since."

Demoe sent the book to print at the end of February. He said it will take about four to five months to produce the copies. He said he may get a publisher and has secured a list of more than 100 clients who have ordered the book.

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MOVING WATER FORWARD

Notice of Construction **William Street Sewage Pumping Station Emergency Generator** Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake



Project Description

Niagara Region is upgrading the emergency generator located at 443 William St. in Niagara-on-the-Lake to ensure the continued safety and reliability of this critical sewage pumping station. The new generator complies with all Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks codes and regulations as they relate to sound, emissions and environmental compliance.

What to Expect

During construction, expect minor dust and periodic noise in the area. No significant increase in vehicular traffic in the area. Typically, one or two service vans will be on site during construction.

The key tasks to be completed are:

- Construction of a new concrete pad located on the south-east side of the existing building, which will require some minor excavation using light earth moving equipment
- A concrete truck will be on site for one day to pour concrete
- A crane will be on site for one day to lift and position the new generator on the concrete pad
- Contracted electricians will be on site to connect the new generator to the switch gear that will be positioned inside the building

When

Working hours will typically fall between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday to Friday. Construction is expected

to begin on April 6, 2026, and be complete by late June 2026. We appreciate your cooperation and patience during this time.

For comments, questions or for more information on the project, please contact any of the following project team members:

Andrew Gubbels, Consultant
MNE Engineering
519-894-9408, ext. 225
agubbels@mneengineering.ca

Frank Gazzola, Project Manager
Niagara Region
905-658-4063
frank.gazzola@niagararegion.ca

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This notice was first issued on March 23, 2026.

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- Nancy Bailey

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Publisher: Richard Harley
Editor-In-Chief: Richard Harley
Managing Editor: Zahraa Hmood
Editor Emeritus: Kevin MacLean
Design & Layout: Richard Harley
Advertising: Megan Vanderlee
Contributors: Dr. William Brown, Penny-Lynn Cookson, Patty Garriock, Maddy Gordon, Steve Hardaker, Andrew Hawlitzky, Brian Marshall, NOTL Museum, Ross Robinson, Julia Sacco, Paige Seburn, Dan Smeenk, Kyra Simone, Tim Taylor, Jill Troyer, Garth Turner, Dave Van de Laar, and many more members of the community.

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



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#68: If you see someone taking a photo of nature or a view, pause and don't walk through their shot.

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



Contributed by Patty Garriock
 "Beauty is in the heart of the beholder."
 -H.G. Wells

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Seasonal swan song for winter

Good riddance, winter! With the waters defrosting along Four Mile Creek Pond, a mute swan lifts its head from the water, droplets falling from its bill. A resident pair has been frequenting the pond, and observers hope they'll raise cygnets again this spring.
 DAVE VAN DE LAAR

Opinion

The little troop that became Shaw Inc.



THE TURNER REPORT

Garth Turner
 Columnist

How could I forget? Day one of my first newspaper job. Fresh out of uni, freshly married, freshly broke, happy to land a job for \$100 a week (it was 1974) with a small-town daily.

I arrived at first light. Eager. Then the crusty veteran newsroom editor walked in. He looked at me, disgusted. "New guy," he bellowed. "What the **** are you doing? There's no news in here. Get the **** out there."

Thus began my career. Out there. Connect with people. Learn the truth. Bring it back. And only then, sit and write about it.

Full circle now, as I volunteer for The Lake Report — once again chasing truth in a small town. To do that well, people must talk to me. When they don't, I wonder why. Lately the list of those who are actively avoiding me has been lengthening.

For example, Tim Jennings. The dude in charge of the Shaw Festival — now at the epicentre of a court challenge, heritage crisis and NOTL's biggest-ever downtown construction

job — has been ducking me since late 2025.

We all need to know a little more about how this outfit has evolved. Its contribution to the economy of the town is not in question. That's huge. By some estimates, \$200 million a year. One retailer close to the star-crossed Royal George figures the theatre brought 20,000 people a month to the main drag. But no more, of course. Not until 2029, after the massive \$85-million rebuild is over.

But I'd like to ask Jennings some questions — especially now with a federal cabinet minister on the way to (presumably) shower more tax money on this growing enterprise. Word on the street, or at least among some neighbours, is that the Shaw has not secured all of the funding required to finish the mega complex that historic buildings have already died for. Is that true?

By the way, the Shaw ran through almost \$40 million last year and paid 600 employees. Just half of that came from selling tickets to its productions. Sales actually fell 8 per cent in 2025, while costs went up. That seems a problem.

Is this related to the aging-out of its audiences? The fastest-growing demographic among ticket-buyers, the festival says, are people over 80. Yikes.

And while the Shaw took in \$15 million from the feds last year, then \$35 million from the Doug Ford government for the George rebuild, plus millions more from the



Shaw Festival boss Tim Jennings has been media-shy lately. Columnist Garth Turner has questions about all the millions the charity is spending, and holds.

province and Ottawa in various grants as well as over \$16 million from private sources, it paid NOTL no property tax. Zero. Despite owning \$45 million worth of real estate.

The Shaw also pays no income tax to Ontario nor to Canada. Being a charity, it skates around these obligations. It gives donors a break on their own taxes.

This is a big business. The Shaw's endowment foundation has tens of millions stuffed in it, mostly in income and capital gains-generating pooled Fiera investment funds, managed by Letko, Brosseau & Associates.

But at the same time, the outfit has almost \$12 million in a revolving line of credit plus a \$15 million mortgage. Given the level of public support, it would be good to know more about how this web of interests is being run. Is it sustain-

able? What happens in an economic downturn, with a half-built theatre complex?

I'd also like Mr. Jennings to explain a portfolio of almost \$40 million in liquid assets while sucking off so much public money. Plus, what's the status of the Shaw Foundation incorporated in Buffalo. Or the for-profit Shaw Anchorage Land Limited?

Then there's the artists' village complex, an ongoing construction site where the Upper Canada old folks residence used to be. Lots of private money has gone into it (the Burton Foundation handed over \$5 million), but what's the plan for long-term sustainability on a complex of five buildings? Why didn't a new theatre go there?

To be clear, the Shaw's a massive driver of economic growth in NOTL. Its viability also hangs off the largesse of donors and governments. It's in the process of constructing two more massive complexes — at the same time operational revenues are down, and just a year after losing millions.

Things might work out great. Or with the economy losing altitude, this could be folly.

Did Mr. Jennings share enough with our leaders before they greenlit projects forever, irreversibly, altering the place?

He's not talking. The truth is out there.

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

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Premier Doug Ford's changes to freedom of information laws a **threat to democracy**



Wayne Gates
Special to The Lake Report

In Ontario, we have freedom of information, or FOI, laws for one simple reason: we live in a democracy, and the public has a right to know what its government and elected representatives are doing.

People in Niagara-on-the-Lake pay their taxes, follow the law and participate in our democratic system. They deserve transparency and accountability.

That's why I'm deeply concerned about the Ford government's recent move to limit FOI requests.

The changes that the premier is proposing would block access to records from Ford's office, his ministers and political staff.

Let's be clear: all those offices are places where decisions are made that affect everyday life in Niagara and in Ontario. Think of the

situation we face in health care, or long-term care, or with housing, or the recent fiasco we have been through in Niagara with the threat of forced amalgamation.

Do you think that people in Niagara should have less ability to find out what the government is doing on these files behind closed doors? I certainly don't.

The timing of these proposed changes should also raise some serious red flags.

Over the past few years, there has been no shortage of controversies at Queen's Park and in the premier's office. The textbook example was everything that happened with the Greenbelt.

We know decisions affecting protected Greenbelt lands were made in ways that benefited well-connected developers. Ontarians only learned the full story because journalists and the Official Opposition at Queen's Park were able to access internal records.

We've also seen ongoing questions about Ontario Place and the future of one of Toronto's most iconic areas. Just like with the Greenbelt, access to government records has been essential in helping the public



Doug Ford's decision not to allow freedom of information requests pertaining to himself, his office or his ministers is a wreckless act that flies in the face of accountability and begs the question, "what is he hiding?" writes Wayne Gates.

understand what's happening behind the scenes.

Then there's the issue of the premier's personal cellphone. Courts have ruled that records related to government business on that phone should be subject to access requests.

Now the premier is now trying to change the law to keep his cell records hidden. The question on everyone's minds should be: what is the premier hiding?

And then there's the skills development fund. There are serious questions raised about how taxpayer dollars are being spent.

Are they being spent on

worthwhile programs that help train workers to be best equipped for the Ontario economy in 2026 and beyond, or are they made up of more handouts to well-connected insiders?

For people here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, this matters more than you might think.

When the government limits access to information, it makes it harder for journalists and the broader community to hold the government accountable. It makes it easier for politicians to avoid answering tough questions.

It's not just me saying this. Ontario's information and piracy commissioner even said, "This amendment is about hiding government-related business to evade public accountability."

At the end of the day, this isn't about politics. It's about trust.

Freedom of information laws help protect that trust. Weakening them sends the wrong message — that the government would rather hide information than answer for its decisions.

Ontarians deserve better. *Wayne Gates is the member of provincial parliament for the Niagara Falls riding.*



This week's riddle is "Jeopardy!" style
Category: **DOUBLE TALK**

The "ants go marching" rhyme took this double-talk phrase from the Civil War song "When Johnny Comes Marching Home."

Last issue category: **MOVIES BY DECADE**

Clue: "Good Will Hunting"

Answer: What is the '90s?

Answered first by: **Lynda Collet**

Also answered correctly (in order) by: **Sue Rautenberg, Emma Balsas, Bob Wheatley, Catherine Clarke, Donna Pearce, Howard Jones, Bob Stevens, Marla Percy, Claudia Grimwood, Rob Hutchison, Jim Dandy, Sylvia Wiens, Mike Gander, Margaret Garaughty, Wade Durling**

Email answers to editor@niagaranow.com, with your name, for a chance to win a \$25 Irish Harp Pub gift card every week. (Subject line: Riddle me this)

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Don't judge people by the **books they own** or read

Dear editor:

No decent person needs to be reminded that the ideology of Adolf Hitler represents one of the darkest chapters in human history. The hatred and destruction unleashed by Nazism deserve complete and unequivocal condemnation.

That is precisely why the controversy surrounding a Niagara political figure and the purchase of a signed copy of Hitler's "Mein Kampf," as recently discussed in The Lake Report, deserves a calmer and more thoughtful response than the rush to demand a resignation that we witnessed and ultimately received.

Studying history — even its darkest chapters — is not the same as endorsing it. Reports indicated that the book in question may

have been a rare edition acquired years ago as part of a collection of historical artifacts.

Whether one finds such collecting appropriate or not, historians, libraries and museums preserve similar material so future generations can more easily understand how destructive ideas take root.

Here in Niagara-on-the-Lake, we live among constant reminders of the sacrifices made to defend free societies.

Just down the road stands Fort George, where soldiers fought during the War of 1812 to preserve the young institutions that would eventually shape modern Canada. Their sacrifice helped secure a country confident enough to examine its own history honestly.

Additionally, many of the historic homes that give Niagara-on-the-Lake its charm were built in eras whose values we now see very differently.

We preserve those buildings not because we approve of everything about the past but because understanding history honestly helps us build a better future.

History also serves to remind us that democratic societies sometimes must confront uncomfortable realities in order to defeat greater threats.

During the Second World War, Winston Churchill reluctantly joined with Joseph Stalin to defeat Hitler-not because he admired Stalin's regime, but because confronting Hitler's tyranny

required understanding and dealing with the world the way it was.

As Churchill himself observed, "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it."

If we begin demanding that individuals resign from public life based solely on the title of books they have read or purchased, we are venturing down a very slippery slope.

Democracies judge citizens by their actions and character, not by speculation about the content of their personal libraries.

A confident democracy should not fear difficult books. Rather, it should fear the moment when citizens are punished simply for reading them.

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Navigating the new heritage conservation plan, pt. 3



Brian Marshall
Columnist

Over the last two weeks in this column we have considered NOTL's new heritage conservation district plan — specifically sections 6 and 7 that speak to policies effecting “contributing” and “non-contributing” properties respectively.

As the final installment in this series, let's indulge in some commentary.

Up front, if you open the link to the plan (available on the Town of NOTL's website, notl.com, by searching “Old Town Heritage Conservation District Plan” in the search bar and clicking the link “Phase 2: Plan Report”), please do not be dismayed by the size of the document.

Now, while I'm certainly not suggesting that you shouldn't read the entire plan if such is your inclination, for most people, the meat of the plan's policies and guidelines are located

in the 15 pages of section 6 devoted to contributing properties, the six pages of section 7 related to non-contributing properties, then section 9.1 and 9.2 (three pages) which outline heritage permit requirements and exemptions for properties in the new district.

Further, if you own a contributing property — all which can be found in appendix E (“Statements of Contribution”) listed alphabetically by street name and number — you may wish to refer to the contents of appendix F wherein you will find a brief description of each contributing property and the reasons underwriting its definition as such.

At this juncture, allow me to state that the architectural styles utilized in the plan are woefully inadequate, often not accurate and do not follow the best scholarly definitions of Ontario's architectural styles.

For example, “picturesque” is not an architectural style. Instead, it is a broad descriptor applied to architectural styles and designs influenced by the precepts of a late-18th and early-19th-century Romantic philosophical movement that rejected the harsh industrialization of England's urban landscapes in favour of integration with nature and our intuitive



This home at 240 Centre St., Brian Marshall says, has been labelled as Georgian rather than Regency in the heritage district plan, due to a limitation in the definition of Regency style in the plan. FILE

human emotive response to harmony.

In fact, the “picturesque” was primarily focused on landscape design, not built forms, however, it was almost inevitable that its philosophical embrace by English upper crust society would have a significant impact on architecture which, in turn, would cross the pond into Canada.

Quoting from Janet Wright's “Architecture of the Picturesque in Canada”

report published by Parks Canada in 1984: “Picturesque does not refer to an architectural style but to an aesthetic point of view.”

Then, we come to the Regency style which the plan limits to only one — the Regency cottage — of its various forms and expressions. This oversight results in the authors pushing the other Regency designs incorrectly into other categories.

Consider the dwelling at 240 Centre St., correctly a cubic-form Regency expression inspired by the 1819 Upper Canada Assembly building (hailed at the time as a Regency masterpiece), but which has been labelled Georgian. Or, St. Mark's Rectory, which is classified as Italianate in the plan but, like Sir John A. MacDonal's Bellevue in Kingston, is actually a Regency Tuscan villa.

Completely ignored is the Arts & Crafts style and, I would note, Old Town has several excellent examples (including 133 Regent St. which the plan shows as an example of Edwardian on page 57) gracing its streets.

Why does this matter? Well, as the policies and guidelines contained within the plan suggest, if you plan to do any work on your contributing property, that undertaking should be

informed by the building's architectural style to ensure that any alterations are compatible and in-keeping with its contributing attributes.

Moreover, the finished result will look better if the alterations are in harmony with the original design precepts.

For those considering work on their contributing property, I'd recommend that you consult Robert Mikel's book “Ontario House Styles” published by James Lorimer & Company.

While it is certainly not on the exhaustive scholarly level of McAlester's Field Guide to American Houses, it's an easy read, full of informative photography and, in my opinion, the best (most accurate) reference on Ontario's architectural styles that I have reviewed to date.

Moving on, let's kick apart some of the language used in the plan.

What does “physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to, and distinguishable from the heritage property” actually mean?

Taken out of order, “subordinate to” is a descriptor that defines any new addition, out building or infill dwelling as secondary to the existing streetscape and/or contributing buildings.

This can be accomplished through lower roof peak

heights, set-back from the built heritage facade and various other design considerations.

“Distinguishable from the heritage property” is a somewhat loose term which generally speaks to the ability of experts to discern the historical construction from new construction.

And, “physically and visually compatible with” speaks directly to seamlessly merging new construction with built heritage provided it conforms to the aforementioned subordinate and distinguishable provisions.

At this juncture I would draw your attention to the addition on the Hiscott House at 78 Prideaux S., which fulfils all three stated criteria.

As an end note, allow me to observe that neither the Shaw's proposed Royal George intervention on Queen & Victoria or the garage addition proposed for the Crysler-Burroughs House at 187 Queen St.

conform to the provisions of the original heritage district guidelines nor to the newly adopted plan.

Aren't politically motivated exemptions wonderful? *Brian Marshall is a NOTL realtor, author and expert consultant on architectural design, restoration and heritage.*

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Henry Paffard would love today's Paffard Street



ROSS'S RAMBLINGS

Ross Robinson
Columnist

The coincidence was too great to ignore.

While writing my ramblings earlier today for this week's paper, I took a break to read the *Globe and Mail*.

The main editorial was about modifying bylaws to allow increased density in residential neighbourhoods, to enable more people to live in Toronto. NIMBY and BANANA, and the discussion continues — "not in my back yard" and "build absolutely nothing anywhere near anything."

Disclaimer: As always, I am not saying I am right. I just put forth my views, hoping to encourage thought and discussion.

So, how does this continuing debate across

Lake Ontario relate to Henry Paffard here in Niagara-on-the-Lake?

I suspect that most readers of my weekly Ramblings are wondering, "Who the heck was Henry Paffard?"

Many will know there is an east-west running street between King and Charlotte, just south of John Street, named after him.

And a subtle historical plaque on the front of the Old Courthouse at 26 Queen St. downtown. Our local museum has a goodly amount of resource material about this historical giant.

Paffard Street is indeed a friendly neighbourhood roadway, and a good example of how streets sometimes evolve over the years.

But I have read a fair bit about Henry Paffard, who was an early visionary, determined and selfless citizen of Newark/NOTL. And not that long ago.

A few highlights of his many accomplishments should amaze all of us. And don't forget, he did it all via verbal conversations, and the written word. In cursive. Without email, and even without rotary dial or touch-tone telephones.



Our town has had so many people work hard to create the Niagara-on-the-Lake we know today. Henry Paffard was a giant, writes Ross Robinson. NOTL MUSEUM PHOTO

To be repetitive, not that long ago. Think about it: our ancestors were determined.

Permit me to list a few of Paffard's efforts that helped our town develop. He was the mayor for a total of 26 years, first elected in 1863. And they were not easy years.

During his watch, the government offices and the courthouse (and the jail) moved from Newark to St. Catharines, which had an obviously negative effect

on our town. The Erie and Ontario Railroad went bankrupt. Businesses and farmers and fishermen were devastated.

Somehow, Mayor Paffard and his peers persevered and came out the other side. We can only imagine.

A few of his most notable accomplishments. And incidentally, as well as his civic efforts, he was town pharmacist from 1851 to 1898, mostly at the corner of King and Queen streets. In the current Apothecary

"museum."

He was an officer of the local library for 45 years (for a time, it was called the Mechanics Institute). In 1869, he fought to allow girls to be admitted to the local grammar school.

Henry Paffard accomplished so much, and helped to create our town fire department. This was a busy citizen, and remember, all without modern means of communication.

I will continue heaping plaudits on Henry Paffard. His determination and dedication are a major reason we have such beautiful and mature tree cover in Simcoe Park.

And the magnificent avenue of stately trees on the Commons. And, and, and...

As the editorial in the *Globe and Mail* said, "Changing zoning criteria means neighbourhoods will change. They're supposed to."

I really believe Henry Paffard would be pleased to see today's eponymous Paffard Street. About 20 single family homes. Some 15 attached townhomes, with a clever mix of exterior colours and styles.

And, betcha didn't know this, a very desirable four-storey, 16-unit condominium building.

This bigger building is tastefully buffered by trees, and backs on to our well-used and maintained Upper Canada Heritage Trail. Even that town amenity has been a struggle. Kudos to the hardworking proponents.

To ramble to a conclusion this week.

The current Paffard Street is a prime example of a mixed-density neighbourhood. People get along and chat with each other. They are observant and watch out. They seem to care.

Sometimes they give passing dogs a treat. And on really hot summer days, a few bowls of water magically appear for thirsty dogs.

I sincerely hope my Ross's Rambling this week doesn't sound preachy or pedantic.

Let's open up our minds a bit and, as a municipal election looms in our town, remember that neighbourhoods inevitably change. They are supposed to.

Be kind.

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Red Roof founder ‘humbled’ at Rideau Hall

Zahraa Hmood
The Lake Report

It was a surreal moment for Steffanie Bjorgan, to be surrounded by, as she described it, “some of Canada’s best and brightest people,” all gathered inside the country’s most famous home, located in the nation’s capital.

“It wasn’t nervousness,” she said. “It was more just a sense of awe. Like, ‘How the hell did I get here?’”

The Niagara-on-the-Lake resident was in Ottawa on Thursday to meet the Governor General at Rideau Hall and receive one of the highest honours the federal government can bestow on an individual.

Bjorgan was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal for her efforts as the founder of Red Roof Retreat, a charity that provides recreational and respite services to children and young adults with special needs.

Since opening 26 years ago, inspired by Bjorgan’s



Steffanie Bjorgan with Gov.-Gen. Mary Simon.
ANNE-MARIE BRISSON

journey to find recreational programs for her son, Garrett, who has cerebral palsy, it’s grown to serve more than 200 families in the area.

In summer 2024, the Governor General’s office informed her that she would be receiving the award, but Bjorgan said due to a backlog with the office since the pandemic, the ceremony was delayed to 2026.

Bjorgan arrived at Rideau Hall at 9:30 a.m. She described the Governor General’s residence as a beautiful and unpretentious

place: “It’s everything you’d expect from something being Canadian.”

After a meet-and-mingle with the other award recipients, then a brief rehearsal where ceremony co-ordinators showed them where to stand and turn and how to greet the Governor General, Bjorgan lined up to receive her medal.

“When it’s your turn, it really is just a blur for about a minute and a half,” she said.

Bjorgan said Gov.-Gen. Mary Simon is a “very quiet, gracious, unassuming person, but you can feel her presence.”

“You can tell she’s just a very good representative of our country.”

After lunch at Rideau Hall, she ended the day at the Canadian Tire Centre, watching the Ottawa Senators take on the New York Islanders with the people that matter the most: her family.

“Without my husband and my boys, I would’ve never been able to do this.”

When Bjorgan was informed that she’d be receiving the award, she said they told her, “We can’t find an organization that’s done exactly what you’ve done.”

That got her thinking about what she’ll do after handing the reins of the non-profit group over to the younger generation.

“I would love to go to other communities and help them do what we do.”

For now, she’s focused on overseeing the expansion of Red Roof’s main hub on Concession 6 Road, from a 1,100-square-foot facility to a new, 5,700-square-foot, two-storey building.

The \$4.3 million project is \$500,000 away from meeting its goal.

As part of its fundraising, on April 26, Red Roof will host its annual pasta dinner. Tickets are almost sold out, but those interested in supporting the charity can bid in the dinner’s online auction, or donate items for the auction and raffles.

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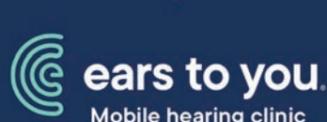

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Brock wrestling coach creates scholarship honouring the legacy of **Kekoo Gatta**

Dan Smeenk
Local Journalism Initiative
The Lake Report

A Brock University head wrestling coach wants to honour the legacy of two people he says made significant contributions to the school's program, including one with long ties to Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Coach Marty Calder plans to establish an athletic and academic scholarship for students entering the wrestling program in honour of the late Kekoo Gatta, a NOTL-based homebuilder who died in September 2024 after an accidental drowning in the Niagara River, as well as Michelle Fazzari.

Calder said the recipient will be an incoming wrestler. He said he does not yet know the scholarship amount but hopes to award it by the start of the next school year.



Kekoo Gatta, pictured here with the Junior Brock Badgers and the late Michelle Fazzari, is having a scholarship named in his honour at Brock University. SUPPLIED

Zubin Gatta, Kekoo Gatta's son and an assistant coach with the Junior Brock Badger Wrestling Club, said he is touched by the tribute. "He gave so much to the wrestling world in Niagara," he said. "You could ask hundreds of kids who are now older how much of an impact he had on their life. I know my three best friends, they looked up to him, in almost the same way I did

as a dad, as a mentor." Calder said he came up with the idea to honour Fazzari and Gatta after their deaths within days of each other in 2024. Gatta was 60 years old when he died. Fazzari died of cancer at 37. Gatta worked as a fundraiser at Brock and ran the Junior Brock Badger Wrestling Club. He also owned Gatta Homes, a custom home-building company

based in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where he lived. "These were two huge losses for our organization," Calder said.

He said he coached Fazzari and wrestled Gatta when they were in high school. Gatta once won a silver medal at the Canadian Nationals tournament.

Calder and Gatta reconnected when Gatta became more involved with the Junior Brock Badger program as his children took up wrestling.

"He grew it from nothing," Zubin said, noting his father began coaching about 25 years ago.

Calder praised Gatta's work ethic in wrestling and business: "It's crazy how much work he did."

Zubin also spoke about his father's character.

"He was one of the best mentors a kid could have," he said.

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Pickard Grist Mill

This photograph shows the Pickard Grist Mill, built by Benjamin Pickard around 1800 near present-day Wagg Road along Four Mile Creek. At the time, Four Mile Creek was one of the region's most active milling corridors, with as many as 25 to 30 mills operating along its banks. Constructed entirely of wood, with heavy timber framing and no iron gearing, the mill reflects the ingenuity and resourcefulness of early Loyalist settlers. During the War of 1812, it took on a very different role, serving as a hospital for wounded soldiers of the British Army and local militia. In the years that followed, the mill passed through several prominent Niagara families, including the Secords, Streets and Servoses.

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Makings of my column: Curiosity, research and discovery



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Dr. William Brown
Columnist

Sometimes people stop me in the street, grocery store, post office or community centre and ask me where the ideas for my columns come from. Fair enough.

Most come from surveying recent articles in medical and science journals or reviewing a subject for a long overdue update to a book I wrote in 2016. The book had the wordy title “Perspectives: The Evolution Of the Cosmos, Life, Humans, Culture and Religion And a Look Into the Future.”

That was a lot for a book, but signalled a major change in my interests, from a very satisfying but narrow career in neurology and neuroscience to a much broader interest in the universe, how life began, evolution, especially human evolution and culture including religion.

I kept notes and as ideas

jelled it made sense to pull them together into what birthed a book.

It helped along the way to summarize some of the material, hence the many short articles in local newspapers and several series of talks at the library, which helped me pull the material together inspired somewhat by Steven Weinberg, a physicist and Nobel Laureate who once quipped that if you wanted to understand some area in science, teach it.

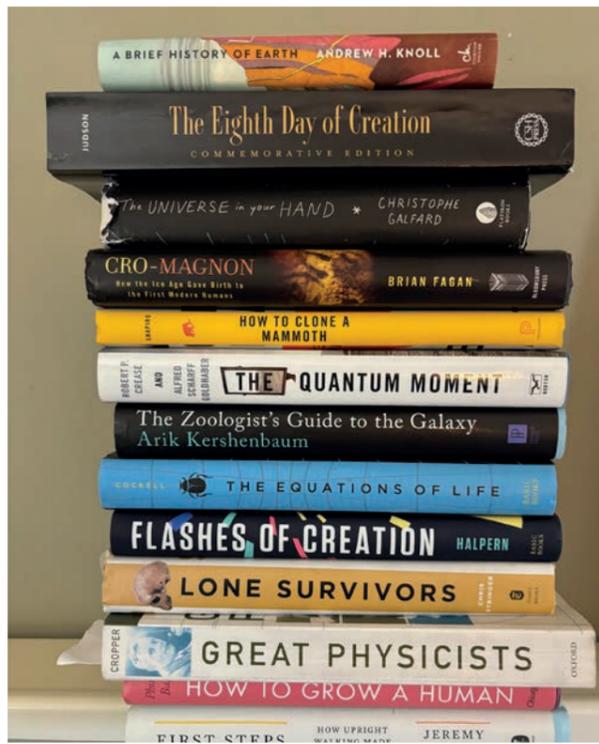
And that’s precisely what he and another Nobelist in physics Richard Feynman did by teaching courses in biology and other off the usual track for them, subjects.

In a small way, that’s what I’ve done — used the opportunities for teaching something, to learn about it.

That’s what happens every year with the Nobel series in which, more often than not, I wasn’t familiar with the subject of the award until I dug into what the laureates achieved in physics, chemistry and medicine.

Over the years, I’ve become more familiar with cosmology and quantum physics as well as modern-day chemistry. Even so, it’s often a scramble to figure out what the laureates did and why.

It’s also a marvellous



A few of the many, many sources of knowledge Dr. William Brown uses as inspiration for his weekly column. SUPPLIED

journey every year to master enough of the material to understand what they did, how they went about it and why the nominating committees thought their work was so outstanding.

The last is very important because it’s a way into the mind of the committees in the sciences to how they decide what were and are truly outstanding foundational studies in the sciences.

The website Nobel.org is a treasure trove that reaches

a century and a quarter back into the past to highlight key stepping stones for how science evolved in the past, and a glimmer into future directions.

That’s certainly the case in recent years for physics in which year after year some aspect in quantum physics has been highlighted and heralded in some fashion the coming era of the quantum computer.

What about other sources? My primary sources include

top notch journals such as Nature and Science in which many a laureate’s work was published, the Proceedings of the Royal Society in the U.K., the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the U.S., and in medicine, the New England Journal of Medicine and the Lancet.

The National Institutes of Health website in the United States used to be very useful, but funding cuts have hurt the quality of their product.

For books, I often turn to those written by excellent authors such as Brian Greene and Steven Weinberg, or multi-authored texts by leaders in their fields and books with which I’m not familiar but whose reviews in Nature or Science were compellingly interesting to me, one example of which was Andrew Knoll’s 2021 book “A Brief History of Earth: Four Billion Years In Eight Chapters.”

Another dependable source has been the New York Times, especially for articles written by Dennis Overbye about the cosmos or Carl Zimmer on biology, evolution and human origins.

Indeed, it was Zimmer’s interview with Chris Stringer over Stringer’s 2012 book, “Lone Survivors,”

that launched my interest in human evolution. I couldn’t put it down.

One recent example too was Zimmer’s article on how such a complex organ such as the mammalian eye evolved. It’s a great story.

Driving everything in my quest for understanding nature have been recurring themes for me: the evolution of the universe writ on the largest and smallest scales, the origin and evolution of life, the evolution of hominins including humans, human culture and religion, what makes science different, the rise of artificial intelligence and how all of those interests interact.

Those are the prime movers behind what I understand about the evolution of everything, why I read and write what I do, and my answer to those wonderful questions people ask when we bump into one another.

For their interest, I’m very grateful.

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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Obituary

Francis Léonard



LÉONARD, Francis —
It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of our beloved Francis. He passed peacefully at home, with his dog Jack by his side, on March 18, 2026, at the age of 73. Francis leaves behind his loving husband of 44 years, David. He was the beloved son of the late Marcel and Louise, and a dear brother to Marcel, Lucien, and his twin, Christian. He was a proud uncle to Luc, Patrick, Geoffrey, and Natacha, and a beloved great-uncle to Maude, François, Yannick, Maxime, Laurie, Mathias, Clément, as well as a cherished great-great-uncle to George.

Francis was loved by all who knew him. Generous to a fault and always willing to help, he truly marched to the beat of his own drum. He had a deep love for art, interior design, and beautiful things, and was known as a great organizer and an exceptional host who loved bringing people together. A man of impeccable taste and natural elegance, his presence never went unnoticed.

Born in Belgium, Francis later settled in Montreal after visiting his aunt and quickly realizing it was where he belonged. It was there that he met the love of his life, David. Together, they built a beautiful life, later relocating to Toronto and eventually settling in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a place they fell in love with after visiting friends.

Francis was a passionate advocate for the rights of all- both humans and animals. In his memory, donations may be made to Rainbow Railroad Canada, supporting LGBTQI+ individuals in accessing lives free from persecution, or to the Humane Society of Greater Niagara, helping provide safe refuge and compassionate care to animals in need.

He will be deeply missed and forever remembered for his kindness, individuality, and the love he shared so freely with those around him.

Arrangements entrusted to Morgan Funeral Home. As per his wishes, cremation has taken place and a private family interment will be held at a later date.

Memories, photos and condolences may be shared at www.morganfuneral.com.



For obituary and memorial inquiries, contact megan@niagaranow.com.

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